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GoLem(s) in Eden : In Search For a Transcendent Element In a Science Fiction Novel

Acta Humana nr 3, 73-86

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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GoLem(s) in Eden: In Search For a Transcendent Element In a Science Fiction Novel

Everything we see could also be otherwise.
Everything we can describe at all could also be otherwise.
There is no order of things a priori.

L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

The planet Eden depicted in Stanislaw Lem's novel published in 1959¹ is a world riddled with puzzles, the unknown, the unexplainable, the inconceivable. In its composition the book proves to be a challenge not only to the readers and their judgment, but apparently also to the critics, whose discerning eye seems to favour *Solaris* over other Lem novels and is infrequently turned towards *Eden*. Characterisation in the book has also been treated marginally by most authors, and usually merely as one of the many exemplifications of the problems concerning the analysis of the thematic layer of the book, or in articles and chapters offering a global view lumping together all types of non-human characters (aliens, AI, robots, androids, etc.) from the majority or all of Lem's works. For this reason it seems even more desirable to undertake a more thorough investigation of the literary creations of characters in *Eden*, taking into account the complex structure of the textual web of interrelated elements forming the novel. Therefore, this article will aim at offering, if not yet an exhaustive, then at least a more detailed analysis of the matter which could count as a contribution to a multifaceted comprehensive discussion of the issue.

The inquiry will employ James Phelan's rhetorical theory of narrative² as an analytical method, based on the conviction that character cannot be studied in isolation from other elements of the novel but that it is inextricably linked to and interrelated

¹ *Eden* first appeared in instalments in *Trybuna Ludu* in 1958, the book edition followed the next year.

² As expounded by Phelan in his book *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

with other areas of the text, which together form the means for a particular type of communication, i.e. rhetorical transactions between the author and the audiences. Since the discussion of characterization in the book involves two types of character, the analysis of their construction will encompass two constructs, human and alien. Additional questions which the article sets to clarify concern the differences in characterization of human and alien characters with regard to their three components (mimetic, synthetic and thematic), how it is possible to account for a collective character/protagonist in the novel, the relation between the two types of characters in the text in relation to thematic functions, and the specific quality in alien character.

The Human

In one of his articles on Lem's fiction Jerzy Jarzębski, though without entering into a discussion on this subject, makes an allusion to "some naive and improbable elements in the novel"³, and at first sight it may seem that one of the possible weaknesses he is referring to is the construction of characters, and especially of human characters, in *Eden*. Lem himself was not fully satisfied with the characterisation in the book and at one point confessed that had he the chance to write *Eden* anew, he would have granted the characters more depth and personality.⁴ At the beginning of the novel, the reader is presented with the crew and a situation of the spaceshipwreck on a planet which has never been explored before. This should develop in the authorial audiences certain expectations regarding characterization, namely that the author is going to reproduce the pattern present in adventure, utopian and science-fiction genres. In the book, Lem makes explicit reference to this tradition:

The science-fiction books I read as a kid must outweigh this poor wreck of ours, yet not once did I come across a story anything like what has happened to us.

Because it's so prosaic, the Cyberneticist said, grimacing.

Yes, this is something original – a kind of interplanetary Robinson Crusoe, said the Doctor.⁵

To some extent what follows in the text confirms those expectations, but simultaneously, just like the passage in the quoted exchange, when combined with a particular construction of the characters present in the novel it offers a disclaimer. As the action progresses through a series of instabilities, it is likely to produce in the authorial audience a dissonance between the expectations and what is being

³ J. Jarzębski, "Stanisław Lem, Visionary and Rationalist", *Science Fiction Studies*, # 12 = Vol.4, Pt 2 [July 1977], p. 114.

⁴ After J. Jarzębski, *Wszystkie światy Lema*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2003.

⁵ S. Lem, *Eden*, Mariner Books 1991, e-book, p. 6. If not stated otherwise, the quotations are from this edition, at the end of a quote in brackets.

communicated to the reader, which becomes the basis for numerous tensions which accompany reading *Eden*.

