

la beauté, le sublime, la laideur, etc. Sa dernière considération semble discutable, car il est hors de doute qu'une influence profonde sur la régularité d'interprétation des phénomènes à tel point complexes (le tragique et le comique avant tout) doit tenir compte des moyens historiquement changeables de compréhension et de ressentiment de ce que nous appelons le comique et le tragique. La séparation artistique de ces catégories ou leur accouplement dans la sphère des oeuvres d'art et de courants différents résulte indubitablement de la diversité de leur compréhension et de l'évaluation de leurs fonctions.

Lorsque nous jetterons un coup d'oeil sur l'ensemble des considérations et de l'argumentation de Dziemidok, nous sommes contraints à lui poser la question suivante: Est-il parvenu à construire une théorie (un système de directives) qui embrasserait la quantité maximum de situations et de possibilités comiques? On peut être persuadé que la réponse serait positive. Incontestable est le fait que le livre de Dziemidok contient le plus riche ensemble de constatations et d'observations concernant le comique et qu'il solutionne effectivement maintes incertitudes qui naissent à la confrontation des théories existantes avec les phénomènes concrets qui apparaissent au cours de la vie et dans l'art.

Ce sont les raisons importantes pour lesquelles le livre de B. Dziemidok sur le comique peut être signalé comme un travail de grand mérite.

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Ryszard Handke, POLSKA PROZA FANTASYCZNO-NAUKOWA. PROBLEMY POETYKI (POLISH "SCIENCE FICTION" AS A LITERARY GENRE. ITS POETICS). Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków 1969, pp. 176.

Ryszard Handke's publication on Polish science fiction is an exceptional phenomenon in the literary criticism of the last few years. It is the only extensive study of the fantastic genre in Polish literature, some earlier articles in periodicals by the author himself and other

critics (W. Ostrowski, J. Trzynadlowski) being rather theoretical bases for historical studies. The importance of Handke's study is due to two factors mainly. It is the first attempt at a comprehensive presentation of the historical development of Polish science fiction from an exclusively literary point of view (unlike, for instance, J. Szacki's attitude to another fantastic genre; cf. his book *Utopie*, Warszawa 1968). Examining the poetics of science fiction it also considers some theoretical issues applicable to the novel in general, such as the role of the narrator and the category of the addressee. Thus the range of material the book tries to cover fully justifies calling it a pioneering research especially if we bear in mind the indifference of critics towards the problems of fantasy. So the book should open broad vistas for the discussion of some vital issues in fantastic literature.

The author divides his book into two parts. The first one is devoted to a search for the differentiating features of the genre in the fictional world of the works analyzed, special attention being paid to the linguistic ways of creating fantastic elements. In the second part the role of the narrator and the addressee in science fiction are being discussed. The book is also supplied with a summary in English, a list of abbreviations and an index of Polish works of science fiction.

In the introduction Handke tries to define both the limits of the genre and the kinds of fantastic literature in general, basing his remarks on some chosen pieces of criticism, mainly by R. Caillois and J. Trzynadlowski. According to the author, the differentiating feature of science fiction is the existence of fantastic technical means in the plot which condition the appearance of uncommon situations or incredible actions. Those fantastic means are in opposition to veristic tendencies of realistic literature and are also used, though with a different function, in some other fantastic genres. But they can never be found in a fairy tale kind of fantasy.

The above summarized opinion evokes a feeling of uncertainty. The meaning of the phrase "science fiction" was much discussed both in England and the United States. The term was coined by H. Gernsback in 1927; there exist definitions by Bob Olsen, J. O. Bailey, E. Cris-



pin and others, undergoing many significant changes, simultaneously with the evolution of the genre. According to E. Crispin's opinion, science fiction does not necessarily presuppose any technology; it may employ a disturbance in natural order (e.g. a genetic change as a post-radiation effect, or any other biological change) which differs the world of science fiction from other worlds of fantasy. One can easily find examples to support Crispin's statement, such as J. Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, B. Aldiss's *Hothouse* or J. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *The Wind from Nowhere*. The tendency may be observed in a majority of western science fiction which hardly ever use the fantastic motifs of technique and civilization. Deviating in some respects from the trends in the development of western science fiction, Polish SF in its main body seems to follow tendencies most characteristic of the first phase in the historical evolution of the genre. Evidently, this is not Handke's viewpoint. Here Polish SF is studied in isolation from the general background. Such an attitude determines the theoretical understanding of the characteristics of the genre. It does not seem right to apply the simplified definition of R. Handke to the whole genre and it is difficult to accept the existence of motifs of fantastic technology as the main differentiating feature between SF and other fantastic genres. On the other hand some interesting observations on the nature of SF poetics, though perhaps valid, as far as Polish literature is concerned, are not of primary importance when applied to SF in world literature (e.g. remarks on the psychological depth of SF, on humour or the importance of neologisms in creating the fictional world). There are, however, some close links between SF in Poland and abroad which might have been observed. It is perhaps worthwhile reminding the reader that Polish SF of the twentieth century comes mainly from St. Lem who is known to be versed in western fantastic literature and considerably influenced by his readings, especially in his first creative period.

