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THE TYPES OF A PRESENTED WORLD IN FANTASTIC LITERATURE

Though fantasy appeared in literature almost at the very beginning of its existence and underwent an evolution in several literary genres, though the development of typically fantastic genres began to reach unheard-of summits in the XXth century, a historian of literature is often at a loss when confronted with the problems of the technique and function of fantastic elements in a literary work of art. The amount of questions to be solved grows alongside with the progress of the literary genres and the research into fantasy is still in the initial stage. A sufficiently adequate definition of fantasy has not been worked out so far and the attempts at the division of fantastic works into separate types have not really brought a satisfying result.

In the situation it seemed reasonable to leave out in this work the question of all the doubtful solutions to the definition problem and try to look closer into the topics connected with the structure of various types of a presented world in the books that belong to the so-called "fantastic" literary genres. The author hopes that the choice of this method will be justified in the course of the considerations.

The paper aims at showing certain similarities in the methods of creating a literary world in various epochs and various genres of fantasy. In the opinion of the author the similarities may serve as a base for the classification of fantastic literature, and they may form a starting point for the further research into the general laws ruling the development and the nature of fantasy itself.

To make the main idea of the paper clearer, the author decided not to touch such topics as the function of the fantastic elements in literary genres or the subject of the narrator, though they seem to be closely allied to the central theme of the dissertation. Feeling that it would expand unnecessarily the scope of the subject, the author gave

up the attempts to justify his, perhaps too pessimistic, view on the up-to-date results of the research into fantasy, which is expressed at the very beginning of the paper.

Literary genres, that are connected closely with fantasy, which is their main tendency in forming the literary world, are not rare. The fairy-story seems to be the most ancient of them. Fantastic characters abound in a fairy-story: wizards, witches and fairies change the material world as they choose, elves sing in the forests, gnomes and trolls dwell in the mountain caves, hobgoblins, brownies and dwarfs are to be met everywhere. In a fairy-story a knight usually fights with a fire-breathing dragon or with giants throwing huge rocks. The animals and birds begin to speak and think. The world of objects and things has its own laws, too. A singing sword warns a knight before a battle, a spring or a well shows a man his future instead of reflecting his face, a mysterious ring, turned on the owner's finger, carries him into an invisible world and magic shoes allow him to run at an amazing speed. Other motifs also become fantastic: a good man in a fairy world is quite safe, because there is justice there, a compensation for all. An uncommon power of feelings, love or hatred, gives people a magic power over all the world¹. Fantasy influences the language of the fairy-story, too: symbols create an atmosphere of a meaningful depth of thoughts.

In the fairy-story the use of symbols leads to the multiplying of meanings, but in the fable, owing to its didacticism, the meanings are limited because of the use of allegory. As in the fairy-story, the animals have the gift of speech, but are only to represent people, their characters and their typical reactions to typical situations. It is important, however, that in the fable certain animals always represent the same types of characters. In the fairy-story by St. Exupéry, for example, the fox may be a nice friend and a teacher to the Little Prince, but in a fable it would have to embody above all the vices of cunning and flattery.

Characters are influenced by fantastic elements in the utopia, too. In correspondence to the main feature of the genre, namely, that the utopia is an artistic picture of a perfect state existing in the imagination of the author², not only characters are changed in the direction of a maximum of goodness, beauty and nobility, but all the social

¹ Cf. T. Sinko, *Świat baśni*, "Maski" 1918, Nr. 7/8, pp. 127—131, 148—152.

² The definition by W. Ostrowski, in: *Wprowadzenie do utopii (O literaturze angielskiej)*, Warszawa 1958, pp. 137—207).

institutions, nature, changed by men, social and political relations have the same attributes. The structure of the state, and not the characters, is here in the centre of interest.

The romantic genres, such as the Gothic novel, the ballad and sometimes even the romantic drama³, enriched literature with new fantastic characters: ghosts, appearances, nixies, spectres and others. The atmosphere of awe and macabre, connected with the deep interest in magnetism and in psychology of the individual, often pathological even, is usually created by descriptions of hours of fear at dark nights, by narrative about the mysterious sounds in gloomy places, like cellars, crypts, ruins, dungeons. This atmosphere is manifest owing to the accordance of the nature phenomena with the psychic state of the heroes as well as to the interference of the supernatural. It leads to a new, deeper and generally tragic interpretation of our environment and sense of existence, it discloses the conflicts between Man and Fate, it creates the feeling of infinity round Man and inside his psyche.

