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STRUCTURING UNCERTAINTY: AN ATTEMPT AT READING H.G. WELLS' "THE APPLE"

The analysis presented here originated as an attempt at reconstructing the rules of the literary supercode in the short story *The Apple* by H. G. Wells published in 1896.¹ Curiously enough, such an interpretative effort, undertaken under the assumption that a literary analysis could lead to explaining all the doubts arising from the process of actual reading led the author of this work almost to repeat the initial statement of the text: "I must get rid of it(!)" and put the story away. The fact that the text had this very effect on its individual reader might be, broadly speaking, indicative of its compositional principle² which this analysis aims to discuss.

The first words of the short story are rendered in direct speech: "»I must get rid of it,« said the man in the corner of the carriage, abruptly breaking the silence" [A 152]. The narrator's subsequent explanation reveals the situation of a train journey. For the addressee, these words constitute the first understatement in this short story: they trigger doubt about what this man might want to get rid of and why.³ In the second sentence, the reader's

¹ *The Complete Short Stories of H. G. Wells*. Ed. John Hammond. London, Phoenix Giant 1999, p. 881. All references and quotations from *The Apple* by H. G. Wells come from this edition and in this analysis will be marked as "A" followed by a page reference.

² Of course, only as much as an individual reader's reaction may be indicative of the rules of a literary supercode.

³ In *The Apple*, two levels of literary communication: implied author – implied reader, and narrator – addressee generally overlap. The reliable narrator, hidden behind the recounted events, speaks on behalf of the author. Consequently, the role of the implied reader corresponds to that of addressee of narration. Therefore, the categories "implied author" and "narrator", as well as "implied reader" and "addressee", will be used interchangeably in this analysis. To avoid repetitions, the categories of "author" and „reader" occurring without qualifying epithets will hereafter refer to "implied author" and „implied reader". The term "understatement" (niedopowiedzenie), used by A. Zgorzel-ski for the analysis of poetry, seems particularly useful here. Compare *Taktyka niedopowiedzeń i sugestii*. In: *Konstrukcja i sens*. Gdańsk, Uniwersytet Gdański [n.d.], p. 110–111, 167.

situation already turns out to be parallel to that of a character in the fictional world. A Mr Hinchcliff, lost in private thoughts, imperfectly hears the man's words and is at a loss how to respond to such a statement. The following sentences indicate that the stranger's behaviour is perceived as alarming also in the fictional world: he ignores Mr Hinchcliff's attempts at communication and continues his incomprehensible debate with himself.

On the structural level, the first sentence of the text cunningly introduces the main theme of "the forbidden apple" – if only as a supposition. Judging by the title, the reader might well expect it *is* some sort of apple that is referred to. On the other hand, neither the fruit's properties nor the cause-effect context of the stranger's utterance have been revealed yet. This potentiality of the relationship between the title and opening sentence constitutes the first uncertainty in the short story which is to be based on a specific principle of uncertainty throughout. Thus, it may be asserted that the *incipit* constitutes a metacommentary to the following parts of the short story, though initially it is not revealed as such.⁴

Simultaneously, the compositional principles shaping the opening sentences of the text, such as transparent third-person narration and a typical setting of a railway carriage, suggest mimetic prose convention.⁵ This pact with the reader is further maintained by providing Mr Hinchcliff with a verisimilar name, journey destination, and direct characterisation by the narrator.⁶

The narrator, though omniscient, restricts his perception of depicted reality to Mr Hinchcliff's point of view. Thus, the text reveals only as much as the main character might see or know. Such a relation between the narrative perspective and narrative voice in the initial part of the story (that is: of the one who sees – Mr Hinchcliff, and the one who speaks – the narrator) is fundamental for establishing the attitude of ironic distance towards the main character.⁷ The narrator (and consequently the addressee)

⁴ M. R. Mayenowa points to the metatextual character [metatekstowy charakter, transl. H. L.] of a literary text title, beginning and ending in *Poetyka teoretyczna. Zagadnienia języka*, 2nd rev. ed. Wrocław, Ossolineum 1979, p. 267–286.

