

## *Science Fiction In Latvian Literature*

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**Abstract.** The present paper is devoted to the overview of the beginnings and development of the genre of science fiction in Latvian literature. Similarly to other popular fiction genres, science fiction in Latvian literature has not been very popular due to social and historical reasons; however, during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century several authors have at least partially approached the genre and created either fully fledged science fiction works or literary works with science fiction elements in them. The paper looks at the first attempts to create science fiction-related works during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; it then provides an insight into three epochs when the genre received comparatively wider attention: 1) the 1930s produced mainly adventure novels with elements of science fiction mirroring the correspondent world tendencies of that time period; 2) the period between the 1960s and 80s saw authors who had the courage to leave the strict platform of Soviet Social Realism, experimenting with a variety of science fiction elements in the postmodern literary context which allowed for a wide metaphoric interpretation. This epoch also saw the emergence of a specific phenomenon – humorous / satiric science fiction which the authors employed in order to offer social criticism of the Soviet lifestyle; 3) the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the emergence of several science fiction works by a new generation of writers: these works presently comprise the majority of newly published science fiction. The paper outlines the main tendencies of the newest Latvian science fiction such as authors experimenting with a variety of themes, the preference for dystopian future scenarios and humour. The paper offers brief conclusions as to the possible future of Latvian science fiction in context of the current developments in the genre.

**Keywords:** dystopia; forecasting the future; genre; science fiction; technologies

### Introduction

When it comes to science fiction, the tradition of the genre in Latvia is nowhere near as deeply ingrained as in many of the neighboring countries (such as Lithuania, Estonia or Russia). While the literary history of Latvia does present several attempts at creating works in the genre of fantasy – the majority of these attempts being rooted in national folktales and legends and their Romantic

adaptations –, the possibilities offered by the genre of science fiction initially seem to have held little appeal for Latvian authors. The first impression when overlooking the scope of Latvian literature might be that out of all the traditional themes and plots offered by science fiction only the concept of time travel has been included in a relatively larger number of works of fiction, but even on these occasions the writers have used this concept mainly as a means to transport the reader back to the heavily romanticized heroic Latvian past, or to deliver insights into Latvian cultural heritage, i.e. the purposes for including the science fiction trope have been of purely educational nature. The Latvian writers, so it seems, have never dared to undertake a serious attempt to try to look into the future – an assumption confirmed by literary scholars. “Latvian novelists are not captivated by the concept of a purely imaginary world. They rather choose to stay on solid ground and use a historical time and place as basis for their fantastic inventions,” such is the conclusion drawn by the literary scientist Ingrida Kiršentāle in her book *Prozas žanri (The Types of Prose Fiction)*, published a couple of decades ago (Kiršentāle 1991: 78)<sup>1</sup>. There is in the scholarly works also a considerable lack of clear definition regarding the science fiction genre as well: for instance, researcher Vitolds Valeinis in his work *Ievads literatūrzinātnē (An Introduction to Literary Science)* puts the science fiction novel among the subcategories of the wider range of the adventure novel (Valeinis 1994: 248), whereas Andrejs Grāpis in his textbook *Literatūrteorija vidusskolai (Literary Theory for College Students)* briefly characterises the “fantastic novel” as a genre that “prepares the human being for the changes caused by scientific development, showing psychological, moral and social collisions as a specific warning about the future ruin of civilisation” (Grāpis 2001: 113) which is a definition that only partially covers the wide possibilities of science fiction themes and tropes.

However, the present paper attempts to demonstrate the fact that several Latvian writers have from time to time created works either properly belonging to the genre or at least with science fiction elements in them, exploring parallel dimensions as well as the far reaches of space. The paper thus is an attempt to provide an insight into their visions, pertaining specifically to the realm of science fiction, the fantasy genre having been discussed elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> All the quotes from Latvian in this paper have been translated by writer and translator Laura Dreize solely for the purpose of this publication.

