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THE STRATEGIES OF CREATING ALLEGORY IN THE GENRE OF UTOPIA/DYSTOPIA

СТРАТЕГИИ СОЗДАНИЯ АЛЛЕГОРИИ В УТОПИИ И АНТИУТОПИИ

This article examines the strategies of creating allegory in utopia and dystopia based on T. More's *Utopia* and J. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The author distinguishes several types of allegory in a historical perspective: the ancient narrative and figural allegory, the Biblical typological, prophetic and situational allegory, and the diversification of allegory from the Middle Ages onwards, which expands from conveying spiritual and transcendental truths to encompass social and political ideals. The strategies of a utopian and dystopian allegory, while preserving its basic qualities of a double plane of reference and contrast, involve a motif of travelling to an imaginary but realistically presented land (island), a dialogical perspective, and emotivity with the general purpose to serve as a platform for societal criticism.

K e y   w o r d s: *allegory*; *utopia*; *dystopia*; *travel motif*; *contrast*; *dialogical perspective*; *symbolism*; *emotivity*.

В статье рассматриваются приемы создания аллегории в утопии и антиутопии на основе романов «Утопия» Т. Мора и «Путешествия Гулливера» Дж. Свифта. Автор различает несколько типов аллегории в исторической перспективе: античная повество-вательная и образная аллегория, библейская типологическая, пророческая и ситуативная аллегория, а также рассматривает расширение возможностей аллегории со времен Средне-вековья: от передачи духовных и трансцендентных истин до построения социальных и политических идеалов. Стратегии создания аллегории в утопии и антиутопии, сохраняя ее основные качества двойного плана и контраста, включают мотив путешествия к вообра-жаемой, но реалистически описанной стране (острову), диалогическую перспективу и эмотивность и служат основой для социальной критики.

К л ю ч е в ы е   с л о в а: *аллегория*; *утопия*; *антиутопия*; *мотив путешествия*; *контраст*; *диалогическая перспектива*; *символизм*; *эмотивность*.

Allegory is a specific artistic device known to writers and scholars since ancient times. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* provides an extensive definition of the term, encapsulating its three main facets. Originating in Greek (ἄλλος "other" + ἀγορεύω "public speaking"), allegory may be

understood as a) "an entire work of art", b) "a pattern of images"; and c) "arbitrary interpretation, where something is read 'as an allegory' of something else" [1, p. 37]. Referring to the first meaning, allegory represents a literary or artistic genre (in literature – a philosophical narrative, like Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, the fable, the parable, etc.), "in which the entire work of art is presented as secondary with respect to its meaning" [1, p. 37], i.e., the reader is invited to dig into deeper layers of the text to discover a different story from the one given on the surface. The second meaning is quite traditional: we encounter symbolic figures who often personify broader notions (e.g., a serpent personifies sin), and are used "to give visible form to abstract concepts and processes" [1, p. 37]. The third, a more mundane interpretation of allegory, involves the so-called "allegorizing", "when nonallegorical works are interpreted as if intended to be allegories" [1, p. 37]. A. Fletcher points out that "allegory is [...] a fundamental process of encoding our speech. For the very reason that it is a radical linguistic procedure, it can appear in all sorts of different works..." [2, p. 15]. Thus, allegory features in chivalric romances, utopian/dystopian political satires, pastorals, apocalyptic and dream visions, imaginary voyages like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, fairy tales, etc.

This paper aims to examine the specifics (techniques or strategies) of allegory as a literary device in the genres of utopia and dystopia following a critical overview of existing theories pertaining to allegorical narratives. For the purposes of our study, we adopt the understanding of allegory as "a mode of literary and artistic composition" suggested by V. Brljak [3, p. 1], or a literary (often stylistic) device [4], which operates on two levels – a literal story and an underlying abstract or moral message, conveyed with the help of symbolic implications. As J. Whitman explains, allegory continually mediates between "two conflicting demands – the divergence between the apparent and actual meanings" [5, p. 2].