⁵ Compare A. Zgorzelski's suggestions on anticipatory preparation of the addressee by the opening sentences of a literary text for a certain type of fiction: *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science-fiction*. Warszawa, PWN 1980, p. 26. For discussion of J. Tynianov's term of "anticipatory preparation" see also A. Zgorzelski *The Systemic Equivalent as a Genological Factor*, *Poetics Today* 18 Winter (1997) 4.

⁶ About establishing a pact with the reader on the verisimilitude of fictional phenomena represented in prose, compare A. Martuszevska: *Powieść i prawdopodobieństwo*. Kraków, Universitas 1992, p. 80–84 ("pakt z czytelnikiem" – transl. H. L.)

⁷ See G. Genette's distinction of narrative perspective and narrative voice discussed in H. Markiewicz *Autor i narrator*, in: *Wymiary dzieła literackiego, Selected Works*, vol. 4, Kraków, Universitas 1996, p. 95; ("perspektywa narracyjna" and "głos narracyjny" – transl. H. L.). The category of "distance" as a component of communicative situation is defined by M. Głowiński in *Cztery typy fikcji narracyjnej*. In: *Dzieło wobec odbiorcy: Szkice z komunikacji literackiej. Selected Works*, vol. 3, Kraków, Universitas 1998, p. 207–218; ("dystans" – transl. H. L.). The scholar emphasises the role of narrative distance in

although undoubtedly sharing the spatial point of view of the main character, only apparently assumes his ideological and psychological system.⁸ Having an insight into the character's thoughts, the narrator ironically recounts Hinchcliff's indulgent appreciation of his new college cap, which he "ostentatiously displayed" on his portmanteau to mark his "newly-gained" and, to his mind, "very enviable" pedagogic position [A 153]. The effect of irony arises here as if between the lines. The text presupposes that the addressee would recognise the general principles of human behaviour and assume ironic distance towards them⁹. Thus, Hinchcliff's "irrepressible pride" is unmistakably contrasted with the lack of any pedagogic success in his life. It turns out that he has just matriculated at London University Correspondence Studies, and he is only on his way to take the post of a junior assistant at a provincial Grammar School.

Jonathan Culler considers irony as an element of verisimilitude [*vraisemblance*] in the text and argues that the reader who discovers such irony participates in a kind of game the text invites him to.¹⁰ In the short story *The Apple*, the constituents of this game are a marked indistinctness of opinions and uncertainty about the interpretation of the depicted phenomena, which arise from the dominant point of view of the unreliable main character.

The initial part of the text also serves to disclose the elements of strangeness in the fictional world. Such an effect arises primarily from contrasting the instantly intelligible and familiarised character of Hinchcliff and the unintelligible and unfamiliar figure of the stranger¹¹. Hinchcliff is from the very beginning endowed with a proper name; and the reader, having an insight into his thoughts, may assume a relevant distance towards him. On the other hand, the man from the corner of the carriage remains unknown throughout the short story. His being designated as "the stranger" soon begins to function as a substitute for his missing name, which does not make him more familiar for all that – the foremost connotations of this word stress unfamiliarity.¹² Moreover, his actions are incomprehensible and his state-

provoking a proportional distance on the part of the addressee; *ibidem*, p. 209. The role of distance in shaping implied reception is also discussed by A. Zgorzelski in *Conradowskie dystanse*. In: *O nowelach Conrada*. Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Morskie 1984, p. 83 ("implikowany odbiór" – transl. H. L.)

⁸ The distinction of points of view in relation to spatial, ideological and psychological planes, *et. al.*, has been proposed by B. Uspensky in *A Poetics of Composition*, trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig. Berkeley, University of California Press 1983.

⁹ On the mechanism of recognising irony by the addressee, see J. Culler *Konwencja i oswojenie. Znak, styl, konwencja*. Compiled by Michał Głowiński. Warszawa, Czytelnik 1977, p. 185–86.