## What is Science Fiction?

The elements of science fiction as a literary genre have been present in literature ever since the Classical Age and some scholars even put the beginning of science fiction as far as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Rome when Lucian of Samostata wrote his *True Stories*. The majority of researchers, however, agree that the science fiction genre was formed over the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; its development owing to the rapid technological progress and shifting social structures of this particular period, the last statement concerning, of course, mainly Europe and Northern America, where, consequently, the basic tradition of the science fiction genre was formed. The epoch itself added to the formation of the genre – finding themselves in a situation where the past was the only understandable category of time and the future seemed full of endless possibilities offered by the rapid development of science and technologies, science fiction writers felt intrigued by the chance to try to predict the course of the future, as is well demonstrated by the works of such authors as Jules Verne, Herbert George Wells and even Edgar Allan Poe.

A common misconception states that science fiction is only interested in technologies. In fact, literary criticism regarding genre fiction has long since proved the contrary – ever since the very beginnings of the genre its authors have been studying people both as individuals and as part of a society, and the adaptability (or inflexibility) of human nature in the context of technological and social development. As stated by the scholar David Seed, “Applied science – technology – has been much more widely discussed in SF because every technological innovation affects the structure of our society and the nature of our behavior.” Moreover, Seed adds: “It is helpful to think of an SF narrative as an embodied thought experiment whereby aspects of our familiar reality are transformed or suspended.” (Seed 2001: 2) So, in the science fiction genre as we know it, science is always representing means to reach a certain end, rather than an end itself. “Effective science fiction does not transform science into fantasy, even though it may give the appearance of doing so,” concludes scholar Roy Arthur Swanson. “It brings us back to the limitations of science by means of fantasy or fiction.” (Swanson 1976: 278) Using scientific achievements and social phenomena to create a vision of a possible future, however near or far, writers have attempted to bring out the patterns of human emotions and behavior in this state of altered reality. In order to create a believable vision of this reality, themes such as the development of artificial intelligence, invention and uses of cloning, life in the post-nuclear world, close encounters with extraterrestrial intelligence, the uncontrollable development of machinery, overpopulation, and time travel are used – these are all among the most popular themes discussed in science fiction literature.

Depending on the themes present, literary theoreticians have further divided science fiction into various subgenres: hard science fiction, which pays the most attention to the exact depiction of scientific discoveries; soft science fiction, where style, plot, and characters take precedence over scientific accuracy; utopia/dystopia, where the main points of interest are social structures distinct from ours; adventure science fiction; cyberpunk, which deals mainly with predicting the evolution of computer technology; space opera, steam-punk and many others. There exist also a number of more detailed classifications, yet no final common classification has been introduced. However, it is indisputable that science fiction has for several decades been declared a full-fledged literary genre, which has been extensively researched not only by literary science, but also by philosophy, theology and even theoretical physics. A number of encyclopedias, books, research papers, and theses are available on the topic as well; however, in Latvian the topic is still open to research.

### Science Fiction in Latvian Literature: the Beginnings

It hardly takes the fingers of two hands to count the works of Latvian literature that can be at least partially considered science fiction. The first unfinished drafts of Latvian sci-fi short stories can be found in the posthumously discovered notes of the Latvian Romantic Jānis Poruks (1871–1911) whose literary heritage consists mainly of lyric poetry and melancholic short stories: therefore the attempts to write stories in such a rational genre can be called unexpected at the very least. These drafts are, however, still very vague, and it is difficult to predict what might have become of them had the stories been completed.