To begin with, the dimensions that first come into focus when analysing human characters from the novel are the thematic ones. The humorously used name “Robinson Crusoe” or the attribute “coming from the Earth” are nothing special in themselves if considered in isolation from the text. However, when applied in the context of a new alien planet they coalesce into functions and help to build and communicate to the authorial audiences certain thematic assertions and conclusions. In the opening pages of the story the situation of the craft’s crew is compared in the book to the situation of the famous castaway from Defoe’s novel – they are “a kind of interplanetary Robinson Crusoe” as one of the characters, the Doctor, called them. This simile is merely to some extent analogous for the surrounding world they try to explore and conceive is not another part of the old globe, but an utterly new, alien, unrecognizable and often repulsively strange reality. They explore the planet gradually and systematically and look, often in vain, for similarities with the Earth, trying to detect any familiarity in the landscape, in the encountered artifacts (machines, constructions, desolate factory), and in the alien civilization. Although they realize the absurdity of such practices – »You don’t expect to find an exact replica of the Earth’s civilization here, do you?« the Physicist snorted⁶ – they cannot stop looking for any traces which could restore the connection with the familiar and the known. Simultaneously, they try to conceive this new world and organize the new experience, which on the linguistic level manifests itself in naming, especially in giving such names which evoke Earthly associations and connotations.⁷ As Geier observes, this process follows a set pattern:

[...] the Unknown transposes itself into the Known and partially similar, in this way the Unknown stops being a mystery. By giving it a name, the Unknown becomes a part of the tame world⁸.

The process of semantic organization of the unknown world, of translating alien reality into their own seems to be almost automatic in humans, and most certainly is so in the case of human characters in *Eden*. On the one hand, the undying curiosity of the explorers seems to be incessant even in defiance of constant failures in comprehending and explaining the surrounding world, alien artifacts and alien society. On the other hand, though, hard as they try, with time they accumulate more and more data which they fail to assemble into manageable information, and

⁶ S. Lem, *Eden*, Agora, Warszawa 2008, p. 29 [translation mine]

⁷ This is for instance how they arrive at the name for the inhabitants of the planet, the doublers.

⁸ M. Geier, „Eden: elementy semiologii »pozaziemskiej«”, *Lem w oczach krytyki światowej*, ed. J. Jarzębski, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989, p. 110 [translation mine]

this burning problem of the astronauts can be expressed in the recurrent phrases which echo in the text: ‘I don’t know’, ‘I don’t understand’ and ‘what does it all mean?’. Moreover, this new reality reveals more and more features which they find appalling and terrifying if they try to explain them by relating them to the known.⁹

Thus the “interplanetary Robinsons” get entangled in the replicating process of cognition and semantic organization of experience of the new world and the longer they get muddled up in the thicket of the unknown, the more confused they become and the harder their Earthly minds try to cram the Mystery (alien reality of Eden) into the system of the known notions and categories. But the results of their operations are meager and the crisis on this plane seems irreversible: the surrounding reality remains an elusive puzzle, invariably escaping comprehension, and in the end the characters, although well aware of the futility and absurdity of their endeavours, find themselves without any better semantic key to the full understanding of the planet’s reality than their own knowledge and experience. They seek to curb the new reality using language but to no avail, as the linguistic activity turns out to be a process in which the familiar or the newly coined name serves only to cover the fact that the nature of its *denotatum* remains unknown.

At this point, it is time to emphasize the importance of the synthetic component and its connection with the implementation of the considerably limited mimetic component in the characterization of human characters in *Eden*. In fact, the only human character from the novel whose mimetic component is slightly more developed is the Engineer – he is addressed by his first name (Henry) by his colleagues¹⁰, and on several occasions his reaction to the facts or discoveries happens to be more affective than that of the rest of the crew. A possible function of such characterization is to involve the authorial audiences not only intellectually, but also emotionally with the issues and problems the crew face and try to deal with. Brushing aside these infrequent instances of the Engineer’s individualization, it becomes apparent that the whole crew are undeveloped as characters in terms of their mimetic dimensions. The range of spots of indeterminacy in them is greater than the usual, the reader has scarcely any information about the characters’ background, their lives before the crash, no descriptions of their physical appearance; the only information the audiences are able to find in the text is that the crew members are humans and white, but the knowledge concerning the human characters basically exhausts with these words. Frequently,

⁹ For instance, the isolated city of ‘graves’ which they call a cemetery, or a piece of sharply pointed narrow pipe implanted in doublers’ bodies of unidentified purpose, which conjure up the images of torture or oppressive experiments and which at the end of the book find a completely different explanation and show how erroneous such practices may be. The cemetery, they learn, is deciphered as a kind of a concentration camp, and the implanted pipes turn out to be doublers’ natural writing organs/communicative tools.

