

Abstract

„Icosaméron” – *the utopian metafiction of Giacomo Casanova*

The aim of this work is to comment on a little-known work of Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798), the *Icosameron*, published in Prague in 1787. It tells the adventures of two siblings, Edward and Elisabeth, in an underground world called Protocosme. After having gained recognition of indigenous inhabitants, Mégamicres, the traveller, establishes his own civilisation there. After his return to his native England, Edward's stay is told over twenty days, hence the title of the book.

The proposed analysis tries to identify metafictional structures in *Icosameron*, which critics categorise as “narrative utopia” or “imaginary journey”. The methodology is inspired by Jean-Paul Sermain's research – he defines metafiction as a particular dynamic of fiction. This dynamic challenges narrative strategies which create an illusion in literary works of the 17th and 18th centuries. As for the notion of utopia, the thesis is based on the works of Jean-Michel Racault, who analysed the narrative utopia model in the classical era.

The structure of the thesis tries to reflect the stages by which the metafiction acts in the interior of the narrative structure. Three levels are distinguished: the level of Edward's narration, the level of debates between the traveller's listeners, and the level of paratexts: the *Literal commentary of the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis* and a dedicatory letter to count Waldstein, Casanova's employer in Dux's castle.

The analysis of the first metafictional level concerns the geographic representation of the world situated in the heart of the Earth with civilisations of Mégamicres and Alfrède, descendants of Edward. This level also interrogates the traveller's self-representation. Thanks to his intelligence and skilful manoeuvres, Edward becomes an indisputable master in Protocosme. To tell his underground adventures, which were during eighty-one years, and to interest his listeners in the time of twenty days, Edward uses traditional methods in travel literature: descriptions, collective scenes, narrative anachronies, embedded stories, and portraits of his close friends. However, the traveller-narrator manages the tension between a descriptive mode and a narrative mode. The last one validates Edward's political rise and family success. Despite this positive representation, the traveller-narrator introduces narrative elements which contest his good intentions. The underground world doesn't turn out to be better than the surface world. A possible reading of methods concealed by the traveller, character and narrator, values Edward's reference world, via metafiction.

The second metafictional level comments on debates between Edward's listeners. Even though these representatives of wealthy backgrounds are opposed in their ideas belonging to tradition or to materialism, they are all looking for a philosophical message of Edward's journey. Comments of the most original characters, Burghlei and Milady Rutgland, lead to reconsidering instruments of reason. From this trial, it remains rehabilitated, despite its weaknesses. It is a philosophical research of an interpretation of a travel story, exposed in polylogue, a discussion with multiple voices, and discredits and affirms reflective activity at the same time. The obscure origin of the document, which shows these debates, weakens their form and contents in agreement with the metafictional principle.

The third level of metafiction includes the *Literal commentary of the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis* and the dedication. Libertine speculation about the biblical story, leaning on Edward's experience, puts in question traditional beliefs. The *Literal commentary*, like an added piece to the travel story, permits us to spot the Old Testament motifs in Edward's narration. But also, it shows to what extent the narration of twenty days exceeds them. The *Literal commentary* prolongs hesitations already present in previous levels, instead of reinforcing the prestige of Edward's narration, weakened by the accusation of fictive translation.

In all work, metafiction affirms the foundation of illusion, and at the same time, it contests it by discreet but meaningful gestures. Its ultimate goal is to value the critical thinking which is solicited on each level of literary construction.



Stanisław Świtlik