Both the utopia and *SF* introduced the fantastic into a new domain. In the case of the utopia it was the description of a social and political structure of a state. In the case of *SF* it is the domain of science. According to B. Olsen's definition of the genre⁴, science fiction is a narrative about an imaginary invention, or discovery, which is possible in accordance with authentic, scientific knowledge and relates adventures and other happenings which might result from the use of the invention or discovery. Not trying to discuss the definition itself, it is worth while noticing that the fantastic in *SF* influences usually the majority of the elements in a literary work of art: the characters (Martians, beings from other planetary systems), language (a great amount of scientific and pseudo-scientific terms), the story itself. *SF* has much in common with the adventurous novel, especially in allocating the interest in the exotic and in the plot.

The genre of *SF*, though decidedly the most frequent one, is by no means the most significant example of the fantastic literature in this century. There is another kind of stories which seems to be far more salient. They base their plot on the fantasy connected with the intuitive attempts at evoking the mysterious, hidden, unknown powers in Man or in the universe, in their deeper nature existing under the perceptible surface of the phenomena. These attempts seem to be close enough to the aims of romantic fantasy. The latter also aimed at the

³ Especially in Polish literature. Cf. *Dziady* by A. Mickiewicz and *Baladyna* by J. Słowacki.

⁴ "Future Science Fiction", January 1958.

discovery of the most essential truths about the world and Man, attempted to deepen our knowledge about the empiric reality by reaching the hidden phenomena. The fantasy of the XXth century concentrates less on the discovering of the existing truths, it rather creates them. It adds new domains to the already existing scope of knowledge, expands the real world by tending to reach the regions that have been unattainable so far. It enters the new world, which is found really or seemingly in the empiric one, the new world, which is more felt than known, guessed at by the mutual effort of intuition, imagination and reason. This kind of fantasy reaches its aims by using as its favourite subjects such scientific or pseudo-scientific notions as telepathy or telekinesis, by means of personification and animization of nature, by treating incident as an organized action of unknown, great and conscious metaphysical powers.

The romantic fantasy resembled the adventurous explorations of the farthest corners of our globe. The discussed kind of fantasy could be compared to the explorations of the unknown depths of cosmos, to the expeditions which reach far beyond the well known world of our planet. This is usually embodied in a novel or a short story. Sometimes it borders a psychological novel, some other time it is close to a grotesque or it can be unexpectedly found in the adventurous or detective fiction. The most characteristic features of this type of fantasy are the general atmosphere of helplessness and the microscopic dimensions of Man in comparison with the might of the unknown powers he is to cope with.

In the short story *The Wind* by R. Bradbury⁵ the hero devotes his life for the examination of the personality of the winds. The plot is presented in a dialogue of two friends by telephone. The dramatic tension is achieved by creating an atmosphere of awaiting for the ringing of the telephone bell. The beginning of the dialogue is thoroughly realistic. When the recurring motif of the wind appears more often in the talk, the amount of such artistic means of expression as metaphors and similes increases. The fantastic motif is built upon the personification and animization of the wind. Its main function is to intensify awe. The drawing of the reader's attention to Herb's impressions strengthens the feeling ("Thompson waited a moment, suddenly chilled to his marrow [...]. Thompson stood there, cold. He went in and closed the door and leaned against it, and didn't move, eyes closed")⁶. The nightmarish picture of the millions of murdered beings blown by the

⁵ R. Bradbury, *The October Country*, London 1957, pp. 221—232.

⁶ Bradbury, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

mercilessly laughing wind is underlined by the contrast between the deadly struggle of one man against the hurricane and the peaceful atmosphere of a wintry evening, with people playing cards, talking, drinking coffee. The hurricane described by Bradbury is not devoid of humour: entering into the house through little cracks it turns over the pages of the book, which are to expose its villainy; it laughs and whispers in the corners of the room. Being enormously intelligent and cruel, it methodically tears the house down in order to reach and murder the man who knows its secrets. The short story enters the borders of macabre similar to the romantic method of Poe. In the denouement the hurricane kills the man, absorbing his intelligence and personality: the atmosphere of awe is totally justified.

