

Econarratology and the problem of metalepsis and description in Wiktor Żwikiewicz's *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn]*

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The descriptive turn – econarratology – weird fiction – introduction

Since the publication of the two issues of *Forum of Poetics* from autumn 2020 and winter 2020, Polish literary studies have increasingly engaged with the questions of description, mainly defined in the context of the so-called descriptive turn. First introduced and addressed in 2009 by Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best in *Representations*,¹ it was further developed by Heather Love.² The two basic assumptions of the descriptive turn concern problems of different scale. It is postulated that (1) description, considered reproductive in the humanities, should be recognized as a valuable method and (2) we should also reflect on how description functions and what role it plays in cultural texts, drawing on the most current philosophical and social theories.

In the present article, I further engage with the latter question. I propose to combine narratological tools with the postulates of the descriptive turn. This combination is the most effective approach to the study of literary description as the basic structural element of the text. On the one hand, this approach avoids inaccuracies which might appear when scholars associated with

¹ Stephen Best, Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction", *Representations* 1 (2009): 1–21.

² Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn", *New Literary History* 2 (2010): 371–391.

the descriptive turn work with such methodologies as ecocriticism, the philosophy of “presence,” speculative realism, or new materialism,³ which are not primarily intended for literary analysis. On the other hand, the category of description is not constrained within a rigid framework provided by textual linguistics or, more broadly, structuralism. This combination also brings to mind a number of questions about the possibilities and limits of description in terms of – as Heather Houser writes – animating exuberant and mysterious matter, extracting its hidden potential,⁴ as well as commenting on the interactions between the human and the non-human, conjuring up landscapes of risks and dystopian realities, (re)presenting hyperobjects,⁵ and constructing critical and careful descriptions of the environment.⁶ In the critical perspective provided by the descriptive turn, description is a privileged textual element, in and through which entities that have so far remained in the “anthroposhadow”⁷ come to light. Description engages with both real and fictional worlds. Prototypical description, in contrast to narrative, which is primarily concerned with motivations and sequences of events, simply indicates that “something is there and like that”.⁸ We may thus reflect on its potential in relation to challenges in world-building in fantasy, science fiction, and beyond, as well as in the context of the ontological turn in contemporary philosophy.

Considering the above, let us start with Erin James’s take on *e c o n a r r a t o l o g y*.

Econarratology embraces the key concerns of each of its parent discourses – it maintains an interest in studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment, but does so with sensitivity to the literary structures and devices that we use to communicate representations of the physical environment to each other via narratives.⁹

In the most recent reinterpretations of the discipline collected in *Environment and Narrative: New Directions in Econarratology*, John Heggglund,¹⁰ drawing on the now much-discussed work of Joseph VanderMeer, argues that the fundamental distinction made by unnatural narratologists¹¹ between the natural world and the unnatural text fails to account for the weird materialities of our times. The “natural world” as a plane of reference has changed beyond recognition: it is filled with objects that are no longer either artificial or natural (the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, smog, etc.); we find ourselves inside hyperobjects as they invade our bodies, and reality is becoming less and less stable.

³ In Polish literary studies, scholars who engage with the descriptive turn mainly focus on the relations between the philosophy of “presence” and the turn to things. See, among others, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, “Justifying description’ in Zygmunt Haupt’s works”, *Forum of Poetics* 1 (2023): 22–35.

⁴ Heather Houser, “Shimmering Description and Descriptive Criticism”, *New Literary History* 1 (2020): 13–15.

⁵ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

⁶ See: Anna Tsing, “More-than-Human Sociality: A Call for Critical Description”, in: *Anthropology and Nature*, ed. Kristen Hastrup (New York, London: Routledge 2014), 27–42.

⁷ Andrzej Marzec, *Antropocień. Filozofia i estetyka po końcu świata [Anthroposhadow: Philosophy and Aesthetics after the End of the World]* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2021).

⁸ Werner Wolf, “Description as a Transmedial Mode of Representation”, in: *Description in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf, Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam, New York: Brill, 2007), 34.

⁹ Erin James, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press 2015), 23.

¹⁰ John Heggglund, “Unnatural Narratology and Weird Realism in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*”, in: *Environment and Narrative. New Directions in Econarratology*, ed. Erin James, Eric Morel (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020), 27–44.

¹¹ He refers to the studies of Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, and Henrik Skov Nielsen.

All this prompts us to rethink what narrative mimesis or anti-mimesis is. Heggglund therefore proposes that greater emphasis should be placed on the analysis of texts that problematize the basic distinction between the “real world” and the “impossible world,” which, either at a discursive or narrative level, also blur the boundaries between the subject and the environment.

In his article, Heggglund does not problematize description, even though the vast majority of quotations from VanderMeer’s *Annihilation* are descriptions. The reluctance to examine such passages in depth is a result of the long tradition of associating descriptions with nature writing and, more broadly, with the tradition of the realistic novel, where in both cases its function was reduced to creating the reality effect, its ability to represent the environment and things. According to this logic, it would seem that description in weird fiction, which emphasizes the protean nature of reality that does not yield to any representative attempts, should be used sparingly, if at all. Meanwhile, the opposite is true. VanderMeer’s and, for that matter, China Miéville’s books are highly descriptive.¹² This is not surprising; after all, as Graham Harman writes, strange reality calls for strange realism. Consequently, it also calls for descriptions – specifically, allusive and indirect descriptions.¹³ These should be a s y m p t o m a t i c and s p e c u l a t i v e, suggesting the existence of other dimensions of objects that can emerge from the *accidens* which shimmer on their surfaces. To generalize this problem placing it in Harman’s terminology, it can be argued that such descriptions can, among other things, (1) create an illusion in which sensual objects are c o n f r o n t e d with their sensual qualities,¹⁴ thereby disrupting habitual perceptions; (2) challenge the descriptor’s cognitive capabilities;¹⁵ and (3) create an atmosphere (*stimmung*) of horror at times (stemming from the fear of the unknown: the withdrawn real object) and of mystery at other times (a fascination with the a l l u r e¹⁶ of objects when – by virtue of allusion – they seem to reveal the sinister abyss of their reality).