¹⁰ Compare Culler's discussion of *vraisemblance*, *ibidem*, p. 184–187.

¹¹ J. Culler points to "familiarisation" („oswojenie” – transl. H. L.) as an element of *vraisemblance*, *ibidem*, p. 184–187.

¹² Compare the entries "stranger" and "strange" in *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary on CD-ROM*, Version 1.0.03, January 1997. Oxford University Press.

ments concerning his feelings and motives are inconsistent or contradictory. He wants to give the apple away but then he desires it himself. At one moment he encourages Mr Hinchcliff by praising the apple's features and then he discourages him by revealing its flaws.

The ever more puzzling statements and behaviour of the stranger function to enhance *suspense*. At the moment of maximum tension, the man draws out a small fruit from his bag and slowly communicates: "[t]hat ...is the Apple of the Tree of Knowledge". Such an obvious breaking of the mimetic rules of the depicted world by the stranger is instantly acknowledged by Hinchcliff's reaction of surprise and confusion. The student needs a period of painful thinking to arrive at a "sufficient explanation": "»Mad!« flashed across his brain, and illuminated the whole situation" [A 153]. This rational justification seemingly refutes the appearance of the fantastic element in the fictional world.¹³ On the other hand, Hinchcliff has already been established as an unreliable character. Moreover, the addressee has been prepared for something extraordinary by the accumulation of defamiliarising elements prior to the demonstration of the apple. Finally, the man in the carriage is at this very moment designated a "fantastic stranger", which here assumes the opalescent sense of "extraordinary-abnormal-alien" [A 153].¹⁴ Consequently, the credibility of the fantastic is here limited – it functions predominantly in creating suspense. In the short story *The Apple*, ambiguity often arises from understatement and suggestion. The difficulty in defining the sense of the ambiguous element causes accumulation of doubts, and thus evokes the effect of anticipatory preparation of the addressee for some retrogressive execution.¹⁵

In response to Hinchcliff's questions concerning the origin of the apple, the stranger narrates a story of a fugitive who reached an Eden in the mountains of Armenia. The strange man begins as an emotionally involved, first-person "teller", and then gradually evolves into an omniscient narrator hidden behind the recounted events. The emotional involvement is apparent

¹³ According to the definition proposed by A. Zgorzelski, the fantastic is introduced into the text when the initially established rules of the depicted world are broken, which is confirmed by a typical reaction of a character (in here: surprise, fear, disbelief). Compare: *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science-fiction*, p. 21.

¹⁴ R. Ingarden, when discussing ambiguity in utterances, argues that it is "not to be identified with the manifold of unambiguous sentences obtained through »interpretation«. Ambiguity allows "a number of »interpretations« without firmly excluding or favouring any of them. Ingarden speaks then of "opalescence" and "iridescence" of the correlates. See *The Literary Work of Art*. Ed. James M. Edie, transl. George G. Grabowicz. Evanston, Northwestern UP 1973, p. 143–144.

¹⁵ The concepts of "anticipatory preparation" and "retrogressive execution" were introduced by J. Tynianow primarily to explain the functioning of "systemic equivalent" in poetry. However, A. Zgorzelski suggests that these theoretical notions seem particularly relevant for observing the "constructional principles" of "nonmimetic fiction" and their "systemic ways of generating reader's responses". Compare *The Systemic Equivalent as a Genological Factor*, p. 517–518.

when the stranger exclaims: "Armenia! that wonderful country, the first of all countries, where the ark of the Flood remains to this day, buried in the glaciers of Mount Ararat" [A 153]. By placing his story in a factual location and relating this setting to biblical events, the stranger suggests a connection between these two ontologically non-homogeneous worlds¹⁶.