This type of literature forces upon us its own vision of the world, it does not try to accept the conventional interpretation of the nature phenomena. The plot often aims at presenting a metaphysical idea, leading the reader unobtrusively and casually to the questions of a deeper sense of human existence. The object of this type of fiction is not a romantic observation of Man but finding His place and His chances in the universe against the unexpected background of unknown powers, in the universe, which is not created by human standards.

It seemed necessary to treat this kind of fantastic literature more exhaustively as it has not evolved into a definite genre as yet. It seems to be the only type of fantasy, the presented world of which cannot be found in any of the known fantastic conventions, though it should be expected, perhaps, to reach this stage, too, in its historical development.

The literary genres, mentioned above, all of them exploiting fantasy in the course of their historical progress, in spite of many differences, have at least one common feature that seems worth to be examined. A presented world of the utopia, fairy-tale, fable, *SF* and others may be created similarly in some of the genres. Though the fact of belonging to a certain literary genre may be taken as a criterium of the division of fantastic literature, it would be reckless to forget about the various ways of creating a presented world. This aspect is closely connected with the former one.

The literary reality, which is met most frequently, is usually created according to a pattern of the empiric reality. The laws of everyday reality govern the literary world, the characters are typical, the language is modelled after colloquial speech. This is a realistic convention without fantasy (RC) occurring, for instance, in the novels by Jane Austen, Hemingway, Faulkner and many others.

Sometimes, however, in a world consciously created to resemble the authentic reality there happen one or several events that violate the above mentioned laws. The realistic world of a novel is tinted with fantasy, the realistic convention is enriched by a fantastic element (RC·f). *The Invisible Man*⁷ is a typical novel of this kind. At the beginning of this novel the narration has all the features of realism: the reader is given the detailed information about the place and time of the story, the dialogue is colloquial and even the description of the hero is conventionally realistic in the first chapters. The uncanny atmosphere created round the stranger is made plausible in the progress of the narrative by a number of possible realistic interpretations. A crowd of narrators retells the story in a way which suggests giving evidence in a police station to a detective. The fantastic element does not appear till the seventh chapter and even after introducing it the narrative method is still realistic and coloured with humour. In the climax of the novel, when the man dies and his body becomes visible again, the fantastic element disappears, the realistic world being deprived of wonders and mysterious happenings. The literary world in the novel is created in the main by the realistic method, though the author puts in the fantastic element which is static and is not subject to changes and development. The unveiling of the motif is slow and careful. The contrast between the element and its realistic background gives the author an opportunity to introduce changes in the structure of the novel and gives him a chance to enrich the silhouettes of the characters, to vary the kinds of humour, to broaden the scope of problems and ideas and to enliven the story itself.

Sometimes the author creates a literary world, which is governed by laws differing from those of the empiric world. This is usually accepted by the reader as a kind of a literary trick and draws his attention to the manifold meanings of the text. The reader is right in feeling a convention there, but this time it is the fantastic convention (FC), not a realistic one. The language itself at the very beginning of the work often shows what kind of a fantastic convention it is. "Once upon a time" or "Beyond seven hills and seven rivers" — is a signal of the fairy-story. "Czemu płaczesz — staremu mówił czyżyk młody"⁸ — announces the convention of the fable. "In ship Number Fifty-One, halfway from Moon to Mars, four stubbled faces turned to a common, grinning regard as the pounding roar of the rockets died away at last" — is a sign that the story is in SF convention. The ap-

⁷ H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*, Moskva 1955.

⁸ "A young siskin asked his father: Why do you weep?"

pearance of stock phrases, well known motifs and fantastic characters, which are typical for the given literary genre, the usage of these in a typical function and aim create the fantastic conventions of the fairy-story, fable or *SF*.

