

Investigation of Science Fiction in the Danube Basin Countries

Galina Oleinikova¹

Abstract: The science-fiction genre specificity determines not only the particular organization of the literary text, but also the formation of the world depicted in it. All three major components of any literary text: time, place, characters can be revealed in the typological peculiarities of formation and the representation in the text. The dominant principle of constructing the counterfactual reality is the principle of the shift. It deals with a spatial shift, the alienation of represented space from real locative parameters, where the author of the literary work and its readers are located.

Keywords: science fiction; method of alienation; space; the principle of shift

The modern era has witnessed rapid development in science and technology that rival traditional knowledge systems represented by the fields of literature, art, philosophy and religion. Despite the traditional gulf between scientific and literary discourse writers and literary critics of imaginative literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have consistently looked at science as a source of knowledge and valuable insight into the human condition.

Discoveries such as relativity, chaos theory, evolution, cybernetics, quantum theory, invention of unknown worlds and unreal creatures have provided writers with considerable inspiration and new modes of thought that have become a specific genre of literature in the postmodern age – a genre of science fiction.

Speaking about what science fiction is, it is difficult to give the clear definition of it. In 1952 the writer and critic Damon Knight said that science fiction is what we point to when we say it. It means that the ideal definition of science fiction should use objective criteria intrinsic to the work itself, simple, short and to the point.

Robert A. Heinlein, a famous American science fiction writer, admits that it is “a handy short definition of almost all science fiction might read: realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method”.

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Izmail State Liberal Arts University, Ukraine, Address: 12, Repin St., Izmail, Odesa oblast, Ukraine, 68600, Tel: +380930455577, Corresponding author: galyaoleynikova@rambler.ru.

New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy suggests the following term of science fiction: “Works of fiction that use scientific discoveries or advanced technology – either actual or imaginary – as part of their plot”. The most universal definition of science fiction can be found in British dictionary: “Science fiction – a literary genre that makes imaginative use of knowledge or conjecture”.

Science fiction is a modern genre though the earliest steps of the development of this genre can be brightly seen in the nineteenth century when a scientific thought as the paradigm of modern knowledge had begun to increasingly exert itself in the imaginations of different writers. The role of such fundamental scientific works as Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution, the Second Law of Thermodynamics which defines the concept of entropy—a measure of homogeneity or lack of differentiation in a system, Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, had a great influence on the writers inner imagination. Taking cues from such theories, which realize natural barriers to scientific knowledge many other writers and critics of the twentieth century have tended to apply the concepts of randomness, uncertainty, and the breakdown of traditional causality in their works. That's why we can often hear that science fiction is “speculative fiction”, “thought of experience”.

Science fiction writers try to “predict” the future in a literary sense. The earliest writers of the genre are considered to be Jules Verne and H. G.Wells. More recent ones are Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Harry Hart Frank and others.

The authors of this genre often seek out new scientific and technical developments in order to prognosticate freely the changes in technology and society that greatly shock the readers' consciousness. This approach was central to the work of H.G. Wells, who is considered a founder of this genre with his famous works as *The Time Machine* where an unreal vision of a dying world is described and the novel *The War of the Worlds* where the reader can get acquainted with the unrealistic images of Martians and interplanetary travel.

Accelerated scientific advancements in the twentieth century have contributed to the appearance of a great number of different science fiction directions. Thus the writers start to write about cybernetics, human visits to the Moon, time travel, the real possibility of cloning human life and others.

The specificity of science-fiction genre determines not only the particular organization of the literary text, but also the formation of the unreal world depicted in it. All three major components of any literary text: *time*, *place*, *characters* can be revealed in the typological peculiarities of formation and the representation in the text.

The coordinate grid “*time-space-character*” in science-fiction works plays an important role in creating the image of an unreal, unrealistic world. It is known that

the dominant principle of constructing the counterfactual reality is the principle of the shift. In science fiction we deal with a spatial shift, the alienation of represented space from real locative parameters, where the author of the literary work and its readers are located.