¹⁰ However, this happens only about three times in the whole novel.

the characters can be distinguished solely by names, which are neither their first nor last names, but terms for the allotted functions and their professions/specialisations, so in the novel they are called the Captain, the Doctor, the Physicist, the Chemist, the Engineer and the Cyberneticist, and this is the only trace of their individuality. In this way, by focusing the audiences' attention on the profession-names the author foregrounds the synthetic component and "exploits the artificiality of the material out of which the character is made"¹¹. Also on the psychological plane the protagonists seem quite monochrome and so similar in their reactions and opinions, that in some parts of the dialogues exchange of the names of the interlocutors for the others would not make a substantial difference. There are occasions when crew members disagree upon certain matters, but these are always settled by a final decision made in most cases by the Captain, by one of the characters giving up, or in open ballot. The attribute of psychological monochromaticity along with the generally little developed mimetic component allow for a global treatment of human characters in the novel which helps to foreground the synthetic component of the characters as constructs characterized by a high degree of artificiality and bring forward its thematic purpose.

Even though the crew claim that they were not on a scientific expedition (at least not to Eden), the team comprises of members who are highly specialized experts apt in their fields and professions. And yet, the failure which we observe can be considered not so much theirs as individuals, but should rather be read as a failure of human scientific knowledge as such. Interestingly, the element of the novel which serves to build and emphasize this theme is precisely a specific construction of human characters having strongly, or even exaggeratedly, developed thematic dimensions and functions. Such characterization differs significantly from the one traditional realistic fiction offers, where human characters, and especially the protagonists, are presented and developed as individuals, often shown as representatives of or against the backdrop of a society or a community. In *Eden* the picture is completely different: there are six characters, all members of the crew, who are equally important and therefore could all be given the rank of the protagonists (there is no social backdrop present in the narrative except for a totalising logical complement "the humanity"). Hence, taking into account the attribute of "always acting together as a collective, invariably to the good of the whole", and in view of the previously discussed monochromaticity and the lack of individuality in human characters it is possible to conclude that *Eden* has in fact one protagonist, namely the collective, and that such characterization was devised having a thematic purpose in mind. As Phellan explains, "the distinction between the mimetic and the thematic components of character is a distinction between

¹¹ J. Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 14.

characters as individuals and characters as representative entities”¹². Characterization in the book can on the one hand be regarded as *signum temporis*, something that was definitely in keeping with the official ideological line of the communist propaganda of the late 1950s Poland. Yet, there seems to be much more to this than just propaganda or censorship’s interference. First of all, the final outcome of the collective’s efforts on all levels (except for the repairing and restarting of their spaceship) is not a success, but a failure. Taking this theme into account it is at the same time necessary to consider the character dimensions which constitute the thematic component, and to emphasize the fact that human characters in *Eden* are limited in their presentation to qualities and actions grouped in a category “solving problems/facing challenges”, and that these are introduced not without a reason, but because in the course of events the crew are faced with numerous critical situations. Furthermore, the collection of their specializations/functions is not accidental but was rather intended to produce such a combination that in the given situation would predestine the crew to deal with any potential theoretical as well as practical problems. Therefore, such a collective protagonist can be seen both as a carrier of and as a symbolic representation of collective expert knowledge. The thematic component can be regarded here as so constructed and developed as to generate in the novel crucial functions having the communicative purport of passing on the conclusive ideas. Thus, the collective failure of the protagonist serves to illustrate the point that scientific expert knowledge and rational thinking prove to be completely powerless when it comes to solving the puzzle of *Eden*, transcendent to the human subject. In this way, the situation of crisis on the level of cognition and comprehension also exposes the impotence of expert knowledge as an explanatory or interpretative tool.