The novel *Eden* by S. Lem⁹ may serve as a good example of the fantastic convention of *SF*. The laws governing the world of *Eden* are the laws of the future world, when Man has already an access to the stars. The adventures of the crew, their discoveries on a new planet, the repairing of the wrecked rocket, meetings with the inhabitants of Eden are in the centre of interest. The story is told in a chronological order, the author describes the journeys and the work of the crew in detail, even when they are not very important for the story. The characters do not differ much from one another: not all the heroes have their own names even. Instead of the names the author uses nouns denominating profession: the chemist, the doctor, the physicist, the coordinator. The coordinator and the doctor are at first characterized more fully, the one, the captain of the ship — as the most resolute and peremptory person, the other — as a man, whose humour saves the good spirits of the crew in bad moments. In the course of the story, however, they both are deprived of these distinguishing features.

The narrator is not omniscient, he knows only these things which he would be able to hear and see if he were one of the crew. So the narration is of one track and the composition of the novel bases on the sequence of particular events. The narrator reports only what happens to one group of the explorers (when they divide into two), the rest is usually retold in conversations among the characters. All this intensifies the interest laid in the plot. There emerges a complex problem of help for the corrupted societies of the new planets, but it is only a suggestion and it does not constitute any general problematic line of the work. Similarly, the discussion over the methods of giving help is only a passing one among the crew and all the problems expire owing to the denouement of the novel, in which the "dubelt", a member of the Eden society, chooses death from the hands of the Earthmen as the only possible help they can give him. Fantasy in *Eden* touches almost all the elements of the novel except the characters of people and the composition of the work. Narration, completely devoid of lyric elements and symbols, has no great ambitions — it aims at interesting the reader with the singularity of the presented imaginary structures.

Not rare are the cases, however, when the general stock rules of

⁹ S. Lem, *Eden*, Warszawa 1959.

a conventional world in a certain genre are broken in order to bring the world closer to the empiric reality. Then the fantastic world is somehow made more real; the features and motifs which join it with the authentic world are strongly stressed. The composition of the pattern of structural elements in such works seems to be the reverse of the first type of the fantastic world ($RC \cdot f$) and may be presented in the formula $FC \cdot r$. The short story of James Blish *Testament of Andros*¹⁰ may serve here as a good example. It consists of six parts, the first being the longest and the last being composed only of a few sentences. The whole story is put into a kind of frame differentiated from the rest of the text by being printed in italics. The first part of *Testament* presents a professor emeritus in radio-astronomy, Theodor Andresson, who has made a discovery of the solar pulsation cycle (the element of *SF* fantastic convention). The discovery leads to the conclusion that in a short time the Earth is to be destroyed by the sun exploding into a nova. A young assistant of the professor, Mario di Ferucci, does not think the conclusions of Andresson are right. But the professor, being convinced that Mario wants to steal his theory and to seduce his wife, Marguerita, kills him in a moment of passion. The second part of the story, told by Andrew of the Sun, a sort of a prophet of the coming disaster, resembles the series of religious prophecies owing to the stylized use of biblical language. Margo — the sun priestess — is mentioned in the text of the pseudo-prophecies. The third part presents a George Anders in the first days of the catastrophe. Being able to survive the first waves of heat in a shelter, he meets an unknown girl, named Margaret, who escapes from him. He follows her, convinced of the possibility to start a superior race of humans. Andy Virchow of the next part of the story is a kind of a cosmic Santa Claus saving all the intelligent beings from the dangerous situations they find themselves in from time to time. But as St. Margaret did not ask him for it, he did not save the Earth. And though he perhaps could have decided to save some human beings, he would not have saved Dr. Ferguson. The fifth part presents T. V. Andros writing the story of his wretched life in a cell of a mental hospital at the time when the sun gets bigger and hotter.

