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RAIMUND BORGMEIER
Giessen

SATIRE AND SCIENCE FICTION

The uncompromisingly paratactical arrangement of the words in the title gives no clue as to which logical order is intended: *Satire about Science Fiction* or *Satire in Science Fiction?*

To some, the first possibility will surely come to mind more readily. The clichés which condition the genre's image in the public mind virtually invite satire: the aging scientist with dishevelled hair and a mad glint in his eyes, who, behind gurgling distilling apparatus and steaming test-tubes, amid spark-spitting electric experimental set-ups and labyrinthine circuit-systems, hatches out something menacing to mankind; the uncouth robot with its clumsy movements, whose pilot bulbs flash rhythmically and who, in a monotonous tinny voice, gives out banal statements; the huge spacecraft of sparkling chromium which looks like a combination of a large-scale futuristic kitchen and an airborne armoured cruiser; the by now proverbial bug-eyed monsters—*difficile est satiram non scribere.*

But, interesting though the vistas may be which are opened here, I will first of all pursue the second path and develop some thoughts on satire in science fiction. In twentiethcentury Anglo-American fiction with a satirical tendency, science fiction in particular is of considerable importance. I consider science fiction to be:

> [...] die Gesamtheit jener fiktiven Geschichten, in denen Zustände und Handlungen geschildert werden, die unter den gegenwärtigen Verhältnissen nicht möglich und daher nicht glaubhaft darstellbar wären, weil sie Veränderungen und Entwicklungen der Wissenschaft, der Technik, der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Strukturen oder gar des Menschen selbst voraussetzen.[1]

[1] ([...] the sum of those fictitious tales in with situations and activities are described which are impossible and thus implausible under the present conditions, because they presuppose changes and developments in science, in technology, in political and social structures, or even in humanity itself.) U. Suerbaum, U. Broich, R. Borgmeier, *Science Fiction: Theorie und Geschichte, Themen und Typen, Form und Weltbild*, Stuttgart 1981, p. 10.

However, an important precondition for the potential significance of science fiction as satire is, no doubt, the acceptance of the genre as literature in the first place. After decidedly trivial beginnings, science fiction has, for some time, clearly been approaching the mainstream of literature. In the genre's prime sphere of activity, frantic attempts to propagate a ghetto-mentality have ceased, to be replaced by the gradual adoption of the criteria and standards that are normally accepted elsewhere in narrative literature. Serious authors, who are basically outsiders to the genre's domain, are turning towards the genre and are working with science fiction themes and conventions. Likewise, literary criticism is devoting more and more attention to science fiction, though sometimes hestitatingly, or in a mood of coquettish playfulness. Science fiction is no longer just some kind of facile diversion for technologically-minded do-it-yourselfers who are stoneblind to the fine arts, but literature with a considerable potential.

One point in favour of the genre is the vitality which it injects into literary life. Science-fiction texts are not, as a rule, bought to be placed on the shelf unread. There is a sense of fellowship unique to the genre between science fiction writers and readers who take a continuous interest in the genre's development. Science-fiction texts are not only expected to entertain but also to comment on problems of the modern world. For science fiction is apparently pre-destined to tackle questions of fundamental significance: it is, in its essence, a literature of ideas. And anespecially strong point of the genre is its satirical potential.

While this was not recognized for a long period, when science and technology as likely subjects were in the focus of attention, this realization seems to be meeting with growing acceptance. Peter Nicholls, editor of the excellent *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, justly asserts:

> [...] very little sf does not bear at least a family resemblance to satire, at least in those works where the parallels to the contemporary world are derogatory.[2]

Satire cannot be created without a distance to the subject it deals with. Without keeping a certain distance from his topic, the author cannot pillory the imperfections and failings of a certain society, exposing them to ridicule. Consequently, there is a clear tension between satire and realism, and it is small wonder that, for instance, Ian Watt, in his classic analysis of the beginnings of the English novel in the eighteenth century, which is based on the concept of formal realism, has unmistakable difficulties with Fielding's satirical novels, and even has to exclude Swift more or less entirely. Such a distance, as satire requires, is a general principle of science fiction.

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[2] *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction: An Illustrated A to Z*, P. Nicholls, ed., Granada 1981, p. 516.

Science fiction is by nature not primarily mimetic. It cannot pretend merely to depict prevailing conditions because it deviates in important respects from empirical reality. Science fiction thus has been defined, for example, as the literature of cognitive estrangement. The reader must be aware of the fact that the world depicted in a science fiction story differs in fundamental aspects from the reality he is accustomed to. This technique of estrangement, inherent in the genre, can be deployed to great effect, and has also been deployed in this way.

