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ALEXANDER BELYAEV: THE BOUNDARIES OF FICTION

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In the 30–40's of the XXth century, science fiction came into Soviet literature. Its representatives in their works combined scientific inventions with a fantastic invention. Nevertheless, the criticism of the time marked the limits of the «horizon of fiction». The themes of fantastic works should concern the upcoming perspectives of the development of science and technology. Otherwise, the literary fiction would be torn off the life of the person. Nevertheless, fantastical writers, among whom should be mentioned A. Belyaev, did not submit to the «recommendations» of critics and wrote fantastic works in which they talked about the flights of space ship to other planets, detailing the mechanisms of operation of these machines, basing on the theories of well-known scientists, among others K. Tsiolkovsky. That's how hard science fiction appeared. In addition to scientific and fantastic themes, Belyaev wanted to forecast the characteristics of a future man who could live and create in a new society without class divisions. The boundaries of fiction in the writer's works range from the problem of all human to space, underwater and real-unreal travels.

Key words: *science fiction, hard science fiction, boundaries of fantasy, imagination, inventions of technology, a man of the future.*

Each epoch of art and every famous science fiction writer brought something original into fiction, discovering and developing new facts of fantastic imagery and at the same time assimilating and refracting the experience and the most important artistic achievements of the past.

Thus, the continuity of the «fantastic» tradition arose and strengthened in world literature, which led under certain historical conditions to the formation of a new, modern type of science fiction, the so-called science fiction. The most important milestones along this path are undoubtedly the work of Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, the romance fiction of romantics (Hoffmann, Poe, etc.) and, finally, the science fiction of Wells, which to this day can serve as an example of staging in human fiction themes and evidence the enormous artistic possibilities of science fiction, far from being exhausted by modern literature.

In the 30–40s of the XXth century, the development of Soviet science fiction went a new way. «The socio-psychological motives of the future began to exfoliate from the scientific and technical, to move to the periph-

ery of literature [10, p. 24]. Such writers as A. Belyaev, G. Adamov, and Y. Dolgushin «introduced creative work into fiction as one of its main topics, began to fuse scientific and technical utopia with space and military-adventure literature» [10, p. 25]. However, the «detachment of social topics» characteristic of science fiction of the 1930s and 1940s caused great damage to science fiction. The theory of the *limit* that was widespread at that time, according to which the science fiction writer could depict only the immediate prospects for the development of science and technology and only those inventions, the question of introducing them into production was already on the turn of the day, even more detrimental to fiction. Such severe restrictions stemmed from the conviction of critics that a too bold flight of fantasy could lead to a separation from life, and therefore destroy the realism of science fiction. The critics accused the authors who dared to dream of using intra-atomic energy, of flying to the Moon and planets and their development, not only of unscience, isolation from life and its real problems, but even of cosmic imperialism. Instead of being carried away by idle fictions, devoid of any common sense, such as «rays», «atomic energies» and «space flights», etc., critics suggested that science fiction develop «urgent problems of a planned national economy» and focused on «decorating scientific technical foresights» [6, p. 149–159].

The best novels written by the talented science fiction writer Alexander Belyaev were subjected to repeated attacks in the 30s, which dogmatic-minded critics accused of unscience, empty entertainment, thoughtless imitation of far from the best examples of Western European science fiction, deviation from realism in science fiction.

Belyaev's works, among which, for example, are the novels «The Head of Professor Dowell» (1925, 1937), «Seller of the Air» (1929), «Leap into Nothing» (1933), «Star KETS» (1936), «Ariel» (1941) are classified as the genre of solid science fiction (NF). The term — hard science fiction — was first used in a literary review by P. Sheila Miller, published in February 1957 in the journal *Astounding Science Fiction* [15]. (The works of SF are based on the natural science hypothesis (scientific discovery, invention, novelty of science or technology). Maria Galina very accurately summarizes the definition of the Scientific Fiction: «It is traditionally believed that Science Fiction is literature, the plot of which revolves around some kind of fantastic, but still scientific idea» [5]. Some books by Jules Verne, works by Herbert Wells, as well as works by Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and Alexander Belyaev are considered classics of this type of science fiction. It should be noted that the

authors of these books made many «predictions» in the further development of science and technology. As the examples we can take the helicopter in Jules Verne's «Robur the Conqueror» and the plane in «The Lord of the World»; Wells predicted video calling, central heating, a laser, and atomic weapons. In the 20s of the XX century, Belyaev described a space station and radio-controlled equipment («Star KETS»).

