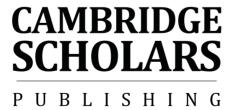# Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited

Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited

Edited by

Andrzej Wicher, Piotr Spyra and Joanna Matyjaszczyk

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INTRODUCTION

ANDRZEJ WICHER

The present volume may confirm some of the expectations that can be formed in the prospective readers' minds even before they start to peruse this text. They would be no doubt right in thinking that the field of fantastic literature abounds in unresolved and contentious issues to which no simple answers can be provided, even if, as is here the case, the theoretical aspects of this genre are in the centre of the authors' attention. The same can of course be said about the so-called mainstream literature, but in the case of fantastic literature, no matter whether it is science fiction or fantasy, there is an additional problem consisting in establishing the relationship between the above-mentioned genres and the genres of the mainstream, or rather in providing some kind of justification for the existence of science fiction and fantasy. This is a little strange, considering that the well known quotation from Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> indeed the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse and yet would still be a kind of history, whether written in metre or not. The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts,

seems to suggest that it is exactly the kind of literature that gives full rein to imagination that truly deserves to be described as faithful to Aristotle's insight about the nature of poetry. Instead of writing about what happened, or writing something that at least looks like an account of what happened, which is what the mainstream literature excels at, a truly inspired poet, or fiction writer, should strive to illustrate "the general truths" ($τὰ\ καθολου$) with what goes far beyond any factual accounts, and is concerned only with "what might happen." Only then can such a poet be reasonably sure that his or her creations will not be confused with the writings of a historian.

Naturally, it would be misguided to attribute to Aristotle an uncritical attitude to irrationality in literature. Much depends of course on how we

interpret the Aristotelian phrase from Chapter 9 of his *Poetics*: τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. It gets translated as "what might happen," "the sort of thing that would happen," or "things that may happen." Fortunately, Aristotle himself explains that what he means by this phrase are things "that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity" or "what can happen in a strictly probable or necessary sequence," and yet this explanation is also problematic, because it seems to suggest that the requirements of necessity (τὸ ἀναγκαῖον) may overrule the rules of probability (τὰ δυνατὰ). Equally ambiguous seems to be the verdict: "One ought to prefer likely impossibilities to unconvincing possibilities, and not compose one's argument of irrational parts" (qtd. in Russel 84). It appears then that "likely impossibilities" (ἀδύνατα εἰκότα) cannot be irrational, even though they can go beyond the limits of the conventionally understood order of the world. At another place of his work Aristotle concedes that "the poet should put what is amazing into his tragedies" (qtd. in Leitch 113). And again it is not quite clear what the author meant by "what is amazing" (το θαυμαστόν),[1] but we get to know that "what is amazing is pleasant."

We may also learn from Aristotle that epic lends itself more easily to representations of "what is amazing" than drama: "what is improbable, from which amazement arises most, is more admissible in epic because [the audience] does not see the person in action." This perception will be after many centuries echoed, in a more radical form, by J.R.R. Tolkien: "[b]ut Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy. Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when it is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted" (Tolkien 47). The problem with such representations is that they "achieve buffoonery and mimicry" instead of "Fantasy." It is clear enough that Tolkien, just like Aristotle, was, on the one hand, fascinated with the possibilities of the wonderful and the marvellous, and, on the other hand, worried by their potential associations with the anarchic, the chaotic, and the ridiculous. It is, at any rate, remarkable that the man largely responsible for the flourishing of fantasy literature in our times could criticize the device of the Time Machine, in H.G. Wells's famous science fiction novel, as "preposterous and incredible" (Tolkien 17). It is also remarkable that a fantasy author should object to an incredibility committed by a science fiction writer, even though it is generally science fiction that is credited with a firmer grasp on reality than fantasy. James Gunn claims that "[t]he basis of fantasy is psychological truth; nothing else matters. The basis of science fiction is

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[1] It seems worth noticing that this Greek term has been translated into Polish as "cudowność" (the marvellous); cf Sinko 53.

the real world" ("Toward a Definition of Science Fiction" 11). Let it be noticed that, while apparently confirming the superiority of science fiction over fantasy, Gunn attributes some measure of truthfulness to both genres. Let it also be noticed that the phrase "psychological truth" implies the kind of truth that is free from the historical and geographical context, and, for this reason, common to humanity at large. It is hard to imagine that Aristotle could have something else in mind when speaking about the "general truths."

All this implies, no doubt, that there should be a certain limit to the free play of imagination, and that this postulate was long recognized as valid even by the creators of fantastic literature. It is exactly the above-mentioned H.G. Wells, blamed by Tolkien for going too far in the direction of the incredible, who formulated the so called Wells's law, stipulating that "only a single fantastic assumption was admissible per story, and must thereafter be developed with the strictest logic of which the writer is capable," and asserting that "nothing remains interesting where anything may happen" ("Wells's law"). James Gunn, in his article "The Readers of Hard Science Fiction," says the following: "At its best, fantasy leads us to psychological insights; at its least, to mindless adventure" (85); indeed, such "psychological insights" look, as has been already emphasized, like another version of Aristotle's "general truths," and the often extreme situations and difficulties that the characters of fantastic literature are confronted with look like an excellent experimental laboratory, where human psychology is tested and revealed. And yet the lovers of this kind of literature are often regarded as amateurs of "mindless adventure."