The range of literary genres, represented by particular stages of the story, seems to be quite wide (*SF*, the fable like story of Santa Claus, the myth part of the prophecy, the psychological, Freud-like story of T. V. Andros). But the consistent use of the variations of na-

¹⁰ J. Blish, *Testament of Andros*, [in:] *Best Science Fiction Stories of James Blish*, London 1965, pp. 119—142. Faber and Faber.

mes (Andresson, Andrew, Anders, Andy, Andros; Marguerita, Margo, St. Margaret, Margaret) and the basic similarities of the plots lead the reader to the conclusion that all the parts speak about the same person and not about five different characters. The allusions to Dr. Ferguson, to a cell in a mental hospital, the hints that the texts were written at a request of a doctor, seem to suggest the interpretation that the story is about a psychology of a madman and not about a cosmic catastrophe. As there appears the date of the disaster (18th March 1956), the reader is completely justified in understanding the story as a presentation of the psychological disintegration of a paranoid schizophrenic and not as a picture of a planet-wide destruction in spite of the majority of the fantastical elements in the text. Besides, the author himself favours this kind of interpretation in his short preface to the story. Though the presented world of *Testament of Andros* is based on typically fantastic conventions, the shaping of the characters and the narrators connects the story with the RC type of literature and at the same time brings it nearer to the empiric reality.

The breaking up of the fantastic convention of a genre may happen not only in the direction of realism, as in the analyzed example, but also in the direction of other fantastic conventions ($FC_1 \cdot FC_n$). The fantastic and conventional world is then enriched by the elements of another world based on a completely different convention. Owing to their mutual combinations, a new kind of fantasy is created. Such is the basic principle of the structure in the majority of Lem's stories in *Bajki robotów*¹¹. The courageous knights, beautiful kings' daughters, cruel tyrants and great wizards are the heroes of these short stories. The plot is based on the motifs of treasure seeking, exotic journeys, fights with monsters. The presented world is a convention of the fairy-story. But the knights are the electro-knights, who, instead of wine and mead, drink liquid helium, and instead of eating bread and meat charge themselves from a plug. The treasures and the rings are made of hydrogen, argon, krypton and xenon; wizards appear to be simply cosmogonic engineers, constructors and inventors. All this belongs to a convention of the SF genre: the presented world is a world of the future, a world of the robot population where Man has become a legend.

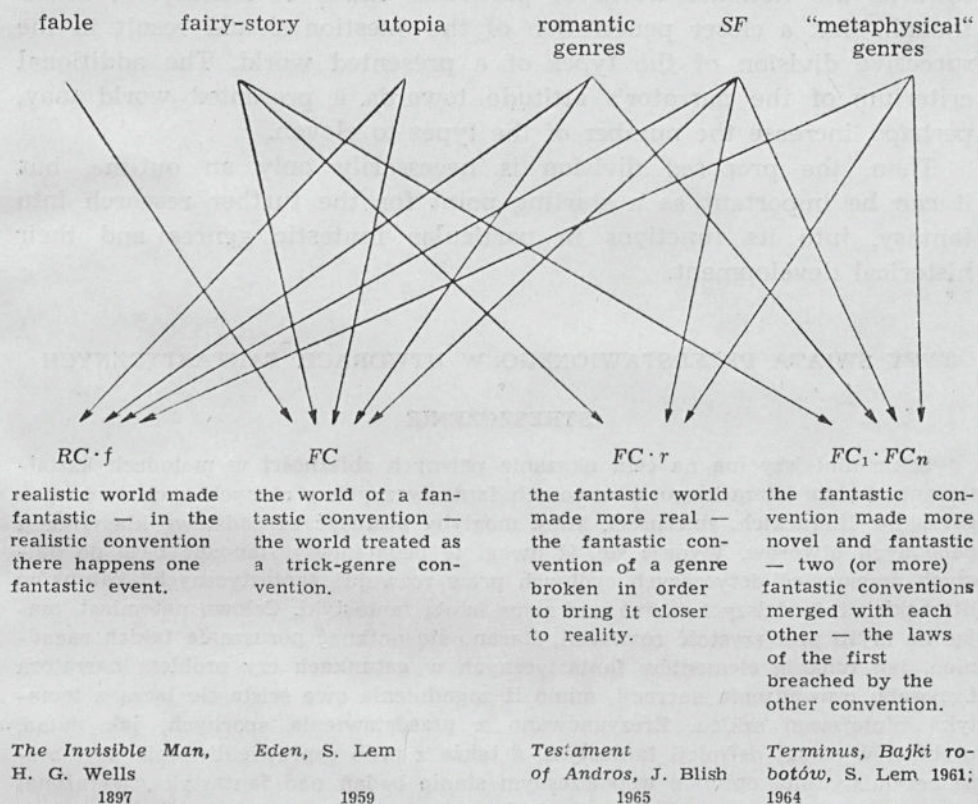
Another story of this kind, *Terminus*¹², is a combination of an adventurous and a psychological story. In the freight rocket speeding to Mars (SF convention) there appears the world of enlivened thoughts,

¹¹ S. Lem, *Bajki robotów*, Kraków 1964.