Simultaneously, the formula of adventurous action¹⁷ (flight from pursuit, dangers, overcoming successive obstacles), and the exotic space connected with such action (inaccessible places in the mountains), function to distract the reader's attention from the gradually more and more estranged elements of the depicted world. Hinchcliff, though initially aghast and reserved, now becomes entirely immersed in the story: "[t]he stranger paused. »Yes?« said Mr Hinchcliff. »Yes?«" [A 154]. The character, and consequently the addressee, evidently become accustomed to the new rules of the depicted world¹⁸ and are gradually prepared for the information of finding the apple of the Tree of Knowledge there. It is worthwhile to observe that this mechanism is triggered by a specific verisimilitude-enhancing device. The events of the stranger's story are placed in a kind of "spatial pocket" which is to give the impression of being located in the documented world. However impossible it would be to trace the fictional space on authentic maps of Armenia or mountain Ararat, the authentic place-names, and the seemingly detailed account of the Armenian's flight through the mountains, suggest a connection between the empirical and fictional realities. On the other hand, this verisimilitude-enhancing device also proves that the stranger feels the fantastic quality of his own tale as he tries to conceal it. The fantastic is discovered, and thus constructed, by both Hinchcliff – as the main character and an acting personage who thinks "Mad!"; and the stranger – as the narrator who calls the apple "wonderful" [A 153].

As the stranger's story develops, the account of the depicted world becomes increasingly detailed and defamiliarised. The elements of space description enhance the atmosphere of terror and suffering connected with dramatic action. Covered with blood, hungry and cold, the Armenian seems to fight

¹⁶ Compare discussion of various types of locations in H. Meyer: *Kształtowanie przestrzeni i symbolika przestrzenna w sztuce narracyjnej*, transl. Z. Żabicki. Pamiętnik Literacki 61 (1970) 3: 251–273. The Bible says that the ark settled after the flood "upon the mountains of Ararat" Gen 8.4, *The Holy Bible*, authorised King James Version. London, Collins 1958.

¹⁷ In fact, it has become common to speak of adventurous "convention". However, as A. Zgorzelski points out, genological distinctness of this notion from the others is questionable. Compare: *Kreacje świata sensów*. Łódź, PWN 1975, p. 24.

¹⁸ This is a phenomenon typical of the fantastic; compare A. Zgorzelski, *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science-fiction*, p. 23.

¹⁹ The concept of "spatial pocket" ("kieszon przestrzenna" – transl. H. L.) is used by R. Caillois in: *Odpowiedzialność i styl*, transl. J. Lisowski. Warszawa, PIW 1967, p. 50 and G. Filip: *Przemiana czasu i przestrzeni jako motyw polskiej noweli fantastycznej początku XX wieku*. In: *Male formy narracyjne*. Ed. by E. Łoch. Lublin, UMCS [n.d.], p. 47.

for life in his flight through the grass "like knife-blades" which "cut and slash[ed] most pitilessly" at him. There is the veil-like smoke and fire of the burning grass; the rocks are blazing in the sun, the sky is like molten brass, and the dry bushes prick like thorns. Finally, the Armenian meets a shep herd, and together they reach a precipice only to see a huge dark valley situated down a polished slope of rock among these grim mountains. The scarce vegetation there is markedly dry, contorted and stunted.

At variance with the spatial motifs, the characters recognise the place as Eden; however, they react to it with fear represented by their falling "upon their faces like men struck dead" [A 153-154]. The accumulation of estranged spatial motifs is intensified by repetition of the word "strange", and the dominant structure of comparisons in descriptions („like", "as", "to the likeness of"). What is more, when Eden is finally recognised by name, the narrator immediately adds that it might be "the sentinel of Eden" as well. This is yet another example of opalesque equivocality in the story – with the word "sentinel" being more typically used to designate a person on the lookout than a place, which the context points to. In the short story, the name "sentinel of Eden" thus evokes an association with the rim of Eden which God "placed at the east of the Garden of Eden" with "Cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life"²⁰.