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In what follows, I should first like to discuss the content, and second, the methods and forms that can be observed in satiric fiction. What are the preferred butts or targets of satiric description? Which thematic areas typical of the genre does satire possibly concentrate on, which are neglected? What specific strategies of satirical science fiction can be detected? What formal aspects perhaps play a special role? Immediately following these questions I shall finish my talk, if I have the time, by briefly touching upon aspects of the genre's history and by trying to register such tendencies in the current development of the genre as have an effect on the possibilities of satirical description.

The best-known science fiction satires are undoubtedly the great dystopias of the twentieth century, which have, despite their undeniable independence, now been appropriated and lumped together, with some success, with the genre's standard text corpus by the science fiction fans and critics. They make it clear beyond any doubt that the real subject of satire in science fiction is not some phenomenon in the future but the society of here and now with its deficiencies and failings. The future (or even some other out—of—the—way world, such as a planet light--years away or a parallel world) only serves as the satirical plane of projection on which the failings of the present can be depicted in more sharply defined outlines.

Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) [3] is, above all, a satire on progress aimed at and made possible by modern technology. Man has here become part of an inhumane technology. Each single member is manufactured for his appointed place in this brave new world' by a systematic manipulation of his genes. Owing to the quintessential significance of genetical engineering for the state of affairs here described, the picture drawn by Huxley retains an astonishing topicality even today. At the same time, the overweening arrogance and ruthlessness inherent in political administration are stigmatized by way of satire: in this future society's system,

[3] I use the Granada edition: A. Huxley, *Brave New World*, Granada 1981.

which is organized down to the smallest detail and governed by a highly-specialized administration according to pragmatic reguirements, individual man is reduced to an interchangeable planning unit. The extremely superficial concept of happiness, which serves the technocrats as a guide-line for their rules and measures, reveals, in satirical exaggeration, the current materialism of our age.

It would be too much of a digression to focus at length on the manifold satiric attacks; a few further examples must suffice. The curious taboos of the world of progress emphasize the relativity and social limitation of moral beliefs: for instance, 'mother' and 'father' are considered as indecent words, and the Bible is looked upon as a pornographic book, whereas infantile sex and general promiscuity rate as normal, and even as decent and ethical behaviour. On the other hand, the belief in authority and the craze for titles have survived, despite the altered conditions, in their well-known forms. For instance, VIP Mustapha Mond's visit to the conditioning centre is the sensation for the students present. The opportunity of meeting such a celebrity face-to-face, in the flesh, inspires them with awed expectancy:

> His fordship Mustapha Mond! The eyes of the saluting students almost popped out of their heads. Mustapha Mond! The Resident Controller for Western Europe! One of the Ten World Controllers. One of the Ten... and he sat down on the bench with the D.H.C. [Director of the Hatchery Centre], he was going to stay, to stay, yes, and actually talk to them [...] straight from the horse's mouth. Straight from the mouth of Ford himself. (p. 38)

Accordingly, both the caste system and the society racket are still very much alive. Eton and everything that belongs to it are still going strong. The rituals of the secular religion of progress shed a partly ironic light on conventional religious practices.

However, the counterpart of the 'brave new world' of progress is not presented without criticism, either. The primitivity of the savages' reservation offers a hardly attractive alternative, and the naive traditionalism of John Savage, long before he commits suicide, turns out to be inimical to life. Huxley, by not committing himself, or explicitly developing a positive norm, makes use of the traditional right of the satirist. Thus the self-criticism he himself makes on this point in a later preface, seems hardly convincing.

Whereas in Huxley's book the brilliant and sophisticated ease with which the author paints his canvas results in unmistakable satire, the satirical elements in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [4] have often escaped critical attention. The sombreness of the picture, which had, among other things, been intended as an anti-thesis to Huxley, made it appear more like some kind of pessimistic prophecy than like a satire. In the Orwell

[4] Cf. G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, London 1977.

year, a popular game consisted of drawing parallels between Orwell's vision and the actual conditions of the year nineteen hundred and eighty-four, and in most cases, Orwell the prophet got bad marks. Then, at the latest, the prudent observer had to come to the conclusion that, with this novel, Orwell had not wanted to furnish an actual prognosis of the future, but a hypothetical counter-model to contemporary reality. Upon a closer look, it turned out to be the title of the book itself which provided confirmation that the main reference was not to the future but to contemporary society. '1984' is the satirically alienated version of the year of the novel's genesis, 1948, and is not intended to be a definite date in the future.

