

## EXPRESSIONISM AND THE SCIENCE FICTION GENRE: THE SPECIFICS OF INTERACTION (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE WORK OF R. HEINLEIN)

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In this article, the author aims to prove that the traditions of expressionism are also found among science fiction writers. The work of the American writer of the twentieth century Robert Heinlein was practically never mentioned by anyone in the expressionist paradigm, however, when studying his biography and literary heritage, we find a lot of details that go back to expressionism - this is magical realism, closely related to this direction, to the artistic method of which R. Heinlein resorted to, according to the researchers of his work; passion for solipsism, the doctrine of which can be regarded to a large extent as a manifesto of expressionism, and the very attempts to go beyond the genre of fantasy, with which the name of this writer is firmly linked. In each work of R. Heinlein, the notes of expressionism are present in different ways: either in the subject (pressure of the state machine or society on the individual), the spirit of freedom and the spirit of protest, attention to the problem of death, mysticism, the problem of limited human perception and the illusory nature of the visible world. All of the above once again indicates that, assimilated throughout the subsequent 1920s. culture, expressionist experience is able to manifest itself, no matter how bold it sounds, in the work of almost any writer - to one degree or another, at one stage or another of his path. In addition, in an artist whose works contain elements of expressionism, one can detect the movement of creative searches from realism to expressionism, but neither the way back, nor the reciprocity of these ways of worldview and world-modeling can be found.

Key words: expressionism, expressionist tradition, Robert Heinlein, «The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag»

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### *Introduction*

Previously, we reviewed the ingress of expressionist reception into the genre of the *work novel* in Austria [8]; the interaction of expressionism with postmodernism, magical realism, and modern schools; and directions and trends [5]. This study aims to analyze how the *metastases* of expressionism can manifest even in the work of writers whose names were never uttered in the context of the abovementioned worldview. One of such literary artists is Robert Anson Heinlein (1907–1988), an American who gained fame as “the dean of science fiction writers” [11, p. 155].

The *research methods* included survey-comparative, comparative-historical, and biographical methods with elements of philological analysis of the work in the general cultural context.

The reputation of this author precisely determined the choice of the object of study, who not only wrote science fiction works but also developed an entire concept of such creativity and its rules. Moreover, none of the critics mentioned this author in line with the expressionist tradition, although not only several works were conducted on

the compositions of R. Heinlein but also several periodizations of his writing. The last problem is discussed in detail.

### *Historical background*

The traditionally identified two/three periods of the writing career of R. Heinlein are determined using biographical facts (influence, success, and alienation, according to A. Panshin), stages of creative growth (initial, mature, and last by A. Balabukha), or writer's interest and historical milestones (periods of science fiction and satirical prose by G. Westphal before and after the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite) [10]. This brief study anticipated the position of the author according to a skeptical statement by D. Gifford that each reader will hold personal views of prose legacy of R. Heinlein and that squeezing the latter into any rigid framework is a thankless task.

### *Research results*

Even a superficial review of R. Heinlein's work suggests that the American writer, having started with a social theme, gradually left it, and moved

toward increasingly greater abstraction, mysticism, and metaphysics. This shift is similar to his Austrian fellow writers, who were discussed in previous works. Thus, the first novel (*For Us, the Living: A Comedy of Customs*, 1939), which was dedicated to social theories, was unsuccessful, while the latter was important for R. Heinlein. He *officially* proclaimed his principle as a writer to enter the literary *market* and be in demand. Therefore, if we entirely, seemingly, and unexpectedly discover a certain expressionist hint (no more!) in the work of R. Heinlein, then the deviation into this paradigm of the American is his conscious, deliberate choice, albeit unconscious, is relatively regardless of how paradoxical it may be. From a *children's* science fiction writer, whose works certainly contained extraordinary personalities that challenged the world of adults, he deviates to a philosophical understanding of the universe, its worlds, the problem of individualism, personal freedom (including sexual freedom), death, and the space beyond it. As we know, all these notions fit into the expressionist strategy. In addition, it (or rather, its echoes) can be traced, given that R. Heinlein's creative career spans the period from the late 1930s to the late 1980s, which is nearly throughout the entire second half of the 20th century.

Examining the titles of R. Heinlein's novels and their themes, such as *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), *I Will Fear No Evil* (another translation: *Passing Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death*; 1970), we see the opposition between man and the world, which is characteristic of the expressionists, radical protest, rebellion, and the theme of the state machine weighing on the individual. Occasionally, they are called Kafkaesque motifs, which ends with the cycle *The World as Myth* (myth-making is a method of F. Kafka, which is considered by Yu. Borev as "the largest representative of expressionism in literature" [1, p. 545]. Alternatively, one of the works of R. Heinlein seems to be an allusion to the short novel *In the Penal Colony* by F. Kafka, in which one of the characters rebels but then voluntarily undergoes castration the novel *Farnham's Freehold* (1964). Later, R. Heinlein shifts the focus of his attention to the oppression of the individual no longer by the state apparatus but by society as a whole [14].

