

Readerly Immersion into the Text-World of *Prisoners of Power* by A. and B. Strugatskys

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Abstract: Science fiction (sci-fi, sf) is of particular interest for researchers working in cognitive poetics. One major reason for this is the way that sf creates and runs alternative worlds that are both alien and recognisable; and the strangeness of these world-constructions can illuminate the operating limits of stylistic frameworks such as text-world theory, narrative comprehension, and other worlds-based mental models.

When sf and fantasy writers imagine an unknown world, they draw necessarily on the familiar as well as the strange. The Russian philologist and semiotician Yuri Sergeevich Stepanov understood this as an expansion of the basic concept of the physical world, created by extrapolation of the known facts into the unknown spaces and places, creating what he called 'a mental world'. There are clear correlations between this approach and the various worlds-based models developed by Paul Werth, Joanna Gavins, and Catherine Emmott, among others.

In this paper, I explore the correlations between these different approaches to mental world creation, with specific reference to the sf novel *Prisoners of Power* by the soviet writers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky (1969, English version 1977). I consider the extent to which different worlds-based models can illuminate the effect of readerly 'immersion' in the recreation of an sf universe. The theme of the paper is relevant to a discussion of how far unreal worlds can be authentic, or not.

Keywords: Science fiction, cognitive poetics, text worlds, mental words, Strugatskys.

1. Introduction

One of the primary interests of cognitive linguistics in terms of text analysis is the research of text world building and the process of the reader's immersion into this text world (Andreeva, 2009:25). It can be more easily observed in the texts of science fiction (sci-fi, sf) as they are

aimed at presenting uniquely different and even impossible worlds. We will use such text as examples for the following analysis.

The novel *Prisoners of Power* (a.k.a. *The Inhabited Island*) by soviet sf writers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky is a part of their cycle of the 'World of the Noon' and the unofficial trilogy about Maxim Kammerer. In this novel the main character (Maxim) visits a planet Saraksh which is inhabited by people indistinguishable from humans, yet Saraksh is still very different from both Maxim's and reader's worlds.

We are going to analyze the representation of the text world called 'Saraksh' using mainly the text world theory by Paul Werth (and Joanna Gavins) and Catherine Emmot's research of narrative comprehension.

2. Text World Theory

According to Werth and Gavins, there are 3 types of worlds: (1) discourse world; (2) text world; (3) and sub-worlds (as Werth called them), or switch-worlds (according to Gavins) (Gavins, 2006; Werth, 1999).

The (1) type of world is the context of the situation including the author of the text, the reader, and the text itself (as in the communicative model Addresser → Message → Addressee, which in our case can be seen as be Author–Text–Reader) (Werth, 1999:83). It is actually the real world where we live, and where such writers as Strugatsky existed (and we know of it). Before his death in 2012 Boris Strugatsky even responded to readers' questions on his web-site, which say of the possibility of feedback in this model (which a different speech act, though).

If the level (1) creates the space of the speech act, then (2) is the speech act itself introduced at level (1). Text world is created with the use of reader's experience and imagination (Werth, 1999:86). There are no Author or Reader on this level, only Text and everything, which is in it. Here we deal mostly with the intertextual events, places, characters etc., otherwise called deixis. Deixis, according to Yuri Apresyan, represents the point of view, of the perspective of the speaker, which allocates them in space and time (Apresyan, 1997:274). As for the deictic categories, we are going to use the ones differentiated by Dan McIntyre: place, time, characters, their social roles, and empathy — the emotions expressed by the characters and/or narrator

(Werth included both of them as 'participants' of the text world (Werth, 1999:210)) (cited from Andreeva, 2009:107).

The level (3) is of special interest as it includes the worlds created by characters themselves (or the participants, as mentioned above). These worlds are speech acts too, only now the characters speak: they may remember past events or think about the future, regret or dream about something, it might look as flashbacks or flash-forwards (Werth, 1999:210).

The trick is that such worlds (3) are not necessarily introduced by special verbs (modal or of speech activity) – as Catherine Emmott says, it is not usually the issue . sometimes such change in time and place (what she calls a change in context) happens abruptly and suddenly. Still, the reader, even if they are surprised, quickly manages to get used to it. It means that they rely mostly on the deictic categories introduced in the text as the names of characters, locatives and temporatives, which means they are important in the construction of reader's mental representation of the text world (Emmott, 1997:173).