Bernard Crick, and of the lading Orvell specialists, at a conference preparatory to the Orwell Year, puts special emphasis on the satirical nature of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by stating:

> He [Orwell] wrote it, he himself said, as a satire—a Swiftian satire. We should no more believe in the literal truth of the institutions of Airstrip One in Oceania than we should believe in the giants and the dwarfs in *Gulliver's Travels*.[5]

For Crick, Orwell's satire is directed at seven targets which I will now briefly summarize:

1. The satire criticises the cynical and arrogant division of the world by the Great Powers and the callous planning of the Cold War in the age after the Bomb.

2. The novel attacks the proletarization of the common people by the modern mass media; ironically enough, in doing so, Orwell failed to recognise the potential of television in this regard, although he did adequately consider the role of penny dreadfuls, the gutter press, pornography and cheap films.

3. It satirises the intellectuals' craving for power and depicts this as the deepest root of totalitarianism.

4. At the same time, it criticises the intellectuals' weakness, their group egotism and their inability to assess the system as a whole: people like Winston do their bit and even enjoy their work although they thus become part of the inhumane system.

5. Orwell protests against the misuse and the falsifications of language for official purposes.

6. He satirises the falsification of history and the destruction of scientific truth in the service of politics.

7. The book especially refers, in a satirical way, to the writings of James Burnham, who, in *The Managerial Revolution* (1942), had put for-

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[5] B. Crick, *Nineteen Eigty-Four and 1984: Satire or Prophecy?* [in:] *Essays from Oceania and Eurasia: George Orwell and 1984*, Papers presented at the Orwell Conference, University of Antwerp, 11—13 November 1983, ed. Benoit J. Suykerbuyk, Antwerp 1984, p. 75.

ward the thesis that the technocrats would supersede the ideologists in world domination.

The two novels by Huxley and Orwell belong to the traditional line of utopias, which underwent a change towards dystopia at the end of the nineteenth century. A close affinity to satire, however, cannot only be observed after this fundamental change to a negative vision, but is detectable, it seems to me, in the very beginnings of the genre. (Science fiction critics, by the way, like to speak of proto-science-fiction in this context.) Even the classical utopias, contrary to the opinions of some ideologists and students of politics, are not unequivocal, serious proposals with a view to the practical improvement of the world. Rather they, too, are playful sketches of models, which reveal through their antithetical attitude to reality, as well as through the literary means they deploy, their satirical orientation. Thomas Morus himself characterises his *Utopia*, on the title-page, as a "libellus [...] festivus", that is, 'an entertaining little book', and established, especially in the first of the two books, an ironical and critical relationship to the contemporary conditions. With good reasons Arthur Pollard, in his *Satire* volume in the Critical Idiom Series, lists the utopia under the heading "Satiric Allegories" as a variety of satire.[6]

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In comparison with the utopias, most science-fiction texts from the actual core of the genre move in a more confined area and, as a rule, restrict themselves to more limited satirical attacks. This holds true, for example, even for Burgess's *1985* (1978),[7] which, as the title suggests, is a corrective comment on Orwell's novel. In this book, it is above all the English labour movement that is attacked and it is especially its closed--shop system, taken to its extreme limits, and propagated as "holistic syndicalism" (p. 117), which is held responsible for the ills of the future society. In his novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962),[8] which has become widely known mainly through Kubrick's film, Burgess depicts juvenile vandalism and its causes as well as the relationship of the state to its citizens, the problem of individual freedom.

Apart from the relationship of state and individual, the capitalist system has proved to be a particularly rewarding butt of satire in science fiction—which is astonishing in the face of the widely-held notion that the genre's attitude is fundamentally reactionary. Here, it is primarily the well-known sf-author Frederik Pohl who comes to the fore. Apart from some short stories about capitalism, his first novel, *The Space Merchants*

[6] A. Pollard, *Satire*, The Critical Idiom 7, London 1970.
[7] A. Burgess, *1985*, London 1978.
[8] A. Burgess, *A. Clockwork Orange*, Harmondsworth 1981.

(1953),[9] written in co-operation with Cyril Kornbluth, comes to mind. The novel depicts a world of consumerdom and ruthless exploitation of natural resources, a world which is totally dominated by a few powerful advertising agencies who carry on feuds against one another. The political domain has lapsed into degeneration: the President of the United States, for example, who is kindly given a lift in a taxi by the protagonist towards the end of the novel, is shown as an insignificant and anxious little man. Mitch Courtenay, the main character, is an extremely influential advertisement manager who has almost reached the top rung of the career ladder. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the system, and says of himself: "Ever since cadet days I have tried to live my life 'for Company and for Sales'." (p. 18). His limited perspective provides the ironic twist which brings the satiric point to bear. Thus he makes the following comments on the revolutionary countermovement of the so-called Consies (whose name is a satirical allusion to the much-quoted 'Commies' of the McCarthy era) with the true ring of conviction:

> I had been exposed to Consie sentiment in my time, and the arguments had all come down to one thing: Nature's way of living was the r i g h t way of living. Silly. If 'Nature' had intended us to eat fresh vegetables, it wouldn't have given us niacin or ascorbic acid. (p. 19)

Mitch blindly trusts the world-improving power of science and technology and believes that:

> Science is a l w a y s a step ahead of the failure of natural resources. After all, when real meat got scarce, we had soyaburgers ready. When oil ran low, technology developed the pedicab. *(Ibid.)*

(The pedicab here praised by Mitch as the *non plus ultra* of progress is, of course, a bicycle taxi.)