Having a quick look at the chapters of the present volume should convince the reader that our authors do notice in the literature that they deal with such crucial psychological, and perhaps even ontological, insights. One of the recurrent points of reference in these articles is Tzvetan Todorov's distinction of three modes in fantastic literature: the marvellous, which is characterized by a spontaneous acceptance of the possibility of supernatural events and creatures, which are then treated as if they were natural; the uncanny, in which everything apparently supernatural has to be explained away as a kind of hoax or illusion that only seemed to undermine or violate the rules of the natural and rational reality; and the fantastic proper, in which the reader, and sometimes also the acting characters, cannot feel certain as to the nature of the narrated, or observed, events: they may be supernatural, but this remains only a supposition or hypothesis (cf. Todorov 25, 41). Todorov's theory, though often criticized, sometimes very harshly, bears witness to the persistence

of the Aristotelian dilemma of how to rationalize the pleasure that the readers derive from representations that seem to defy human reason. Hence its clear bias towards such fantastic representations that preserve at least a semblance of rational worldview.

Halszka Leleń's "The Fantastic as a Technique of Redynamizing Mimetic Fiction" might be read as, among other things, an interesting attempt to defend H.G. Wells's use of what Tolkien called the "preposterous and incredible" device of the Time Machine. The author argues that elements of the fantastic, especially when placed in a realistic context, "redynamize" a given narrative and help to drive its message home. Aristotle of course would not be surprised by this conclusion; for him, giving the writers the licence to take recourse to fiction (which he calls the impossible, or the amazing) was exactly the price that sometimes has to be paid for making the "general truth" appear.

In Joanna Matyjaszczyk's "Todorov's Fantastic and Aguirre's Numinous as the Stages of an Uncompleted Rite of Passage" we observe, mainly on the basis of Wordsworth's ballad "The Idiot Boy," how the categories devised by the famous theoreticians of fantastic literature melt and coalesce when confronted with the textual reality. Remarkable here is the author's ability to connect and reinterpret theoretical conceptions, such as Todorov's three genres of the fantastic and Aguirre's theory of Gothic space, which are not usually set alongside each other. Also remarkable and highly original is her diachronic, rather than synchronic, interpretation of Todorov's theory.

Piotr Spyra's article "Gothic Time and Non-Euclidean Spaces: Temporal Geometries of Terror in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft" is a fascinating account of how modern inventions and discoveries in the fields of physics and mathematics served H.P. Lovecraft, with his essentially conservative attitude, to construct not only the nightmarish space of the fantastic sunken city of R'lyeh, the abode of "the abominable Cthulhu," but also the equally terrifying mental timescapes that structure his characters' experience of fear. As in the previous article, much is made here of Aguirre's theory of Gothic space.

In Åsa Josefson's "People Have a Tendency to Rationalize What They Can, and Forget What They Can't: On the Ambivalence of the Fantastic Universe in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" we observe the limits of the applicability of Todorov's theory, which clearly fails to account for some attitudes towards the supernatural that can be observed in modern fantasy. Thus, we may discover here the possibility of viewing Todorov's "the fantastic proper" not as a condition of hesitation between a supernaturalist

and rational interpretation of ambiguous situations, but rather as an intrinsic combination of two radically different modes of being.

Imke Lichterfeld's "'He howl'd fearfully; Said he was a wolf': Lycanthropy in English Renaissance Tragedy and Contemporary Popular Fiction" traces competently a highly interesting historical process as a result of which the motif of the werewolf, treated in a stereotypical way in the Renaissance theatre, is no longer, in modern literature, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, a simple representation of a monstrous character in a monstrous body. The relationship between the body and character appears, in modern versions of literary lycanthropy, to be often rather complicated and paradoxical.

Weronika Łaszkiewicz's "The Reinvention of Lycanthropy in Modern Fantasy Literature" is, to a large extent, a natural complement to the previous essay. It shows the combination of the motif of lycanthropy with such phenomena as childhood, femininity, or comicality. This combination is highly innovative, perhaps even amazing, considering the traditional representations of lycanthropy. The author shows a good orientation both in English and Norwegian fantastic literature, where the motif of the werewolf is made ample use of.

The chapter by Przemysław Górniak, "Robert E. Howard's Conan Cycle as Modern Epic," is an erudite, but also very readable, study in which the modern fantastic epic literature, represented by R.E. Howard's Conan cycle, is compared, in a rather unorthodox and innovative fashion, with the great epic poems of the past, such as Homer's *Iliad*, or Virgil's *Aeneid*. Since the differences that divide them are obvious enough, the author rightly concentrates on the sometimes rather surprising and remarkable similarities between them.

Bartłomiej Błaszkiewicz's essay "On the Theories of Kingship in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*" shows that fantasy novels, or at least some of them, in spite of being credited only with "psychological truth," can in fact convey a lot of reliable information on various aspects of traditional, especially medieval, society. This chapter suggests that the radical divorce from reality that critics often attribute to fantasy literature may only be a cloak for the fundamental realism of this genre.

In Maria Błaszkiewicz's "Allegorizing the Fantastic: A Spenserian Reading of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*" we find a number of challenging theoretical insights concerning the way allegory functions in fantasy literature. It appears that a more flexible way of understanding allegory makes it possible to find allegorical meanings without dismissing the

disgust of many authors, such as J.R.R. Tolkien, with simplistic allegorical interpretations.

In Robert Gadowski's article, "Critical Dystopia for Young People: The Freedom Meme in American Young Adult Dystopian Science Fiction," we find an interesting study of the way in which the topic of freedom shaped American dystopian literature, giving it its characteristic national stamp. This line of thinking no doubt opens up an attractive possibility of thinking of fantastic literature as a product of national culture, even though it may lack any clear references to a realistic cultural or historical context.

