

from having her appearance ignored. After announcing that Jonathan is the appropriate husband for her, Miss Malin weaves a romantic tale. She tells Calypso that Maersk fell in love with her when he first saw her and that he followed her and decided to stay on the loft because she was there. The girl asks if this is true, and Jonathan replies that it is. Dinesen, however, tells us that it is not and that Jonathan Maersk had not been aware of Calypso's existence. Earlier when he became disillusioned with the superficiality of the fashionable world, he like Timon, retreated from appearances into a melancholy self-absorption. He evaded the tragic necessity of accepting the difference between appearance and reality and of still affirming appearances; he failed to realize as Hamlet does, that "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (II. i.). During the night he spends on the sinking loft, Jonathan learns the power of the imagination to create its own truth. Miss Malin creates his romance with Calypso, forcing him to support her romantic fiction with a lie; even his marriage to the young girl is a masquerade because the Cardinal is not a clergyman but an actor. Yet by the end of the tale, Dinesen describes the two young people as husband and wife: "When he did at last fall asleep, in his sleep he made a sudden movement, thrusting himself forward, so that his head nearly touched the head of the girl, and their hair, upon the pillow of hay, was mingled together. A moment later he sank into the same slumber as had his wife." Through the power of imagination, the romantic illusion has become reality.

J. R. Brink
Arizona State University

The Kitsch Novel

The word *Kitsch* whose origin has not been conclusively established' could be a deformation of the English word "sketch" or it might have been derived from the German dialect verb *kitschen* which means to stroke, to rub, to smear, or "to scrape up mud from the street."² It has also been suggested that the word *Kitsch* is derived from the Russian word *kishitsa* which means "to pretend to be more than one actually is."³ The English translation of this term as "trash, rubbish, or junk"⁴ is inaccurate, for each of these words overwhelms the connotative meaning of the German term.

This paper was submitted to the Conference on the State of Paraliterary Studies in Canada (Sept. 30-Oct. 2, 1977, McGill University) and subsequently duplicated for the members of the Canadian Association for Paraliterary and Cultural Studies.

¹Burkhard Busse, *Der deutsche Schlager* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1976), pp. 7-8.

²*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, II (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1971), II, 1247.

³Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Die Krise an der Trivilliteratur seit der Aufklärung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1971), p. 137.

⁴*Langenscheidt's Concise German Dictionary: German-English* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), p. 313.

In German the word *Kitsch* refers to "Aufgeputzte, sich als echte Kunst ausgebende Nachahmung wahrer Kunstwerke,"⁵ thus to imitations of artistic and literary products which are presented in a way that makes them look like genuine works of art. In short, *Kitsch* is equal to counterfeit, pretentious imitation, or vapid reproduction.

Before looking closer at this term, its denotations and connotations, it might be advisable to examine another one, namely the term "trivial" which is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *Kitsch*. The Latin word *trivialis*, a combination of *tri* and *via*, meaning a place where three ways meet, refers to things "that may be found everywhere,"⁶ that is, to things common, ordinary, or of little importance. Trivial literature could, therefore, be defined as "a kind of literature written for no informative, instructive, or poetic reason, but merely to amuse and entertain the masses of moderately educated readers and help them escape from the hard realities of life into an adventurous and fantastic world."⁷

The point one could make now is that although the two ostensibly interchangeable terms, namely *Kitsch* and *trivial*, are often used in connection with popular literary works, the term *Kitsch* stresses the imitative character of the work in question, while the term *trivial* does not. In other words, *Kitsch* is necessarily an inferior and notably pretentious imitation of genuine and authentic works of art, while *trivial* is independent and autotelic regardless of its literary or artistic value. It should be added that fictional works and especially novels have certain characteristics which could be easily labeled as trivial, for they deal most of the time with common and ordinary themes and motifs; but on the other hand, only a few of these trivial novels resort to *Kitsch* elements in order to appear grandiose and splendid.

To find out more about these so-called trivial and *Kitsch* elements, one has to go back in history to the Hellenistic period and to examine a few of the prose narratives of this era which are written in imitation of the great epics of Greece's Golden Age. These stories, which could be regarded as the first novels of world literature, include many trivial and *Kitsch* elements and are, therefore, sometimes termed romances instead of novels; they include the stories of Chariton, Xenophon of Ephesos, Longus, Iamblichus, Achilles Tatius, and above all Heliodorus.⁸ The only aim of these writers was to cater to the unsophisticated masses and to entertain the spiritually jaded population of the cities and give them the illusion of reading highly sophisticated works of literature.⁹

To achieve this end they had to deal with ordinary themes such as love and adventure and to include common or trivial motifs such as murder, kidnapping, incarceration, fights, eroticism (but not pornography), as well as intrigues, conspiracies, and other suspenseful elements. At the same time they had also to dress up and varnish their works in a way that made them look like and sound like the stately narratives of Pericles's time without being

⁵Saad Elkhadem, *Definitionen und Begriffe der deutschen Literatur* (Berne: Lang, 1970), p. 40.

⁶Webster's, III, p. 2450.

⁷Saad Elkhadem, *The York Dictionary of English-French-German-Spanish Literary Terms and their Origin* (Fredericton: York Press, 1976), p. 103.

⁸See for instance Heliodorus of Emesa, *An Ethiopian Romance*, trans. Moses Hadas (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957).

⁹See Franz Altheim, *Roman und Dekadenz* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1951), p. 59.

discriminating or demanding.¹⁰ For these reasons they avoided the highly poetic style of the epics but made sure that their writings sounded poetic. And although they reduced the mythological intricacies of their models to a minimum, they kept a few well-known figures such as Apollo, Aphrodite, and Eros in the background of their stories. From time to time they also included a few equivocal dreams and ambiguous oracles just to advance the action and to compensate for the poor motivation of their characters.

Other Kitsch elements used by these writers are obvious in their choice of plot, portrayal of characters, and, above all, style. Each of these stories, or dramas as they were called by their authors,¹¹ revolves around a noble, attractive, and heroic young man who meets a pious, aristocratic, and beautiful young girl, falls in love, overcomes—alone or with the help of an understanding *deus ex machina*—the many obstacles set in his way by capricious gods or wicked enemies, and marries the girl. This pair, as well as their friends, servants, and maids, are always kind and generous while their foes are the embodiment of villainy and evil.

The style used in these stories is a highly rhetorical one, and the imagery is a rehash of those presented in the great epics. Each book includes a considerable number of pseudo-scientific discussions, sapient speeches, witty anecdotes, salty quotations, popular proverbs, sentimental effects, and catchy phrases.

Keeping these trivial and Kitsch elements in mind and looking at popular novels of our times—or for that matter, of any other time—one notices that although they all make indiscriminate use of trivial elements, some of them indulge in the use of Kitsch elements with the hope of appearing or sounding like literary masterpieces.

It could be suggested, therefore, that when analyzing and discussing popular novels one distinguish between trivial elements and Kitsch elements, and that purely entertaining but unpretentious works of fiction be labeled trivial, while works that are—intrinsically as well as extrinsically—imitative and epigonic, be tagged as Kitsch no matter how amusing and attractive they might be.

Saad Elkhadem
University of New Brunswick

¹⁰See Erwin Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1914); also Saad Elkhadem, "Der Einfluß des spätgriechischen Romans auf die Werke Georg Ebers," in *6 Essays über den deutschen Roman* (Berne: Lang, 1969), pp. 31-34.

¹¹The Greek word is *dramatikon*; see Altheim, p. 14.