

Agnieszka Matwiejczuk

The real worlds – the magical worlds. Wit Szostak's works

SUMMARY

Wit Szostak's literary output is impressive, it consists of novels (12), short stories (24) and a literary work whose genre is difficult to assign unequivocally - *Przypisy końcowe*. In these works the way of creating the world is especially significant – its complexity, the richness of literary references or references to important traditions: Greek and Judeo-Christian, but also references to psychology, philosophy or sociology. This diversity has decided mostly about narrowing of the title of the work and choosing the issues which characterise the literary output of the author of *Oberki do końca świata*.

Wit Szostak (real name: Dobrosław Kot) is a writer and a philosopher, a person with a lot of interests to which he often refers in his texts. This prose writer belongs to Tischner Society, his passion is folk culture, especially music – he is not only the expert but himself plays the violin, gusle and bagpipes. The author of *Chocholów* is a lecturer at Cracow University of Economics. He writes his works under a pen name and in his scientific work he uses his real name and surname to differentiate between these two spheres of his professional activity.

His debut was in 1999 in „Nowa Fantastyka” with a short story *Kłopoty z blaznem*. As a Tolkien's fan, he initially wrote texts referring to fantasy: short stories but also novels – series inspired by folklore of Podhale: *Wichry Smoczogór*, *Poszarpane granie* and *Głędźby Ropucha*. In his later works he has given up „clean” fantasy and started to experiment with different literary styles and trends

The subject of PhD thesis will include the following works: *Trylogia krakowska* (*Chocholowy*, *Dumanowski*, *Fuga*) and *Oberki do końca świata*. Taking into consideration the repetitiveness of literary themes in Szostak's prose, undertaking similar motives or narrative strategies, it was necessary to refer to other novels (and a short story *List*): *Sto dni bez słońca*, *Wróżenie z wnętrzości*, *Zagroda zębów*, *Poniewczasie*, *Cudze słowa* (except fantasy texts).

The author decided to examine genre conventions of the author's works. The attention was paid to the influence of magical realism on Szostak's works and, at the same time, liminal (between realism and fantasy) nature of his texts. The author of *Chocholowy*

refers to Ibero-American tradition of realistic-magical prose - he was inspired by works of writers such as Juan Rulfo, Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, Miguel Ángel Asturias.

However, it does not exhaust the complexity of Szostak's works – the references to a historical novel, hagiographic writing, alternative history are also important. The expression of literary syncretism is *Trylogia krakowska*, in which there is the connection of different genre conventions. Each part of the series has a different way of narration, there are, however, common points e.g. recurring novel heroes or symbols referring to mythology.

In *Oberki...* the writer introduces the folk music (with fragments of authentic oberek) which acts as constitutive motive in the work. The plot covers the period from the World War II to the 1990s and thanks to it the author could show the rural world leaving folk culture. The author tries to „enchant” the reader with the beauty of these places through the way of depiction – real merges with unreal and the world is full of magic and mystery. These form the mythology of the place, for example, the history of primeval of the Wichry kin appears (the history of bringing back the Moon to the firmament by Maciej Wicher becomes symbolic). The novel shows how strong the relation between human, earth and nature can be.

PhD thesis is of theoretical research character with interdisciplinary dimension – there are numerous references to other fields of knowledge. The rich source literature is used. Different methodologies are used with taking into consideration especially psychoanalysis (Zygmunt Freud, Carl Gustav Jung), phenomenology (Roman Ingarden), deconstruction (Paul de Man) – the complexity of Szostak's works and multilateral character of work result in numerous references to different scientific researches.

PhD thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 is entitled *The titles of Szostak's novels* and shows the richness of references to the author's texts and other, important Polish and foreign works. The novels which are the part of *Trylogia krakowska* and *Oberki do końca świata* are analysed. The attention is paid to the terminological ambiguity of the titles, these are the titles what help to interpret. Each text which is the part of *Trylogia krakowska* shows different field of semantic references – the plots are built on word and literary associations. As an example *Chocholy* may be shown which refers to Wyspiński's drama and, similarly to the work of the poet of the Young Poland, the important role is played by oneiricity of the world presented and the heroes immersed in it. Another analysed novel, *Dumanowski*, is an unique work as it connects a lot of literary genres – a reader can find references to fantasy (as well as prose of magical realism), hagiographic

writing and Polish historical novel (with biographical character). *Fuga* is a novel in which one can find the biggest number of references, even in the title itself, to psychology and musicology. Szostak's earlier work *Oberki do końca świata* corresponds with the created reality – a reader is taken to the world of village musicians as the title informs itself and its connotations to folk dance. The music is the quiddity of this novel, thanks to rhythm, rhyme, repeated phrases the history of Wichry kin itself, a reader is taken to the world, where music plays important role.

Chapter 2 entitled *Heroes searching for identity* analyses this problem basing on *Trylogia krakowska* without *Oberki do końca świata*. It has been noticed that identity plays an important role for an individual, especially in the postmodern age when creating coherent personality becomes an important challenge. Each character of the triptych has a problem with personality. The characters are troubled by different demons (from the past as well) which do not allow them to be truly themselves. However, they try to find their own place in the world and settle down there. The place where an individual can experience themselves as an Another is a house, which is especially emphasised in *Chocholy* – the family residence becomes important space which helps to create heroes' identity. Szostak's characters are often shown in difficult and demanding moments. They are the individuals with complex personalities who often fail to deal with the surrounding world and form permanent relations with family or friends. Life for them is a neverending migration, searching for happiness which is difficult to define. The character of *Fuga* has such a complex personality, he is someone different in each chapter, or rather he sees himself as Another.

Myth and mythology in „Trylogia krakowska” – the third chapter of the thesis pictures this issue basing on the triptych. The references to the writer's other works: *Zagrody zębów*, *Poniewczasie*, *Wróżenia z wnętrzości* were necessary only in some parts of the thesis. The author discussed the following issues: sacralization of dailiness, function, role of rites and the relation between *sacrum* and *profanum*. The mythopoeic role of Szostak's prose was emphasised. The influence of the esthetics of the fragment on the works of author of *Fuga* was examined – the writer follows this way of narrating as he thinks that the contemporary world is too complex to picture the whole entire reality. He rejects entirely realistic convention as he claims that in postmodern age it does not fulfil its role.

Chapter 4: *Time and space in the writer's works* deals with *Trylogia krakowska* and *Oberki do końca świata*. Different visions of space time in rural and urban dimension are presented. The attention was paid to horizontal and vertical picture of space (clearly seen in

Chocholy), narrower perspective (House in *Chocholy*) and wider perspective (Cracow in *Dumanowski*) while describing this category. It was proved that Rokiciny in *Oberki...* makes a characteristic centre as it is there, where the most important events take place and only signals from „the great world” reach the village. In Szostak's novels time is complex, shown in the dimension of temporality, secularity, but also holiness. Both time and space influence on the plot, but also affect the characters' actions

In the conclusion of PhD thesis the most important issues are included and summarised. As Szostak's works are not known to a lot of readers, it is worth bringing it closer because they answer basic questions of an individual person such as sense of life, creating one's identity or complex relations with Another (widely understood existential theme in an important issue).

The PhD thesis also contains bibliography divided into subjective, objective, studies and context, foreign literature, website addresses and filmography.

28.01.2021r.

Agnieszka Matwiejczuk