In the description of Eden, there are so many astounding elements introduced, and such potent ones, that they could well provoke suspension of the addressee's belief in the story. The stranger is evidently aware of this possibility since he adopts an effective strategy to refute it. Both before and after Eden's description he undermines his own story by suggesting it might be regarded as a vision. However, in both cases he immediately re-establishes its credibility by pointing to the apple as a proof. His tactic apparently works: "»[i]s it?« was all Mr Hinchcliff could say... »Look at it,« said the stranger. It was certainly a strange-looking globe, not really an apple..." [A 155].

Additionally, in the whole story, there are numerous gaps or understatements left which generate the reaction of uncertainty on the part of the reader. Thus, it is not evident if the apple is indeed the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge – the stranger's story suggests it rather comes from some contorted tree. In fact, the ripe fruit itself is something strange in the context of spatial degeneration of the textual Eden. It is also never revealed how the Armenian reached his home village, where he gave (or perhaps sold?) the apple to the stranger. It is finally not clear how and why the strange man got from an Armenian village to the English railway carriage. The whole recounted story does not exactly fit the mimetic setting of the journey, which the narrator voices expressis verbis: "It was a most extraordinary story to be

²⁰ *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary on CD-ROM* and *The Holy Bible*, Gen. 3.24.

told in a third-class carriage on a Sussex railway. It was as if the real was a mere veil to the fantastic, and here was the fantastic poking through" [A 155].

Thus, the stranger's story seems to confirm the initial premonition of the world's double nature by demonstrating the fictional space division into "the real" (the carriage) and "the fantastic" (Eden). It apparently proves that the fantastic elements permeated into the fictional reality of the carriage. Such an element is not only the apple – endowed with fitting epithets: the stranger claims that it is "wonderful", the narrator calls it "strange-looking", and Hinchcliff gradually begins to perceive it as "curious" [A 153-155]. Also the stranger himself is suspicious – as a character, and as the narrator of his extraordinary story. From the very beginning he is associated with darkness, and described as "curious", "singular" and "fantastic". Moreover, the motifs of the stranger's story (blazing rocks, smoke from the fire, molten brass of the sky, knife-blades slashing pitilessly) and experiences of his characters (bleeding wounds, torture, screams and cries, famine and thirst, amazement and terrible fear) have very consistent connotations. All these elements make the figure of the stranger identifiable as Satan. However, typically of *The Apple*, it remains but a suggestion – a provoking understatement. It is worthwhile to notice that in the narrator's comment quoted in the preceding paragraph, there is this trace of doubt visible in the "as if" structure used. Clearly, it is yet uncertain if the rules of the world have indeed been broken.

In consequence of the stranger's story, Hinchcliff's vision of the world is undermined. He begins to perceive the extraordinary colour and shape of the fruit reminiscent of the apples in the stranger's Eden. He also experiences a vision of Eden itself which makes him doubt his senses, undermines his self-assurance and renders him almost speechless. Evidently, discovering different rules of the world is a process entailing wonder and astonishment. The accumulating emotional and intellectual tension is visible in his unfinished statements represented in the text by means of graphic equivalents – dashes²³. This, in turn, results in a particularly strong semantic tension

²¹ The influence of the character's perception on the metamorphoses of space is noted by G. Filip, op. cit., p. 48. It can also be pointed out, following S. Modrzewski's suggestion in *Conrad a konwencje*. Gdańsk, Wyd. UG [n.d.], p. 84–85, that the individualised perception of the world is here closely related to the point of view determining this world. Thus the type of changes affecting the fictional reality seems particularly meaningful.

²² Compare discussion of R. Ingarden's concept of understatement in: H. Markiewicz, *Miejsca niedookreślenia w dziele literackim*. In: *Dzieło wobec odbiorcy. Selected Works*, vol. 4. Kraków, Universitas 1996, p. 47.