All the aforementioned features allow us to regard the characters in *Eden* as constructs designed for some thematic purposes. It is also possible to arrive at a conclusion that the human characters function in the novel as a collective character – a collective protagonist. This in turn for one thing has the function of emphasizing the strongly developed thematic plane of the novel and communicating its ideas to authorial audiences, and for the other serves to juxtapose the human element with the second type of character in the novel, and thus introduce and activate even a larger set of thematic content.

The Alien

It seems justified and adequate to open the analysis of characterization of aliens in *Eden* by quoting Sanders’s claim drawing our attention to the distinctive feature in the construction of fantastic literary creations of characters in Science Fiction:

¹² Ibidem, p. 13.

In a famous dispute over the art of fiction, Henry James taxed H.G. Wells with stressing situation at the expense of character. Wells replied that subtle analysis of character is only possible if the writer assumes that the social frame remains fairly stable. Living at a time when industrial development and scientific discovery were rapidly warping the social frame, Wells felt that he could not afford the Jamesian luxury of cataloguing the minutiae of personality. The world itself had become problematic. Modernist writers have generally sided with James in this dispute, probing ever deeper into the veins of consciousness while progressively ignoring the social realm. With few exceptions, and those fairly recent, writers of science fiction have sided with Wells, creating a genre in which, not character, but the framework within which character acts out its destiny, is at issue¹³.

Now, the specificity of SF concerning characterization does not lie solely in the fact that creation of characters as undeveloped is authorized by its generic property. Its original achievement and at the same time the manifestation of its generic specificity was the introduction to the canon of fantastic characters the figure of alien with its numerous subsequent literary embodiments. Lem's contribution in this area has been widely acknowledged, especially with regard to creations of alien characters which allowed to voice his epistemological skepticism/pessimism, deeply ingrained in the discussion concerning the possibility of close encounters and, even more importantly, effective communication with extraterrestrial intelligence. However, before the focus of attention in the article is moved towards the examples of particular alien characterization in *Eden*, it is necessary to consider certain theoretical peculiarities of a more general nature which accompany the analysis of any alien character.

First of all, posing a question about the mimetic component in alien character is an exceedingly important issue also because it leads to a theoretical problem concerning the basis of reference for the mimetic component of alien characters, which is redundant in the case of realistic fiction¹⁴. Regarding the matter analogically, the alien mimetic component should be based on the reference made to alien designates existing somewhere in the universe. However, since aliens are entities whose existence in the real world is still a matter of conviction or belief in so far as no conclusive scientific proofs concerning their existence are known, such referential operation is impossible. In this sense, the mimetic component in the alien character is non-existent. Still, in SF texts there are numerous examples of reference and plausibility of alien characters to lower Earthly forms of life (plants and predominantly animals) – mostly in the construction of their physical dimen-

¹³ S. Sanders, "Patrouch's »Study of Asimov«", *Science Fiction Studies*, #6 = Vol. 2, Pt. 2 = July 1975, accessed from: http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/reviews_pages/r6.htm

¹⁴ This refers to the lack of a designate in the real, not fictional, world. To the crew of Defender the existence of the aliens is a hard experiential fact, therefore the problem of reference does not occur, only comprehension/translation of the alien reality is problematic.

sion – and on a wider scale also to humans, not only with reference to appearance, but in particular if taking into account the psychological/behavioural dimensions in alien characterization. The alien protagonist in *Eden* replicates this pattern: he thinks, feels, communicates (although using other means) and acts like human beings. Thus, some alien characters can be marked for a substantial degree of anthrophomorphisation.

Furthermore, owing to the fact that alien characters have no objectively existing referent, the synthetic component reveals itself as foregrounded: the attribute alien – composed of predicates which can be expressed as “not human” and “non-existent in reality” – causes any alien character to have a maximum degree of artificiality, and, as a consequence, the authorial audience’s awareness of the fact that alien characters are constructs amounts to the maximum value. The elements which cause the synthetic component to be foregrounded are the dimensions constituting physical appearance of aliens. It is here that SF authors give vent and expression to their creativity, and so did Lem in *Eden*: in terms of their physical build and functioning of their organisms the doubles’ bodies bear only slight resemblance to human beings or animals¹⁵. However, it is worth noticing that at this point in the case of alien characters we can talk of a certain shift: the elements of physical appearance are no longer the constituents of the mimetic component solely, but they partake in framing of the synthetic one as well.