¹² S. Lem, *Terminus*, [in:] *Księga robotów*, Warszawa 1961, pp. 251—305.

feelings and personalities of the dead crew of the spaceship, confined in the electronic brain of an old and worn out robot. In spite of their confinement, the "ghosts" are able to react to the stimuli resulting from situations which happened years after the death of the crew (the convention of romantic genres).

The sketched above suggestions can be presented more clearly perhaps in the diagram which follows (the lines joining genres with a type of a presented world show in which of the genres the given kind of a presented world commonly appears).



The diagram may suggest two ideas. One of them concerns the historical progress of fantastic genres. The historical development of almost all the mentioned genres, it seems, follows the particular stages of forming the fictional world, suggested by the diagram. This usually is the result of breaking the existing convention of realism by means of fantastic elements ($RC \cdot f$). Then it enters the next stage of forming a convention of its own, typical to given genre (FC) and its

further development is based on the breaking up of the conventionalism into two possible directions ($FC \cdot r$ or $FC_1 \cdot FC_n$). The works analyzed in the paper can exemplify this sort of a development in the case of *SF*, but it is quite apparent that the suggestion is true as regards the rest of the presented genres as well.

The diagram seems also to confirm the author's earlier remark that the modern "metaphysical" genres of fantasy have not passed the stage of forming a convention as yet.

As it has already been said, the author of the paper, mainly for the reasons of clarity, resigned of presenting the narrator's attitude towards the fictional world of particular kinds of fantasy. It seems though, that a closer penetration of the question should result in the successive division of the types of a presented world. The additional criterium of the narrator's attitude towards a presented world may, perhaps, increase the number of the types to eleven.

Then, the proposed division is necessarily only an outline, but it can be important as a starting point for the further research into fantasy, into its functions in particular fantastic genres and their historical development.