Although the conflict is de-fused in the end and the protagonist, having come to recognize the truth, is shipped to Venus with his Consie--friends, the satirical warning of the dangers of American-style capitalism, which is inimical both to nature and Man, is very impressive.

We have here a satirical example of an "extrapolation", much talked--about by science-fiction critics, where specific tendencies of the contemporary conditions are exaggerated and their hypothetical future development is traced. Satirical criticism in science fiction, however, is also sometimes directed at fundamental traits of human nature and of human behaviour. Thus, the short story *The Liberation of Earth* [10] by William Tenn is a mordant satire of the credulity of human beings and their readiness to let themselves be exploited. Two alien races, the Troxxt and

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[9] F. P o h l and C. M. K o r n b l u t h, *The Space Merchant*, Harmondsworth 1973.

[10] *The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus: An Anthology*, ed. B. Aldiss, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 303—320.

the Dendi, who are at war with each other, repeatedly take turns "liberating" the earth, as their propaganda has it, and as the blue-eyed naive narrator innocently echoes, and have themselves celebrated as liberators each time. In the end, however, the earth is almost completely destroyed and—ironically enough—not even safe for military action any more, and the narrator realizes:

> Possibly it was at this time—possibly a liberation or so later—that the Troxxt and the Dendi discovered that the Earth had become far too eccentric in its orbit to possess the minimum safety conditions demanded of a Combat Zone. (p. 320)

Man, however, as the narrator stresses with something akin to religious fervor, is "free", that means, he vegetates unprotected, exposed to conditions of extreme wretchedness.

One further satirical butt of satire in science fiction is the genre itself. As I pointed out in the beginning, satirical selfreflection almost suggests itself—even if science fiction authors tend to take themselves and their profession rather seriously. Not infrequently, though, one meets with isolated instances of this variety, when a certain science-fiction topos is referred to ironicaly in order to create a foil for the story in hand. This happens, for instance, when, in the course of a story, just before encountering an alien, characters state in conversation that non-human beings from other planets exist only in science-fiction comics.

The—rarer—case of a fully developed satire about science fiction is found in Cyril Kornbluth's short story *MS Found in a Chinese Fortune Cookie* [11]. Here, the main butt is the claim that can be found now and then in the world of science fiction that a truth which redeems the world and solves all problems has been discovered. (Thus, for instance, Ron Hubbard, the founder of scientology, who died in California in January 1986, was a science fiction author before rising in rank to become the millionaire head of a sect.) The narrator of the tale within the tale, a science-fiction author himself, has hit upon *The Answer* during the course of his work. At first, however, he thinks he has gone insane:

> I was quite sure I had turned paranoid, because I've seen so much of that kind of thing in science fiction. Anybody can name a dozen writers, editors, and fans who have suddenly seen the light and determined to lead the human race onward and upward out of the old slough. (p. 513).

His wife later affectionately comes to the same conclusion, which is only natural, after all, for "there is probably not one writer's wife who does not suspect her husband is a potential psychotic." (p. 521). Although this diagnosis is obviously incorrect in this case, the lamentable author is given an injection and taken by force to a mental hospital. From there, his only contact is with Kornbluth, the author, to whom he sends cigarette

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 511—522.

papers covered with scribbled bits and pieces of his outrageous theory. Naturally the manuscript, which has to be smuggled out of the institution in Chinese fortune cookies, remains incomplete. The reader waits in vain for the all-encompassing answer. In this short story, the tendency of the genre to combine extreme improbabilities with familiar elements is satirically pilloried.

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Science fiction has at its disposal an unusually large thematic range. If one looks at each of the different thematic areas of the genre, it is easy, indeed, to imagine a satirical treatment of each, and one can also find corresponding examples in science-fiction texts. Ulrich Broich, in his systematic analysis, lists, in the main, the following science-fiction themes: space flight, time travel, conflicts and disasters, alternative worlds, worlds on other planets, parallel worlds, supermen, degenerate man, aliens, robots, androids and computers [12]. Beginning with space flight, which I have already mentioned in connection with *The Space Merchants*, and the device of time travel already used in Wells's *Time Machine* (1895) in order to pillory the dangers of an unbalanced relationship between workers and capitalists, all thematic areas are deployed for the purpose of satire.