3. Readerly Immersion

Simply put, the immersion of a reader into a text is the process when the reader imagines the described in the text events, places and characters, or reenacts them in their mind [citation needed]. It does not, though, explain *how* such immersion happens, which is essential, according to P. Stockwell (Stockwell, 2013: 274). Thus, we need a more detailed description of the process.

3.1. Deictic shift theory

The deictic shift theory, which was developed by a group of researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo and outlined in Duchan, Bruder and Hewitt, tries to explain the readerly immersion, or, as Dan McIntyre states it, 'how it is that readers often come to feel deeply involved in narratives', so that 'they interpret events in a narrative as if they were experiencing them from a position within the story world' (McIntyre, 2006: 92). Readers do have such tendency, according to Segal, whom McIntyre quotes in his book: the 'reader often takes a cognitive stance within the world of a narrative and interprets the text from that perspective' (McIntyre, 2006: 92).

Readerly immersion, then, is a result of a deictic shift within the narrative that changes the deictic centre, around which the utterance is composed. There can be a number of such changes throughout the narrative, as McIntyre points out, and they will cause changes in the point of view that readers can take.

It is necessary to explain what is the notion of the deictic centre. According to McIntyre (McIntyre, 2006: 92), it refers to a speaker or hearer's location in space and time, as well as to their position in a social hierarchy, all of which influences how they interpret the surroundings, which is in accordance with the egocentric nature of language, which means that by default we assume ourselves to be at the deictic centre of our world.

Thus it is the deictic centre which controls the way we interpret deictic terms (the already mentioned categories of place, time, characters, their social positions and empathy), which is indicative of our point of view, both literal and figurative (McIntyre, 2006: 93).

An important thing of the theory is that, according to McIntyre, people are not limited to only one, their own point of view. Here he refers to Stockwell's idea of deictic projection (Stockwell, 2000: 26), which means simply taking into account points of view other than our own (McIntyre, 2006: 94).

3.2. Psychological projection

The explanation of the process of the readerly immersion into a text world can be explained with the help of the notion of psychological projection (Whiteley, 2011), which is in a way an extension of the above-mentioned deictic projection.

The idea behind the psychological projection is, Whiteley refers to Lahey, that 'readers are able to construct a representation of themselves in their text-worlds in order to fill the addressee role created by the text' (Whiteley, 2011: 26). This idea was developed by Gavins and Stockwell who spoke of 'close metaphorical mapping between features of their self-aware personality in the discourse-world and features of an entity in the text-world', which led to strong emotional experience and response to the fictional discourse (Whiteley, 2011: 26).

Psychological projection bears different names in different studies: 'self-implication' (Lahey and Gavins), 'projection' and 'identification' (Stockwell and Gavins); Whiteley herself speaks of

different degrees of psychological projection, 'based upon the different conceptual or mental domains that are involved in the metaphorical mapping' (Whiteley, 2011: 26). She defines the narrowest sense of psychological projection as the linguistic notion of deictic projection and the idea of mapping the features of the discourse-world and the text world (Whiteley, 2011: 26).

In broader sense psychological projection does not simply correspond to the idea of mapping spatio-temporal coordinates of different realities. It presents the imaginative reconstruction of psychological aspects of other entity's perspective, i. e. the ideas, goals, attitude, emotions, and their global worldview among others. Whiteley refers to this broader level of projection as 'perspective-taking projection' and describes it as the mapping of someone's characteristics onto the entity I the text-world, including their thoughts, emotions, and feelings (Whiteley, 2011: 27), thus making the experience of reading closer to the 'real', life-like experience, as if the reader has been through the described events themselves.

4. The Analysis of *Prisoners of Power*

In the following analysis we are looking at the means Strugatskys use to construct their fictional world in their own way, which could be called their idiosyncrasy. Precisely we are going to look at the process of readerly immersion into the text world, then – the gradual world-building with the means of sub-worlds, then – an important feature of this novel – the change of focalisations and sympathy.

4.1. Readerly Immersion

Everything mentioned above can be observed in the text under analysis as well.