I also concur with Joanna Bednarek that the “challenge posed by the Anthropocene is best addressed by texts that are seemingly about something else,”¹⁷ that is by texts which operate through allusions, metaphors, postmodern games. This is how weird fiction operates. Therefore, using econarratological tools and unnatural narratology, I will explore the role that ontological metalepses can play within this genre. I will also focus on the descriptive aspect of weird fiction, examining the mechanisms involved in constructing illusions and the syntactic structure of non-prototypical descriptions.

¹²Stephanie Swainston argues in *The New Weird* that “[t]he details are jewel-bright, hallucinatory, carefully described [...]. It is visual, and every scene is packed with baroque detail.” Quote after: Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “The New Weird”, in: *New Directions in Popular Fiction. Genre, Distribution, Reproduction*, ed. Ken Gelder (Parkville: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), 184.

¹³“There are ways to talk about things without talking about them directly. And that is what authentic realism requires.” Graham Harman, Krzysztof Hoffmann, Andrzej Marzec, “Ontologia zajmuje się tym, co istotne, nie tym, co pilne”, trans. Krzysztof Hoffmann, *Czas Kultury* 1 (2023): 22.

¹⁴Graham Harman, *The quadruple object* (Winchester, Washington: Zero Books, 2011), 131-133.

¹⁵Harman emphasizes this aspect in Lovecraft’s descriptions. The narrator is not entirely sure of what he is looking at; something “seems to him” to be something, “it reminds him” of something; he emphasizes that the reality of what he imagines is uncertain, its description is not literal. Graham Harman, *Weird realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester, Washington: Zero Books, 2012), 33-34.

¹⁶“Allure is a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a thing’s unity and its plurality of [specific qualities] somehow partially disintegrates.” Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 104.

¹⁷Joanna Bednarek, “Oduczenie się człowieczeństwa: fantastyka i antropocen” [Unlearning Humanity: Fiction and the Anthropocene], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2020): 124.

Inspired by the descriptive turn and the abovementioned questions, I will analyze *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn]¹⁸ – the debut book of a somewhat forgotten Polish science fiction writer from the 1970s and the 1980s – Wiktor Żwikiewicz. His work stands comparison with the most influential contemporary works of weird fiction. Endowed with extraordinary imagination enriched by his knowledge of geology, botany, and the contemporary theories of evolution, Żwikiewicz filled his novels with spectacular, painterly, and illusive descriptions which rely on surreal analogies. In general, his prose is experimental, not to say avant-garde, and often employs the poetics of pastiche. The writer makes erudite historical, religious, literary, and scientific references. Żwikiewicz's writing style is eccentric, sometimes too sophisticated – it is old-fashioned, dead from the moment of its birth, groundbreaking, even though it references the outdated poetics of the Young Poland movement. It is as much graphomaniacal as it is expressive and bold, because it drifts on the troubled waters of language. Żwikiewicz's prose is insightful and even prophetic. Apocalyptic in tone, it challenges anthropocentrism by considering the agency of such entities as planets and biospheres. Indeed, Żwikiewicz's fiction becomes truly relevant only today, in the era of global warming, when the world has become so monstrous.

I retroactively classify his work as weird fiction: it constitutes an eclectic combination of different styles and genres; it subverts conventional expectations about the plot and the physical nature of the narrative world; it points to the existence of strange material dimensions that are not accessible to the senses. In this regard, it challenges human ways of conceptualizing reality. Above all, it delves into the ontological and epistemological meanders of uncertainty: “What happened?” is absolute anathema to weird fiction.”¹⁹ Last but not least, Żwikiewicz was also inspired by Bruno Schulz and Stefan Grabiński.²⁰ In *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*,²¹ Joseph and Ann VanderMeer discuss both as canonical writers of weird fiction. I therefore have great hope that the time has come to rediscover the works of the “science-fiction legend from Bydgoszcz.”

Druga Jesień's structure and diegetic levels

Druga Jesień is a diverse work, reminiscent of the *silva rerum*, with very complex and often illogical relations between the diegetic levels and the represented (sub)worlds: complications are introduced by ontological metalepses.²² The narrative world as a whole is neither functional nor physically probable. It is heterarchical in nature:²³ the hierarchy between the signifier and the signified is either non-existent or disturbed.

¹⁸Wiktor Żwikiewicz, *Druga jesień* [A second autumn] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1982). Henceforth referenced as DJ with the page number. I would like to point out that the novel was written in 1978, the date of publication is not binding here. The title is a direct reference to a short story written by Bruno Schulz.

¹⁹Excerpt from VanderMeer's interview with Caitlin R. Kiernan, Interview: Caitlin R. Kiernan on Weird Fiction. “Deep time is critical...”. Source: <https://weirdfictionreview.com/2012/03/interview-caitlin-r-kiernan-on-weird-fiction/>, Date of access 1 Sep. 2023.

²⁰Wiktor Żwikiewicz, Marek Żelkowski, *Pył na księżycu* [Moon dust]. Source: <https://polter.pl/Pogawedki-z-Wiktorem-4-c23452>, Date of access 1 Sep. 2023.

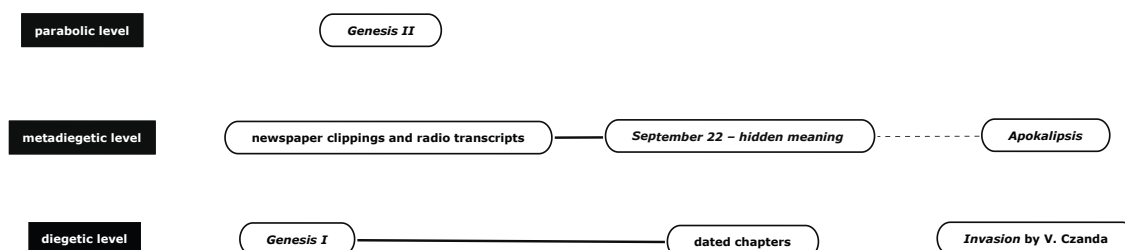
²¹The canon of Old Weird has been established retrospectively. *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, ed. Ann VanderMeer, Jeff VanderMeer (New York: Tor Books 2012).

²²“Ontological metalepses involve disorienting transgressions of boundaries that are physically or logically impossible, and hence properly unnatural.” These boundaries may, for example, refer to narrative levels or possible worlds. Alice Bell, Jan Alber, “Ontological Metalepsis and Unnatural Narratology”, *Journal of Narrative Theory* 2 (2012): 167.