The thematic component relates us directly to what in Lem’s prose was one of his key recurrent themes (and what resulted in the form of skepticism in *Eden*), i.e. the problems involved in CETI (contact with extraterrestrial intelligence), which stem from the fundamental ontological difference in the nature of humans and

¹⁵ The following passages reconstruct a doubler’s physical appearance: “The thing’s as big as an elephant.” [...] a naked humpbacked mass [...] As from a gigantic, elongated oyster, a small two-armed trunk emerged between the thick, fleshy folds that closed winglike around it; dangling, its knotty fingers touched the floor. The thing, no bigger than a child’s head [...] He grasped the end of a limp, multijointed arm, and the small veined torso turned, revealing a flat face [...] “It possesses two circulatory systems, but they’re not entirely separate.” [...] “The big creature – the carrier – seems to have traveled by hopping or striding. [...] As for the hump, it turned out to contain the digestive tract.” [...] “the smaller creature [...] sat inside the larger body – there’s a pouchlike nest there. The only thing to which I can compare it is a kangaroo’s pouch, but the similarity is very slight and nonfunctional.” [...] “It had to be intelligent to open and shut doors, not to mention starting the generator” [...] “The only problem is that it has no nervous system in our sense of the word.” [...] “There are organs there,” the Doctor went on, “whose purpose I can’t even begin to fathom. There’s a spinal cord, but in the cranium – a tiny cranium – there’s no brain. There *is* something there, but any anatomist would laugh at me if I told him it was a brain. . . A few glands, but they appear to be lymphatic while near the lungs, and the creature has three lungs, I discovered the damnedest thing.” [...] “A needle [...] or not a needle – you can see for yourself. It’s in a jar in the library. A piece of thin tubing, broken, with a sharp end, almost like something used to give injections.” (25–29).

aliens. This difference is explicitly pronounced by one of the characters when he argues that “these are not human beings”(105). So the thematic dimension “alien” is at this level encoded with the predicate “the other”, and the attribute is crucial because its occurrence in the text generates a strongly developed thematic component as the alien character is the carrier of authorial ideas. Thus one of its functions on the thematic plane in the book is to communicate that “the other” may not be fully cognized and comprehended¹⁶. However, the analysis of the thematic content in *Eden* discloses yet another peculiarity of characterization, namely the fact that some attributes of the characters do not have the semantic power if these characters are regarded independently, especially in isolation from other characters. Therefore, the next step in the analysis would be to study what happens when the two character types enter in interaction.

In *Eden*, the theme of CETI is approached from a specific angle, focusing not so much on the meeting but on the problem of communication between the aliens and humans. The way leading to communication with the alien civilization which the castaways had to make in the novel was long and complicated. At first, they thought that the planet was uninhabited. Then through the major part of the novel, encounters with doublers always ended badly (for the aliens) and invariably resulted in failure in communication. Curiously enough, the crew noticed that there was a constant lack of interest on the part of the aliens, who did not seek contact with humans. Now, the semantic relation between the two types of characters (two worlds), human and alien, can be represented as two disjunct circles. Unless those two circles cross at some point, there will not be even a possibility of a semantic common ground for the representatives of the two worlds. However, also the crew do not seek direct contact from the very beginning, but only when their experiences and subsequent events on the planet make them realize that as long as they do not encounter other intelligent creatures and manage to get in contact, i.e. full contact meaning successful communication with them, they will never be able to understand this new world. It also became clear to them that the subject-object character of the relations with the aliens have to be changed, for as long as they are the object but not the subject in this relation communication will be non-existent.