The first finished narratives containing the characteristics of science fiction can be observed in the writer and journalist, co-author of the declaration *Mūsu mākslas motīvi* (*The Motifs of Our Art*) Eduards Cālītis' allegories *Kinkinas plūdi* (*The Flood of Quinquina*) and *Milža gals* (*The Giant's Demise*, both published in 1910), as well as other works. As the publisher and literary critic Imants Belogrīvs states in his extensive essay concerning Latvian fantasy and science fiction *Zvaigžņu purva bridēji* (*Through Marshes of Starlight*), these texts are “somewhat metaphorical, somewhat reminiscent of Swift and mysterious, empty lands where time stands still, the laws of physics operate differently and such notions as mind, will, love etc. are personified” (Belogrīvs 2004: 128).

The first one to demonstrate the ability to create a full-length sci-fi novel exhibiting the prophetic power often attributed to authors of the genre is the poet, writer, and politician Gotfrīds Milbergs (Skuju Frīdis). In 1925 he publishes a novel *Sidrabota saule lec* (*The Dawn of a Silver Sun*) where he uses

truly *fantastic* precision to describe the Russian (Muscovite) invasion in the Baltics in 2107 and the subsequent occupation, many of the details predicting real events that occurred fifteen years later. Sadly, that is essentially the only reason for the novel to be worth mentioning, as from an artistic viewpoint it is rather lacking. Granted, it is rather amusing to read that in 2107 a radio in every aircraft is considered an incredible novelty, or how swastika-adorned Latvian airplanes conquer Muscovy, resulting in the deposition of the regime of Czar Cyrill and the establishment of Latvian/Russian bilingualism. These sketches do not, however, promote the “willing suspension of disbelief”, as Samuel T. Coleridge defines the readers’ reaction to fantastic elements (Coleridge).

Ten years later, the prose author Jānis Veselis writes several works with science fiction elements in them – for instance, self-made spaceships appear in the first two novels of his trilogy *Tērauda dvēsele* (*Heart of Steel*, 1938). These scenes, however, are seriously lacking in credibility from the technological point of view, since the homemade rocket is shown, for instance, as taking off from one countryside village and landing in the next. Consequently, the fantastic elements in these novels are of such poetic nature they can easily be interpreted as a symbol or an allegory rather than as a serious attempt at creating a science fiction work.

It must also be noted that during this period of time, the boundaries between science fiction and fantasy are still blurred and the authors write what can be defined as (or what they themselves define as) “fantastic realism” that embodies the characteristics of both genres, while literary critics provide next to no definition or division among them.

The interwar period finally sees an upsurge in local adventure fiction. Imants Belogrīvs writes: “1936 sees the beginning of a mini-era of Latvian science fiction with the emergence of classic adventure novels, all following the simplistic outline of American pulp fiction of the 1930s: there’s a plot, a vaguely defined setting, fast-paced action, oversimplified character relationships.” (Belogrīvs 2004: 130) Science fiction themes are present in several novels by Vilis Lācis: *Ceļojums uz Kalnu pilsētu* (*The Journey to the Mountain City*, 1939) deals with questions related to genetic engineering, extraterrestrial intelligence, and the relationship between human and machine, whereas *Cietumu valsts* (*Prison State*) investigates the economic aspects of a utopian society. The notion of utopia is also explored in Ansis Gulbis’ novels *Jaunā valsts* (*The New Country*, 1932) and *Druvā un karā* (*In Field and War*, 1934).

In the adventure novels published over this period of time (*Pasaules glābēji* (*Saviors of the World*, 1937) and *Profesora Sūnas brīnišķīgais eliksīrs* (*The Miraculous Elixir of Professor Sūna*, 1938) by Miķelis Paulockis, *Dzīve zvaigžņu pasaulē* (*Life in the Realm of Stars*, 1938) by Jēkabs Zaļkalns, etc.) the catalyst for

the action is often a fantastic presumption: an encounter with visitors from other planets, a supernatural invention, supermodern future technologies, telepathy, etc. The wide range of themes and the gradual progress towards more complex content seemed to predict then that Latvian science fiction would gradually see a development equal to that of other countries, since the preference of science fiction elements in adventure stories was then a worldwide tendency which under suitable conditions would probably have developed in a stable genre tradition in Latvia as it did in Western countries during the following decades. Unfortunately, the natural evolution of the genre in Latvia was considerably impacted by the impending Soviet occupation.

