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**Reality and history in antoni gawiński's (1876-1954)
fantastic works for children**

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*In this paper I tried to show that history and the past become an important constitutive element defining reality in the fantastic texts for children. Excellently analysed by White, the poetics of historical writing (including meta-history, historical fictionalisation vs. truth, “tropes and tropology of history” and “ironical approach to history” history vs. myth, legend and fantasy, the significance of narrativity for the representation of reality) is also a factor in analysing and interpreting literary historical texts for children and youth. History can appear—like in the case of Antoni Gawiński's oeuvre—on three levels: 1) the fantastic-mystical level exposing the Romantic vision of history through the national heroes' graves; in the fable *Przygody Okruszka*, it abounds in oneiric motifs as well as in elements of remembrances, memories and memory (the past as such), 2) the reality framed in the fable convention of a historical parable with pronounced elements of legend (Napoleonic times) and the theme of pacifism in *Lolek Grenadier*, 3) the realistic historical novel without fantastic elements, complying with the poetics of didactic tales, richly illustrated with iconic material (the Renaissance) in *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka*.*

Key words: *intercultural communication, reality, history, fantasy, fairy tale.*

The actuality of the research. In literature, reality, history and fantasy function on various levels. Theory of literature perceives this issue as a complex one. The methodological intricacies caused by the overlapping layers of historicity, reality and fantasy have been tackled by such eminent theoreticians as, among others, H. White [15], R. Wellek [14], K. Bartoszyński [2], E. Auerbach [1].

In their works concerning among others representations of reality (treated also as a historical-philosophical category identified sometimes with realism), the scholars refer to many notions and definitions, e.g. mimesis, replication and repetition, imitation, reflection, similarity and difference, verisimilitude and truthfulness, referentiality and representativeness, closeness and distance. Polish scholar Zofia Mitosek, the author of *Mimesis*, claims that „realist works represent reality the way it appears in the current experience at the level of common cause-effect logic [...] [and] the processual character of the circulation of literary representation makes a writer select data that reality imposes on him; the classical hierarchy of themes is opposed by the search for the phenomena typical of a given historical moment...” [9, p. 80].

It seems that history (national history, the past, etc.) can become a lucid frame of reference in works presenting factual events; we should nevertheless remember that history's relationships with reality are peculiar and ambiguous.

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In Poland, a still interesting phenomenon is Antoni Gawiński’s *oeuvre*, in which reality evoked by history and the past, constructed by mechanisms typical of fantastic literature, importantly imbues the works with specificity. Reality and history appear in Gawiński’s texts at three levels: remembrances, chronicle and the fantastic (mysticism). Gawiński produces various versions of history, e.g. a Romantic vision (in *Przygody Okruszka*), a legendary vision (the Napoleon legend) and a fantastic (oneiric) vision (in *Lolek Grenadier*). In accordance with the indicators of historical realism, his literary fiction is marked by didacticism, particularly pronounced in *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka*, a historical novel set in the Italian Renaissance, dealing also with the conflicts between Poland and the Teutonic Order. These works will be the subject of my analysis¹.

The objective of the article. In this paper I’ll try to prove that in A. Gawiński’s *Przygody Okruszka*, *Lolek Grenadier* and *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka*, in the confrontation of dreams (magic or fantasy) with reality, the references to the past and history clearly consolidate and strengthen the reality level of the text, especially in the case of the two latter texts.

Three models of reality and history

a) A romantic vision of history: *Przygody Okruszka*.

Przygody Okruszka is a multilayered, ambiguous, symbolic, and philosophical fable (fantasy) of magic and marvel, featuring Okruszek, a little boy who copes with evil that wants to conquer a wonderful Fairy Land.

One of the most important reception planes of the text is overlapping of the layers of the real and magical worlds. The text features real and fairy characters, and nature becomes the real background of events as well as the realm of magic and wonder (the world of nature coexists here with the world of fantasy in opposition to the layer of the real, materialised civilisation). An additional stimulus for the boy’s actions is his discovery of the past, history and the graves of the heroes who died for the motherland [3, p. 103].² Antoni Gawiński should thus be regarded as one of the founders of the Polish literary fairy tale [13, p. 219, 247]. We enter the Fairy Land—the realm of poetry, music and art defended by Okruszek, a poet’s son—owing to reveries, dreams and visions [12, p. 329-330]. These elements of Young Poland’s literary imagination—the oneiric motifs—so pronounced in Gawiński’s *oeuvre*, go hand in hand with some aspects of the contemporary fantasy genre.