Valery Bryusov, working on the theory of science fiction literature, in his remaining unpublished article «The Limits of Science Fiction» (1921) identifies «three tricks that a writer can use when portraying fantastic phenomena: 1. To depict a different world is not the one we live in. 2. Introduce into our world the beings of another world. 3. Change the conditions of our world» [11, p. 92–93]. Bryusov's thought was embodied in the works of Belyaev. The novels and stories of the writer most often narrate about the movement of characters to other planets, where they meet unusual flying or crawling creatures. In addition, the author invites readers to get acquainted with his vision of a new world, the best, most perfect, in which everyone can develop their abilities and be happy.

Speaking of the boundaries of science fiction in Belyaev's works, the question arises: are there any limits to human imagination? And here comes a term like imagination, which has the ability to create certain images, ideas, some ideas, skillfully manipulating them. Imagination plays a dominant role in such psychological processes as creativity, visualization, modeling, memory, i.e. every process that takes place «in images» [12, p. 43] is taken into account. It should be added that the imagination is able to stay in three temporal dimensions, drawing in them both real and surreal images. But what is most characteristic of the imagination is the process of thinking, memory, fantasy and often the desire to create such a space in which the desired and unrealizable in reality reign, a world of comfort, joy and happiness, i.e. what is lacking in reality, and what is more, thanks to the pointed sense organs, this world is perceived as valid, unlike most images and ideas.

Similar thoughts, no doubt, excited the keenly feeling and inexhaustible flight of Alexander Belyaev's inner vision. For him, science fiction became the work of his life, it was science fiction that the writer devoted his knowledge, abilities and strength to. By the way, before Belyaev, this literary genre did not know such a breadth of topics, nor such a variety of forms, nor such elaborate literary techniques. The writer left a mark in all its varieties and in related adventure genres; he created purely his own, Belyaev's works (for example, a cycle of science fiction tales, half-humorous short stories about the

inventions of Professor Wagner). And this despite the fact that Belyaev turned to literary work quite late — he was already under forty. The author of «Ariel» was not one of those lucky people who early find his calling. Life managed to leave him quite a bit from side to side before he became a writer. All Belyaev's works cover some fifteen years and testifies to his titanic hardworking.

It was repeatedly noted that the writer's fantastic works are characterized by specific features. According to Belyaev, «everything here rests on the rapid development of action, on dynamics, on a rapid change of episodes. Here the heroes are known mainly not by their descriptive characteristics, not by their experiences, but by external actions» [11, p. 94].

The novel «Amphibian Man» (1927), where it is the lightning-fast decision of the protagonist Ihtiander to save the drowning girl, creates an avalanche of dynamic motifs that densely fill the plot-compositional space of the novel, giving it a touch of adventure and adventurism, can serve as an illustration of the above. The main character, to whom the gills of a young shark were transplanted, becomes the first inhabitant of the ocean. The dream of his named father, Dr. Salvatore, to give people another world where you can find freedom and happiness, lies in the possibility of moving them into the underwater world. However, the good intentions of the romantic doctor do not find their application: Salvatore did not take into account in his theory of global salvation of the world such natural human feelings as loneliness and love, which cannot be mathematically calculated and predicted, not to mention managing them... The most characteristic feature of science fiction works is the meticulous detailing of facts, as well as the selection and practical application of probable future predictions in the field of science. Stanislaw Lem in his article «Where are you going, the world?» (1962) writes that our future is formed not by already existing inventions, even if very improved, but by discoveries and inventions that no one foresaw [7, p. 162]. Based on his fantastic ideas on scientific arguments, Belyaev resorts in this novel to the «opinion of a medical expert,» which Professor Shane represents. His scientific mindset debunks the myth of an amphibian man: «Science <...> knows of cases where even a completely adult person has an overgrown gill hole in his neck, under his jaw. These are the so-called cervical fistulas» [3, p. 149]. It is the combination of science and fantasy that «genuine science fiction is different from baseless fantasies divorced from scientific knowledge» [14, p. 54]. Belyaev explains this approach by saying that «nothing exists in naked fantasy except an empty play of imagination, while in science fiction, «assumptions» and scientific «mis-

takes» are just a threshold that must be crossed in order to enter the field of completely benign material based on strict scientific data» [9, p. 97]. And what is important, according to the author of «Air Seller», «a writer working in the field of science fiction must be so scientifically educated that he can not only understand what the scientist is working on, but also on this basis be able to anticipate such consequences and opportunities that are sometimes not clear to the scientist himself ...» [11, p. 81]. These are not empty words. For Belyaev, the man whose mind he worshiped, whose works he studied in detail, to whom he devoted more than one novel and named a star by his name — «KETS», was Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovsky. Armed with the theory of Tsiolkovsky about the creation of a rocket and the flight of a person into the superatmospheric and further into interplanetary space, Belyaev got acquainted with the rocket control mechanism and the ability to move in it in outer space — all this is interestingly and fascinatingly captured on the pages of science fiction writer novels.