The very first lines of the novel (taken for the Part One: Robinson Crusoe, Chapter 1 (Strugatsky 1977:7)) literally describe the main character's, Maxim (and reader's as well) immersion into the new text world, no one of them has any idea of this new place (though the reader might have read abstracts, then they would have some idea of this world. But in this study we will assume that the reader has not read or heard anything about this novel before reading it).

Extract 1a (Strugatsky 1977:7):

'Maxim opened the hatch, leaned out, and *cautiously* scanned the sky.'

Extract 1c (Strugatsky 1977:7):

'Flinging the hatch wide open, **he** jumped into *the tall dry grass*.'

Some explanations: **bold** are the names of the characters in the current context (here it is Maxim); dotted underline — the verbs which in this extract denote the process of Maxim's (and the reader's) immersion into the new world. The reader follows Maxim who does all these actions. Underlined are locatives, *italics* – empathy, which helps the reader to immerse into the text world as well.

Immersion itself is rather brief, and here it is mostly the first paragraph (which includes, besides these two sentences, some descriptions of the new world, which will be mentioned below). The main function of the immersion into the text is to ease reader's comprehension of the text world and to interest him to continue reading.

SF has some unique instruments for that as it can describe completely different and even impossible worlds, which is why so many readers are drawn to this genre. Such fantastic imagery can be seen in the next extract from Strugatskys' work.

Being on the 'threshold' of the new worlds, Maxim (together with the reader) continues his exploration of the Saraksh:

Extract 1b (Strugatsky 1977:7):

'Low-lying and solid-looking, it [the sky] lacked that airy transparency suggestive of infinite space and a multitude of inhabited worlds; it was a real biblical firmament, smooth and dense.'

4.2. Gradual world-building

Extract 2 (Strugatsky 1977:7):

'The grass was waist-high. Nearby, *dense bushes loomed darkly*, and *dreary gnarled trees* occasionally broke the landscape. It was almost *as bright as a clear moonlit night on Earth*, but without Earth's moon shadows and hazy nocturnal blueness. Everything was gray, dusty, and flat. The ship rested on the bottom of an enormous hollow with sloping sides. The surrounding terrain rose sharply toward a washed-out horizon; the landscape seemed strange because nearby a broad, serene river flowed westward and apparently upward along one slope.'

Let us draw our attention from the text for a moment and turn to Emmott's research again. In her work, she pointed out the linearity of text world building process. Because the text is linear, and the reader follows it word by word, they create their mental representations linearly as well, using the deictic elements of the texts, and fill in the gaps of their mental maps with the help of their own experience. Here Emmott compares the reader to a blind person who cannot imagine the surroundings with people and objects around them until being told of their presence, which changes the blind person's mental representation [Emmott 1997: 118].

That is why only when the words 'space' and 'ship' are mentioned, the reader starts to think of the possibility of space travels in this world (of which they had no idea before), and in accordance with that they change their mental representation of the text world, probably using their knowledge of sf or actual space programmes.

At this moment in the narrative the reader can make a mental map of the described events place, including the ship and its surroundings. The only known character is Maxim, from whose perspective the reader 'observes' the text world. They also together with Maxim *feel* the *strange* atmosphere of this new place.

Though then a surprise awaits the reader:

Extract 3a (Strugatsky 1977:8):

'The IRU didn't attract *solid establishment types*. **They** were wrapped up in **their** own *serious affairs* and knew that the exploration of alien worlds was just a *monotonous and exhausting game*. *Yes, monotonously exhausting and exhaustingly monotonous.*'

This is what Emmott calls the change of context [Emmott 1997: 141]. The reader has to get used to it quickly and adjust their mental representation. They understand that something new happened, but they lack information to make a coherent mental map, so they continue reading:

Extract 3b (Strugatsky 1977:8):

'Discover a planet, name it after **yourself**, determine its physical characteristics, do battle with **any monsters you** might encounter, and establish contact **with intelligent beings**, if there are **any**. If not, *become a Robinson Crusoe.*'

The context changes and expands, though the information is still insufficient to build a clear picture.