²³Brian McHale borrows the concept of heterarchy to describe metalepsis from Douglas Hofstadter. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987), 120.

The novel consists of a collection of short stories which are further interwoven with newspaper clippings (articles, interviews, dispatches) and transcripts of conversations between New Wave and GT5X radio stations. The whole is united by the motif of transmutation: newspapers report on botanical anomalies; radio transcripts hint at the presence of some international conspiracy; and short narrative forms, woven through plotlines that correspond to various characters, illustrate the transformations of the biosphere. These elements constitute the core of *Druga Jesień*. Then, there are two prologues: “Genesis I”, introducing the visionary scientist David Sweetlicz (who also appears in the chapter “11 września – zmierzch” [September 11 – Twilight]) and “Genesis II” (a kind of parable concerning the origins of the alleged invasion). Also, the metadiegetic chapter “22 września – drugie dno” [September 22 – Hidden Meaning] stands out among the other dated chapters, as it features the Author²⁴ of *Druga Jesień*, who has been residing in a bunker, recording radio conversations and collecting bizarre clippings from various newspapers. The story culminates in “Apokalipsis” [Apocalypse], which describes the Earth’s transformation. This section of the novel is preceded by such a complex and multi-layered scenario that fully grasping what has transpired is nearly impossible.

The novel’s basic diegetic structure looks as follows:²⁵



Graph I (source: own study)

Druga Jesień is indeed a complex literary work. If the collection of newspaper clippings is only a subjective (manipulated) selection, and the press, after all, “goni za sensacją za wszelką cenę” [is first and foremost concerned with the sensational] (DJ 34), and the alleged radiation mentioned by Professor Boris Kukarin in *The Guardian*, which, as is prematurely assumed, “posiada pewne właściwości zdolne rekonstruować wewnętrzną strukturę materii...” [possesses properties that can reconstruct the internal structure of matter...] (DJ 38), and thus it may as well be a constant “dla całego Wszechświata, jest jedną z jego konstant, podobnie jak zjawisko czasu, przestrzeni, grawitacji etc.” [in the entire Universe, it is one of its constants, just as time, space, gravity, etc.] (DJ 38), then we should ask whether the transformation of the Earth (a second autumn) also takes place in the world of the Author who collects newspaper clippings or only in the short stories (dated chapters) that he creates.

²⁴The metadiegetic level of the Author is not the same as the level of the reader who is reading the book of the author, that is Żwikiewicz. The Author and the author are not the same person, hence the diacritical difference.

²⁵The graph does not represent an objective system, but an interpretation. Newspaper clippings and radio transcripts can just as easily be considered diegetic elements. The same is true for *Apokalipsis*.

“Autumn never dies”

But what is a second autumn?

Jest to eksplozja słonecznego żaru, kwintesencja wszystkich protuberancji, jakie zieleń liści tak pracowicie przeistaczała w makroenergetyczne ciągi molekuł – od rozwinięcia pąka, aby u schyłku istnienia nagromadzony ogień wyzwolić ze słonecznej baterii.

[It is an explosion of solar energy, the quintessence of all prominences that the green leaves so laboriously transformed into macro-energetic sequences of molecules – from the moment the bud opens, so that at the end the accumulated energy may be released from the solar battery] (DJ 13–14).

An ordinary red or gold autumn leaf is a sign of exhaustion, and when it turns brown it signals its own decay and death. But leaves in this extraordinary fifth season are governed by different laws. They are solar batteries – biochemical accumulators – that release energy in prominence explosions, just like the sun. Hence autumn is a function of the object’s passing, and a second autumn is its evolution. It unveils the previously hidden qualities of organic matter. It transforms not only living beings but also things made of carbon compounds. And so – with a quiet burst – wooden tables start to sprout fresh shoots from dormant buds, while books begin to bloom.

Mysterious radiation renders the Earth’s skin cancerous. The biosphere – as an interobjective and sympoietic system – turns into a teratoma. This metamorphosis is instigated by the hyperobject – an elusive and generally withdrawn entity, that serves as a catalyst of relationality. It reveals the metaphorical meshes²⁶ of unusual connections between things and eliminates the distinction between the subjective and the objective dimensions.

Szczury–olbrzymy. Zająte pilnym oddzielaniem ziarna od plew nie dostrzegają nawet, jak z niematerialnej głębi jesień nawiewa nici srebrnych pętli, cienkich – aż przenikających, wiążących na nowo, odmiennie [...].

[Giant rats. Busy with separating the wheat from the chaff, they do not even notice how autumn blows silver threads, in loops, from the immaterial depths; they are thin – they are everywhere; they re-bond, anew [...]] (DJ 15).

In the parabolic “Genesis II,” from which the above quote comes, the Earth begins to transform when the first “strange stranger”²⁷ reaches the “island” (that is the Earth) and enters a “strange laboratory” (DJ 14). It is a dead spider with the shreds of its web – gossamer – that are like Lovecraftian tentacles. They represent relationality: the process of re-bonding. *Druga Jesień* is therefore speculative science fiction about a symchthonic²⁸ apocalypse – an emergent revelation of a new form of matter.

²⁶Morton, 28.

²⁷Morton, 73.

²⁸Tentacular thinking is symchthonic for Donna Haraway – it is connected with the sinister entanglements of creative recursions of life and death. The term chthulucene has its origin in the name of the spider Pimothulu. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 30–33.