²³ Compare J. N. Tynianov's concept of equivalent. The unknown text remains "semantically optional" and only "partly revealing". "The instant of such a partial impenetrability is filled, as it were, with the maximum tension of the unavailable (but potentially given) elements. ...Thus, the phenomenon of equivalents does not decrease or impair a text but rather signals the full pressure, the charged tension of as yet undispersed dynamic elements." Translated by A. Zgorzelski in *The Systemic Equivalent as a Genological Factor*, p. 516.

which accumulates until the stranger completes Hinchcliff's successive unfinished thought, naming the apple as "the Forbidden Fruit". At this very moment the narrator authoritatively confirms the strangers "perfect sanity" and Hinchcliff seemingly yields to this idea hypothesising "[s]uppose it was?" [A 155]. However, the hesitant structure used here still implies he is not totally convinced.

Naming the fruit as "forbidden" by the stranger-Satan prepares the addressee for the scene of temptation – which indeed follows in the form of tempting with knowledge. However, the retrogressive execution of this scene does not satisfy the addressee's expectations. It is a very particular temptation since it gradually gets all its elements reversed and thus undermines all the hitherto established implications. The stranger begins with the typically satanic strategy of encouragement to accept the apple (knowledge): "»[t]hat would make it all clear and bright again. We should see into everything, through everything, into the deepest meaning of everything«". Yet, when challenged by Hinchcliff, the tempter begins to waver: "»[m]an has fallen. Merely to eat again could scarcely«, "my heart has failed me at the thought of all that one might know, that terrible lucidity – Suppose suddenly all the world became pitilessly clear?" Finally he reveals that he is afraid of this knowledge: "[a]nd worse – to know yourself, bare of your most intimate illusions... No merciful perspective" [A 155–156]. Now it is the stranger who does not finish most of his utterances, which evokes further semantic tension. It is not clear what such absolute knowledge means to him, what cannot be changed by eating the apple, nor what "terrible lucidity" he is afraid of. On the other hand, the semantic and phonetic planes of his utterances seem to support his earlier potential identification. The homogeneous connotations of the stranger's words such as "lusts", "weaknesses", "no merciful perspective", "world... pitilessly clear", and the phonetic realisation of the phrase "terrible lucidity" seem to invoke the stranger's proper name – Lucifer, and thus support his possible identification as Satan. Yet also here, the recognition brings further doubts: doesn't Lucifer see himself for what he is? May "the light-bringing"²⁴ be afraid of light (knowledge)? The reader is encouraged to speculate further: perhaps Satan only devilishly pretends that he is afraid of self-knowledge and knowledge as such. Perhaps it is yet another element – a very tricky one – of temptation.

The temptation is effective only for a moment. Mr Hinchcliff, who at first resolutely rejected the offer as "not my kind of knowledge", during the conversation becomes gradually attracted: "knowledge is power", "[that] would be a great advantage" [A 155-156]. However, he soon distances himself from such conjectures, suspecting it might be a kind of poisonous fruit. The temptation eventually fails when the mimetic space attracts Mr Hinchcliff's attention: "»-MWOOD,« he saw. He started convulsively. »Gracious!« said

²⁴ For etymology of the word "Lucifer", see: *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary on CD-ROM*.

Mr Hinchcliff. »Holmwood!« and the practical present blotted out the mystic realisations that had been stealing upon him”. Lexical choices in this utterance – differentiated here by means of superadded underlining [H. L.] – confirm the foreboding of a sly Satan gradually assuming control over the naive student.

This retrogressive execution of the scene, congruent with the reader's expectations, is yet again undermined by the stranger's behaviour. The tempter uses the rush of Hinchcliff's disembarking to make him accept the apple "instinctively". However, as the train pulls out, he already seems to regret it: "»[n]o!« shouted the stranger, and made a snatch at it as if to take it back," [A 156]. Yet again returns the tension evoked by reversal of the expected execution. The scene astonishes the reader as much as Hinchcliff. It is not clear if the stranger consciously manoeuvred Hinchcliff into accepting the fruit (he seemed to have given up temptation earlier). Why does he want the apple back (he seemed to be afraid of it earlier)? What does he shout (perhaps he will try to recover it later)? Mr Hinchcliff stands "astonished, staring at the end of the last waggon receding round the bend, and with the wonderful fruit in his hand," [A 156]. Such an unexpected execution of the scene provokes the reader to further conjectures: perhaps it was all a cunning Satanic stratagem calculated to stupefy Hinchcliff – will he eat the apple then? Or perhaps the stranger was indeed mad, and the apple was the source of his madness – will the new owner go insane as well? To some extent, Hinchcliff's subsequent behaviour confirms all of these possibilities.