A vivid example of the consolidation of author's fiction and scientific knowledge can serve as the novel «Leap into Nothing» (1933) by Belyaev. The title itself contains an indication of the spatial infinity of fantasy. To jump into «nothing» is a kind of transport to a certain void, an existing non-existent locus, which rather causes fear of the unknown rather than a pleasant journey. Endowed with a spatial characteristic in this work, «nothing» is associated with «everywhere» and «nowhere», which, in turn, expands the boundaries of space to infinity.

In an article on «Between Things and Void», Yuri Lotman believes that «a world without a horizon is a world without a reference point and a fulcrum. This is existence in a vacuum, in a void» [8, p. 299]. The «horizon» for the characters of this novel is their life principles, often colored by such features as greed, desire for enrichment, selfishness, etc. It is «nothing» that is the void in which the king of the exchange, Marshall de Gerlange, wanted by the police for fraud, chairman of the board Samuel Stormer, lady Hilton, who hates changes in society and new power in the hands of the lower class, as well as her confessor bishop Job Weller and personal Doctor Thacker, not the place that was supposed to be an oasis of salvation for them. Belyaev confirms in his work the idea that a person spoiled by external factors is not able to change his mentality and desires: even when he is on another planet, he is characterized by the usual way of thinking, old habits and skills. The method of studying the hero's behavior and reaction, often used by Wells, the author of «Leap into Nothing», as we see, uses it very skillfully.

Highlighting a specific artistic detail — in the novel, for example, precious stones — the writer forces her to «work» on a plot that unfolds in realistic and outer space, thereby exposing the true intentions of characters marked with negative features. Fantastic situations are recreated in two topos dimensions, giving us the opportunity to observe the behavior of characters who, ignoring the obvious improbability of what is happening to them and ignoring the unusualness of their situation, continue to live in petty, limited interests and ideas of the «society» they have just left. The author explicates the skill of social typing with a bizarre mix of the impossible, the fantastic with the ordinary, the super-ordinary. Zakhar Fainburg in the article «Modern Society and Science Fiction» asks the question, what gives science fiction a figurative art form? The author presents a whole series of artistic «effects» that «directly stem from the artistic-figurative design of scientific ideas and hypotheses in modern science fiction: the effect of the reality of a fantastic situation, a fantastic idea, the effect of presence, the effect of empathy, and also «extremely important (especially for speculatively assumed social situations) the effect of integrity» [13, p. 33], which consists in the fact that «the phenomenon of interest to the author is not considered separately in science fiction... but as in eobschy in its influence, for his role as a single element of a hypothetical world» [13, p. 34]. Confirmation of the foregoing can serve as the novel «The Head of Professor Dowell» (1926). The author himself admits that to a large extent this is an autobiographical work. Since the writer put the writer in a plaster bed for more than three years due to paralysis of his lower body, his whole life at that time was reduced to the existence of a «head without a body». Using the «reality effect», the writer turned it into a fantastic idea. Professor Dowell after the betrayal of his friend Professor Kern, continues to live after death, or rather his head without a body begins to exist as an object of experiment and a source of brilliant ideas. Belyaev describes in detail the mechanism for connecting such an important human organ to the apparatus as the head. Unfortunately, Kern uses the knowledge and experience of the «talking head» for selfish purposes: he gives out the ideas of Professor Duel for his own, wishing to receive worldwide fame. Here Belyaev goes beyond the boundaries of science fiction, which focuses solely on the description of the process of «revitalizing» a person after death, adding to the plot of the novel the public and personal relationships of the characters, checking their humanity and decency with fame and money.

In the light of the foregoing, the idea suggests itself that the boundaries of Belyaev's science fiction are directly related to the novelties of technology