The meta level of metalepsis

The apocalypse of a second autumn unfolds in all dated chapters except for the chapter “22 września – drugie dno,” which introduces significant complications that disrupt the ontology of the narrative world/s. In this chapter, the “sci-fi poet,” referenced in “Genesis II,” speaks from his bunker after seven days of solitude. He is the Author of the as yet unfinished *Druga Jesień*, though he never refers to himself as Wiktor Żwikiewicz. He delivers a long monologue on the state and prospects of contemporary science fiction and, looking for the right ending for his book, decides to open a brown envelope with a new issue of the Austrian journal *Quarber Merkur*. Inside, he discovers a review written by the journal’s editor-in-chief – the renowned Franz Rosensteiner. Rosensteiner reviews a new book titled *Inwazja* [Invasion] by V. Czanda (pen name). The book describes an attack or rather a “relocation” of the parasitic Earl race from the *Canes Venatici* constellation to Earth. Rosensteiner’s review, which briefly summarizes the book, informs us that the aliens irradiate the Earth’s biosphere, effectively destroying it, wishing to recreate the environmental conditions on their home planet. The Earls therefore bring with them a new autumnal law of nature: whatever they absorb into themselves during the summer, “w sobie spalają, aż do granic ostatecznej entropii. Po nich zostaje tylko chłód i mrok, wiecznie martwa zima” [they burn in themselves, to the limits of ultimate entropy. Afterwards, only cold and darkness remain, an eternally dead winter] (DJ 160). Rosensteiner clearly states that *Inwazja* is a bad book which celebrates the apocalypse. He criticizes Czanda for his “wątpliwą erudycję i skrajny infantylizm [...] w zagadnieniach współczesnej fizyki i biologii” [questionable erudition and very poor knowledge [...] of contemporary physics and biology] (DJ 160) but ultimately concludes that the book is timely. It offers “ledwie wyobraźnią zabarwiony obraz rzeczywistości” [a picture of reality barely tainted by imagination] (DJ 161). Rosensteiner’s review further reads:

Proszę spojrzeć za okno. Nie minęło jeszcze lato stulecia, słoneczna jesień zabarwia lasy i parki odcieniem dawno nie spotykanej czerwieni. To w rzeczy samej jakby zapowiedź innego, bajecznego świata, prorocstwo raz na tysiąc lat trafiającej się najwspanialszej piątej pory roku. Sezon kanikuły przyniósł kilkanaście sensacyjnych doniesień prasowych [...]; wybitny naukowiec ma nieostrożność przedstawić do publicznej wiadomości wyniki radiowego nasłuchu kosmicznej przestrzeni i – wystarczyło. Pech w tym, że inwencji V. Czandy daleko do błyskotliwego talentu Orsona Wellesa, którego słuchowisko radiowe, oparte na „Wojnie światów” Herberta G. Wellsa, wstrząsnęło kiedyś opinią publiczną Stanów Zjednoczonych. A poza tym, przynajmniej się szczerze, trudno dzisiaj wywołać panikę w kręgu zagorzałych wielbicieli science fiction, dawno obytych z mitomanią kosmicznych inwazji.

[Look out the window. The summer of the century has not yet passed, the sunny autumn is tinting the forests and parks with a shade of red that has not been seen for a long time. It is indeed like a harbinger of a different fantastic world, a prophecy of the most wonderful fifth season that occurs once in a thousand years. The dog days brought a dozen or so sensational press reports [...]; an eminent scientist had the imprudence to tell the public about what he discovered when he monitored space by means of *radio* signal-transmitting – that was enough. Unfortunately, V. Czanda’s creativity does not compare with the brilliant talent of Orson Welles, whose radio play, based on Herbert G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*, once shocked public opinion in the United States. And besides, let’s admit it, today it is not so easy to terrify ardent science fiction fans. They are so familiar with the mythomania of space invasions.]

Druga Jesień could end with this metaleptic frame device, which is also a bridge between two ontologically different worlds. However, the novel becomes even more complicated in the final chapter “Apokalipsis.”

The opening page of “Apokalipsis” is peculiar: the eleven letters of the title are arranged somewhat disorderly. The reverse is blank. The following pages show that the Author, alone in the bunker, who was about to finish his novel, suddenly wakes up at his blossoming desk in the body of an Earl. He is in Czanda’s book. The novel thus turns out to be a misunderstood masterpiece, a self-fulfilling prophecy, a prediction (DJ 152). In a word, it is “Apokalipsis,” a r e v e l a t i o n .

However, the final chapter opens with these words:

Earl przekroczył grudę łachmanów zwalonych na ziemię i stanął przed ścianą – wobec jego ciała lustrzaną.

– Taki więc jestem – powiedział.

[Earl stepped over a pile of rags that had fallen to the ground and stopped before a wall – a mirror which reflected his body.

“So that’s what I am,” he said.] (DJ III, 165)

These are the final words of Czanda’s *Inwazja* quoted by Rosensteiner. His review opened with this quote. A distinct pagination of “Apokalipsis” (with Roman numerals) and the new nomenclature, which does not appear in other parts of *Druga Jesień*, suggest that this is in fact a chapter from *Inwazja* that was reprinted in *Quarber Merkur* underneath Rosensteiner’s review. It is not the novel’s ending written by the “sci-fi poet.” Neither is it proof of the prophetic nature of Czanda’s work. In this reading, the world does not undergo significant transformation. Such an interpretation also explains the aesthetically questionable style of this part.