The illness of the already mature writer (i.e., peritonitis and ischemic heart disease), which frequently forced him to lead a solitary lifestyle,

facilitated his deviation toward an expressionist worldview when he was interested in the neo-mysticism and solipsism of G.D. Uspensky, a position in which one's consciousness is seeming to be the only reality instead of the external world [12, p. 128].

Notably, solipsism is mentioned in the works of the most diverse writers, in which a few researchers trace the expressionist experience (e.g., A. Beliy, V. Pelevin; Yu. Mamleev; the work of the author of this article has been devoted to the expressionist tendencies of the latter [13]).

The fascination with solipsism dates back to the late period of R. Heinlein's creative activity (1970s–1980s), when he released the pentalogy *The World as Myth*, which includes novels that also hold a symbolic meaning in the context of the objective of the study aim, that is *Time Enough for Love*, *The Number of the Beast*, *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls*, and *To Sail Beyond the Sunset*. However, according to critics, although they sum up the philosophical views of the author, they are artistically weak. Meanwhile, at the moment, the fact that the American writer tried to "expand the boundaries of science fiction, proceed to a new creative level" is important [3].

Moreover, W. Patterson Sr. and J. Thornton classified the novel *The Number of the Beast* as *magical realism* [12, p. 128] according to style, which is also a type of echo of expressionist aesthetics (according to A. Gugnin, the unifying principle in this case is the "two-world artistic space of the work, which can either be clearly divided into either the real-rational and the fantastic-irrational ..., or it is organized in such a way that unreal <...> elements invade everyday reality until this everyday reality turns into unreal" [2, p. 356].

According to James Gifford, R. Heinlein's philosophy is expressed most clearly in works of small form. Thus, the story "Goldfish Bowl" is dedicated to the problem of human perception (note that this aspect is key in expressionism), and the story *The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag* is dedicated to the illusory nature of the world (1942) [10].

The latter warrants an in-depth examination. The very epigraph from the poem by the decadent poet A. Swinburne attunes the reader to an expressionist worldview, the pessimism of which makes these two movements similar:

“...From too much love of living,  
From hope and fear set free,  
We thank with brief thanksgiving  
Whatever gods may be  
That no life lives for ever;  
That dead men rise up never;  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea.” [9, p 6]

According to the plot, the main character hires detective spouses to determine what he does at work, because his memory fails him and he constantly sees traces of dried blood under his nails. Detectives go out (through mirrors!) to parallel worlds created by certain Sons of the Bird; the memories of the spouses about the events of the day also become entirely different. As a result, the universe wherein the heroes and, therefore, the reader are located is only a work of art by a certain artist. Critics, to whom Hoag belongs, evaluate his masterpiece. To save his detective friends from death due to his desire to rebuild the world by destroying the demonic Sons, he advises the couple to leave in any direction to never look back. When they set off in their car and look back, they see only fog. The blood under Hoag's nails is that of the Sons of the Bird, which intended to frighten the latter. Notably, in ordinary reality, Jonathan Hoag is a meek, timid, and shy person. From the first pages, we find that the doctor, who he asked for help before hiring detectives, is rude to him then throws him out of the office:

He was afraid of rudeness in the same way that some people are afraid of snakes, or heights, or confined spaces. Rudeness, even if not directed at him personally, but even simply manifested in his presence. He felt bad, he was overcome by a feeling of helplessness and shame” [9, p. 8].

For this hero, being in a noisy, busy city in a subway car was “a serious test, with all this crowding, jostling, dirt and always possible insults” [9, p. 9]. When he, confused and frightened, tries to come to his senses on a crowded street (this is also the favorite landscape of the expressionists) and decides on future actions, he is either rudely pushed by a random passerby nor a boy on roller skates who uses butts against him, and the angrily and incredulously at Hoag when he tries to smooth things over. Seemingly, R. Heinlein, in the image of Jonathan Hoag and the plot of the story, consistently implements the doctrine of “man in the aesthetics

of expressionism.” according to A. Matsevich: “... expressionism assigns him the role of a creator, filling the unsteady, amorphous chaos with lines, colors, sounds, objects, creatures, and his “self.” In expressionism, a tendency frequently occurs toward anthropomorphism in which landscape, animals, and even inanimate objects are humanized to reveal their *spirit* and internal dynamism [4, p. 632–633]. <...> Expressionism was considered an art designed to revive a man that was humiliated, desecrated, suppressed by nature and technical civilization, fraught with wars, revolutions and other cataclysms. ... “Strangers we are all upon the earth” (F. Werfel).” Focusing on man, however, expressionism, considers him not as an individual character but in a certain generalized, metaphysical aspect. He is uninterested in an individual, specific person with his thoughts, feelings, actions but as follows:

... a simply person as such, a person in general, a person “in himself” or humanity, with the setting for the generic, typical .... The human image is simplified, schematized, the psychological motivation of actions and causal relationships are discarded. The characters are approaching an abstract scheme of good and evil, the personification of a pure idea [4, p. 633].