¹Antoni Gawiński (1876-1954) was a versatile artist of Young Poland and the modernism period. He was a painter, a graphic artist, a writer and an art critic. He wrote, painted religious pictures, made stained-glass windows and theatre decorations, produced book illustrations, taught drawing, and lectured in art history. The pictorial and poetic quality of his books is one of his most important qualities. Gawiński’s first book (*Sen życia*, a novel for adults) was published in 1906; then in 1912 his fable *Dzięścieciu rycerzy* was published. Also in 1921, in the collection titled *Bajki staroświeckie*, the author published reworkings and paraphrases of classical fairy tales, e.g. *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding-Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Puss in Boots*. Joanna Papuzińska, on the one hand, writes about Gawiński as an eccentric and mysterious figure and, on the other, summing up his literary *oeuvre* she states that he practised ‘old-fashioned Young Poland’s vogues’ [10, p. 30]

²The generic features of fantasy literature include undoubtedly the motif of transforming and rectifying reality by children appointed to fulfil this mission in the world which for various reasons has become evil or confused. This motif refers to the turning points and climactic events in history (of a country or of the world). For this reason fantasy literature approximates the mythical thinking about the world and although ‘it derives equally from the fable, mythology, legend, medieval chivalric romances, and adventure novel,’ it clearly ‘transfers into literature the structural principles of myths... with the clear ethical dimension of each element of the presented world being one of the generic dominants of the text’ [3, p. 103].

The oneiric character of the presented world is evoked by the dreamy landscape, its colours, characteristic understatements, muffled sounds, symbols, figures, mysterious, hardly comprehensible events which have basically no beginning and no end' [8, p. 44].

The dream in *Przygody Okruszka*, however, has a clearly defined function. It is not only a vision in a sleep; the protagonist does not come back to his own world after awakening. Just the opposite: Okruszek wakes up in a different world, a Fairy Land, because like a romantic hero he has a mission to accomplish there. Such protagonist can be certainly recognised also in young romantic Kordian. The protagonist's inner strength derives both from angelic support and parental affection: 'to fall asleep in the elemental space in the embrace of a gliding Angel... Is there anything more beautiful? It can happen only to a child for whom a loving and nostalgic mother prays' [6, p. 91]. The passage into another world is gentle: 'the boy slept soundly and he did not wake up even when the luminous Guide parted with him and left him on the elevated bank of a swirling river at the verge of impenetrable woods. The sky brightened in the East, and the stars disappeared one by one in the blue abyss. The dew appeared; a new day was approaching' [6, p. 91]. The description of a new world to which Okruszek is conveyed is impressionistic, subjective and 'angelic,' correlated with the protagonist's inner experiences; it is evocative and saturated with lyricism [8, p. 42]. After he wakes up, the protagonist is led by the Earth Spirit to the Forest. In Gawiński, the Earth Spirit takes on the form of a sage. In C.G. Jung's theories (*Phenomenology of the spirit in fables*), the 'spirit' is symbolised most frequently by a figure of an old man connected sometimes with the father complex; sometimes it is an old sage (or a Romantic hermit) who guides the protagonists and teaches them how to act in the world (resorting to the imperative mood of Go! Take! See!) and apart from 'cunning, wisdom and knowledge... manifests...also moral features' [7, p.438-450]. Uncovering layers of the ground, the Spirit shows Okruszek the past and history. He unearths for the boy truths which are not magical and marvellous, the world which is not the realm of fantasy and fable, but the real history, the graves of the heroes who died for the motherland-mother?: 'on their bones and ashes rustling forests will thrive, fertile fields will yield crops, the houses will rise and the towns will be peopled on the swirling rivers...But whatever happens, it will happen on this soil full of love, saturated with sacrifice and faithful devotion...And all this will happen under the eternally watchful eye of those who lie in their beloved Mother's lap...they are her invisible guards: the HEROES' [6, p. 92].