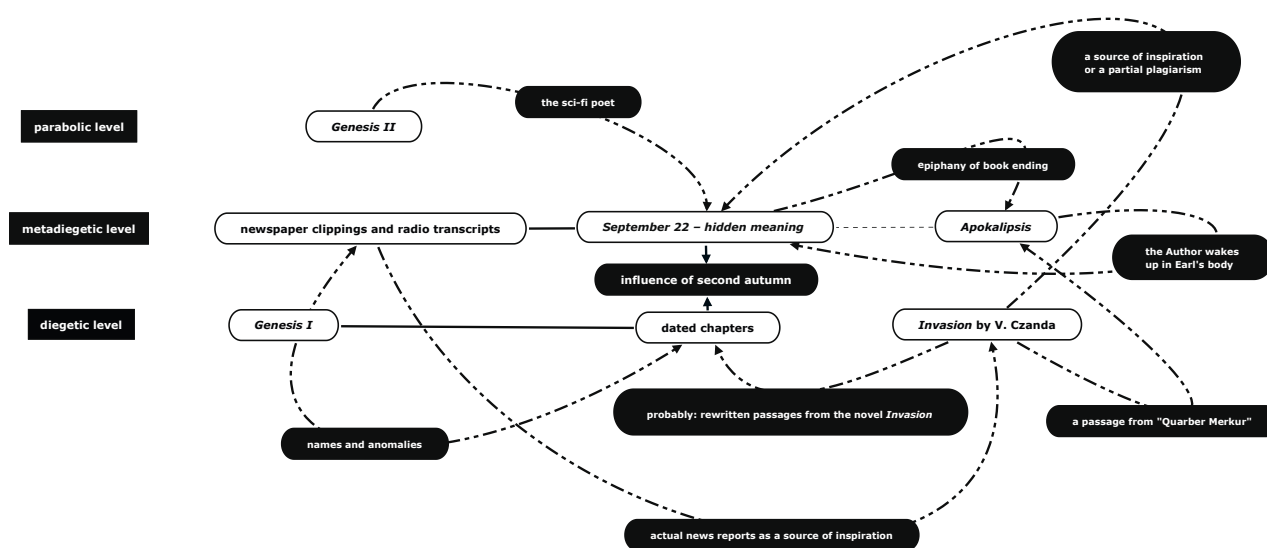
Another interpretation is probably even more interesting. “Apokalipsis” can nevertheless be read as the ending of *Druga Jesień* which came as a r e v e l a t i o n to the Author. He added some transfictional motifs (from *Inwazja*), placed himself in someone else’s fiction, and perversely declared that he did not finish the novel at all. The fragment quoted earlier – paradoxically – proves this. The passage reprinted in *Quarber Merkur* included one more sentence, but it was cut out from “Apokalipsis.” In addition, Rosensteiner also quoted in his review a passage about a native American woman called La Malinche, who is “naga i rozwarta swym czerwonym wnętrzem – między resztkami białych ścian rozwarta do nieba, czeka dopełnienia” [naked and wide open with her red interior – wide open and facing the sky; lying between the remains of white walls, she awaits completion] (DJ 159), which is after all a quote from *Druga Jesień*! Can it be that V. Czanda is the pen name of the Author – the “sci-fi poet?” What would *Inwazja* be then? A published draft version of the novel? Not necessarily. The Author of the unfinished book mentions that in his writing he in fact synthesizes illusory worlds.²⁹ Similarly to “Apokalipsis,” *Inwazja* could have been

²⁹“Dlaczego ja sam siedzę przy tym biurku i na użytek własny dokonuję syntezy iluzorycznych światów” [Why am I sitting at this desk and synthesizing illusory worlds for my own use?] (DJ 146).

a source of inspiration for the entire final draft of *Druga jesień*; the “sci-fi poet” would thus be more of a “sci-fi scribe,” that is someone who transcribes newspapers and writes down conversations he heard on the radio, a writer who is at best good at compiling different sources.

My analysis so far has been focused on the fictional world of the novel. Still, the identity of V. Czanda and the nature of *Inwazja* were further discussed by Żwikiewicz in different paratexts. In an interview conducted by Marek Żelkowski,³⁰ Żwikiewicz explained how on his way to the Czytelnik editorial office he lost the original version of *Druga Jesień*, which in his opinion was incomparably worse than the final draft. Thanks to this unfortunate accident, he rewrote the book, drawing inspiration for its experimental structure from Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*. Thus, V. Czanda could be W. Żwikiewicz, and *Inwazja*, criticized by the fictional Rosensteiner, might represent the first draft of *Druga Jesień*. This would push the boundaries beyond what Stanisław Lem achieved: Żwikiewicz wrote a review of his lost novel and included it in its new version.

Overall, the metaleptic structure of *Druga Jesień* is difficult to capture by tracking the jumps between diegetic levels – there are too many of them (see Graph II³¹).



Graph II (source: own study)

A novel as intricate as this one questions the very process of an *a priori* ordering of the diegetic levels, which, in turn, highlights the limitations of the typologies of “metaleptic movements” used to describe its narrative structure.³² The book employs both the so-called vertical metalepses (a vertical transition between metadiegesis and diegesis and *vice versa*) and horizontal metalepses (a horizontal transmigration between two novelistic worlds: Czanda’s *Inwazja* and *Druga Jesień*) as well as intersecting intradiegetic and extradiegetic transitions between the levels of the story. All of these transitions are logically impossible, and through their paradoxical connec-

³⁰Żwikiewicz, Żelkowski.

³¹Graph II only takes into account selected metaleptic jumps in *Druga jesień*.

³²John Pier, “Metalepsis”, in: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Source: <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/51.html#Wagner>, date of access 1 Sep. 2023.

tions, they create a Gordian knot. Unnatural narratologists Alice Bell and Jan Alber analyze this problem within the critical framework of possible worlds, a perspective particularly well-suited for addressing the complexities of this text.³³ From this vantage point, we can distinguish between three fictional worlds with distinct ontologies (in particular: distinct climates):

- a) A world where there is no second autumn.
- b) A world where there is a second autumn, and it is a sign of the Earl invasion.
- c) A world where there is a second autumn, and it is a climatic anomaly of unknown origin.

In such a perspective, one that does not focus on individual characters, Żwikiewicz's novel is a *narrative machine* which produces various stories within three variables: a second autumn (exists/does not exist); if it exists, then (there is/there is no invasion). It also creates numerous strange loops between them.

This, in turn, raises questions about the functions of ontological metalepses in econarratology. One of the most important ones is to stimulate readers, who often identify the metadiegetic level with their own reality, to engage in deeper thought. Breaking the fourth wall encourages reflection on the agency and performativity of metaleptic narratives, which is particularly significant in the context of climate activism. The drastic nature of the described transformation, thanks to metalepses, seems to exceed the boundaries of the fictional world. Just as Rosensteiner noted in his review, the reader can look out their actual window and wonder whether another extremely hot summer they are experiencing does not resemble a second autumn.

Metalepses also complicate the distinction between micro-narratives and macro-narratives, or local narratives (that is stories in the dated chapters) and grand narratives (Anthropocene, Capitalocene; that is, at a parabolic or metadiegetic level, apocalypse, invasion). They show how profoundly and paradoxically they intertwine with and condition one another.