### Science Fiction Under Soviet Regime

By claiming that art and literature must first and foremost serve as an ideological weapon, the Soviet regime controlled all creative expressions. It is interesting to note that out of all the main genres of fantastic literature – namely, science fiction, fantasy and horror fiction – only science fiction in the USSR was allowed relatively free development (which resulted in USSR science fiction tradition growing into the second most widespread after that of the USA). However, a sort of an ideological *Berlin wall* was erected between the fantasy, horror and science fiction genres. The explanation of this fact is obvious: the general direction of science fiction corresponded perfectly with the ideological aims of the Soviet regime: to propagate the unstoppable technological and social progress of the human race, the “conquest of stars”, and the attainment of the perfect future in our own reality – the essential elements of the genre conformed with the basic principles of dialectical materialism as well. Of course, when defining science fiction as a genre the ideological difference between Soviet and Western science fiction was expressly stressed: “The USA saw the massive reproduction of the superman hero who fights the interstellar gangsters – this fiction often lacked artistic quality. On the other hand, Soviet science fiction tends to deeply discuss social and philosophical problems as well as to stress the meaning of scientific progress.” (*Zinātniskā fantastika* 1987: 647) Obviously, fantasy and horror fiction did not fit these principles, so for several decades the evolution of these genres in the Soviet republics including Latvia was all but halted. The development of science fiction, however, took a different turn.

During the period in Latvia science fiction was extensively available in translations. The works of the master science fiction writers (Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Robert Shekley, Stanislav Lem, and others) were abundantly published not only in Latvia but all over the Soviet Union, and the same was true

for several sci-fi anthologies and series (such as *Fantastikas pasaulē* (*The World of Science Fiction*), *Piedzīvojumi. Fantastika. Ceļojumi* (*Adventure. Science Fiction. Travel*)); moreover, quality science fiction surfaced from the Russian community of Latvia (for instance, the works of Vladimir Mihailov). However, when it came to foreign authors, the Soviet literary environment chose stories and novels that corresponded with its ideology: the regime acknowledged only those Western sci-fi writers who demonstrated the tendency to expressly criticize and oppose the establishment of their respective countries emphasizing, for instance, the drawbacks of capitalism: it was only these works that were translated and, after being submitted to censure, published in the Soviet Union. For Soviet authors, on the other hand, any form of protest was forbidden – after all, what could you possibly oppose in the land of universal happiness? Instead, it was with growing intensity that the Soviet writers celebrated the “most progressive country” and the bright future of Communism. So, science fiction was turned into a tool for promoting dialectical materialism and Soviet ideals, whereas the fantasy genre was deliberately silenced since these principles could not be applied to it. Unfortunately, this attitude has left its mark on the modern perception of science fiction in Latvia (and possibly elsewhere in the ex-USSR), as its subjugation to ideology contributed to the degradation of the genre, while the fifty-year long ignorance of the fantasy genre still raises questions as to the genre’s validity.

Surprisingly enough, even the relative freedom of genre did very little to fill the bookshelves with Latvian sci-fi works. There were some traces in children’s literature: *Lidojums uz Mēnesi* (*A Journey to the Moon*, 1947) by Anna Sakse, Frīcis Rokpelnis’ children’s play *Zaļais stars* (*The Green Ray*, 1962), as well as Alberts Jansons’ story *Lielā Kristapa jaunais amats* (*Lielais Kristaps’ New Office*, 1975), in which contemporary children are transported back to Latvia’s age of serfdom; author uses time travel to paint a hyperbolic picture of slavery and class struggle. Writer and critic Andrejs Upītis, however, demanded that the “Soviet children’s literature must offer a vital, realistic, and aesthetic depiction of real life”. With ideology in the forefront and social values replacing ethics, the perception of the fantastic shifts as well: “The giants and gnomes of old are ousted by the working man and the powerful tools created by science and technology.” (Osmanis 1977: 407)