The different themes of the genre can be used both more or less in isolation and in combination, or even in a manifold mix, in order to create satire. In Vonnegut's novel *The Sirens of Titan* (1959),[13] for example, we encounter a rich abundance of genre conventions.

Least suitable to a satirical representation seem to be subjects that demand the creation of an intense atmosphere. Remarkably abstemious towards satire, for instance, is Frank Herbert, despite the five hundred pages he had at his disposal, in his novel *Dune* (1965),[14] one of the most successfuul science fiction best sellers. The author is striving to generate a feeling of empathy in the reader for the world of the arid desert planet, and satire would detract from such an effect. Similar things can be said about Stanisław Lem's novel *Solaris* (1961),[15] where it is precisely the protagonist's experience of the strange planet, a huge ocean endowed with intelligence, which is in the foreground. The first-person narrator stresses this in conclusion towards the end of the novel when he declares: "Although I had read numerous accounts of it [i.e. the planet], none of them had prepared me for *the experience as I had lived it*, and I *felt* somehow changed." (p. 203; my italics.). Or in the following paragraph:

[12] Cf. U. Suerbaum, U. Broich, R. Borgmeier, *op. cit.*, p. 63—79.

[13] K. Vonnegut, Jr., *The Sirens of Titan*, London 1967.

[14] F. Herbert, *Dune*, London 1978.

[15] Here the English version, translated from French by J. Kilmartin and S. Cox, is used: S. Lem, *Solaris*, New York 1973.

"I had never *felt* its gigantic presence so strongly [...]" *(Ibid.)* The renunciation of the satiric mode in this case seems to be all the more remarkable as Lem in other works, e.g. in his *Robot Tales (Bajki robotów)*, is a great friend of satire.

It is possibly the theme of conflicts and disasters which is least conducive to satire, since it tends towards a strong emotional response in the reader. J. G. Ballard's disaster novels, such as *The Drowned World* (1962) or *The Crystal World* (1966), scarcely contain any satire. Atmosphere and intense psychological experience, an emphasis on the inner perspective, are clearly opposed to satire.

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Various as the individual themes of science fiction may be, they share one characteristic which determines the genre: their distance from the reader's familiar world of the here and now. From this characteristic distance, we can also derive the most important kinds of satiric strategy in science fiction. They consist of the introduction of a new perspective, of the inversion of familiar viewpoints, and of the creation of surprisingly different ways of looking at things.

A perspective that deviates from the familiar possibly offers itself not only in the future, in alternate worlds, or in the vastness of space, but also in the past. In his short story *Poor Little Warrior!* [16] Brian W. Aldiss takes his protagonist on a hunting safari in a time-mobile, back to the age of the brontosaurus. In the time travel tourism, the reader recognizes, in satirical distortion, the mutated growths of contemporary top-notch tourism: farther and farther, riskier and riskier the trip has to be so that the traveller can escape from his own self. And this enterprise is doomed to failure in the end, as the trigger-happy giant-saurian hunter has to realize: "Poor little warrior, science will never invent anything to assist the titanic death you want in the contraterrene caverns of your fee-fo-fi--fumblingly fearful id!" (p. 77). Only death itself can do justice to the death-wish, but actual death never possesses the dimensions desired by the subconscious.

The altered perspective, here, is also a matter of dimension: the time traveller, although he manages to kill the thunder lizard with well-aimed shots from his super-rifle, is then savaged by giant crab-like parasites that leave the slain host animal and kill the hunter. So, in the end, his desire to die is appeased, and the narrator can offer him the following, ironic, consolation:

> You do your best, kicking for at least three minutes. By the end of that time there is a whole pack of the creatures on you. Already they are picking

[16] *The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus...*, p. 72—78.

your carcass loving clean. You're going to like it up there on top of the Rockies; you won't feel a thing. (p. 78).

Dimension is an important aspect of the changed perspective in Pohl's *The Tunnel under the World.*[17] The protagonist discovers by chance that his life invariably passes in the same, recurring patterns. Not only do his way to work, the work at his office, and the way he spends his leisure time always proceed according to the same routine, moreover, it is always the same day, July 15. After the protagonist has tracked down various things in his life that make no sense, he finally discovers that he is a robot. He and his surroundings are part of an experimental model for the exact empirical testing of marketing prospects of new industrial products. After an accident in a chemical factory, which annihilated a small American town with over twenty thousand inhabitants, the data and thought patterns stored in the casualties' brains were transferred to robots, which yielded "a whole town, a perfect slice of America" (p. 364). This provides an experimental set-up on which trade and industry can test the consumer reaction of potential purchasing groups to the new products. The cynicism of the advertisement designers is fully brought to bear when the main character is told that the whole town (including himself) exists only on a miniature scale. The responsible manager tells him to his face: "Im a businessman; I count costs. If a thing has to be full-scale, I build it that way. But there wasn't any need to in this case.", (p. 368). To industry, which manufactures products and plans their sale, the consumer—this is the satirical message—is only a calculable machine, and one of the miniature size at that. The perspective of the consumer is, in the end, negligible.