Metalepses also makes us realize that there is actually no meta-level. There is no outside to hyper-objects – they stick to the body, to the eyes. When we read and write, we are entangled in them. We cannot adopt a position from which we would look “holistically” at the environment, the planet, or global warming: there is only the intra-dimension. In *Druga Jesień*, the Author, isolated in a bunker, has no idea what is happening outside. He thus turns out to be just as exposed to the effects of the strange radiation as the imaginary objects he creates. Second autumn breaks free from the shackles of its fictionality – it absorbs and incorporates everything. It even nullifies diacritical difference – it devours *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn] and its Author. In *Apokalipsis*, we read:

Złuszczające się warstwy papierowego naskórka obnażają zawartość coraz głębszych pokładów, rozdziały obumarłych znaczeń, dalsze strony upstrzone czarnym ziarnem. [...] Kopnął ocalały stos książek na podłodze. Rozsypały się z suchym szelestem. Języki żywego ognia żwawiej zatańczyły

³³Both scholars, unlike Marie-Laure Ryan, who also employs the possible worlds theory in her examination of metalepsis, emphasize that the latter separates, rather than brings together, distinct ontological domains. Bell, Alber, 173.

płomykami liści na upstrzonych literami stronach. Pąki ukwiałów łąpczywie pożerały słowa, zdania, rozdziały całe, jakby ich treść wreszcie stawiała się ciałem.

[The peeling layers of paper skin reveal the ever deeper layers, chapters of dead meanings, further pages speckled with black grain. [...] He kicked the surviving stack of books lying on the floor. They scattered with a dry rustle. Flames, resembling leaves, eagerly danced on the printed pages. Buds of sea anemones greedily devoured words, sentences, whole chapters, as if what they talked about finally became flesh.] (DJ IV, 166; XV, 177).

The work twines in the reader's hands: sentences and syntax twist and turn, paper comes to life and scatters the letters of *Apokalipsis* about. It is no longer clear whether they were simply written with a trembling hand or disarranged by second autumn. Sentences and chapters bloom – this not only introduces a correspondence between words and things, between the description of plant growth and the beginning of life – it also points to the book's inherent complexity, reminiscent of the *silva rerum*. Perhaps the book is some kind of independent rhizomatic amalgam of texts scattered on the Author's desk: as if the pseudopodia grew out of V. Czanda's *Inwazja* and Rosensteiner's review, and then seized newspaper clippings, radio transcripts, "Genesis I," and "Genesis II," merging into the heterogeneous whole of *Druga Jesień*.

The sign of the rose – descriptions and illusions (discursive level)

In Żwikiewicz's weird fiction – mainly in the dynamic, non-prototypical descriptive segments – a gap opens up between objects and their properties, which Harman wrote about in reference to the works of H.P. Lovecraft. However, in *Druga Jesień* this gap turns into a real abyss. As in Przyboś's cathedral, it is like a roof suspended over the world and the text. At a discursive level,³⁴ this effect is achieved by the stratification of the described objects via recursive metaphorical comparisons, which at times create descriptive illusions, *mise en abyme*, and at times completely disintegrate the images of things. They point to contradictory properties or saturate the image with so many qualities that it becomes unrecognizable. This phenomenon is also visible at a stylistic level, especially in syntax – specifically, in compound-complex descriptive sentences.

The chapter "31 sierpnia – znak róży" [August 31 – The Sign of The Rose] is a condensed sample of Żwikiewicz's poetics. Written in a style reminiscent of the poetics of Young Poland, it tells the story of Doña Esther's paradise garden, which rose in less than a week from corn cake crumbs that fell upon a barren clay floor:

Patrzył dziwnie jasnym wzrokiem.

Błął brokatu pęczniał w szczelinie między murami, dojrzewał bukietem pulsujących mięśni, jakby

³⁴I refer to a very useful three-level method of studying descriptions proposed by José Manuel Lopes. Lopes distinguishes "a stylistic level, where description is analyzed at the level of micro-sentences; a discursive level, where analysis focuses on the internal organization of larger descriptive segments/blocks; and a functional level, where, through the correlation of descriptive segments with other segments in the text, such as narration, we can focus on the functions description might fulfill in the context of a given work." Analysis and interpretation of selected descriptions will be conducted at these levels. José Manuel Lopes, *Foregrounded Description in Prose Fiction: Five Cross-Literary Studies* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 20.

się ściany otworzyły płcią gorącą albo rozsadził je wbity klinem krwawy węzeł serca. Ogromny i żywy jeszcze. Jeszcze, a może – zachłystujący się dopiero tętentem.

Dostrzegł, jak magiczna siła – powolna jego wezwaniu – przebudziła okrężne napięcia w mięsistej torbieli. I złote łuski liści otworzyły się nagle z chitynowym chrzęstem, tam – w dole, wybiegły mu na spotkanie tunelem drążonym w falbanach konarów, jakby w dziąsłach broczących złocistym miodem śliny. Zakołysały się jeszcze, rozwarły szeroko i zastygły w zupełnym oddaniu – pąsowe, z lekka rozchylone jak do pocałunku wargi, a między nimi, na dnie samym, niby kość zaklinowana w gardle – biała plama, rozpostarta i znajoma, chociaż zatopiona w cieniu, mglista z oddalenia i niedopowiedziana, kusząca owalem ledwie zarysowanego, cielesnego kształtu. Ona tam była, czekała – na powrót dziewicza, nietknięta dona Estera.

[He looked with strangely bright eyes.

Glitter swelled in a crack between the walls, ripening with a bouquet of pulsating muscles, as if the walls had opened, revealing a pulsating vagina, or as if a bloody heart nod were driven in between to part them open. Huge and still alive. Still alive or maybe only just choking on the sound of a hoofbeat.

He saw how a magic force – which he controlled – awakened circular tensions in the fleshy cyst. And the golden scales of leaves suddenly opened with a chitinous crunch, there – below – they ran out to meet him down a tunnel carved in the frills of the branches, gums salivating with golden honey. They swayed again, opened wide, and froze in complete devotion – crimson lips, slightly parted as if for a kiss, and between them, at the very bottom, like a bone wedged in the throat – a white spot, open and familiar, though hidden in the shadow, from a distance undefined and unspoken, tempting with the oval of the body that was barely visible. She was there, waiting – virgin once again, untouched once again, Doña Esther] (DJ 83–84).

In this description, the old man Paquito comes into contact with “dziwna oranżeria” [the strange orangery] (DJ 86) for the very first time. He observed the garden’s rapid growth from a window in the attic of a tenement house. When he opened it, he removed the only physical barrier between him and the garden. He noticed lush, intentional vegetation, which only at that moment, by creating a tunnel, allowed him to see a woman that was its integral part. The scene, however, is stratified: the “tunneling” resembles the development of a single flower bud – a “fleshy cyst” – out of which a scarlet rose grows, revealing a golden-brown ovary (the virgin Doña Esther).