Zbigniew Głowala's "Freaks of Flesh and Mind: (De)generation in the Works of Clive Barker" includes a number of rather provocative statements concerning the status of horror literature. The author claims, on the basis of his analysis of works by Clive Barker, that horror literature, instead of being a niche phenomenon, should be treated, from an existentialist point of view, as the most central of literary genres, which certainly challenges the traditional division between the so-called mainstream literature and other literary genres.

Finally, concerning Maciej Wieczorek's chapter, entitled "Staging the Fantastic: Tolkien, Todorov, and Theatricality in Contemporary British Drama," we may say that it is a bold attempt to refute Tolkien's above-mentioned denial of the possibility to reconcile the spirit of Fantasy with the spirit of Theatre. According to Wieczorek, it is quite possible to stage plays containing fantastic or supernatural elements, and there is nothing that would make the theatrical convention into a less effective carrier of the fantastic than the narrative literature with which fantasy is usually associated. This argument is illustrated with some appropriate examples taken from modern British theatre.

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Chapter One

The Fantastic as a Technique
of Redynamizing Mimetic Fiction

Halszka Leleń

Despite the unprecedented surge in literary theories in the past century, the few existent theories of the fantastic are still scarcely recognized as a separate field in literary studies. The overall and perceptive study of twentieth-century literary theories by Anna Burzyńska and Michał Paweł Markowski does not even list the category of the fantastic, referring only to Sigmund Freud's term of the uncanny, or *Unheimliche*, which was developed on the grounds of psychoanalysis (65). The lack of a consistent approach among scholars makes it difficult to determine the systemic function of literary techniques proper to fantastic literature so as to view it in the context of other types of fiction. The aim of this chapter is to consider the devices of two-world structure in fantastic fiction and of fantastic intrusion in antimimetic fiction (as distinguished by Zgorzelski, "On Differentiating" 300-02). It is to demonstrate that they are artistic techniques oriented at transposing mimetic ways of representation into new, but still recognizable, models of the world which act as a commentary on the quasi-empirical world. This principle of transposition works here by changing supragenological conventions, just like the change of pitch in music. In this way conventions of mimetic fiction are redynamized. Before we proceed to discuss this function of the fantastic, it is worthwhile to present an overview of crucial theoretical distinctions.

The notable literary scholarship focused on the phenomenon of fantastic literature and literature dealing with the fantastic element is represented by Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction a la literature fantastique*, which considers the fantastic as a phenomenon related to genological studies. Some influential observations on the poetics and development of the literary genre of fantastic literature have been presented by Darko Suvin in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. There is also a discriminative but relatively little known theory of the fantastic created by Andrzej

Zgorzelski, which is the foundation of this chapter. It was first developed in two of his works. *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science Fiction* became known only to Polish specialists, although it was favourably and extensively reviewed in *Science Fiction Studies* in 1981 (Blaim). "On Differentiating Fantastic Fiction" appeared in *Poetics Today* (1984) but was scarcely recognized as important for the development of the concept of fantastic literature outside Polish literary circles. These two texts, as well as some other works of the scholar, marking his lifetime focus on the fantastic, contributed to a more recent publication entitled *Born of the Fantastic*, published in Poland in 2004 and reviewed in *Science Fiction Studies* in 2013, where it is praised for its "coherence of […] proposals" (Trźbicki 184). Zgorzelski's discussion is very precise in systemic terms and allows for a distinction of fantastic literature from science fiction and fantasy, with which it is frequently confused in contemporary scholarship (for example in the works of Scholes, Schlobin and Suvin referred to in this chapter). Zgorzelski identifies fantastic literature as a supragenological type of fiction built on the principle of world-model confrontation which is acknowledged within the fictional world by character reaction. What the implied reader recognizes as the order of the fictional world modelled on empirical reality is confronted with a different, strange, and fantastic world order ("On Differentiating" 302).

It needs to be noted that the three above-mentioned scholars can be seen as forming different schools of thinking about the phenomenon in question. Zgorzelski is aware of Todorov's and Suvin's achievements as his predecessors in the research into the fantastic, but he is also highly critical of their lack of precision. For example, the Polish scholar points out the usefulness of the application of Suvin's term *novum* for the discussion of the modelling of the fictional world in the case of the appearance of the fantastic, but he also points out the inadequacy of restricting it only to the concept of estrangement (Zgorzelski, *Born* 48-49). Zgorzelski is even more distanced from Todorov's theoretical background when he argues that "his concept of genre is dangerously entangled in generative terminology and in result hardly workable in analyses." He goes on to assert that in Todorov, the relationship "between the fantastic and genological conventions […] is not adequately explained" (Zgorzelski, *Born* 9-20).

For the present consideration of the fantastic as a device of fiction and of fantastic literature, one needs to understand the way a literary text operates. Speaking about models of the world, rather than records of the world, is an idea proposed by Robert Scholes, who argues that "[i]f fictions are model versions of reality, rather than either records of the real

or fabrications of the unreal, then we must explore the ways in which such models may relate to our existence" (11). Undoubtedly, this should be done by viewing the literary devices proper to fantastic fiction as deliberate ways of foregrounding the aesthetic plane of the texts. Such an awareness is not directly expressed in criticism, but it can be inferred from many scholarly observations. Roger C. Schlobin comments on the artistic quality in "fantasy works," by which he means both fantastic and antimimetic types of fiction proposed by Zgorzelski, when he argues that "fantasy's reliance on the impossible and the empirically unknown requires less imitation and more invention than mimetic art" (Preface xvi). These two commentaries from Scholes and Schlobin also draw attention to the more widely felt relationship between models of the world in fantastic and mimetic literature and the resulting possibility of finding some planes of comparison between these supragenological categories.