Extract 3c (Strugatsky 1977:9):

'What for? Well, **you'd** be thanked and told you've made an enormous contribution, and **some prominent expert** would summon **you** for lengthy discussions. **The school kids**, especially the little ones, would gaze at **you** in awe. But **your old teacher** would ask only: "Are **you** still with the IRU?" Then **he'd** change the subject and look distressed and guilty because **he** felt responsible for **your** inability to outgrow the IRU. And **your father** would say: "H'mm" and hesitatingly offer you a position as a lab assistant. And **your mother** would say: "**Maxie**, when **you** were little **you** drew rather well." And **Pete** would say: "How long can this go on? Haven't **you** disgraced yourself long enough?" And **everybody** would be right except **you**. So what do **you** do? **You** return to IRU headquarters, pick up the catalog, open it at random and stab blindly.'

Here the reader finds enough textual information to build a clearer picture of the text world. It differs, however, a lot from the previous paragraphs, which hints the reader that all this happened at another place in another time. There are no clear confirmations of time and place here, apart from the future forms of verbs and some new characters. Here the reader relying on their life experience and knowledge of the novel (in particular, that before this very moment they were following Maxim's perspective) should decide what this change of context represents. The most logical assumption a reader can make at this moment is that it was Maxim's internal monologue (what imperative and future forms of the verbs, as well as direct addresses 'you' point at).

Such change of context creates a new subworld in the text world of the novel and reader's mental representation, which we may characterize as 'Maxim's recollections of Earth' (which is only hinted at this moment, but proved later in the narrative).

Later the reader involving Earth, which we will refer to collectively as parts of the subworld 'Maxim' (as, according to Werth, 'for [creation o of the subworlds] [the characters] are responsible' (Werth 1999:212)).

4.3. Different focalisations

The following extracts present sub-worlds of the locals, which shed more light on the main text world (where the main storyline happens), which is important to the reader as they know almost nothing this brand new world. The new information is given in small pieces, which leaves the reader more dissatisfied with the quantity of given Information (according to maxims of Grice), but it is all the reader can get at this moment.

Extract 4 (Strugatsky 1977:19):

Guy sat on the edge of the bench by the window and polished the insignia on his beret with his cuff while **Corporal Varibobu** prepared **his** travel orders.

...

"What handwriting," thought **Guy** somewhat enviously. "Ink-stained old **fogey**: twenty years in the Legion and still a measly clerk. Just look at those eyes goggle — the pride of the brigade..."

The change in context happens here the same way as described above, but for one main difference – the point of view has changed as well. From this moment the reader follows a perspective of an indigenous, Guy Gaal, including his thoughts. It creates a new subworld, by Gaal this time. We are not going to speak of it separately, though, but only as a part of a bigger subworld 'Saraksh', created by its inhabitants and drastically different from Maxim's subworld:

Extract 5 (Strugatsky 1977:70):

'It turned out that the inhabited island was neither a sphere nor a geoid; in fact, it wasn't a planet at all.

*According to **Guy**, the inhabited island was the World, the only world in the universe. Beneath the natives' feet lay the firm surface of the World Sphere. Above them was a gigantic gaseous sphere of finite volume and unknown composition, whose physical characteristics were still not understood.'*

...

'Gravity acted away from the center of the World Sphere, perpendicular to its surface. In short, the inhabited island was located on the inner surface of an enormous bubble in an infinite firmament filling the rest of the universe.'

Although the narrative at this moment follows Maxim's perspective, from the style and choice of words it is obvious to the reader that Maxim only retells Gaal's words about the world state. Again, this extract helps to create the subworld 'Saraksh'

Next follows Maxim's own explanation of the world construction:

Extract 6 (Strugatsky 1977:71):

'**Maxim** *believed* that the *unusual* characteristics of this planet's atmosphere were the *key to the matter*. In the first place, its *unusually* high index of refraction lifted up the horizon and from *time immemorial* had *inspired* the **natives'** peculiar conception of **their** land as being neither flat nor convex but concave.'

...

'In the second place, the atmosphere was very dense and phosphoresced day and night, so that **no one** ever saw the stars. Isolated instances of observation of the sun were recorded in chronicles and served as the basis for countless attempts to create a World Light theory.'