The object, just like in Salvador Dalí’s paintings, shimmers in a surrealist illusion: at times it is a rose and at times it is a garden. This instability is further deepened by a series of comparisons to 1) a vagina, 2) a heart node, and 3) the lips – the quoted description is a metaphor for the first kiss. Descriptive illusion is meant to blur the boundary between the garden and the woman whom the voyeuristic Paquito desires. He was watching Doña Esther for a long time. He even saw her having sex with her husband, and later wondered: “kto w rzeczy samej zapłodnił jałową ziemię: zapiekłe okruchy kukurydzianego placka, czy też pijane nasienie don Estero, które zamiast w rdzawe łono, trysnęło w ceglastą glebę” [who really fertilized the barren earth: corn cake crumbs, or the drunken seed of Don Estero; it did not enter the rusty womb, and fell on the brick-red soil instead] (DJ 81).

From the moment lush vegetation swallows the alabaster-skinned Doña Esther, Paquito sees her as the copper-skinned La Malinche, Cortez’s lover and once again a virgin. His goal is to *p e n e t r a t e* the garden. He can enter through a gate – “ucho igielne” [eye of the needle] (DJ 76) – located in a gap between the walls which surround the courtyard. When he enters the “strange orangery,” Paquito begins to transform. He loses his subjectivity and becomes one with vegetation, gaining new powers

and senses. He experiences synesthetically – “widział powierzchnią skóry, jak liść – zagłębieniem dłoni, jak korzeń – opuszkami palców; dostrzegał jakieś wnętrza poprzez stopy na płask przywarte do ziemi” [he saw with the surface of his skin, like a leaf – with his palm, like a root – with his fingertips; he perceived some spaces with his feet which were flat on the ground] (DJ 87). He also has visions of glass houses, reminiscent of beehives, filled with anthropoid aphids. A moment later in the “gąbczasta gęstwina” [spongy thicket] he sees the Daughter of the Sun – “widmo hostii rozkrzyżowanej przejrzystą koronką” [the specter of a sacred host spread wide as you would spread your arms on the cross with transparent gossamer] (DJ 89) – who only now turns out to be a traitor to her tribe. She is a virgin waiting for the new Cortez, ready to help him build his utopia. Although Paquito runs out of the garden in terror, he is forever changed. He becomes the guardian of the gate.

At a functional level, the titular “sign of the rose” is therefore a prognostic of a non-human utopia, of the non-anthropocentric in the Anthropocene, that is a new era of the strange and the monstrous. In Paquito’s vision, the reinforced concrete structures of corporate office buildings are perfect habitats for strange creatures to grow and evolve. The transformed Earth-La Malinche becomes a sacred host, a sacrifice offering to an alien plant god, a cosmic flower that, once again “rozwarły swym czerwonym wnętrzem [...] czeka dopełnienia” [wide open with her red interior [...] awaits completion] (DJ 89). In the future, she will be a pregnant traitor to humanity, capable of feeding alien races – “eszelony TYCH, KTÓRZY PRZYJDĄ PO NAS” [the echelons of THOSE WHO WILL COME AFTER US] (DJ 144).

A baroque flowering sentence (stylistic level)

At a stylistic level, Żwikiewicz’s descriptions have several distinctive features. For one, he systematically uses forgotten or, especially considering the standards of contemporary Polish, rare words, which both enrich descriptions and render them strange: semantically unclear, they lose their mimetic functions. Below I list selected examples from “31 sierpnia – znak róży:” bierwiona [logs], bryzgi [splashes], brzemie [burden], cembrowina [well casing], delirium [delirium], fajansowy [faience], furkot [fluttering], gruzły [lumps], guano [guano], hacjender [haciender], kobierzec [carpet], krzta [shred], lak [sealing wax], mansardowy [mansard], matecznik [den], miech [bellows], munsztuk [bit], muslin [muslin], oranżeria [orangery], oścień [goad], parchaty [covered with scabs], plew [chaff], polepa [threshing floor], posoka [blood], powłóczysty [sweeping], prycza [bunk bed], pseudopodia [pseudopodia], na płask [flat], płowy [tawny], rachityczny [rickety], rozcapierzony [splayed], rozkrzyżowany [spread wide], szamerowany [braided], werbel [drum], wierzeja [gate], wykusze [bay windows], wężowidła [brittle stars], zapiętkły [fierce].

In terms of syntax, instruments – auxiliary objects used by agents to perform actions – dominate in Żwikiewicz’s prose. As Henryka Sędziak writes in her analysis of Stefan Żeromski’s *Ashes*, instruments “are objects used to perform actions, either as a tool or material.”³⁵ In Żwikiewicz’s work, passive and active adjectival participles are most often used to express the instrumental meaning. They create unconventional combinations that influence the way the described objects are visualized and, most importantly, signal shifts in their agency. Let us take a look at one of the descriptions quoted

³⁵ Henryka Sędziak, “Składnia wyrazów przymiotnikowych z podrzędnymi rzeczownikami w «Popiołach» Stefana Żeromskiego” [The syntax of adjectival clauses with subordinate nouns in Stefan Żeromski’s *Ashes*], *Studia Łomżyńskie* 6 (1996): 276–277.

earlier: “tam właśnie białe widmo hostii rozkrzyżowanej przejrzystą koronką” [the specter of a sacred host *spread wide as you would spread your arms on the cross with transparent gossamer whitened*] (DJ 89 – emphasis MM). This is an exceptionally complicated example. It is an image of a woman-tree, a sacrifice offering in the garden which is like consecrated bread in a monstrance. The sacred host is “spread” by gossamer – a semi-transparent lace which covers the chalice and a leafy substance in which Esther-La Malinche is enveloped. It is syntax that informs us about the instrumental role of the material which covers the object and thus gives it its shape. The task of the garden is therefore to “show” (Latin: *monstrare*). The barren clay floor is a temple in which the “mystery of rebirth” takes place: dead soil comes back to life; the female body is reborn as a plant-human monster (Latin: *monere*). However, it is not so much the sacred host as its whitening specter that is “spread” by the gossamer of this strange orangery. This specter deconstructs the opposition between life and death, the undead cannot be resurrected: bread is no longer bread, but it is not yet flesh; the woman is no longer Esther, but she is not yet La Malinche. The moment of transformation – the moment when being turns into something else – is thus captured.