Zgorzelski distinguishes fantastic literature from mimetic fiction. The latter type of prose is built on the principle of recognition by the implied reader of the order of the empirical reality in the fictional world (302). In this theory, the two types of fiction—fantastic and mimetic—are different from the type of literary text which uses the device of the fantastic intrusion of a single supernatural element which breaks the world model initially introduced as quasi-empirical. This type of fiction is called antimimetic by the scholar. It uses the device of the fantastic in the function of correcting the mimetic laws of the fictional world which are initially established in the text. This is attained, for example, by the appearance of a ghost (Zgorzelski, *Fantastyka* 21).

Antimimetic texts can be categorized according to their application of some recognizable, generic devices of the fantastic, known from the Gothic repertoire or developed with the rise of scientific romance, such as a ghost or an apparition, the devil, imaginary species, unknown inventions or some progress-related change of human abilities. Fantastic texts, by contrast, incorporate the character's journey, or sometimes only insight, into another, strange and unknown reality which does not comply with the mimetic order of the character's world. These texts are distinguished by the properties of the fantastic world, with the marked modelling based on some recurring topoi. One of them is *locus amoenus*, based on biblical Eden. This type of texts can be viewed in generic terms as a reactivation of the common spatial motifs used in the European medieval tradition (Schlobin, "Locus Amoenus" 29-30). There is also a tendency to use the topos of *locus terribilis*, which is based on the biblical representations of Hell or Purgatory and linked to the literary motif of a terrifying place from the Gothic tradition. Most prominent are also the utopian or dystopian

elements of these topoi, which are modified with various combinations of post-pastoral features and quasi-scientific elements with a Gothic tint. Sometimes the techniques used by the two types of fiction, fantastic and antimimetic, converge in some way. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is a fantastic text in Zgorzelski's categories. On the one hand, it establishes the literary conventions for vampire stories based on a confrontation between the quasi-empirical world order of nineteenth-century England and the supernatural Transylvanian reality. On the other hand, the novel is clearly rooted in the conventional elements of Gothic fiction and its model of supernatural visitation apparent in the motifs of the haunted mansion, assaulted lady, fatal attraction, character going insane, and others (Pierce 213).

The central idea of this chapter—seeing the devices of two-world structure and of fantastic intrusion as means of renewing the established conventions of mimetic fiction—is not completely new. In his analysis of the generic process leading to the emergence of novel supragenological conventions, Zgorzelski identifies the fantastic element in literature as the principle of the generic reinvigoration of petrified conventions which have lost their force, leading to the appearance of some *novum*. The scholar traces the process leading to the emergence of the genre of science fiction from the earlier utopia. The understanding of such generic role of the fantastic in the historic-literary process can also prove inspiring in terms of how it helps to understand the way fantastic devices redynamize the precepts of mimetic fiction. This is what the present chapter aims to demonstrate. However, we shall treat the fantastic as not only the fantastic element of antimimetic fiction but also as the technique of two-world structure to be found in fantastic fiction in Zgorzelski's terms. The intrusion of the fantastic element, which shatters the known, recognizable and tamed order of quasi-empirical reality, as well as the device of two-world structure, can be treated as factors inducing a new way of looking at the fictional world and its conflicts. By representing the world order of apparently known reality in a changed and novel way, the text reveals itself to be in need of correction on the level of the act of reading as it induces perception from a new, metaphorical perspective.

The device of fantastic intrusion is very widespread in the prose of the turn of the century. It seems that many texts use the device of the ghost or apparition so as to reveal something hidden about the personality or psychological condition of the character as well as about the society that he or she represents. This literary metaphorization of senses has been widely noticed by literary critics in "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" by Robert Louis Stevenson. It is quite frequent for ghost stories to

redynamize the precepts of psychological fiction, with the fantastic device used as the vortex of the character's emotional state. The split of character features into two personages is acknowledged in Stevenson's short story as the result of deliberate action on the part of the character, who wants to control and eliminate the negative aspect of his personality. This leads to the surge of Gothic horrors in the townscape which is likewise divided in spatial terms into the realms of darkness and light. The plot development is focused on demonstrating the negative axiological assessment of the social system which produces such a conflict on the character and spatial level of the fictional world model.

The device of a dream is also exploited quite frequently in the stories which introduce the fantastic as a tentative interpretative option which is not ultimately confirmed. In the short story "The Withered Arm" by Thomas Hardy, the elements of the Gothic convention are used for the transposition of the psychological conflict of the central character—a wronged milkmaid typical of Hardy—into the realm of the supernatural. The country tale of a pastoral type is here modified by the intrusion of the ghost which is not certain and stands for the character's suppressed emotions. Rhoda does not consciously cast a curse on Gertrude, the new wife of her son's father. She only dreams she makes a gesture of self-defence in the nightmare she experiences while sleeping. Such uncertainty provokes an ambiguous reading of the text and functions as a principal factor of destabilized interpretation. This constitutes a continuation of some Gothic fiction conventions of prolonged indeterminacy used by Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The twisting of the conventional horror-fiction device of a ghost's appearance can be observed in many texts of the period. In "The Turn of the Screw" by Henry James, the reader is never informed clearly that the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel are really seen at Bly. The narrative technique of first-person narration in the embedded story makes it possible to interpret the sightings as an excited projection of the troubled state of the obsessive governess. The way she is characterized as over-concerned about screening the children's innocence and the way she tries to curb the growth of their adolescent sexuality are the traits which are consistent with her typically Victorian propensity for indirect social communication. These elements contribute to the implicit suggestion of her mental instability as the source of ghostly sightings, which is confirmed by the children's playful and wicked willingness to exploit it. On the other hand, the short story's opening narrative frame works to establish the text as a proper ghost story—the audience gathered at Christmas are waiting for the story, read from a written record, as the ultimate specimen of the genre—with not just one child protagonist seeing