The scene in the adult fiction was somewhat different, yet the number of science fiction works was still small and the authors were heavily controlled by ideology as well. Vilis Lācis revised his afore-mentioned novel *Ceļojums uz Kalnu pilsētu* (*The Journey to the Mountain City*), so that it complied with the pro-Soviet ideology, its new title being *Ceļojums uz Norieta pilsētu* (*The Journey to the Waning City*, 1959). Anatols Imermanis’ novel *Mortona piramīda* (*Morton’s Pyramid*, 1971) earned certain (yet quite modest) renown as the first piece of

Latvian literature dealing with the issue of artificial intelligence, asking the same question Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* did: what could happen when technology has advanced so far it can create an intelligence superior to that of humans?

Over the course of the 1960s and 80s, with censure gradually easing up, the echoes of foreign literary tendencies reached Latvian literature and fantastic elements once again were becoming an instrument of creative expression. One of the most specific aspects the science fiction motives during this epoch appeared in the periodic editions devoted to humor and satire such as *Dadzis* and *Dadža kalendārs* (*Dadzis' Calender*) where a number of Latvian authors (Andrejs Skailis, Žanis Ezītis, Maija Kudapa and others) published short prose – technically science fiction featuring interstellar travels, time travels, extraterrestrial life etc., – which were in fact feuilletons aimed at social criticism of the less than favorable aspects of Soviet everyday life, such as the lack of basic goods in the shops, the bribery system in every possible industry, consistent “tradition” of stealing from workplaces, etc. Of course, none of the authors dared ridicule the most dangerous aspects of Soviet life – when such themes as heavy armament etc. were mentioned, they always concerned “the degrading West”. Even so, in a number of these stories the authors approached the reality with such precision it is still unclear how the censorship allowed these texts to be published. Yet, in all details, these texts belong expressly to the genre of science fiction.

On another level, fantastic motifs, the relative concept of reality, the merging of different levels of spacetime, and other elements of fantasy were more and more frequently used in metaphorical sense and Postmodern literary context; the predominant literary features of this period in this regard being narratives reminiscent of a dream state, text fragmentation, the amalgamation of literary genres, the divergence of space and time categories, and psychotic characters. During these decades, several authors, for example, Vladimirs Kaijaks, write a number of stories combining the traits of science fiction and horror. These manifestations, however, were few and in all senses just representing individual flickers of indisputable talent.

### Science Fiction Reborn?

In the literary jumble during the Latvian National Awakening and the following years fantastic fiction does not even see a proper birth, never mind a rebirth. Although the removal of censorship allowed for the appearance of a wide range of translated fiction in various genres, including some science fiction, the local authors obviously were not prepared to write fiction in genres that were for such



a long period considered unworthy of serious attention; the authors therefore – most probably – lacked both the theoretical background and the knowledge of the most famous works in the genre since, as it was already described, the selection of science fiction published in Latvian translation was specifically limited in range.

Several Latvian authors, however, attempted to write some science fiction, the results more often than not being rather curious, but the quality of the works being far from excellent. For instance, the novel *Izredzētie* (*The Chosen*, 1993) by Austris Kalmiņš reads like a weak imitation of the worst examples of Western “disaster sci-fi”. It presents a world where the majority of people die as a result of a mysterious catastrophe, and four survivors – two (Canadian and Latvian) men and two (Finnish and Japanese) women – take to laser weapons to fight a mafia comprised of Lords of the Planet who are responsible for subjecting the human race to a deadly virus and want to conquer the world. The storyline was unfortunately full of clichés, the writing was insipid, and the novel was widely regarded as a failure.