Allegory may be viewed as a concept, too, which encompasses certain narrative strategies and criteria, i.e., what kind of characters – humans, animals or abstractions – should be engaged in the narrative, what primary didactic aim should be targeted, what kind of reader should be envisaged, etc. Allegory has gone a long way through literary forms and genres, starting from the ancient Greek and Roman examples, the Bible, various transformations in the Middle Ages and modernity. The origins of allegory lie in the narrative. As J. MacQueen points out, "[a]ll western and many eastern religions have found their most perfect expression in myth – a narrative, ... which serves to explain those universal facts which most intimately affect the believer, facts such as times, seasons, crops, tribes, cities, nations, birth, marriage, death, moral laws..." [6, p. 1]. Such narratives used mysteries, the interpretation of which was allowed only to priests or initiates. The most salient example is the myth of Ceres and Proserpine (in Greek, Demeter and Persephone). It can be read as the embodiment of the earth fertilised by seed, which represents the eternal life cycle; or it can be taken to a higher level to refer to human immortality, or rather, rebirth after death. The myth of Orpheus can be referred to the *narrative* type of allegory, too. The ancient texts also contained what J. MacQueen referred to as "*figural allegory*" alluding, for example, to the

goddess Natura to whom no myth is attached, but who is the figure representing certain physical and intellectual qualities of the universe [6, p. 18], or the harp of Orpheus.

While using widely these two types, the Biblical allegory, in its turn, relied on a different plane of reference − a *typology*, suggested by such scholars as É. Mâle [7] and G. R. Owst [8]. They theorize that the Old Testament events stand to the New Testament ones as *types*. Thus, for example, St Paul of the New Testament views the Exodus story as both historical and symbolic: Egypt represents sin, the Promised Land is God's Kingdom, and the wilderness symbolizes the struggle for salvation. Some scholars also identify a *general prophetic* and *situational* allegory in the Bible, which depends not so much on a story, a narrative, as on a situation. "A figure may be involved, but to bring out the allegorical meaning, it stands, not in isolation, but in a meaningful context" [6, p. 23].

In the Middle Ages, allegorization of time and history emerged as the continuation of Biblical and Classical texts, and the best-known allegorical writings composed in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance include Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (13th c.), Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1321), William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1377), Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* (c. 1405), Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). N. de Guynn considers medieval allegory to bear a discursive character, when a play with meanings creates "the ambivalence of cultural artefacts" [9, p. 16]. In "Il Convivio (The Banquet)", Dante reflected that interpretation can take place on four levels: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the mystical [10], where the allegorical level stands out for its own worth. M. Nievergelt identifies two types of medieval allegory − one uniting "the earthly domain of sense perception with the divine realm of intelligible knowledge" [11, p. ix–x], and the other (the later Middle Ages) amplifying "what should be the imperceptible mediation of the text into something which draws attention to itself, even at the expense of the allegory's other, deeper meaning" [11, p. ix–x]. The complexity of the medieval allegory lies in the changing role of vision, impacting man's ability to receive knowledge through language. Vision was not just a physical act but also a metaphor for spiritual insight and understanding. Hence, the diversity of visual images in fictional texts, involving those that could be easily imagined (visualized): animals, places (a mountain, a forest), objects (keys, candles, mirrors, books), as well as abstract concepts (Faith, Virtue, Temperance, etc.).

Based on S. K. Akbari's research, we can assume that the major trajectory of allegorical representation ran through the connection between vision (dream vision, visual imagery depicted in embodied figures, etc.) and knowledge − "knowledge of the self, carnal knowledge, knowledge of God, or knowledge of the Division and Darkness" [12, p. 234]. In the early Middle Ages, this connection was strong, with personified Nature, Truth and other virtues supposed to take a human upwards, toward God. In the 14th century, "Chaucer directed attention ... to man's place here on earth and his ability to govern himself" [12, p. 235]. Thus, it was

becoming less necessary to appeal to representations of concrete objects and figures, especially using the genre of the dream vision, to deliver knowledge about moral virtues. According to S. K. Akbari, "in the years after 1400, the use of vision as a metaphor for knowledge continued to decline in the realm of secular writing, though it continued to be used as part of the rhetoric of mystical experience and affective piety well into the fifteenth century" [12, p. 235].

The evolution of allegory during the Renaissance was grounded in the epistemological changes – an increased focus on human actions in the present time, rather than transcendent ideas, resulting in a more conspicuous presence of a human narrator and minimized superhuman personification (e.g., Sin or Truth). The personality as the agent of moral choices and judgements entered the realm of allegory. Personifications were combined with both classical gods and real, historical figures (e.g., Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), which uses the title character to represent Queen Elizabeth I as an embodiment of moral virtues).