the ghost but two children who experience it. Furthermore, the governess and her story are verified by the admiration expressed for her by the secondary narrator, who reads her story from the record he received directly from the woman. The credibility devices of the narrative frame do not exclude the interpretation of the supernatural as uncertain but rather reinforce it. Both Hardy's and James's texts use the device of the ghost as a reflection of the female character's conflicts over sexuality and relationships with men.

In Hardy's short story, the troubled milkmaid dreams of Gertrude as a demon which pesters her physically—by sitting on her chest—and emotionally, by boasting of a wedding ring which was implicitly denied to Rhoda, who has a son out of wedlock. It is notable that she dreams of the superior lady as an incubus. This type of ghost is traditionally represented as male rather than female and is endowed with a role of encroaching on female integrity by violation of her sexuality. The ghostly vision is thus a projection of the male-female relationships and stands for the harm suffered. It is clearly stated in the text that the vision is a night-time dream. However, its rational explanation is questioned. Instantly after waking up, Rhoda is struck by the real-like quality of the dream. She also learns that Gertrude remembers a similar dream which started her arm ailment. Furthermore, the plot development belies the fact that the sighting was only a vision. Gertrude's arm gradually withers even though Rhoda tries with all her might to help her. Similarly, the proof of the ghost's veracity against the system of uncertainty in "The Turn of the Screw" is Miles's final death. Both long short stories explore the topoi of psychological fiction—the conflicts of emotionally troubled women—and they do this by adopting the device of uncertainty about the appearance of a ghost well within the antimimetic convention.

An important element in such type of fiction is the modification of perception. This is frequently the dominant feature of stories in which the veracity of fantastic intrusion remains uncertain. This type of fiction is noted as generically influential by Todorov (24, 41; cf. Martuszewska 70). This reorients the focus in reception onto the diegetic mode, that is onto the way the story is told. "The consequence of all this is to displace the attention of the reader from the story to the discourse" (Lodge 147). The shift is from what is being described to how it is done. The uncertainty encoded in the projected interpretation makes the text ambiguous with the mutually conflicting, unresolved interpretations sprung between the natural and the marvellous interpretations of fantastic intrusion or fantastic confrontation. Such uncertainty is frequently the dominant feature of the texts and necessitates their constant reinterpretation. This may be brought

into focus already in the narrative frames of the texts, with the extra disturbance to the narrative's unity attained by the difference of attitudes between the opening and the ending.

In "The Door in the Wall" by H.G. Wells both the opening of the short story and its ending foreground the voice of the secondary narrator passing the story to the reader. Wallace's friend first makes it clear that he is doubtful about the story. He passes the judgement that the impression of its veracity springs only from the way in which it is told.

> He told it me with such a direct simplicity of conviction that I could not do otherwise than believe in him. But in the morning, in my own flat, I woke to a different atmosphere, and as I lay in bed and recalled the things he had told me, stripped of the glamour of his earnest slow voice, denuded of the focused shaded table light, the shadowy atmosphere that wrapped about him and the pleasant bright things, the dessert and glasses and napery of the dinner we had shared, making them for the time a bright little world quite cut off from every-day realities, I saw it all as frankly incredible. "He was mystifying!" I said, and then: "How well he did it!" (571)

By contrast, in the short story's ending, his judgement is presented as less determined. The way he poses questions about Wallace's experience is more open-ended. This serves to admit the mystery of the story and relates it to the mystery of the human experience of life and death.

> You may think me superstitious if you will, and foolish; but, indeed, I am more than half-convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something—I know not what—that in the guise of wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret and peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world. At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end. But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination.
> We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger and death. But did he see like that? (584)

The principle of uncertainty in the short story serves to show the self-referential, compositional role of two-world structure as the projection of the unresolved, conflicted nature of Wallace's life torn between childhood dreams and social demands represented by the institutions of school, parent or vocation. This final uncertainty of the narrator works to reinforce the topos of torn, flawed and unstable personality proper to psychological fiction. It is metaphorically worked out into a spatial contrast between the townscape of unhappy childhood and a vision of a Paradise-like garden.