A spatial shift in the science-fiction, as a rule, occurs at two levels: in outer-planetary scale, it means the alienation of the place of fictional events away from the Earth, deep into the outer space and the shift away from the Earth surface as a standard start point, where an alienation vector can be directed both up and down. This kind of spatial shift of counterfactual world is called above ground – subterranean/ underwater shift. Graphically it can be presented in the following way:

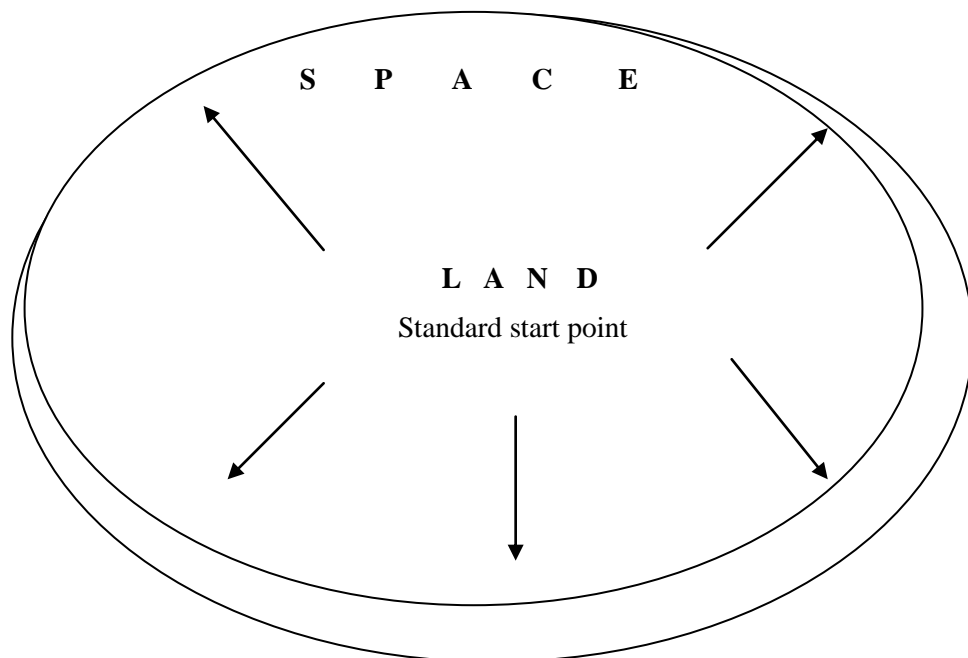


Figure 1. Spatial Shift in Science Fiction

The analysis of the science fiction works displays that the shift from the Earth's surface happens more frequently. Thus, according to the author's reasoning in the novel "Sphere" the most part of the planet was covered with water, that's why the contact with the unearthly aliens is apt to occur not on the land but down on the water.

Norman had assumed that any contact with unknown life would occur on land; he hadn't considered the most obvious possibility – that if a spacecraft landed at

random somewhere on Earth, it would most likely come down on water, since 70percent of the planet was covered with water (6,37).

Describing a future city on the Earth in 7 millions years hence, J. Kampbell in his story named "Twilight" specifies that the city has 30 over ground and 20 underground levels: *There must have been **thirty levels** above ground, and **twenty more** below, a solid block of metal walls and metal floors* (7,28).

The remove deep or upward from the surface occurs also in the case when locale is not on the Earth but on the other planet. Thus in A. Asimov's novel "Foundation" the plot is unfolded on the planet Trantor, which is tunneled over a mile down the land and a few miles into the bottom of the ocean: *Trantor is tunneled **over a mile down**. It's like an iceberg. Nine-tenth of it is out of sight. It even works itself out a few miles into the sub-ocean soil at the shore-lines* (1,15).

The removeness degree from the surface can be explicated not only through the indication of numerical data but also through the detail of the sensorial perception. Thus for example the narrator in the H. Wells' novel "The Time machine" describes his emotional state being impressed by the visit of the underground world inhabited with Morlocks. The narrator goes down in the deep draw-well. Glancing upward he sees a little splash of light and a twinkling star in the sky.

Glancing upward I saw the aperture, a small blue dish, in which a star was visible (W/T,44).

Thus a significant remove from the Earth's surface breaks human's familiar environment and creates the atmosphere of queerness, strangeness and a psychological discomfort. In the case of submerging deep down the effect of alienations and a psychological strength grows stronger at a cost of the hostility and danger of the environment that is alien to human being.

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