In *Happy Birthday, Dear Jesus,*[18] much like in *The Space Merchants*, Pohl makes use of the naive perspective of an individual who enthusiastically supports the futuristic consumer society, and who is convinced of its values and institutions. When the protagonist, who adores a missionary's daughter despite her old-fashioned ways, sends Father Christmas with his helpers and glittering consumer goods to her house in the 'usual way', that is, in the month of September, and he is quite shocked to discover that he has been declared a *persona non grata* for "perverting the Christian festival", (p. 77).

Walter M. Miller, in his story *I Made You,*[19] introduces the perspective of a machine, in this case, that of a highlyspecialised fighting machine named Grumbler. The machine is portrayed as having human attributes, emotions in particular, whereas the human beings are treated like things.

Inversion is a very popular and effective satirical method in science

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 337—369.

[18] *The Best of Frederik Pohl*, New York 1975, p. 62—85.

[19] *The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus...* p. 485—496.

fiction. That which is normal and familiar to the reader is presented as the unusual and eccentric, and vice versa. In Robert Sheckly's tale *The Monsters* [20] aliens land on a planet with their spacecraft. The natives quickly discover that "They are decidedly not human", (p. 111) and then wonder: "Could antything so hideous be moral?" Such doubts are further nurtured by the appearance of the newcomers:

> Upon closer inspection, the creatures were more horrible than could be dreamed. The bulbous object on their bodies just might be a head [...]. But in the middle of that head, instead of a smooth, characterful surface, was a raisged ridge. Two round indentures were on either side of it, and two more knobs on either side of that. And in the lower half of the head—if such it was—a pale reddish slash ran across. (p. 111).

The reader has been aware for some time now that the strange 'monsters' are really humans, and that he shares the perspective of amphibious aliens. By reversing the positions, values and opinions that are normally taken for granted are alienated, modified and satirically called into question. Not least of all, the matter-of-factness with which one's own opinion is taken to be the only possible one, without so much as a single doubt, receives satirical criticism.

The very title of William Tenn's *Eastward Ho!*,[21] an inversion of the old catchword of the American pioneers, reveals the tendency of this story. After an atomic war, the Red Indians have turned out to be most adaptable and thus are in a dominant position. The roles of Indians and Whites are reversed. The Whites are fobbed off with trinkets, are not allowed to drink fire-water, and are pushed farther and farther back on to uninhabitable land. In the end, the last group of Whites capable of any action sets out on a few sailing-boats to travel due east across the Atlantic on a quest for the much-fabled lands of Europe. Primarily, what is satirically questioned here, is the American pioneer spirit.

An even more daring inversion is affected by Pohl in his wellknown short story, *The Midas Plague*.[22] In a total consumer society, the familiar relations are inverted. The rich enjoy the privilege of not having to consume, whereas the poor are subject to a graduated form of compulsion to consume, that means, they are forced to pull their weight in the consumption of automatically produced goods. The protagonist, whose newly-contracted marriage shows some traits which, *mutatis mutandis*, are familiar to the reader, works his way upwards, not without problems, and can so relieve himself of the oppressive obligation to consume. The story, written with panache, though in patches somewhat long-winded, satirically calls traditional roles in modern consumer society into question.

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[20] *Best SF Five*, ed. E. Crispin, London 1971, p. 108—118.

[21] *The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus...*, p. 536—552.

[22] *The Best of Frederik Pohl...*, p. 128—187.

Above all, it fundamentally poses the question whether, or to what extent, wealth, in its traditional meaning, signifies freedom and when, on the contrary, it turns into an obligation to consume.

Whereas, in the course of this story, the satirical reversal strategy is obvious to the reader relatively early, it is only in retrospect, so to speak, that some short stories gain their full satirical quality. The special final sharp twist of the ending, not uncommonly a proper surprise ending, lets the story appear, with hindsight, in a new satirical light. A graphic example is Robert Sheckley's *The Store of the Worlds.*[23] Until the end, the reader believes that the protagonist has not accepted the storekeeper's offer of opening up an ideal, alternate world to him, and has chosen instead to carry on his usual life in the bosom of his family with its minor and major problems. At the end, however, the reader discovers that this supposed reality of day-to-day bourgeois life, seen before the backdrop of a post-nuclear situation of scarcity, is an imaginary reality. What seem to be dull trivialities of normal life—so the ending is satirically trying to make clear—adopt, if seen from a different perspective almost ideal features.