In the remaining part of the story, which tells of the new Grammar School teacher's "début" in Holmwood, the depicted world becomes predominantly mimetic again; while the fantastic elements, which used to evoke terror, are ridiculed here. In this scene, the former ironic distance of the narrator (and the addressee) towards the main character is re-established. Additionally, direct and indirect signals of humour are introduced.²⁵ Seeing some people on the platform, Hinchcliff immediately assumes his ostentatious air from the beginning of the short story: again he wants to communicate his social position by means of his "studiously arranged" appearance. To his mind, everybody in the town recognises him and the apple considerably spoils the elegant effect of his posture. Thus, Mr Hinchcliff, "awkwardly concealing his sense of awkwardness", reviews in panic all the possible scenarios of getting rid of the "encumbrance". He tries to hide it desperately, but then the fruit seems to bulge in the pocket "dreadfully" and to wobble the hat "ludicrously". He imagines that all the pedestrians "regard him with interest", he feels their eyes fall "on the excrescence" immediately; he even fancies "ironical note in the voices". Thus, he nervously considers eating the apple (and attaining omniscience "there and then"!) but he desists at the

²⁵ For the distinction of "direct and indirect signals of humour" ("bezpośrednie i pośrednie sygnały humoru" – transl. H. L.), see A. Zgorzelski: "Pojedynek" jako nowela humorystyczna. In: *O nowelach Conrada*. Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Morskie 1984, p. 29–37.

thought of its "potent juice" staining his face and cuffs [A 157]. In consequence, the tension established earlier around the motif of the apple through an atmosphere of terror and uncertainty is here comically released.

Simultaneously, along with the augmenting signals of humour, the elements of the fantastic gradually lose force. Hinchcliff still believes that the apple is fantastic yet he has more mundane problems to attend to, which clear "his mental atmosphere". While he enquires after his way and transport for the luggage, and frets about producing the right impression on the people around, the extraordinary apple becomes an undesirable "addition... on his best appearance", and as such has no other significance. The narrator states directly that "the curious earnestness of the man in the train, and the glamour of the story he told, had, for a time, diverted the current of Mr Hinchcliff's thoughts," but then asserts that this feeling is gone.

Such a thorough change of attitude to the fantastic elements²⁶ is also visible on the phraseological level of the text. A novel manner of naming and describing the apple is introduced, which is in striking contrast with the former insistence on the fruit's wonderful quality and biblical phraseology. What used to be called "The Apple of the Tree of Knowledge", "the Fruit of the Tree", "the Forbidden Fruit", is now referred to as "the naive refreshment of an orange", "a juicy fruit", "a phosphorescent yellow tomato"²⁷ [A 153-157].

Due to a gradual evolution of the main character's behaviour from rational thinking to uncontrollable outbursts of emotion (he begins to curse!), also in this part of the story there is *suspense* at work. Hinchcliff's increasingly absurd ideas on what to do with the apple prepare the reader for some remarkable retrogressive execution of the scene. Afraid of ridicule, Mr Hinchcliff finally throws the "encumbrance" over the wall to an orchard adjoining the road. The narrator immediately informs that the teacher feels a sense of loss for a moment, but he may confidently pass the oncoming girls.

Further on, it turns out that Hinchcliff experiences a dream at night about the valley from the stranger's story, and he finally knows that what he, so "regardlessly", threw away "really was the Apple of the Tree of Knowledge". The narrator recounts that he wakes up unhappy and that such grief returns regularly, until one night he sets off to look for the apple [A 158]. In the silent, moonlit town, Hinchcliff for once acts against the rules: he slips out of the house, climbs over the walls and finally gets to the orchard. The reader is again induced to anticipate some extraordinary event.