The principle of testing the literary possibilities of cognition offered by using the ghost-story model of fantastic intrusion is also prominently exploited by some Modernist authors. An example can be found in the short story "A Haunted House" by Virginia Woolf. The story of the house visitation by a couple of ghosts is clearly exploited in an experimental manner for the sake of the redynamization of the narrative technique of telling the story. The way it builds equivalences and contrasts which are mostly suspended and left unresolved reveals that the fantastic element does not perform its basic function of changing the world model but rather it is endowed with the function of testing the possibilities of merging points of views and destabilizing the conventions of mimetic and antimimetic fiction. The agentive roles and personal roles in the short story are left uncertain. The personal narrator of the story tells of an experience of witnessing the ghostly couple's night-time visitations of the house in a way which fuses the personal and impersonal points of view. It is not clear in the short story who says what and of whom. The standard reaction of fear on the part of the character is missing and is substituted by the personal narrator's feelings of fondness and interest. The narrator's voice, the ghosts' voices and the addressee's presupposed responses are merged and indefinite. The spatial circumstances of the country house, with the elements of mimetic setting like the noises of wood pigeons and threshing machine, point to the objective of redynamizing not only the antimimetic but also the mimetic fiction of love story type.

Whatever the decorations, the stories of fantastic confrontation are invariably focused on comparing the two world orders, which gives a novel perspective on the reality shaped as mimetic. It has been so since the times of eighteenth-century fantastic travel fiction endowed with the function of social satire, represented by *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. Suvin sees this element of the satirical perspective as one of typical techniques of the process of cognitive transformation (10). In Swift's text, the problems with understanding experienced by the main character in his encounters with the social systems of Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa and Houyhnhnms are equal to the fantastic creatures' problems with apprehending the human nature that Gulliver represents and the functioning of his society. It is the tradition of romance which is evoked in *Gulliver's Travels*. It continues to be used in turn-of-the-century and early modern fantastic fiction. The old-time knight went on the quest not only to complete his mission but to learn something about his own weakness. This trait continues to be used in endowing the fantastic worlds with the metaphorical function of representing in a distorted way the reality modelled on the empirical world (Leleń 107).

The awareness of such a function of the confrontation with the fantastic world is acknowledged by some commentaries coming from the authors of turn-of-the-century texts. *The First Men in the Moon* is clearly a fantastic text according to Zgorzelski's classification—it relates a visit of two educated gentlemen from Victorian England to the world of superior organization found on Earth's satellite. Wells declared that he fashioned this account of the journey of Bedford and Cavor to the Moon "in order to look at mankind from a distance and burlesque the effects of specialization" (qtd. in Philmus 143). It is indeed a common function of fantastic literature to offer a new, spatially dislocated and emotionally destabilized point of view on the empirical reality, which is intuitively grasped in the comment uttered by this author of many works seminal for the development of new genres. It was none other than Wells who started the fiction of interstellar confrontation with "Under the Knife" (1896) and *The First Men in the Moon*, the literature of time travel with "The Time Machine" (1895) and "A Story of the Days to Come" (1899), as well as prehistoric fiction with "A Story of the Stone Age" (1897) and "The Grisly Folk" (1921). All of these presuppose some form of looking back on the world of the narrator's or characters' origin. This can be done in a more or less apparent way, as the text is sometimes dominated by the description of the newly discovered reality. However, pre-Modernist texts as a rule preserve the dominance of implicit comparison between the two worlds, with the fantastic world redefining the perception of the world shaped as mimetic.

Within the group of texts which undertake the precepts of travel fiction, there are some which are still very much focused on the pretence of the journey. These are the pieces of prose which are built on the plot structure proper to the fiction of adventure, relating the dangers and excitements of the discovery of a new land, such as *The First Men in the Moon* and "The Time Machine." They include a plausible (developed in quasi-scientific terms) justification of how the fantastic journey could take place by means of a newly-invented vehicle. The journey to the place is then related in detail, including the account of the changing sensory perception of the traveller. The generic tendency in this type of fiction is, however, to reduce focus on the account of the means of travelling. The device of systemic equivalent can also be adopted and the journey could be substituted by the motif of a mental journey of imagining the other world (Zgorzelski, "Systemic Equivalent" 515-16). The account of the fights between the prehistoric ancestors of the modern men and the Neanderthals in "The Grisly Folk" is inspired by a visit to the museum. The narrative mode of quasi-scientific speculation is inspired by the plain,

matter-of-fact question uttered over the display cases "[c]an these bones live?" (685). It then motivates a detailed insight into an openly fictitious story of a particular fight between the two human forms. The particular situation is gradually generalized into an exemplary illustration of the general tendency assumed by scientific inference from the few known premises. Ultimately, the account of the warfare serves no other purpose than explaining the fears of the contemporary men ingrained in the subconscious and revealed in dreams.

> And the strain of the victors was our strain; we are lineally identical with those sun-brown painted beings who ran and fought and helped one another, the blood in our veins glowed in those fights and chilled in those fears of the forgotten past. For it was forgotten. Except perhaps for some vague terrors in our dreaming life and for some lurking element of tradition in the legends and warnings of the nursery, it has gone altogether out of the memory of our race. But nothing is ever completely lost. (693)

The quasi-psychological insight into human experience is combined with a quasi-paleontological approach so as to produce a new type of prehistoric fiction which is fully to emerge with *The Inheritors* (1955) by William Golding and *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (1980) by Jean Auel.

The reality shaped on the empirical model is sometimes presented in the form of satirical exaggeration. The technique can be demonstrated with the example of the introductory presentation of Victorian society in "A Story of the Days to Come." It is represented by the prosperous gentleman Mr Morris, who epitomizes the social mores of his times. For all his marginal role in the later development of action, placing such a detailed character description in the opening of the text suggests its vital function in the long short story's composition.