Putting the poetics of SF in the centre of his interest, Handke confines his observations to those phenomena in prose works that can best illustrate the development of Polish science

fiction as a literary genre. Making analysis of the given poetics the ultimate aim of his study, the author rightly observes that the present state of research upon science fiction is not well balanced with the prominence of SF as a cultural phenomenon.

In the first chapter of the book the author tries to delineate the development of Polish science fiction, starting with the first works of Krajewski and Trippin where the dominance of veristic methods in the presentation of the fictional world was prevailing. The next phase of the development is characterized by the existence of the novels with the motif of a wonderful invention which often is the only fantastic element in them. Then came the novels by St. Lem with their over-emphasis put on technical elements employed. Still later Polish science fiction was developing mainly along two lines. One tendency was marked by a progressive limitation of technical innovations whereas simultaneously the genre acquired psychological depth in the delineation of characters. The other tendency, started and developed in Poland, constitutes an independent branch of science fiction. It is the grotesque SF, bordering some satirical and prophetic kinds of literature. In that trend the elements of science fiction proper are often juxtaposed to the fantastic elements of the fable or fairy tale, thus giving vent to humour and creating possibilities of presenting a widened range of modern problems.

The next two chapters offer a detailed analysis of neologisms as linguistic means for the creation of the most important distinguishing features which are descriptions of the fantastic technique and of the civilization involved. The author discovers a twofold function of neologisms, stressing the non-identity of an object with the empiric reality, and, at the same time, creating a fictional but concrete and recognizable world. These two functions viewed as opposing factors seem to illustrate some general tendencies in the linguistic ways of creating fantastic fiction and are supposed to be one of the characteristic features of SF.

The same tendencies are mentioned in the first chapter of the second part of the study as factors which influence the creation of the narrator in modern SF. As the fictional world



of SF needs concreteness, the narrator must try to reconcile his tasks of endowing the world both with strangeness and verisimilitude. The limitations of the narrator's knowledge about the fantastic world is far easier to be explained by his individual characteristics than by the non-existence of such knowledge. Hence the abandoning of the narrator's anonymity is common to a great majority of science fiction. Even when the narrator resigns from taking an active part in the action he does not acquire omniscience but confines his knowledge to that of the protagonists. Handke considers the above mentioned process of limiting the narrator's omniscience typical of SF, but he treats its similarity to certain tendencies in world literature as purely accidental. Handke's point of view seems to imply the absence of inter-relations between the development of SF and the trends in the evolution of literary means of expression in some other genres of narrative prose. He sees no possibilities of SF either being influenced by the twentieth century prose forms or exercising any influence upon them. Such controversial statements would become more convincing were they verified by some historical and analytical data.

The last chapter of Handke's book is devoted to the characteristics of the addressee and the narrative situation in the futuristic kind of

science fiction. The author states that the "future" narrator, belonging to the fictional world, tells his story to the addressee of two kinds: the "future" addressee and the one contemporary to the author. This duality is accompanied by a dual character of actual information. The larger the amount of information understandable to both addressees, the smaller the futuristic fantasy in the work and the lesser the "hermetic" quality of the narration for the real recipient — the reader. Thus, the fantastic in this kind of fiction seems to be conditioned, at least partly, by the way of forming the narrative situation and the addressee, the character of the latter and time setting being mutually inter-related.

Though often controversial, Handke's book about Polish science fiction constitutes a valuable study of fantastic literature. The study is a breakthrough in the ill-famed tradition of subjective criticism, it touches the very essentials of SF such as the problem of the addressee which is perhaps the most interesting one here. The book points to the necessity of conducting similar studies upon related genres and manifests the need for comparative research on the evolution of fantastic genre in world literature.

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