Żwikiewicz also often expresses the instrumental meaning by use of adjective phrases considered to be Young Poland mannerisms:³⁶ “piętrzyły się [...] pnie rozdarłe wiśniowym pożarem” [tree trunks [...] *torn apart by cherry fire* were piled up] (DJ 87); “stygły w bezruchu cieliste pseudopodia [...] rozcapierzone mglistymi zwidami parujących zgliszczy, sztywnymi członkami na stos złożonych topielców” [flesh-colored pseudopodia were cooling off, still, [...] *splayed with misty apparitions of steaming ashes, with stiff limbs of drowned people arranged in a pile*] (DJ 81–82). I would argue that in order to advance the object-oriented ontology, we should analyze such structures and assess how objects as instruments of action function in language. In Żwikiewicz’s prose, tree trunks are torn apart by fire, while pseudopodia are splayed by apparitions and the limbs of drowned people. Only thanks to my arms that I raise can I spread my arms wide as you would on the cross – they spread me. This function disappears in “ready-at-hand”³⁷ sentences which start with the subject: “rozkrzyżował ramiona” [he spread his arms wide as you would on the cross]. Respectively, it is emphasized in more poetic, “broken,” and strange-sounding constructions which employ *instrumentalis*: “rozkrzyżowany ramionami” [he is spread, as if on the cross, by his arms], which emphasize the role of the instrument.

The motif of the “mystery of rebirth” points to another interesting aspect of Żwikiewicz’s style. The semantics of descriptions correspond to the syntax: the syntactic structure of descriptions and the content are in correlation. The garden is “barok złota zakwitły na glinie” [a golden baroque which blossomed on clay] (DJ 83), and the Author relies on “barokową terminologią. Słowem-mitem” [baroque terminology. Word-myth] (DJ 144).

Cały ogród oddychał, rzeził ciężko zdławionymi piersiami, zdawał się rozpierać ściany kamiennego kufra – już przepełnionego złotem i perłami, szczelnie zarzuconego dojrzewającymi spiesznymi owocami kolczastych brzoskwiń i miękkich kasztanów, po brzegi – jak trzos – nabitego gruzłami orzechów z pąsowej porcelany, wstęgami puszystych muślinów i kulami cukrowych głów na

³⁶Urszula Dzióbaltowska, “O języku poezji Jerzego Żuławskiego” [On Jerzy Żuławski’s poetical language], *Acta Universitatis Lodzianae. Folia Linguistica* 33 (1995): 27–28.

³⁷“The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw [zuriickzuziehen] in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. A tool, Heidegger writes, is noticed only when it breaks (when it ceases to be ready-at-hand, it becomes present-at-hand). Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1964), 99.

przemian z bulwami bursztynu, które w swym żywicznym mięszu skrywają larwy gigantycznych owadów, zalążki pajaków o rubinowych tułowiach i skręcone skrzydła niewyklutych ptaków.

[The whole garden breathed, groaned with heavy chests, seemed to push on the walls of a stone trunk – already overflowing with gold and pearls, filled to the brim – like a purse – with hastily ripening thorny peaches and soft chestnuts and decorated with crimson porcelain nuts, fluffy muslin ribbons, and balls of sugar and amber, which concealed in their resinous insides the larvae of gigantic insects, embryos of ruby spiders, and the twisted wings of unhatched birds.]

Syntax represents vegetation. Descriptions branch out with internodes of subordinate and participial clauses; they blossom with unusual adjectives. What is hidden in the chest – in a baroque garden cathedral – is revealed as we study syntactic trees. This is one of the rarest features of non-prototypical descriptions: as self-referential entities, they refer to their syntactic structure.

Conclusion

The present analysis of descriptions and metalepses in Żwikiewicz's prose was rooted in the theoretical framework provided by the descriptive turn and econarratology as well as Harman's weird realism and Morton's hyperobjects. I retrospectively classified Żwikiewicz's prose as weird fiction, currently hailed as *the* literature of the Anthropocene.

Druga Jesień is surprisingly timely. It tells the story of climate change, the horrors of biosphere, and, in particular, the hidden potential of organic matter, ready to evolve into something unexpected. Through metalepses and a fragmented composition, the novel conveys a sense of epistemological and ontological uncertainty. Like the characters in the book, readers are left unsure, whether second autumn actually occurred and what this phenomenon truly entails. Describing such a complex fictional world/worlds is challenging. Żwikiewicz uses descriptive illusions which emphasize the differences between sensual objects and sensual qualities as well as multi-level structures of references, which, as the analysis at a stylistic, discursive, and functional levels has shown, stratify the object. For instance, in the chapter "31 sierpnia – znak róży," the woman is a pistil waiting for an insect, a hybrid between a plant and a human – a breathing garden, Esther-La Malinche, and the Earth colonized by a cosmic conquistador, while the garden is a baroque cathedral and a monstrosity in which the specter of a sacred host is captured in the process of transubstantiation.

The non-prototypical quality of descriptions in Żwikiewicz's prose allows them to become objects themselves – images of their own syntactic structure that correspond to what is being described. In this respect, Żwikiewicz's prose represents a linguistic approach in weird fiction, where the weird worlds are mirrored in the idiomatic, opaque style.

A secondary, but no less important, aim of the present article was to introduce a wider group of literary scholars to Żwikiewicz's prose: I suppose it is the right time for it to experience its second spring.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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ABSTRACT:

This article presents an econarratological analysis of metalepsis and descriptive techniques in *Druga Jesień* [A Second Autumn], a somewhat forgotten experimental novel by Wiktor Żwikiewicz, which I retroactively classify as an example of weird fiction in Polish literature. Drawing on a methodological framework of the descriptive turn and Graham Harman's assertion that strange reality calls for strange realism, I argue that such a reality also requires distinctive techniques of literary representation – specifically, non-prototypical and strange descriptions that are illusive, allusive, and that challenge the cognitive capabilities of the “descriptor,” ultimately blurring the lines between the subject and environment. Furthermore, I comment on the functions of metaleptic narratives in econarratology, claiming that their paradoxical nature emphasizes the absence of a definitive “meta” perspective from which individuals can examine the planet and the biosphere.

weird fiction

WIKTOR ŻWIKIEWICZ

description

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