Several attempts were made by writers to include such popular science fiction theme as time travel in their works in order to move the adventures forward or else to introduce the reader to some aspects of history – no wonder, then, that this trope was mainly used in works for young adults. For instance, in Andris Puriņš’ young adult novel *Bezrūpīgie ceļotāji* (*The Carefree Travellers*, 1989) and Laimdota Sēle’s book *Spoguļa pārbaude* (*Look in the Mirror*, 1994) time travel is used to unite reality with fantasy. In the former novel, modern teenagers visit medieval Rīga, a spaceship, and other planets, while in the latter the protagonists get acquainted with their city Ventspils’ history four hundred years ago. Neither of these works became especially popular, and the time travel theme in both was from the genre point of view severely underdeveloped, since it was not used to discuss the possible implications of such a possibility itself, but rather just as an unexplained moving force of the adventures.

There appeared, however, several literary works that exploited science fiction themes and tropes quite successfully, if not always in the classic meaning. For instance, Egils Ermansons wrote two of the so called “holocaust” visions – novels *Cilvēks ar bērnu ratiņiem* (*The Man with the Baby Pram*, 1994) and *Mala* (*The Edge*, 1999), both exploring a situation where in modern Latvia a string of mysterious disasters take away not only the citizens, but also the political and socioeconomic structure of the Soviet regime, allowing the ones who have been left behind to begin life anew. The theme of the post-apocalypse here was used as a metaphor for the loss of the habitual lifestyle that shook the people considerably, since the life had to literally begin anew with no knowledge of how to do it. These are two of the best examples of post-apocalyptic science

fiction in Latvian literature. Another post-apocalyptic work of this time is the dystopia by Pauls Bankovskis *Plāns ledus* (*Thin Ice*, 1999) which uses the point of view of two children to describe life on our planet in a modern ice age induced by an ecological disaster. For the first time ever Latvian literature sees also the emergence of the alternate history genre – in his novels *1945 Rīga* and *1940* Ainārs Zelčs plays with the scenario where Germany wins World War II and the president of Latvia orders the army to resist the invading Soviet armed forces in 1940 (which did not in fact happen), respectively. These versions did not become especially popular, though. These works largely used the science fiction themes and tropes in order to try to put the various aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian history in perspective, not to exploit the themes themselves. A little different were the works by Vladimirs Kaijaks who continued crafting short stories with fantastic motifs. In the anthology *Vecis* (*Old Man*) published in 1992, the story *Mašīna* (*Machine*) borrows a well-known trope: a technologically advanced future machine falls in love with its creator and nearly kills him out of jealousy. In Kaijaks' anthology *Masku teātris* (*The Theatre of Masks*) all stories combine elements of fantasy, science fiction, and horror. One of the stories – *Mēle* (*Tongue*) – depicts a partly fantastic, partly absurd situation: after receiving a tongue transplant the patient inherits the manner of speaking, thoughts, and personality of the donor. Another story – *Ralfa Keninga eksperiments* (*Ralfs Kenings' Experiment*) —fleshes this theme out in full: a brain transplant carries the whole personality over to the new body, and this allows the inventor (who doesn't concern himself much with morality) to let his aging beloved choose a new body among the young and beautiful women living nearby. These stories concentrated more on psychological and social consequences of advanced technologies – which corresponds to one of the objectives of science fiction genre – rather than used the themes for metaphoric purposes and the previously discussed authors did.

After the publication of these works science fiction in Latvian literature, sporadic as it was, for some time becomes practically nonexistent.

### The Newest Tendencies

Taking into account this slow and fragmentary development, the following facts are all the more astonishing. During the first years of the second decade of the new millennium several original works fully corresponding to the staples of science fiction appeared over just three years: 2010–2012. The reason for this may well be the fact that a younger generation of authors had reached the point when they could attempt creating fiction of the kind they loved to read most.

