

**From Dawn Boreham Dawn Boreham, “The Revenant in Contemporary Fiction”  
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The term fantasy covers a broad area of literature that includes ‘myths, legends, folk and fairy tales, utopian allegories, dream visions, surrealist texts, science fiction, horror stories, all presenting realms other than the human.’<sup>1</sup> This non-conformity to the conventions and restraints of the recognised genre format has meant that in England literary criticism has been untheoretical in its approach.<sup>2</sup> This has led to a marginalisation of the fantastic and dismissal by some critics. It was the work of Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic* that took a structural approach, which sought to discover common features in order to gain a clear definition for the genre. For Todorov there are three defining features of the fantastic:

1. The text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described.
2. This hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of a naïve reading the actual reader identifies himself with the character.
3. The reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as ‘poetic’ interpretations. [...] The first and third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

Todorov’s definition relates to the purely fantastic and establishes ‘absolute hesitation’ in the character and the reader: ‘they can neither come to terms with the unfamiliar events described, nor dismiss them as supernatural phenomena.’<sup>4</sup> This hesitation creates an existential anxiety and an unease, which is commonly agreed to be a defining element of the fantastic.<sup>5</sup> Jackson considers Todorov’s theory omits to regard any historical perspectives, which can influence the perception, vision and knowledge of the character, narrator and reader.<sup>6</sup> Also, due to Todorov’s direct analysis of the text his definition ‘fails to consider the social and political implications of literary forms’, facets that have been shown to have an impact.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Todorov, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 6.