Ironically, the first doubler they meet dies and the second one, whom they spare after he seeks shelter in the astronauts during one of their explorations and take on the craft buried underground, appears to be mentally deficient. The breakthrough comes almost at the end of the book with the arrival of an intelligent and learned

¹⁶ The pinnacle of alien characterization as the other, which allows for not skeptical, like in this narrative, but a pessimistic interpretation with regard to the possibility of cognition of the alien, has been achieved in *Solaris* with the literary creation of the alien ocean-character.

doubler led by the same curiosity that earlier initiated human exploration of the planet. Unfortunately, when they all think the missing key element which will be able to interpret the new world has appeared, it turns out that it is not going to be so.¹⁷ Additionally, technology fails them again in this last interpretative attempt. Initially, they only communicate with the doubler using drawings and other iconic means, but when the castaways realize that strange coughing produced by the alien is in fact speech, they use a computer linguistic calculator. However, the machine's translation is deformed and the informative content of utterances often obscured and still incomprehensible, which leads to the occurrence of a phenomenon explained in Geier's words:

[...] between what is experienced without its clearly formed meanings and a subsequent semanticising transformation a particular tension and a particular risk is formed: there is a danger, that the experiential layers (mental or mnemonic ones) cannot be included into any system of meanings, that these layers will not gain the value meaningful, but they will escape the semantic apparatus and will remain bare existence, meaningless "being"¹⁸.

However, meaningful translation can be attempted if applied in a larger context, i.e. that of the whole text or even of the totality of human experience and knowledge, because "eventually the unknown planet becomes inhabited with values, which (allegorically, moralistically and allusively) with reference to our world mean *everything*"¹⁹. This is done in the novel by engaging the authorial audiences into making judgments, and so it is here that the text involves the reader and evaluation can take place. Hence, further manifestations of tension must be observed in the book on the thematic level of axiology and ethics.

Although regarding themselves as representatives of a highly advanced civilisation, the members of the crew are brought to the lowest levels of evolution by the situations and events on the planet: "And, too, there was something humiliating, he thought, about returning to the ground like worms." (10) On several occasions they also display a sample of their abilities, behaving more like barbarians, and later justify killing living, supposedly intelligent inhabitants of the planet with the reasons of emotions which in the face of fear, threat and danger make them act instinctively, like animals or beasts; they simply pull the trigger and annihilate. Moreover, the horizon of expectations, which initially builds upon the crew's rapture over the planet on the aesthetic level later clashes with the image of the planet

¹⁷ Due to radioactive contamination of the area around the hole made in the isolating copula the doublers planted around the rocket, the intelligent doubler got contaminated as well and fell victim to radiation sickness, which practically meant a death sentence.

¹⁸ M. Geier, „Eden: elementy semiologii »pozaziemskiej«”, in: *Lem w oczach krytyki światowej*, ed. J. Jarzębski, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989, p. 108 [translation mine].

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 109 [translation mine].

verified in direct experience. Their helplessness and inability to understand and interpret the surrounding world also intensifies negative perception of the place. The Engineer, having arrived at the conclusion that the deserted factory produces without aim and all the processes taking place there are senseless, shouts infuriated:

It's the work of a lunatic, or, rather – he pointed in the direction of the factory – “lunatics. A civilization of lunatics, that's what this damned Eden is!” (20)

The culminating point in the interaction with the alien world and its evaluation is reached in the novel after doubler's explanations, when the elements of the system operating in the alien society finally translated turn out to be most similar to those at work in the societies depicted in dystopian fiction or to oppressive forms of authoritarian rule from human history. At first, the humans are outraged and want to act against what they perceive as injustice, but eventually they acknowledge doublers' autonomy and decide to leave the planet and the inhabitants at their own mercy. The urge to bring peace, harmony and happiness to the inhabitants of the planet becomes rejected in view of the argument that it is neither just nor relevant to apply the categories and values from one civilization to a different and alien one, along with the bitter conviction that their intervention would only worsen the current state of affairs:

We're leaving the planet – the Engineer went on. – If only we had learned their language better. And figured out how that damned government of theirs, which pretends not to exist, operates. And given them weapons. . .

Weapons for poor wretches like our doubler? Would you put an antimatter gun into his hands?

In that case we ourselves could have –

Destroyed the government? – the Captain said calmly. – Liberated the population by force?

If there was no other way.