> The **excellent** Mr. Morris was an **Englishman**, and he lived in the days of **Queen Victoria the Good**. He was a **prosperous and very sensible** man; he read **The Times** and went to **church**, and as he grew towards middle age **an expression of quiet contented** <u>contempt for all who were not as himself settled on his face</u>. He was one of those people who do **everything that is right and proper and sensible with inevitable regularity**. He always wore **just the right and proper clothes**, steering **the narrow way between the smart and the shabby**, always subscribed to **the right charities**, just the **judicious compromise** <u>between ostentation and meanness</u>, and never <u>failed</u> to have **his hair cut to exactly the proper length**. (333, emphasis added)

The description of Morris's figure and customs constitutes a tensional parallel to the presentation of his descendant, the fantastic Mwres, and the social conventions of the fantastic future. However, it is as much the Victorian times as the future world which are the constant focus of observation. Both men and both societies are described by means of disproportionately idealized features (foregrounded through bold print in the quoted passages) which are questioned by grotesquely distorted properties (foregrounded through underlining in the quoted passages). The object of such a technique of semantic and axiological juxtaposition is to redynamize the precepts of social fiction of a combined type: fiction of manners and Condition of England shifted to new spatio-temporal circumstances. Placing character conflicts in the future setting is a device which sheds new light on the reality presented as mimetic. This is exemplified by the two fragments describing the difference between Victorian breakfast, presented as ostensibly barbaric, and future breakfast, described as allegedly refined. The passage quoted below illustrates how, in the fiction of this type, a compositional device of comparison evokes a distanced attitude in reception. The artistic organization of discourse is attained through the disruption of automatized perception. Bathos is introduced, which undermines the social ethos.

> It was **a very different meal** from a Victorian breakfast. The rude masses of bread needing to be carved and smeared over with animal fat before they could be made **palatable**, the still recognisable fragments of recently killed animals, hideously charred and hacked, the eggs torn ruthlessly from beneath some protesting hen—such things as these, though they constituted the ordinary fare of Victorian times, would have awakened only horror and disgust in **the refined minds of the people of these latter days**. Instead were **pastes and cakes of agreeable and variegated design**, **without any suggestion in colour or form** of the unfortunate animals from which their substance and juices were derived. (336, emphasis added)

The descriptive effect of barbaric distortion is attained on the rhetorical level—through endowing the Victorian meal with negative axiological orientation of the lexical choices. In its essence, the breakfast of Mr Morris consists of an ordinary breakfast menu of bread, butter, meat and eggs. On the other hand, the circumspect and allegedly positive description of Mwres's breakfast of "pastes and cakes" conceals the fact that it is identical in substance with his ancestor's meal, the only difference being the de-aestheticized misrepresentation of the Victorian meal.

The self-referential nature of this positive instance of repast eaten by Mwres is also apparent here as it is characterized by means of the

contradictory phrase "agreeable and variegated design, without any suggestion in colour or form." This suggests that colour and form are negative phenomena, concealing the fact that no variegated design is possible without these features. This is the more prominent as colour and form are the most crucial features of the future dress.

> His legs he encased in pleasant pink and amber garments of an air-tight material, which with the help of an ingenious little pump he distended so as to suggest enormous muscles. Above this he also wore pneumatic garments beneath an amber silk tunic […]. Over this he flung a scarlet cloak with its edge fantastically curved. On his head […] he adjusted a pleasant little cap of bright scarlet, held on by suction and inflated with hydrogen, and curiously like the comb of a cock. So his toilet was complete and, conscious of being soberly and becomingly attired, he was ready to face his fellow-beings with a tranquil eye. (335)

The last sentence of the above quotation is a double-edged commentary on the relative nature of the social perception of propriety. It foregrounds the conventionality of all human behaviour. The clothes are assembled by the process of aesthetic selection and serve the function of denoting social status. The attire of Mwres is most markedly a composition of external elements, which are ridiculed by exaggeration of colours and shapes. They are organized into some patterns that are endowed with the communicative function of representation understandable in some conventionalized code of the future. For the implied reader, they also convey the sense of satire encompassing the sober Victorian clothes of Morris, which Mwres markedly rejects. In the context of the whole contrastive descriptive plane of the text, introduced by the two-world structure, it refers not only to the characters' presentation or self-representation, but also to the way the literary text functions by means of the arbitrary effect of conventionality. The communicative and cognitive functionality of the pattern-oriented principle of confrontation is thus delicately revealed (Parrinder, "Revisiting" 38).

The double world model of fantastic fiction is displayed as oriented on attaining a novel perspective on the reality, characters and conflicts, represented as mimetic. Moreover, it seems that it is a device deployed so as to redynamize the petrified conventions of social fiction. It is not only fiction of manners which is thus transformed through contrast with the future world, as in the analyzed long short story. A very similar effect is attained on the generic precepts of travel fiction. A journey to a different, exotic and fantastic world can be used to look back on the way human society operates in the quasi-documentary world, which is thus highlighted

as deficient in some ways. It can also work to warn against possible future disfigurement of the present weakness in social practices. This constitutes a revival of the traditional function of utopian fiction, later developed in dystopian texts. The traits of both genres can be found in the two-world structure of "The Time Machine," a piece of fantastic fiction marked with the conventions of traditional travel fiction. The Time Traveller has all the attributes of a daring explorer: a vision of what he wants to explore, the aim of this journey (to verify the supposition of the cultural advancement of a temporally-distant country), the means to travel (a self-made, intricately wrought machine equipped with a saddle, which is a reminiscence of the romance convention of riding a sophisticated steed). Just as the Time Traveller's discoveries in the future of the year 802701 go against his expectations, so do the implied reader's expectations about the fantastically distorted travel fiction account turn awry. Patrick Parrinder points out that the description of the distant future society in "The Time Machine" is a "satirical distortion of present-day life," and he interprets such texts as applying the technique of extrapolation ("Experiments in Prophecy" 15-16).