5. Conclusion

Maxim's view of Saraksh differs from the natives' view (including Gaal), which allows us to speak of two different subworlds: (a) Maxim's subworld, which, besides Earth and Pandora (mentioned in some of Maxim's recollections) includes his own presentation of Saraksh; and (b) the subworld of Saraksh, limited only by this world and the natives' ideas about it.

All the general information about the text world of the novel was included in the scheme below (Fig. 5.1).

We decided not to differentiate separately the text world and subworlds of the novel, with the text world being an 'objective' world of the novel, for the following reasons: the reader follows perspectives of characters for the whole narrative, be it Maxim or somebody else. Moreover, Maxim's subworld (with Maxim coming from a technologically advanced world similar to ours) takes the place of a more objective representation compared to the subworld of Saraksh inside the text world of the novel.

We have observed the text world of *Prisoners of Power* where, as we can see, two drastically different subworlds are contradicted: Maxim's subworld, and the subworld of Saraksh. The former interprets Saraksh as a planet and includes other worlds, while the latter denies existence of other planets and interprets Saraksh as a hollow world.

Prisoners of Power

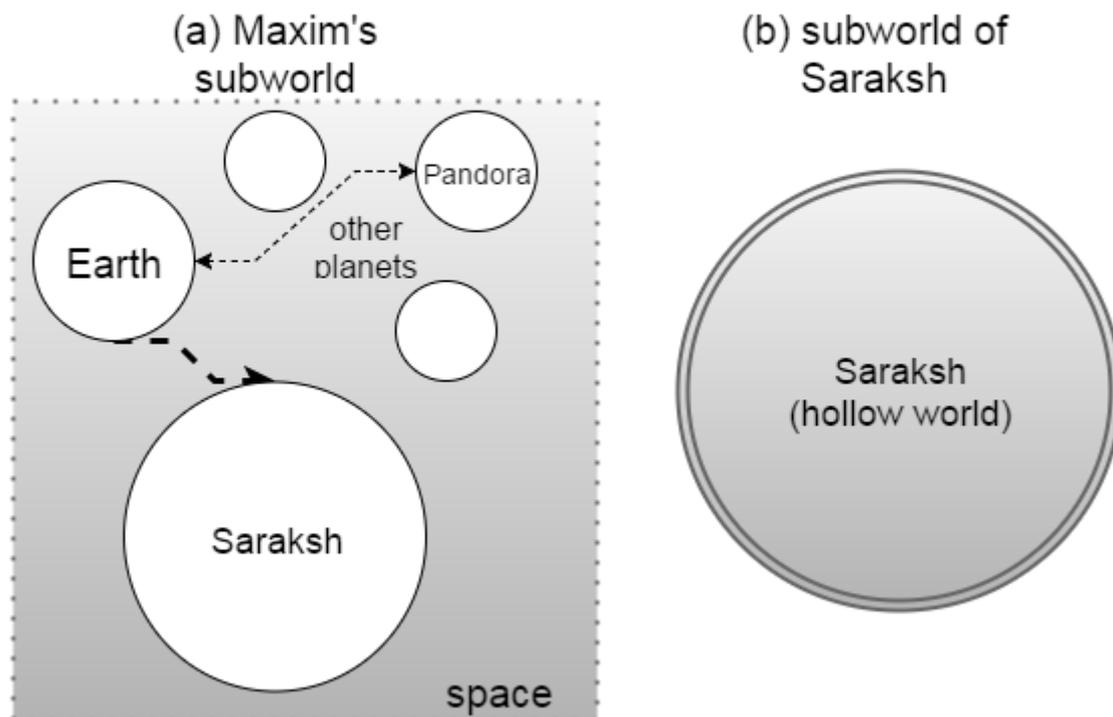


Fig. 5.1. Text world of Prisoners of Power

We have also looked into the process of reader's immersion into the text, which is, according to C. Emmott, a linear one. It involves 'building' the text world around the reader who acquires a certain perspective (usually the narrator's or of the main character) in time and place using a certain world-building elements – deictic categories. Such process is also complicated by the reader using both their knowledge of the text (which they acquire linearly while reading) and their life experience to complement the textual facts.

Next we are planning to expand this text world by including other novels in the trilogy about Maxim Kammerer – *Beetle in the Anthill* and *Time Wanderers*, where the authors developed the micro-picture of the Earth of the future and the macro-picture of their fictional universe.

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