In the first place, these are not human beings. Remember, you spoke only with the computer, and therefore understand the doubler no better than it does. Second, no one imposed all this upon them. No one, at least, from space. They themselves.

If you use that argument, then there's nothing, that should be done! – shouted the Engineer. [...]

Is the population of this planet a child that has got itself into a blind alley and can be led out by the hand? If things were only that simple! Liberating them, would have to begin with killing, and the fiercer the struggle, the less idealistic the killing becomes. In the end we would be killing merely to beat a retreat, to counterattack; then we would kill everything that stood in Defender's way. You know how easily that can happen!

The Engineer nodded. (105)

Drawing from Habermas, who traces the literary origins of crisis in ancient tragedy²⁰, it is possible to form an analogy which seems to depict extremely ad-

²⁰ J. Habermas, „Na czym polega dziś kryzys? Problemy uprawomocnienia w późnym kapitalizmie”, *Teoria i praktyka. Wybór pism*, PIW, Warszawa 1983, pp. 423–448.

equately what we could describe as the moral dilemma of the crew from the book's ending: it is a situation in which either decision will have fatal consequences, and this existential deadlock can be expressed quoting doubler's final utterance transcribed by the computer – "Zero, Zero, Zero". The repeated words are pivotal as they reflect the tragedy of himself and his society and the deadlock of the situation, showing that with the crew's leave he can see no way out and no options for the future if he stays. Hence, "*in Eden CETI breaks off with the possibility of a future relationship between human kind and the other*"²¹. It is also a moment where the didactic dimension *exposes itself*, engaging authorial audiences into forming "*ethical judgments about the moral value of characters and actions*"²².

Finally, in the book there are two groups of subjects which can be both regarded as affected by crisis – the crew of the spaceship and the mysterious society of doublers, the inhabitants of Eden. Habermas, discussing the origins of the notion, locates the centre of crisis in an active cognitive subject. Through the greater part of the narrative our attention falls on the crew of the rocket but the change in perception of the role of the alien from the object to the subject opens up a possibility of there being a second centre. However, this trace of a crisis in the society of Eden's inhabitants is only vaguely visible. It is obscured by the lack of information and therefore what the authorial audiences reach is an incomplete image, unreliable and distorted by the imprecise linguistic decoding of the calculator. So it only looms on the horizon, but escapes cognition. Additionally, the composition of the novel is such that the access of authorial audiences to the information about the alien society is on the one hand filtered by the human focaliser (the human collective which is the prism-source of information about the aliens) and on the other the intelligent doubler (the supposedly reliable explanatory source). The pattern of the situation is in some respect reminiscent of utopian and adventure writings, with a traveler or a group of travelers and a representative of the visited society describing and explaining the minutiae of its functioning – in this configuration the intelligent alien has the function of a relator. However, the contact with one representative does not dispel the doubts; information about Eden's civilization cannot be deciphered not only because of the failing technology (the computer-interpretator which often comes up with only approximated meaning and has to be further translated by the crew members), but also due to the fact that "the planet is ruled by individuals who remain totally unknown. Their rule is based on a skillful

²¹ K. Krabbenhoft, "Lem as Moral Theologian", *Science Fiction Studies* #63= Vol. 21, Pt. 2 [July 1994], p. 220.

²² J. Phelan at: http://www.cas.uio.no/Publications/Seminar/Consilience_Phelan.pdf. If the situation of the alien characters aroused in the authorial audience the feelings of compassion and pity for the aliens and their fate, it is possible that the tension will form, because the authorial audiences may disagree with either the crew's decision or their judgment of the situation, or both.

manipulation of information, which is either distorted or blocked. Some phrases are simply eliminated from the language, they may not be used: the unsuccessful mutants marked for merciless elimination are ‘sick persons’, and the gigantic botch-up of the geneticists remains obscured”²³. The reader knows only as much about doublers as the human characters do, and, consequently, does not know just as much. So just like the world of Eden, which constantly escapes human cognition and comprehension, the image of alien-other the readers endeavour to reach and comprehend in the end turns out to be also a certain boundary, a wall behind which merely a fragmentary view is disclosed, blurred and never complete. It is not yet “the absolute other” but a mile step in the direction of such characterization²⁴.