TYPY ŚWIATA PRZEDSTAWIONEGO W UTWORACH FANTASTYCZNYCH

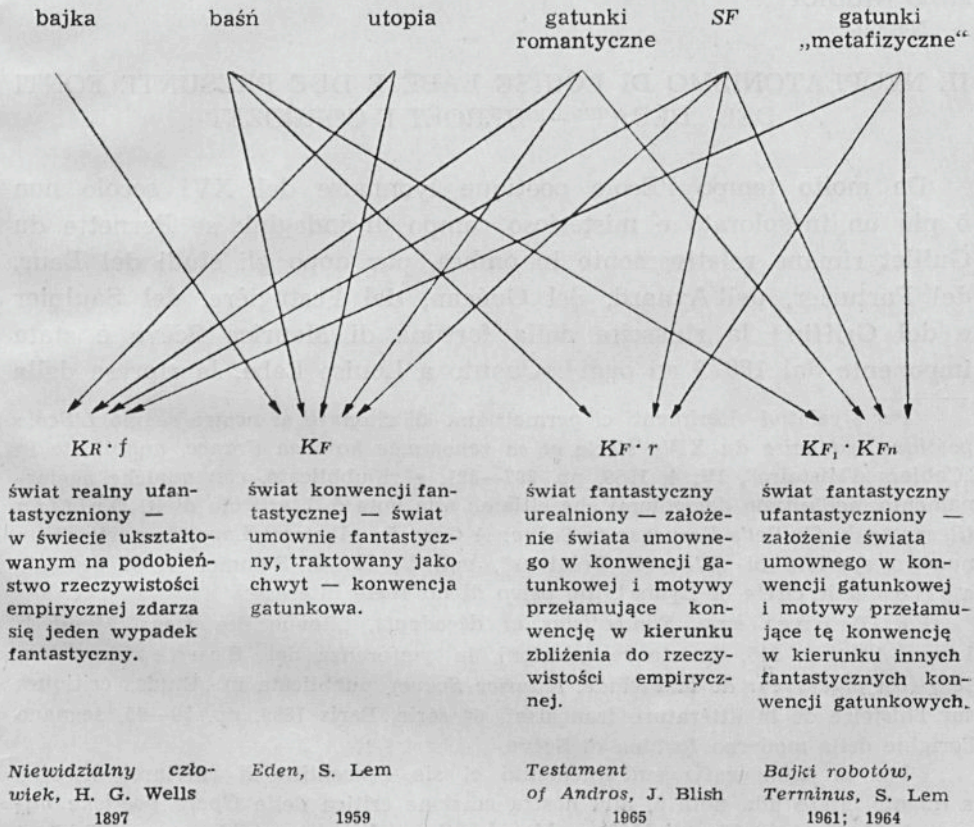
STRESZCZENIE

Szkic niniejszy ma na celu ukazanie pewnych zbieżności w metodach kształtowania świata literackiego w utworach fantastycznych z różnych epok i różnych gatunków literackich, zbieżności, które mogłyby posłużyć za podstawę klasyfikacji podobnych utworów. Wydaje się, iż uwagi te będą mogły stanowić bazę do dalszych przemyśleń dotyczących ogólnych praw rozwoju „fantastycznych” gatunków literackich i do dalszych badań nad samą istotą fantastyki. Celowo natomiast, mając na myśli przejrzystość rozważań, starano się uniknąć poruszania takich zagadnień, jak funkcja elementów fantastycznych w gatunkach czy problem narratora i sposobu prowadzenia narracji, mimo iż zagadnienia owe ściśle się łączą z tematyką niniejszego szkicu. Zrezygnowano z przedstawienia spornych, jak dotąd, problemów samej definicji fantastyki, a także z prób usprawiedliwienia zbyt może pesymistycznej opinii o współczesnym stanie badań nad fantastyką, wyrażonej na wstępie tych uwag, jako że zrelacjonowanie dotychczasowych wysiłków na tym polu wykraczałoby poza ramy zamierzonej problematyki.

Po omówieniu głównych cech tych gatunków literackich, które w swym rozwoju historycznym posługiwały się fantastyką, zaproponowano nowy podział utworów fantastycznych — zgodnie z przyjętym kryterium odmiennego kształtowania świata przedstawionego. Wyróżniono cztery jego rodzaje, opatrzone je symbolami i umieszczono na schemacie, który ma ukazać, jakie rodzaje świata przedstawionego bywają zwykle spotykane w danym gatunku literackim.

Zamieszczony poniżej diagram podsunąć może obserwację dotyczącą procesu historycznego. Wydaje się bowiem, że każdy prawie z wymienionych gatunków

literackich w swym rozwoju przejść musi poszczególne etapy w kształtowaniu świata fikcji — zgodnie z ilustracją na schemacie. Powstaje on zwykle dzięki przełamaniu jakiejś istniejącej już konwencji realistycznej elementami fantastycznymi ($K_R \cdot f$). Następnie przechodzi dany gatunek przez etap kształtowania się konwencji i umowności (K_F), a potem jego dalszy rozwój polega na przełamaniu tejże umowności w dwojakim kierunku ($K_F \cdot r$ lub $K_{F1} \cdot K_{Fn}$). Nieprzypadkowo w toku niniejszego szkicu dobrano wszystkie analityczne przykłady z zakresu historycznego rozwoju *science fiction*, ale i w stosunku do innych gatunków obserwacja ta wydaje się co najmniej prawdopodobna.



Schemat powyższy potwierdza również sugerowany w pracy wniosek, że współczesne nam gatunki fantastyki „metafizycznej”, omówione dokładniej w artykule, nie ukształtowały się jeszcze w typ konwencji.

Wydaje się jednak, iż bliższe wejrzenie w problem stosunku narratora do świata fikcji poszczególnych rodzajów fantastycznego świata łączyć się powinno z dalszym rozczłonkowaniem typów świata przedstawionego. Gdyby przyjąć, podczas dokonywania podziału, dodatkowe kryterium stosunku narratora do świata przedstawionego, należałoby wyróżnić chyba nie cztery ich rodzaje, lecz około jedenastu.

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