In the 19th century, S. T. Coleridge suggested that allegory "cannot be other than spoken consciously", whereas the symbol is associated with a writer's unconscious conception of it. Coleridge defined allegorical writing "as the employment of one set of agents and images with actions and accompaniments correspondent, so as to convey, while in disguise, either moral qualities or conceptions of the mind that are not in themselves objects of the senses, or other images, agents, actions, fortunes, and circumstances so that the difference is everywhere presented to the eye or imagination, while the likeness is suggested to the mind…" [13, p. 30]. This observation was significant for further distinction between allegory and symbolism in literary studies.

Turning now to the strategies of allegory in utopia and dystopia, it is important to note that both critique society by imagining alternative worlds. G. Claeys points out that someone's utopia might well be someone else's dystopia [14, p. 7], and P. Vieira rightly observes that "the separation between the two genres is not so clear-cut" [15, p. 352]. Allegory is inherent in them satirizing society and its institutions and values.

One important aspect of allegory is its more or less universal interpretational prescription: an intended reader is expected to grasp the deeper-lying hidden meaning of the work by decoding some recognizable images in the way the author encoded them. As G. Teskey explains, "Such hints provide the general contexts of meaning within which interpretation is to occur (moral, historical, political, religious), leaving the reader to fill in and organize details. An allegory arouses hermeneutic anxiety and supplies instructions for interpretative play" [1, p. 37]. Some critics, however, argue about the subjectivity of allegory and multiple readings of its message: "Paradoxically, the most objective treatment of an allegory, that is, one true to the laws of the object itself, must at some point be subjective. The reader must choose" [16, p. 254]. Subjective interpretations arise from the reader's role, the contingency of language, and the impact of historical context. Universal interpretations are supported by the idea of allegory as a search

for esoteric truths and transcendental meanings. We shall rely on the latter view as the authors of utopias and dystopias clearly intended their meaning to be grasped with little freedom for multiple interpretations.

In this initial study, we shall limit ourselves to two exemplary works – Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Being both utopian and dystopian in their deeper structure[1], these texts can serve to elucidate the foundational principles of allegorical poetics in these genres. First of all, a utopian or dystopian novel always depends on place, or *topos*, being a "no-place". In the two texts, we may see that the actions are set in credible, albeit totally imaginary localities. As S. Triantafyllos points out, "The utopias and social critiques that were written during the seventeenth century and which used the Pacific and the *Terra Australis Incognita* as their geographical locations, are unique for their innovative way of incorporating real events and the growing geographical knowledge in their narratives" [17, p. 179–180][2]. The topoi in More's and Swift's novels include fictional islands, with their precise dimensions and/or physical and political geography. "The island of Utopia is in the middle two hundred miles broad, and holds almost at the same breadth over a great part of it, but it grows narrower towards both ends. Its figure is not unlike a crescent. Between its horns the sea comes in eleven miles broad, and spreads itself into a great bay, which is environed with land to the compass of about five hundred miles, and is well secured from winds" [18, p. 50–51]. Similarly, J. Swift presents Laputa as "The flying or floating Island" which "is exactly circular; its Diameter 7837 Yards, or about four Miles and a Half, and consequently contains ten Thousand Acres. It is three Hundred Yards thick" [19, p. 154]. Blefuscu, however, is based on real geography: it is an "island situated to the North North-East Side of Lilliput, from whence it is parted only by a Channel of eight Hundred Yards wide" [19, p. 69][3]. The claim for factuality is noteworthy, at it diverges significantly from the ephemeral worlds of medieval visions, suggesting a vital connection of the upper and lower layers of allegorical ambiguity. In both texts, the islands' remote locations may be an allegory of an autonomous society, disconnected from the problems of the outside world. The landscape of More's Utopia has fertile soil, abundant resources symbolizing the ideal environment for human flourishing. Swift's countries of Brobdingnag and of wise Houyhnhnms (horses) share these qualities, too: "… long Rows of Trees … naturally growing; … great Plenty of Grass, and several Fields of Oats" [19, p. 208]. Its simplicity

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[1] Many scholars suggest the dystopian character of T. More's *Utopia*, the most prominent and convincing source being *Different Readings of Sir Thomas More's Utopia – from an Ideal State to the First Dystopia* (2009) by Jelena Vukadinovic.