In the last sentence of the short story, the narrator states authoritatively: "[b]ut nothing was to be found of it there among the dewy grass and the

²⁶ This is not only the attitude of Hinchcliff but also of the narrator and addressee which undergo change.

²⁷ These new names result from Hinchcliff's visualisations of other people's perception of the apple. Compare the ideas of Uspiensky about the point of view on phraseological level and in naming p. 25-32.

faint intangible globes of dandelion down". The syntactic structure used here stresses the semantic sense of the utterance very forcefully. The word "nothing" in subject position enhances its perlocutionary force.²⁸ Additionally, the space details seem to add credibility to the utterance through visualisation of place. Retrogressive execution of the final scene is not congruent with the horizon of expectations generated through the account of the way to the orchard. This is syntactically expressed by the initial position of the conjunction "but", which forewarns that the sentence will be in opposition to the previous utterances.

However, the above analysis does not explain the whole semantic tension brought by this final sentence of the short story. The doer of all the actions in the two preceding paragraphs (that is the whole *Nachtgeschichte*) was Hinchcliff. In the final sentence, through using object structure ("nothing was to be found of it"), the doer of "finding nothing" is generalised. It is no longer the ultimately unreliable Hinchcliff, but also the sender of the message and his addressee. And when the reader begins to check if indeed nothing of the apple was to be found there, he/she may perceive that the spatial motifs in the orchard constitutes an echo of the space of the stranger's Eden: here "dewy grass" (there grass like "knife-blades"); here dandelion down globes (there strange apple-globes). The gesture of Adam was likewise repeated when Hinchcliff threw the precious fruit away in annoyance! Might the apple, then, be yet hidden in the orchard? If so, why does the narrator so decisively deny it?

The key-word, or otherwise the metatextual commentary, is in this sentence the word "intangible". It is both the apple – as the depicted object, and *The Apple* – as the whole literary text, which is intangible here. The last sentence brings also the final resolution of the device of the fantastic in the short story. It ultimately reinforces the limited reliability of the fantastic elements – they are forcefully undermined by the subject "nothing". Virtually nothing of the fantastic stays in the fictional world apart from the uncertainty in the addressee's mind.

Throughout the short story, the devices of suggestion and understatement are used so as to evoke an expectant stance in the reader. Scene after scene, the addressee of the text is induced to anticipate some resolutions of the scenes but then he/she is invariably surprised by the retrogressive execution. All the time, there is alternatively induced doubt and assurance. The reader is repeatedly provoked to question and to believe the subsequent suggestions, but no ultimate judgements may be formulated due to the strategy of understatement. What is significant is that no doubt and no assurance, both in the course of action and in the whole of the text, is finite.

²⁸ Compare *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Ed. David Crystal. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers 1997.

In the short story *The Apple*, semantic and compositional "obscurity" generates the text's opalescence. It can be asserted that it is a text calculated for such iridescence used to achieve "the full enjoyment of its aesthetic character".²⁹ In each actual reading, the multiple understatements are to remain in the state of an implied, as if "folded", only-just-originated idea and as such they have an aesthetic function and make the text "self-focused"³⁰. This is the basis of the artistic and autotellic character of this text, which ultimately makes the reader experience what it is about³¹.

²⁹ Compare the use of the notion of "obscurity" proposed by R. Ingarden, *ibidem*, p. 214–215; and his discussion of the function of "opalescence" and "iridescence" p. 144. See also footnote 22.

³⁰ See R. Ingarden's consideration of the role of "understatements" quoted and analysed by H. Markiewicz: *Miejsca niedookreślenia w dziele literackim*, p. 55. About the ambiguous character of any "self-focused" message, and the poetic function making the text ambiguous, see R. Jakobson: *Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics*. In: *Style in Language*. Ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press 1960, p. 370–371.

³¹ Compare S. Modrzewski's discussion of autotellic quality in Conrad: *Conrad a konwencje*, Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo UG [n.d.].