

BOOK REVIEWS

Jonathan Gottschall, *Literature, Science and a New Humanities* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); ISBN: 978-0230609037; 233 pp.; paperback; ISBN: 9780230615595. RRP: 55 euros.

Only a slim volume, Jonathan Gottschall's *Literature, Science and a New Humanities* is nevertheless predicated on a bold and exciting premise. Gottschall calls for an understanding of academic theory which sees the humanities and sciences not as two distinct and opposing academic fields, but rather as two complementary aspects of a more holistic scholarship. To this end, Gottschall posits that the current relationship between the two, long fraught with difference, is in dire need of amelioration. His consequent proposition is thus a method which seeks to reintroduce elements of the scientific to the large qualitative study of literature.

Perhaps one of the work's greatest strengths is the modesty of the claims it makes toward the more ambitious goal of amelioration. Gottschall avoids overreaching in his suggestions for interdisciplinary collaboration, instead laying out, through case study, potential future areas of collaboration. Gottschall advocates for a return to more quantitative studies in the arts whilst still emphasising the value and continued need for qualitative study. Indeed, the work is not so much a criticism of the arts in its contemporary form as it is a criticism of those who fuel interdisciplinary conflict and derision.

The latter half of the book is devoted to case study: an example of the ways in which Gottschall envisages that the study of arts and the study of folk literature – in this instance folk literature studies – could effectively utilize quantitative research methods. In practice, this study concerns the characterisation of female folktale protagonists across global literature and provides a statistical analysis of the gendering of such folktale protagonists. Gottschall then compares these statistical findings with contemporary feminist fairytale theory, underscoring those results which align with contemporary observations, as well as and those which offer new or contrasting insights on the state of the field. For the most part, his findings support current observations from the literature: that female protagonists are relatively absent from folk tales, that beauty is a characteristic particularly emphasised in female protagonists, and that their tales often involve a marriage plot. Notably, however, what Gottschall's quantitative analysis also illuminates, is that these trends are not unique to European folklore tradition, but rather are present across a wide survey of non-European tales as well, challenging the commonly accepted claim that editorial meddling plays a significant role in the current predicament of female protagonists in European and global folktales.

While the data offered by Gottschall offers an interesting point of departure for further study, previous criticisms of his work are astute in highlighting that his findings, surmised from the data, remain by nature interpretative. In essence, then, the educated reader should be careful not to assume, as Gottschall appears to, that the inclusion of more scientific methods into the field of humanities will help to illuminate a key 'truth' in arts research. What is most valuable in the contributions of this volume, therefore, is not measured from its ability to apply quantitative methods to literature, but rather its advocacy for, and proven movement towards, new and open dialogue between scientific and arts research methods; to reintroduce the value of quantitative study in humanities and arts research. In so doing, Gottschall aspires to alleviate some of the ontological insecurities which have plagued the discipline in recent years, though whether or not the author is truly successful in this endeavour, only time will tell.

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