Accordingly, it becomes clear that Lem intended to emphasize in the text the importance of the distinctive feature of the alien which is a fundamental ontological difference. However, paradoxically, the essence of alien comes into sight as a limit²⁵, and therefore, as transcendent, is elusive and can only be talked of apophatically. The figure of alien in *Eden* is transcendent in yet another manner, namely it enters into a discussion with the prevalent vision of the alien as supreme, i.e. either more advanced (technologically and/or morally) or endowed with superpowers. Moreover, this particular characterization and highlighting the problem of CETI allow for broadening of the thematic plane of the novel and reveal another interpretative possibility of this “simulation” called *Eden*: namely that it may be read not only as a mirror to or a metaphor of the human matters, but should also be regarded as a weighty hypothesis of a serious scientific mind. This, however, should be done within the scope of probing into the potential, not the actual (and hence include literary analysis), otherwise one might run the risk of falling prey to an error of those analyses of alien characters which prove somewhat inconclusive for the very reason that they are based on the invalid practice of treating the entities in question as existing in the real world, and not as theoretical hypotheses, fantastic projections of authorial imagination and vehicles for ideas²⁶.

Thus, playing with the motif of a scientific rational vision of the world where everything can and has to be named, described, researched and finally understood, Lem proposes in his *Eden* a vision that is reminiscent rather of a Kantian model of reality, with humans limited by their cognitive construction and powers, and the alien reality which, still holding something mysterious and elusive up its sleeve,

²³ J. Jarzębski, “Stanisław Lem, Rationalist and Visionary”, *Science Fiction Studies* # 12 = Vol.4, Pt 2 [July 1977], p. 114.

²⁴ The literary creation of “the absolute other” would be the ocean character in *Solaris*.

²⁵ In Wittgenstein’s sense; e.g. propositions 5.6 and 5.632 in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

²⁶ See, for instance, an otherwise inspiring article by K. Steinmuller, “Personoidy u Lema”, in: *Lem w oczach krytyki światowej*, ed. J. Jarzębski, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989, pp. 87–103.

appears to be much wider than the imagination and abilities of human minds and therefore transcendental.

Streszczenie

GoLem(y) w Raju – w poszukiwaniu transcendentnego pierwiastka w powieści science fiction (*Eden* Stanisława Lema)

Nadrzędnym celem niniejszego artykułu jest pokazanie, w jaki sposób swoista kreacja postaci literackich zastosowana w dziele literackim funkcjonuje jako element współtworzący warstwę tematyczną powieści. Analizie poddano dwa typy postaci występujące w *Edenie* Stanisława Lema, ludzi i kosmitów, których odmienność istotowa znajduje swoje odzwierciedlenie w odmienności konstrukcyjnej. Jako narzędzie interpretacyjne zastosowano teorię retoryczną Jamesa Phelana, traktującą postać literacką jako twór wielowymiarowy, łączący w sobie trzy komponenty, mimetyczny, syntetyczny i tematyczny. Artykuł omawia różnice kompozycyjne postaci ludzkich i kosmitów z uwzględnieniem każdego z tych wymiarów oraz ich funkcji w tekście w odniesieniu do jego warstwy problemowej. Na podstawie dokonanej analizy autorka stawia tezę, że występujące w powieści postaci ludzkie można traktować jako bohatera kolektywnego, co poszerza zakres tematyczny powieści, natomiast obcy są pozbawieni realnego referentu dla wymiaru mimetycznego, przy znacznie rozwiniętym komponente syntetycznym i tematycznym. Jednocześnie zestawienie tych dwóch typów bohaterów sprawia, że niektóre atrybuty nabierają mocy semantycznej i przechodzą w funkcje tematyczne dopiero kiedy element ludzki i obcy wchodzi z sobą w interakcję, umożliwiając tym samym pogłębioną analizę warstwy problemowej powieści (problem komunikacji z pozaziemską inteligencją, zagadnienie wartości wiedzy naukowej w zetknięciu z obcą rzeczywistością wymykającą się zrozumieniu, wyjaśnieniu i wartościowaniu, obcy jako granica poznawcza).