It must be noted here that the prevalence of young authors is one of the most telling features of the current “new wave” of fantastic writing in Latvia (of only science fiction as well as of fantasy) which bears witness to the fact that there has emerged a young generation that is not influenced by the Soviet indoctrinations of particular genres as being “inferior” to Realism, and they set out to create works unaffected by inner and outer censorship which so heavily influenced their predecessors. Another reason might be that the hectic time period after regaining the national independence had finally settled down, the abundant translations of fiction of poor quality had left the readers disappointed and the time had ripened for local quality fiction. It may have also been of help that several publishing houses around that time turned greater attention to genre fiction: such global young adult genre fiction phenomena as the *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer and *Hunger Games* trilogy by Susan Collins had become so immensely popular that they managed to shake the publishing world out of the traditional contempt for genre fiction; consequently, the choices for translated genre fiction grew ever wider and several literary competitions were held which as a result produced a number of the works discussed further.

The new science fiction comprised short stories as well as novels. The short story anthology *Bohēmijas zaglis* (*The Bohemian Thief*) by writer and journalist Didzis Sedlenieks offered a light and witty take on popular science fiction tropes – the merging of timelines, artificial intelligence, the influence extraterrestrial civilizations have upon Earth, and many others, linking the plot with historical facts and figures from Latvian folklore. In the anthology we find a tale about the “much anticipated” global catastrophe of 2012, a story about another civilization’s fruitless attempts at contacting us earthlings, and even stories filled with medieval mysticism in the vein of Dan Brown and *Da Vinci Code*. The collection consequently is largely humorous in style, the author having chosen to play with characters, plot lines, and stereotypes instead of discussing global themes seriously. And yet, this is the first fully fledged science fiction story collection ever to appear in Latvian literature.

Three dystopian novels were published almost simultaneously during this same period of time, all written by young female writers: *Laimes monitorings* (*Happiness by the Mile*) by Laura Dreiže, *75 dienas* (*75 Days*) by Ilze Eņģele, and *Digitālo neaizmirstulīšu lauks* (*The Field of Digital Forget-Me-Nots*) by Ellena R. Landara: all three novels being finalists of one of the mentioned literary competitions. Each of the novels offers an interpretation of the theme that in the last 20 years has been predominant in young adult science fiction – a vision of a relatively not-so-distant future (about a hundred years) of a local or global scale where technological advances contribute to dehumanization and other negative effects on society.

The year 2012 saw the Latvian translation of the science fiction anthology *Dubultnieki un citi stāsti* (*Seeing Double and Other Stories*) – a collection of stories by the Latvian author and triple Nebula nominee Toms Kreicbergs *alias* Tom Crosshill, previously published mainly in American science fiction magazines. This publication causes quite a stir among literary critics and is a Latvian Annual Literature Award nominee for Best Debut of 2012. When it comes to the themes used by the author, over the last fifty years they have been widely discussed in both literature and film (of course, in foreign countries): the concept of humans held hostage by their own technological achievements, the attempts of artificial intelligence to emulate human behavior, the paradoxes of time travel, and the creator's responsibility for their creations. One theme that is present in several of Kreicberg's stories is the so-called "jack-stream" – a probable future technology that links together the minds of several people in a natural or induced state of sleep, allowing them to hear and experience the life of the other person from a safe perspective. In several stories, this idea enables the author to explore another theme that, in science fiction, has always taken precedence over technology – the relationship a person has with oneself, with other people, and their day and age. During the same year, writer and stage director Baņuta Rubess' young adult novel *Good Companions* (*Labie draugi*) is published, analyzing a situation where a future school offers impeccably programmed robots as the perfect friends for the students. Is a robot a friend or rather – a foe?

Among the latest additions to the Latvian science fiction bookshelf are two anthologies of short stories: *Purpura karaļa galmā* (*In the Court of the Crimson King*, 2012) and *Zilie jūras vēršī* (*Blue Sea Oxen*, 2015), comprising both fantasy and science fiction stories. The collections confirm that a wide range of science fiction motifs is of interest to the authors (most of them debutants): they tell, for example, of aliens in the Latvian Parliament, of space travelers, post-apocalyptic hermits, and inhabitants of a distant future, to mention just a few of the themes. The third anthology of this kind is currently under way as well.