The technique is used in a twisted and tensional way. In fantastic fiction, the system of binary oppositions is never clear-cut and discriminative in the semantic or axiological way. In "The Time Machine," the Time Traveller has the features of both the Morlocks and the Eloi when he comes back from his journey. Both "The Time Machine" and *Dracula* rework the turn-of-the-century conflicts undertaken also in mimetic fiction: the distress of facing modernity. They do so in a novel way which disrupts the hitherto prevalent way of thinking. The Victorian beliefs are thus put to question. In "The Time Machine," the idea of progress is undermined as the development of humanity turns out to be cyclic, just as any biological or geological process, and where the explorer expects to find progress, he discovers degeneration. This cyclic quality of time is something which characterizes mythic fiction according to Scholes (12). Human beings turn out to be undergoing evolution or, rather against the Victorian optimism, devolution. This is the literary expression of the turn-of-the-century mood of decadence.

In *Dracula*, the conflict is built apparently around questioning the old, represented by Count Dracula, and facing the new, epitomized by the English society. However, it is the Count who brings something new and threatening to the centre of civilization. It is his power to infect people with his undead, troubled quality. The effort of the mimetic characters is centred on purging the new and retaining the old status quo. The Count's success is facilitated by the new economic ways of the society and its

distrust of the old folk tradition. It is only apparent that the Count stands for the superstitious as he adopts a systemic and rational approach in his plans when he studies the English legal system and social mores. On the other hand, his opponents have to learn to exploit folklore and its wisdom to enrich their scientific knowledge before they can curb the invasion. The essence of repulsion evoked by the vampire is also dubious. Dracula, with his expressive power over the weaker sex, stirs their drive for liberation. His actions are seen as destroying female purity and violating the ideal of the Victorian subversion of women, as demonstrated by the cases of Lucy and Mina. This is what evokes the strongest objection in the Victorian men fighting to prevent the changes. These motifs express in a metaphorical way the topical issues of the empirical reality of the time of the novel's composition. The problems are widely explored by the mimetic New Woman fiction of the times, written by both women and men, such as *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) by Olive Schreiner or *Ann Veronica* (1909) by Wells. The fact that these topics are also undertaken by the fantastic novel is the instance of taking the social concerns proper to mimetic fiction and shifting them by artistic expression into the realm of metaphorical representation. Invariably, this results in the effect of the mythical universalization of the semantic plane. That is why *Dracula* can be read as a story of man's fight over preserving the traditional system of values in the social life of the upper middle class.

There are many more examples of texts of the turn-of-the-century period which use the convention of dream vision for the fantastic redynamization of the mimetic convention of the Condition-of-England novel. It is to be found in William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891), where it is used for motivating an exploration of the future society and H.G. Wells's dystopia *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), later published as *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910). However, it is not always the precepts of social fiction which are reworked through the device of two-world structure of fantastic fiction motivated by the dream vision convention. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, Alice's plunge into the world of the rabbit-hole is a metaphoric commentary on the process of growing up, which reworks the conventions of the coming-of-age fiction. The whole plot development as well as textual system of sense generation is based on the convention of a visit in a dream. What reinforces the principle of contrast in *Alice's Adventures*, which is typical for fantastic literature, is the compositional aspect of repeating certain motifs. In this text, constant problems with the changing of size, the inability to understand, frustrating relations with characters, and with the threat of beheading are motivated by the principle of nonsense, or shaken cause-

effect relationship, proper to dreams. This serves to show in a novel way the conventional aspects of children's fiction. Notably, this type of fiction was also undergoing the process of generic transformation in the period generally referred to as the golden age of children's literature.

In fantastic fiction, the structure of the other world, the one which does not concur with the quasi-empirical order of reality, is rarely something completely new, although the fictional world created is also oriented at providing an indirect commentary on the empirical world. However, Scholes asserts that

> [a]ll writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poiesis. No recording. Only constructing. […] No man has succeeded in imagining a world free of connection to our experiential world, with characters and situations that cannot be seen as mere inversions or distortions of that all too recognizable cosmos. (7)

This foregrounds the double function of the device of two-world structure as an artistic reworking of the conventions and objectives of mimetic fiction with a view to offering a new cognitive perspective. The fictional confrontations between the two worlds have been shown to constitute an artistic reworking of the topical issues of the time of a given text's composition. Again, there is the reservation that "fiction offers […] not transcriptions of actuality but systematic models which are distinct from reality, though they may be related to it in various ways" (Scholes 6). It is these systematic models which are artistically functionalized to suggest a new way of viewing the problems of empirical reality, by means of what Suvin calls a necessary "interaction of estrangement and cognition" (7). Suvin also notices that "[t]he aliens—utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers—are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one" (5). In this chapter, we have seen the devices of fantastic and antimimetic fiction—that is those of fantastic world confrontation and intrusion of a fantastic apparition—as literary devices used for multiple purposes in the literary text. They do not only work to enhance the *suspense* of the text or correct the world model evoked in the texts, but they also draw attention to the principle of artistic operating with points of view in the literary work of art. The focus on cognition, typical of these texts, along with the tendency for metaphorical representation, frequently becomes a subtle metafictional tool of foregrounding the tensional textual nature of an *arte*-fact.

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