Satiric quality can also be found in the final twist of the well-known short story *The Cage* [24] by Bertram Chandler. Human beings marooned on a distant planet, having been caught and put behind bars in a sort of zoo by aliens, try to convince their wardens that they are intelligent and hence deserve better treatment. Their final release is due to the fact that, through boredom, they catch a mouse (or rather, a mouse-like animal) which they put into a woven cage. "Only rational beings", so the satirical definition at the ending tells us, "put other beings in cages". (p. 535).

An essential function in satiric strategy can be accorded to language, even above and beyond what is possible in the text of mainstream literature. Science fiction can—and even ought to—depict the strange world by means of a strange language. The author has the possibility of coating this new language with a satirically alienating veneer. An extreme example is Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange,* with its peculiar artificial language Nadsat, which possesses satirical connotations. A weak form of special language unique to science fiction is the use of proper names, which, as in the case of the *Troxxt* (with two x's) and the *Dendi* in *The Liberation of Earth,* can also be taken as tokens of satire.

Up to this point, I have not distinguished between novels and short stories, for both the short and long forms of narrative have been used in the history of the genre. Now, however, I should like to raise the question as to whether both forms possess the same satirical potential, or

[23] *The Penguin Science Fiction Omnibus...*, p. 370—376.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 523—535.

whether one of the two varieties has greater significance in the field of satire. I would suggest that it is the short form, indeed, which is predestined for satire.

A number of arguments, which have, in part, ben mentioned before, can corroborate this assumption (I should like to restrict myself here to the following theses):

1. We saw that the satirical tendency in the short stories of some authors is definitely more marked than in their novels. Lem is a salient example; another one could be Ballard.

2. Especially effective satirical methods, such as the final twist, are reduced in effectiveness the longer the narrative is, or are scarcely possible in longer forms.

3. As we saw in the case of Pohl's *The Midas Plague*, a story of about sixty pages in length, a detailed representation can impair the satirical effect.

4. Very long novels, such as Herbert's *Dune* and its sequels, are often conspicuously abstemious from satire.

5. On the other hand, markedly satirical novels are relatively short and/or split up into small parts or structured episodically. A striking example are Vonnegut's novels, especially *Cat's Cradle* (1963).[25]

What remains to be done is to sketch in a few historical perspectives and to draw the contemporary picture of science fiction with regard to satire. Nicholls, in his 1979 article from which I quoted in the beginning, finds the tendency to be on the wane. He writes, "Pure satires are becoming comparatively rare in sf [...]." [26]

However, the relatively recent success of Douglas Adams' *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) [27] seems to be at variance with this claim. This novel, to which, in the meantime, three sequels have been added, is very reminiscent of Vonnegut. The very author's biography in the opening pages, where Adams is described as follows: "He is not married, has no children, and does not live in Surrey", this biography as well as the title indicate the satirical intention of the book. When, in the beginning of the novel, the earth is to be disposed of by a galactic mechanical caterpillar squad, in order to create room for a "hyper-spatial express route", there are obvious parallels to the methods of terrestrial authorities. Those of the inhabitants of the earth who are not to be pacified by the announcement that this action will only take two minutes, are supplied with the soothing and threatening justification of the official measures, by means of a giant public address system with quadrophonic sound reproduction and a sophisticated distortion technology:

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[25] K. Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*, Harmondsworth 1965.

[26] *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction...*

[27] D. Adams, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, London 1979.

> There's no point in acting all surprised about it. All the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display in your local planning department in Alpha Centauri for fifty of your Earth years, so you've had plenty of time to lodge any formal complaint and it's far too late to start making a fuss about it now. (p. 31)

If one has not made use of the opportunity of having a look at the planning charts, then that is one's own fault, and the galatic speaker washes his hands of the responsibility: "I' m sorry, but if you can't be bothered to take an interest in local affairs that's your own lookout." *(Ibid.)* Apart from the satirical attack on authorities, a whole range of satirical targets can be found, primarily the genre itself and its specific conventions, human attempts at giving meaning to life, religion, high society etc. In the last chapter, philosophy of history, with its partly very superior models of explanation, is attacked when an entry is quoted from the fictitious book—within—the—book *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy:*

> The history of every major Galactic Civilization tends to pass through three distinct and recognizable phases, those of Survival, Inquiry and Sophistication, otherwise known as the How, Why and Where phases.
>
> For instance, the first phase is characterized by the question *How can we eat?* the second by the question *Why do we eat?* and the third by the question *Where shall we have lunch?* (p. 159).