of the first decades of the last century, the achievements of science in the field of space exploration. However, they are not limited only to the mean calculations and hypotheses of scientists — precise scientific calculations passed through the writer's richest creative laboratory, through his imagination and talent, which had no borders. Perhaps that is why the fantastic ideas proposed in Belyaev's novels did not remain only in the realm of fantasy, but found their embodiment in life. What was considered a miracle took on real forms over time. As Yuri Kagarlitsky writes in his book «What is Fiction?», «a miracle is something that contradicts the laws of nature <...> something that goes beyond our present ideas. But it is worth assuming that there are still some laws of nature that we have not known, and the situation is changing. What was a miracle yesterday may turn out to be a reality tomorrow» [7, p. 35]. As we know, organ transplantation is now a normal operation, man's flight to Mars or Venus has also become a reality, radio control of a rocket or other flying objects is considered part of the achievements of astronauts. We believed in miracles, and they became a reality. «Many things, which for a very long time were considered fables and even rejected as ungodly and contradictory religions, were later recognized as such irrefutable truths that anyone who dared to express doubt seemed to be an ignorant and ridiculous fool» [4, p. 3–4]. Today, such a branch of medicine as cryonics is popular, which is engaged in freezing the human body in order to revive it after death after a certain time. Does this to some extent resemble the fate of Professor Dowell's head?¹

Of all the science fiction writers persecuted by critics of the 30s of the XX century, only Belyaev remained true to his idea. When science fiction, «Cinderella», by the definition of the writer, was driven into a dead end, the author of «The Star CETS» did not hide behind silence, did not write to the table, he involuntarily became the mouthpiece of science fiction. According to Belyaev, «the easiest thing is to create an entertaining, sharp-story sci-fi novel on the theme of class struggle. Here and contrasts of characters, and the intensity of the struggle, and all sorts of secrets and surprises. And

¹ Профессор математики Южно-Российского государственного политехнического университета (Новочеркасск) Сергей Некрасов заключил контракт на заморозку своего тела с одной из компаний, занимающихся крионикией. Идея заключается в замораживании человеческих тел или органов до температуры жидкого азота или углекислоты (сухого льда). См. об этом подробнее: http://www.aif.ru/society/people/golova_professora_nekrasova_uchyonyy_zamorozit_telo_dlya_zhizni_posle_smerti (доступ: 27.06.2018).

the most difficult thing is to create an entertaining plot in the work that describes the future classless society, predict the conflicts of good heroes among themselves, guess at least two or three features in the character of the person of the future» [2, pp. 23–25]. The task set by the writer to himself, we can redirect to modern science fiction writers. Maybe they will succeed in fulfilling the dream of the author of «Amphibian Man».

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АЛЕКСАНДР БЕЛЯЕВ: ГРАНИЦЫ ФАНТАЗИИ

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В 30–40-х годах прошлого века научная фантастика стала составляющей советской литературы. Его представители в своих произведениях объединили научные изобретения с фантастическим воображением. Тем не менее критика того времени четко определяла пределы «горизонта фантазии», т. е. тематика фантастических работ должна была касаться предстоящих перспектив развития науки и техники. В противном случае фантазия будет оторвана от жизни. Тем не менее, писатели, среди которых следует назвать А. Беляева, не подчинялись «рекомендациям» критиков и сочиняли фантастические романы, в которых рассказывали о полетах космических кораблей на другие планеты, подробно описывали механизмы работы и управления этими машинами, опираясь на теории известных ученых, как, например, К. Э. Циолковского. Таким образом, появилась научная фантастика. Помимо научных и фантастических тем, А. Беляев хотел предугадать черты человека будущего, который мог бы жить и творить в новом обществе без классовых разногласий. Границы фантазии в творчестве писателя простираются от проблемы человека к космическим путешествиям, подводным, реальным — нереальным.

Ключевые слова: фантастика, научная фантастика, границы фантастики, воображение, технические изобретения, человек будущего.

ОЛЕКСАНДР БЕЛЯЄВ: МЕЖІ ФАНТАЗІЇ

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У 30–40-х роках минулого століття наукова фантастика знайшла свій шлях в радянську літературу. Його представники у своїх творах об'єднали наукові винаходи з фантастичною уявою. Проте критика того часу чітко визначала межі «горизонту фантазії», тобто тематика фантастичних творів повинна була стосуватися майбутніх перспектив розвитку науки та техніки. В іншому випадку фантазія буде відірвана від життя. Проте письменники, серед яких слід назвати О. Беляєва, що не підпорядковувалися «рекомендаціям» критиків та писали фантастичні романи, в яких розповідали про польоти космічних кораблів на інші планети, докладно описували механізми роботи та управління цими машинами, спираючись на теорії відомих вчених, таких як К. Е. Ціолковський. Таким чином, з'явилася наукова фантастика. Крім наукових та фантастичних тем, О. Беляєв

хотів передбачити риси людини майбутнього, яка могла б жити та творити в новому суспільстві без класових розбіжностей. Межі фантазії у творчості письменника простягаються від проблеми людини до космічних, підводних подорожей, реальних і нереальних.

Ключові слова: фантастика, наукова фантастика, межі фантастики, уява, технічні винаходи, людина майбутнього.

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