Indeed, we do not perceive the individual characteristics of the hero, except for the fact that he has dried blood under his nails. In many ways, Hoag in ordinary reality and in his human form resembles the heroes of F. Kafka, Gregor Samsa, Georg Bendemann, and the village doctor, among others, in his lostness and helplessness in this world.

A.I. Ermolaev confirmed the concept of the scaling vector of R. Heinlein's hero:

If in 1957, the hero of “Citizen of the Galaxy” remained a “true American” in all life's troubles and wanted to spread American values throughout the universe, then in the 70–80s, Heinlein's heroes

became true “citizens of the galaxy,” and the USA shrank to the size of a tiny island in the vast universe. The writer does not even try to refute the attempts of the Americans to become “trend setters” in it, they are initially insane and doomed to failure. But Heinlein is worried about something completely different, namely which of the personal, family, sexual, and so on values will retain its significance in this new space-time continuum, and which will disappear like the morning mist [3].

Let us recall that this story was written in 1942, and in the 1970s–1980s, R. Heinlein created the pentalogy *The World as a Myth* in which he finally formalized his philosophy about the number of fictional (!) universes  $\{6^6\}^6$ , which included solipsism and the idea of the illusory nature of the world, which is very characteristic (including!) of expressionism.

#### Conclusions

Thus, the work of the American writer of the XX century Robert Heinlein was nearly never mentioned by anyone in the expressionist paradigm. However, when examining his biography and literary heritage, we found many details that point to expressionism, namely, magical realism, which is closely related to this direction. The artistic method

of which R. Heinlein resorted to, according to researchers, is his creativity and passion for solipsism, the doctrine of which can be considered as a manifesto of expressionism to a large extent. We observe an attempt to exceed the genre of fiction, while the name of this writer is firmly linked with it. In each work, R. Heinlein poses hints of expressionism in different ways, either according to theme (pressure of the government machine or society on individual), the spirit of freedom and protest, attention to the problem of death and what lies beyond it, mysticism (passion for works by P.D. Uspensky), the problem of the limitations of human perception and the visible world illusiveness. These abovementioned reasons again indicate that the expressionist experience learned throughout the subsequent 1920s culture is capable of manifesting itself to a certain degree regardless of how brave it may sound in the work of nearly any writer at one stage or another of his path. In addition, in an artist whose works contain elements of expressionism, then a displacement of creative searches from realism to expressionism can be detected. However, the study identified neither the reverse way nor reciprocity of these methods of worldview and world modeling.

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### ЭКСПРЕССИОНИЗМ И НАУЧНАЯ ФАНТАСТИКА: СПЕЦИФИКА ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ ТВОРЧЕСТВА Р. ХАЙНЛАЙНА)

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В данной работе автор ставит себе целью доказать, что традиции экспрессионизма встречаются и у писателей-фантастов. Творчество американского писателя XX в. Роберта Хайнлайна практически ни разу никем не упоминалось в экспрессионистской парадигме, однако при изучении его биографии и литературного наследия обнаруживаем массу деталей, которые к экспрессионизму восходят – это тесно связанный с данным направлением магический реализм, к художественному методу которого прибегал Р. Хайнлайн, по мнению исследователей его творчества; увлечение солипсизмом, доктрину которого можно рассматривать в немалой степени как манифест экспрессионизма, и сами попытки выйти за рамки жанра фантастики, с которой прочно увязывается имя данного писателя. В каждом произведении Р. Хайнлайна нотки экспрессионизма присутствуют по-разному: либо в тематике (давление государственной машины или социума на индивида), дух свободы и дух протеста, внимание к проблеме смерти, мистицизм, проблема ограниченности человеческого восприятия и иллюзорности видимого мира. Всё вышеперечисленное в очередной раз указывает на то, что усвоенный всей последующей за 1920-ми гг. культурой экспрессионистский опыт способен проявлять себя, как ни смело это прозвучит, в творчестве практически любого писателя – в той или иной мере, на том или ином этапе его пути. Кроме того, у художника, в произведениях которого присутствуют элементы экспрессионизма, можно обнаружить движение творческих поисков от реализма к экспрессионизму, однако ни обратной дороги, ни взаимообратимости этих способов миротворения и миромоделирования найти нельзя.

*Ключевые слова:* экспрессионизм, традиции экспрессионизма, Роберт Хайнлайн, «Неприятная профессия Джонатана Хога»

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