Evocations of the past are then very important in the story. By learning to understand history, the young protagonist learns how to act. In the fable an important role is played also by the motifs of 1) testimony of the Squirrel, an eye-witness of the events, 2) chronicles and books, 3) memories of the dying Fairy-Friend-Granny. Owing to these components, the structure of the work's narrative is partly retrospective.

History and the past have a mystical dimension in the text as well. Both the motif of chronicle-book and the Romantic topos of the national heroes' graves imbue the text with equivocal symbolism. They refer the reader to a rather indefinite past and tradition, which adds a deeper, metaphysical sense to the interpretive considerations on the role of the little (Romantic) protagonist in the text.

b) The Napoleon legend: pacifist Lolek Grenadier.

Lolek Grenadier takes on a conventional form of a historical parable and a didactic adventure story, in which magic and marvel do not play an essential role, but whose plot is based on the oneiric poetics. The little protagonist is in his sleep transferred by a beautiful Fairy-Star to the Real Land charmed into being but true, full of sorrow and suffering:

the land of Napoleonic history. The boy who becomes a real grenadier and fights under Napoleon is in fact Karol, the Bolesław Jeziorański's. In his childhood, Karol listened to the stories told by his grandmother (a daughter of Gujot de Pravier, a French soldier) about the victories of the Emperor, who in the early 19th century became a great hope for the enslaved Poles. The Napoleon legend played a very significant role in Polish literature at the turn of the 19th century. The enormous expectations for an extraordinary leader who was to free Poland from oppressors and give it liberty—so obvious in our national epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*—have become a theme of numerous works abounding in 'conscious and purposeful as well as in subconscious references to Mickiewicz's text... in the form of for example motifs of peregrinations, numerous Legion soldier figures who miss the Soplicowo-like mansions they left in the motherland, meadows, fields and forests' [11, p.175] or in the form of clear allusions to 1812. The little protagonist, Lolek the grenadier, participates in real battles fought by Napoleon (e.g. Austerlitz, Jena, Eylau, Leipzig, and Waterloo) and receives the Legion Cross for courage. When Lolek receives the Cross, the emperor distinguishes him and nearly makes friends with him. In the tale, Napoleon is presented as an ordinary, modest man: he wears a grey uniform, has a pale, tired face, is familiarly called by his soldiers 'Small,' has his quarters in a humble abode of a local parish priest and occupies a poorly furnished room. This layer of the real in the text refers the reader to the sphere of the everyday and commonness well-known to the young addressees of the work.

The Emperor is vividly delineated. Gawiński produced in his texts the genuine 'atmosphere of Napoleon's cult verging on mysticism...the soldiers are enthralled by the leader's personality and genius...he has a nearly irrational power over his soldiers' souls...the myth of his divine power...the expression of the omnipotence which evokes humility and awe' [12, p.178-179]. The tale additionally emphasises the common adoration and love of the Great Emperor not only as a leader but also as a good father, which refers to the world of children's imagination. The most splendid moments Lolek experiences in his military career are connected with an opportunity to be alone with the great leader. He sits in Napoleon's lap, listens to the leader's strategic planning and looks at the real map of Napoleon's potential conquests (he localises e.g. Germany and Russia). In the moments of such private conversations, the Emperor makes the little protagonist realise the sense of liberty, peace, patriotism, motherland's immortality and death and tries to explain to him the sense of the martial 'establishment of the order' in the world. The child asks then resolutely and reasonably: 'so are we going to fight for ever?' and he does not get a straightforward answer.

After the discussions with Germans in an inn, Lolek begins to realise that 'establishment of the order that gives power to the nations' [4, p. 46] or 'ordering of the world' may be ethically and morally dubious if one considers the arguments of the opposing party. Two Germans explain to the young protagonist—and the soldier fascinated with combat—the sense of such formulations: 'but you want then to feel good in our country and not to have us feel good there' [4, p. 52].

