

Abstract

Antonín Kudláč

Czech Popular Fantastic Arts 1990 – 2012 in Cultural, Social and Literary Contexts

The dissertation focuses on the exploration of popular fantastic arts in the Czech environment between 1990 and 2012. Popular fantastic arts are defined as a segment of popular culture, which uses fantastic motifs and finds expression in various art forms and media (literature, film and television programs, visual arts, games, etc.). Popular fantastic literature (science fiction, fantasy, horror) is used as the basic medium for research in this area. For defining and understanding the nature of popular fantastic arts, its recipients (the so-called fans), who form a distinctive subculture called the fandom, are of extreme importance. This dissertation, bordering on interdisciplinary cultural anthropology, sociology, literary criticism and media studies, is based on the hypothesis of an active and creative approach of the recipients of popular culture, who endow these cultural artifacts with their own meanings, share them and use them for their own interests. This approach is rooted mostly in the theoretical works of John Fiske and Henry Jenkins, in particular in the concept of participatory culture and cultural divergence.

The work consists of two parts. The research development of popular culture in the Euro-American academic environment in the 20th century is introduced in the first part, followed by an outline of the theories of popular fantastic arts coming primarily from Anglo-American scholars. Together they form the necessary basis for understanding the broader context in which the dissertation is set. The outline of professional reflection of popular fantastic arts in Czech environment reflects both the one-sidedness of its focus on literary fiction and its lack of focus on the social aspects. The first part of the dissertation is concluded with the survey of Czech popular fantastic arts in the defined period, namely the literary component of description of its basic trends and genre forms and with the suggestion of dividing the authors into literary generations.

The second part of the thesis contains an attempt on the comprehensive characterization of the Czechoslovak fandom as a subculture in the given period. In the introduction, the current state of the subculture research both in the Czech environment and abroad is summarized, and basic methodological approaches in this area are presented. A brief outline of the institutional history of fandom (particularly its changes after 1989), including a model of the internal

structure of the subculture, is followed by the analysis of the social environment of the fans and its constitutive signs that leads the author to describe the fandom with the term "subculture of the transitional type."

Further analysis tries to capture the differentiation and hierarchical positions of the members of the subculture, based on the symbolical or subcultural capital. The next chapter views fandom as a community based on active work with pop-culture artifacts using a broad range of media tools. The conclusion of the second part of the dissertation is devoted to the "mythology" of fandom, i.e. to ideas, chosen as vital for the subculture, which are incorporated into the design of its collective identity. The discussion focuses on two myths – the myth of "revival" and the myth of conflict between "amateurs" and "professionals" within the fandom.

The dissertation confirms the specific nature of the subculture of the recipients and the "users" of popular fantastic arts, that is defined more with creative handling of the products of popular culture than with their consumption. Fading of the distinct boundaries between the elite and popular culture, typical of the postmodern era and the society, shows Czech fandom at the turn of the 20th and 21 century as a specifically postmodern phenomenon.