[2] Though neither of the works that we analyse was written in the 17th century, Swift's novel, however, created in the 18th century, definitely adopts this strategy of incorporating new geographical knowledge into an allegorical narrative.

[3] Though the action takes place on the islands of Lilliput and Laputa, it is Blefuscu that is described using geographical parameters, while Laputa – physical dimensions.

mirrors the rational and harmonious lifestyle of its inhabitants. Thus, the technique of allegory here consists in the creation of a fictitious setting with veritable physical dimensions and qualities. However, the dystopian unrealistic character of the flying island of Laputa definitely hints at the flaws in world policies of the time, exposing colonization and aggressive interventions: "It was eight Months before the King had perfect Notice that the Lindalinians were in Rebellion. He then commanded that the Island should be wafted over the City. ... The King hovered over them several Days to deprive them of the Sun and the Rain" [19, p. 159].

The techniques used to build a plot line in utopias involve the motif of travel to create the second layer of the story, while dystopias tend to rely on the story development itself. Besides More's text, *News from Nowhere* (1890) by W. Morris, *Erewhon* (1872) by S. Butler, *A Modern Utopia* (1905) by H.G. Wells and *Island* (1962) by A. Huxley all feature travels to real or fictitious regions. Dystopian novels tend to focus on depicting a state of things from within rather than emphasizing travel. They often portray oppressive societies, environmental collapse, or post-apocalyptic worlds, serving as allegories for contemporary issues (*Brave New World* (1932) by A. Huxley, *1984* (1949) by G. Orwell, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by M. Atwood). However, some dystopian novels (*Gulliver's Travels* sharing this genre quality) incorporate travel as a central theme, particularly when characters must navigate hostile environments (like the Lilliput and Laputa) or search for refuge (Brobdingnag or the Houyhnhnms' country).

A dialogical perspective appears to be another strategy of creating allegory in utopian/dystopian narratives. Thus, in *Utopia*, the narrator – Thomas More himself – recounts his experiences while on a diplomatic mission to Flanders and then subsequently introduces Raphael Hythloday, a traveller and philosopher who shares his insights about Utopia and narrates his experiences from his first-person perspective. This technique of a dual narrative approach – or using the strategy of a story retold – allows More to explore different viewpoints while maintaining a dialogue about political and social theories.

Swift's narrative also possesses the dialogical perspective, especially in the "utopian" chapters where the protagonist has debates with the King of Brobdingnag and the Master of wise horses: "When I had put an End to these long Discourses, his Majesty in a sixth Audience consulting his Notes, proposed many Doubts, Queries, and Objections, upon every Article" [19, p. 117]. The narration is also first-person, and when Gulliver recounts his voyages to remote regions of the world he reveals himself to be intelligent and well-educated, yet his perceptions are often naïve. Gulliver may appear as an unreliable narrator (absolutely untypical for the earlier types of allegory), with a limited perspective. This difference in the degree of reliability between Hythloday and Gulliver distinguishes the two subgenres allowing for different allegorical implications: laudability of what is ideal and deprecation of what is negative.

The characters in utopias and dystopias tend to be more personalised than the abstractions of the mediaeval allegories. Thus, in *Gulliver's Travels*, psychological

portrayals are meticulously elaborated, and that helps to produce a profound picture of the qualities they aim to personify. Thus the King of the giants is primarily the paradigm of the good King, however, resembling James III[1].

The next important component is the technique of opposition or juxtaposition: *here* vs *there*, *now* vs *then*, *us* vs *them*. In *Utopia*, the primary opposition lies between the ideal society of Utopia and the flawed European societies of More's time. Utopia is presented as communal, ensuring its people easily meet their needs: "… every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want anything" [18, p. 142–143], while European society is depicted as a place where there is "a great number of noblemen among you that are themselves as idle as drones, that subsist on other men's labour…" [18, p. 18].