In spite of the exception constituted by Adams' satirical novels, on the whole I tend to agree with Nicholls' thesis about the decreasing importance of satire in today's science fiction. Two tendencies, represented by J.R.R. Tolkien and Ursula Le Guin, are moving, I believe, in this direction.

Primarily owing to the immense success of Tolkien, there is a strong interest in the genre in fantasy and fantasy elements. Fantasy, however, with its emphasis on atmosphere and emotion, stands somewhat in contradiction to the distancing and alienating attitude of the satirist.

The same holds true for the demand for increased psychological verisimilitude, the depiction of more complex and rounder characters, as they have been propagated and achieved in exemplary fashion by Ursula Le Guin, who may be the most outstanding contemporary representative of the genre. If, however, science fiction is, indeed—either seemingly or in reality—to join up with mainstream literature à la Virginia Woolf, the genre simultaneously loses some of its satiric potential. Pollard says about satire in general: "[...] the satiric character can possess only a limited independence. More than most fictional characters he is the creature of his maker." [28] Science fiction, whose difficulties in the portrayal of round characters have been variously noted by genre theoreticians, has basi-

[28] A. Pollard, *op. cit.* p. 54.

cally fitted this finding. If, however, the genre now succeeds in its attempts to create more complex characters, the consequence will be an automatic withdrawal from satire.

Whether and in how far these tendencies will persist in the future, no one can say. Science fiction, too, has long since said farewell to the claim of being able to give reliable forecasts of the future. The genre historian should follow the example of the genre.

SATYRA I LITERATURA FANTASTYCZNO-NAUKOWA

STRESZCZENIE

Rozprawa rozpoczyna się obserwacją, iż w dwudziestowiecznej anglo-amerykańskiej SF o charakterze satyrycznym szczególne znaczenie ma element fantastyczno-naukowy. Stało się to możliwe wskutek tego, że literatura SF stale i zdecydowanie zbliżała się do głównego nurtu literatury. Nie można już patrzeć na SF jako na prymitywny sposób zajmowania się nauką i technologią, lecz należy ją uważać za prawdziwą odmianę literatury, za literaturę idei, której jedną z mocnych cech, jak rozprawa utrzymuje, jest jej potencjał satyryczny. Odchylenie od empirycznej rzeczywistości, dystans wobec przedmiotu przedstawionego — co jest istotne dla satyry — jest także podstawowym składnikiem SF, a więc bardzo łatwo pozwala na podejście satyryczne.

Autor omawia szereg tekstów jako przykłady satyrycznej treści SF. W dobrze znanych wielkich antyutopiach Huxleya i Orwella namalowano dość szeroko zakrojone satyryczne obrazy nowoczesnego społeczeństwa. Jednak i w innych tekstach, które o wiele wyraźniej należą do tego *genre*, można znaleźć satyryczne ataki o bardziej ograniczonym zasięgu. Często odnoszą się one do stosunku między państwem i jednostką, do pewnych aspektów systemu kapitalistycznego, lecz również do podstawowych cech ludzkiej natury, a nawet do samej SF i jej nieco ekscentrycznych rysów.

Do satyrycznego potraktowania nadają się różne standardowe tematy SF, jak podróże kosmiczne lub roboty. Występują one zarówno bardziej lub mniej izolowane jak i w połączeniu. Najmniej zmierzają ku satyrze, jak to rozprawa wykazuje, tematy związane z atmosferą i intensywnym przeżyciem psychologicznym.

Satyryczne strategie używane w SF często polegają na nowych perspektywach otwieranych przez przyszłość, inne światy, przestrzeń kosmiczną, a nawet przeszłość. W niektórych przypadkach niezwykła perspektywa może być kwestią rozmiaru. Ulubioną metodą satyryczną w SF jest przede wszystkim inwersja. Zakończenie niespodzianką, jako środek satyryczny, rezerwuje się dla noweli SF, która na ogół wydaje się rozporządzać większym potencjałem satyrycznym niż długie opowiadanie.

Rozprawa zamyka się naszkicowaniem kilku perspektyw historycznych. Z pewnymi wyjątkami, rola satyry w dzisiejszej SF zdaje się zmniejszać. Autor podejmuje próbę wyjaśnienia tego zwiększonym znaczeniem fantazji (Tolkien) i wzrastającymi usiłowaniami tworzenia pełnych charakterów (Le Guin), które to tendencje nie sprzyjają satyrze.

Przełożył *Witold Ostrowski*