The image of war Gawiński conjures up has then a clearly pacifist character. Although the soldier's slogans are courage, sacrifice and glory, the cruel and bloody history unfolds its tragedies in front of the boy: death and loneliness. Enriched in knowledge of history, Lolek comes back happily to his contemporary reality.

c) Historical realism and didacticism: *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka* (1937)

Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka is a historical novel in which fictional figures and events appear in parallel with the historical layer. The book's cognitive and didactic qualities are linked with historicisation of the fictional world and descriptive narration. The narrator

introduces a young reader to the realities of the Polish and Italian Renaissance as well as to the political situation of Poland under the Jagiellons by means of the travel convention: journey of the Polish bishop Erazm Ciołek and his companion, the royal page Andrzej Wilczek to Italy. The bishop and the page are sent on a mission as envoys to Pope Julius II in order to discuss the conflict between Poland and the Teutonic Order. The reader gets an opportunity to visit together with the protagonists some places conjured up in the novel, e.g. Rome, the Vatican, Florence, Venice and Cracow, as well as to meet the whole pantheon of Renaissance artists. The author presents an interesting view of Poland filtered through the vision of the culturally rich Italy when during the journey across Italy, the Poles are confronted with the local population and culture. Gawiński's motherland, Poland, is shown partly as if from the perspective of a foreigner: 'you could say that the whole world was in mental upheaval and Poland was not a provincial hamlet; in Cracow books were published, a lot was read and rumours were heard about extraordinary travels and expansion of the world... Poland gravitating always to the West opened its doors widely and hospitably to the Latin culture. Many Italians, who for many reasons, most frequently the political conflicts and family feuds or their love of adventure or trade left Italy, settled in Poland to their great contentment. Cracow grew more beautiful and manners more refined' [19, p. 19].

In the stories of Wilczek's peregrinations there is no fantastic layer: history and reality are shown here in a realistic manner and the glosses about Italian Renaissance masters' works as well as their reproductions included in the book's appendix imbue it with a clear didactic character.

Resume. In this paper I tried to show that history and the past become an important constitutive element defining reality in the fantastic texts for children. History can appear—like in the case of Antoni Gawiński's oeuvre—on three levels: 1. The fantastic-mystical level exposing the Romantic vision of history through the national heroes' graves; in the fable *Przygody Okruszka*, it abounds in oneiric motifs as well as in elements of remembrances, memories and memory (the past as such). 2. The reality framed in the fable convention of a historical parable with pronounced elements of legend (Napoleonic times) and the theme of pacifism in *Lolek Grenadier*. 3. The realistic historical novel without fantastic elements, complying with the poetics of didactic tales, richly illustrated with iconic material (the Renaissance) in *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka*.

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Michułka Д. Реальність та історія у фантастичних творах для дітей Антонія Гавінського // Ученіє записки Таврического національного університета ім. В.І. Вернадского. Серія «Філологія. Соціальні комунікації». – 2012. – Т.25 (64). – № 1. Частина 2. – 429-434.

*Реальність, історія та фантазія функціонують у літературі на різних рівнях. У творчості Антонія Гавінського історія проявляється на трьох рівнях: 1) фантастично-містичному, на якому виявляється романтичне бачення історії крізь призму могил національних героїв; у казці з'являються теми сновидіння та елементи нагадування, згадування і пам'яті (взагалі минулого) – *Przygody Okruszka* (Пригоди Окрушка); 2) реальність у жанрі казкового історичного роману з міцними елементами легенди (часи Наполеона) та темою пацифізму – *Lolek grenadier* (Лолек гренадер); 3) реалістичний історичний роман без елементів фантастики, написаний у поетиці дидактичного роману, з багатьма ілюстраціями (епоха Відродження) – *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka* (Мандрівки Анджєя Вільчка).*

Ключові слова: міжкультурна комунікація, дійсність, фантастика, історія, казка.

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*Реальность, история и фантазия функционируют в литературе на разных уровнях. В творчестве Антониего Гавинского история появляется на трех уровнях: 1) фантастико-мистическом, на котором показана романтическая картина истории сквозь призму могил национальных героев; в сказке появляются онирические темы и элементы напоминания, вспоминания и памяти (вообще прошлого) – *Przygody Okruszka* (Приключения Окрушка); 2) реальность в жанре сказочного исторического романа, с сильными элементами легенды (времена Наполеона) и темой пацифизма – *Lolek grenadier* (Лолек гренадер); 3) реалистический исторический роман без элементов фантастики, выдержанный в поэтике дидактических романов, с большим количеством иллюстраций (эпоха Возрождения) – *Peregrynacje Andrzeja Wilczka* (Странствование Анджєя Вильчка).*

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация, действительность, фантастика, история, сказка.

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