In *Gulliver's Travels*, several contrasting worlds serve to satirize different aspects of humanity and society. For example, Lilliput is contrasted with Brobdingnag: the Lilliputians' small size mirrors their small-mindedness, petty debates, and ridiculous customs, while the Brobdingnagians' immense size reflects a more open-minded approach to governance. The land of the Houyhnhnms presents a stark contrast between the rational, clean, and benevolent horses and the brutish, filthy, and degenerate Yahoos. The Houyhnhnms represent reason and order, while the Yahoos embody the worst aspects of human nature. This contrast leads Gulliver to implicitly and explicitly compare the societies he encountered with England. He often finds the customs, politics, and values of these foreign lands to be either superior or inferior to those of his home country, providing an ample opportunity to satirize European government and society: "… England … was computed to produce three Times the Quantity of Food, more than its Inhabitants are able to consume… But, in order to feed the Luxury and Intemperance of the Males, and the Vanity of the Females, we sent away the greatest Part of our necessary Things to other Countries, from whence in Return we brought the Materials of Diseases, Folly, and Vice" [19, p. 235].

While the settings and characters in these works provide the perspective, symbolism often signals the double layer in the narrative account. In *Utopia*, the island symbolizes self-containment, suggesting that a perfect society must be separated from the corrupting influences of the outside world; gardens represent harmony between humanity and nature; gold serves as a symbol of folly and materialism; the tower in Utopia symbolizes strength and moral integrity; and the figure of the ploughman – hard work, responsibility, and connection to the land.

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[1] C. Rawson and I. Higgins in their Explanatory notes to the 2005 *Gulliver's Travels* edition suggest: "However, the king and his views had seditious political resonance. The Stuart Pretender or 'James III' is 'a huge Giant' across the sea in a political allegory printed in Dublin in 1714 (*The Life of Aristides, the Athenian; Who was Decreed to be Banish'd for His Justice.* (Dublin: Printed by Daniel Tompson, 1714), 25)" [19, p. 306].

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Lilliputians symbolize ridiculous customs of English society; Brobdingnagians embody the capacity for both good and evil; Houyhnhnms symbolize the rule of rational thinking and the benefits of collective living, while Yahoos embody the nastiness of human nature.

Emotivity embedded in the narrative adds to the allegorical quality of the utopian/dystopian genre. It can be wonder, disbelief, amazement, irony and a range of other emotions not characteristic of medieval allegorical texts. Rhetorical questions often serve this purpose in *Utopia*: "'But as to the question, 'What more convenient way of punishment can be found?' I think it much easier to find out that than to invent anything that is worse; why should we doubt but the way that was so long in use among the old Romans, who understood so well the arts of government, was very proper for their punishment?" [18, p. 26].

The later epoch when *Gulliver's Travels* was composed expanded significantly the emotive range of reactions to the realities described. Thus, the King of Brobdingnag reacts with amusement and laughs at "human grandeur" [19, p. 96] and Gulliver's proud recounting of England's politics, trade, wars, and religious divisions, because, with his higher moral standards, the King finds England's complexities trivial. The King's most famous emotive reaction to Gulliver's description of England's monarchy, Parliament, religion, and judicial system reads: "I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth" [19, p. 121]. He delivers this scathing judgment with strong disgust, contempt and emotional revulsion. Gulliver, in his turn, after his experiences with the Houyhnhnms, is permanently altered and unable to reintegrate into human society, carrying a lasting attitude of disgust toward his own species: "My Wife and Family received me with great Surprize and Joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must freely confess, the Sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust, and Contempt..." [19, p. 271].

In conclusion, while pre-Renaissance allegory encompasses a typology that includes narrative, figural, typological, prophetic, temporal, and historical examples, the allegorical features in utopias and dystopias defy straightforward categorization. Although these genres also employ narrative devices such as retold stories, travel motifs, symbolism, contrast and personification, their primary double layer consists of the presented utopian or dystopian setting and the ironic absence of the "ideal" in real life, as the non-ideal aspects of contemporaneity are satirized. This makes allegory in these genres predominantly social and political, rather than religious. Furthermore, the imaginary lands in utopias and dystopias possess credible dimensions and features that reference the real world, rather than dream-vision or fairy-tale realms, and the characters are more personalized. A distinctive trait of allegory in these genres is its allowance for unreliable narrators and dialogue. Unlike earlier allegorical narratives, which often relied on moral expostulation, utopian and dystopian allegories introduce emotivity and pragmatic or materialistic reasoning.

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