Several Latvian authors have lately turned to the science fiction genre in order to write for teens and young adults. In his novel *Kristofers un Ēnu ordenis* (*Kristofers and the Order of Shadows*) writer Arno Jundze blends elements of sci-fi and cryptography fiction; in the novel, a Latvian teenager Kristofers learns about the mystical Order of Shadows that controls travel through spacetime and discovers secrets hidden right beside us in the streets, buildings, and churches of Riga. In the novel *X Ralphi Indrae jeb Neparastā ekspedīcija* (*X Ralphie Indrae, or the Extraordinary Expedition*) Didzis Sedlenieks gives his protagonist Ralfs a time machine that lets him travel back to ancient times where Ralfs and his friend Indra come in contact with prehistoric animals and meet aliens; the plot is fueled by adventures, but Sedlenieks does not delve into the theory behind

time travel. In her debut young adult adventure novel *Ala (The Cave)* Māra Ozola offers a look at Latvia after a global apocalypse, allowing a group of ninth-graders and their teacher to restart civilization.

All the aforementioned works contain traits characteristic of young adult science fiction – the plot is based on fantastical assumptions, the character development of the teen protagonists stems from actively exploring the foundations of unknown worlds (while simultaneously learning more about themselves), etc. Rather symptomatic is the fact that these works addressed to teens are written by older authors, so a more-or-less pronounced presence of didactic tone is inevitable; another flaw is the author's ignorance of the relevant scientific material. But the main point remains – adventure-filled and informatively charged science fiction works are slowly regaining their place in Latvian young adult literature.

Two of the recently published young adult sci-fi novels, however, shift their focus from action and suspense to setting and methodology of the genre that constructs their basis – *Tikšanās laikā (A Timely Encounter)* by Elizabete Eglīte and *Sektors 18-08 (Sector 18-08)* by Ilze Eņģeļe. Eglīte's novel is a somewhat traditional story about a time portal that allows a girl from the 21<sup>st</sup> century to meet a boy from the 18<sup>th</sup> century; this encounter takes place in Latvia and both time periods are portrayed in meticulous detail. At the heart of the tale there is the question of whether people from two different times can stay together, which lends the novel a high level of emotional saturation. The theme of Eņģeļe's novel – space travel – aims to place it on the shelf of “hard” science fiction, however, the characters are also young adults.

The latest science fiction work published just on December 2015 is the novel *Mēness teātris (Moon Theatre)* by Ieva Melgalve. Formally it falls within the category of post-apocalyptic works, as it depicts a world where but a single “lifeboat” remains after a global catastrophe – a giant theater where on several dozen stages different shows are enacted to suit all the spectators' tastes. Eerie circumstances confirm the clichéd statement “all the world's a stage”, actors lose their identity until nothing remains but the roles they are playing, controlled by vigilant and malevolent artificial intelligence in the guise of mimes, or robots. Nevertheless, conforming with the rules of the genre, a few of the actors wish to break out of this vicious cycle and find the truth about life – if any still remains.

It is possible to conclude that Latvian writers have undeniably demonstrated both talent and ideas to create quality science fiction works. Although the genre has been slowly emerging in Latvian literature over the period of more than a hundred years, it is during the present day that the possibilities of seeing quality science fiction appearing are highest. The Latvian authors, especially those belonging to the younger generation, are well-equipped to discuss themes

that have been topical in science fiction for a century or more, but they are also following the current tendencies in world science fiction – the prevalence of young adult science fiction/adventure novel and young adult dystopia being among the most popular tendencies. It is perhaps not without reason, then, to hope for a future formation of a stable local science fiction tradition that we most probably already see emerging now.

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