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## SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

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ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8384-289X>**Some aspects of extraterrestrial life in science fiction**

**Abstract:** the purpose of the article is to trace how science fiction deals with the theme of otherness in terms of the interaction between the concepts of aliens and earthlings, resulting in the perception of earthlings as aliens. Until now, this approach has not been used. The research was conducted on a wide range of science fiction authors, including S. de Bergerac, F. Godwin, H. Wells, H. P. Lovecraft, I. Yefremov, R. Heinlein, R. Bradbury, J. Corey, S. Lem, the Strugatsky brothers, N. Stephenson, P. Watts. Comparative motif analysis was used. The article notes that the concept of aliens in science fiction can develop in two directions. They can be seen as creatures similar to earthlings in physical and psychological aspects (a type of neighbor /inhabitant of another village), contact with them is possible and beneficial. Alternatively, they can be portrayed as completely different and terrifying creatures (a type of monster), contact with them is deadly or impossible. In science fiction, earthlings who have undergone some kind of mutation may be considered as “the different others”, even aliens. A characteristic feature of homo alius in science fiction is their language, which is presented as equally mutated through hybridization. The way that homo alius is perceived in relation to normal human beings in science fiction is always ambiguous, leading to a variety of relationships between the concepts within the semantic field of “friend or foe”.

**Key words:** earthlings; transhumanism; monster; H. Wells; species divergence; otherness; Strugatsky; hybridization of language.

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## НАУЧНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

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ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8384-289X>**Некоторые аспекты проблематики инопланетности в научно-фантастической литературе**

**Аннотация:** цель статьи – отследить специфику разработки научной фантастикой проблематики иного в аспекте взаимодействия представлений об инопланетянах и землянах, приводящего к восприятию землян как инопланетян. До настоящего момента подобный подход не применялся. Исследование проведено на материале авторов, представляющих широкий диапазон научно-фантастической литературы: С. де Бержерака, Ф. Годвина, Г. Уэллса, Г.Ф. Лавкрафта, И. Ефремова, Р. Хайнлайна, Р. Брэдли, Дж. Кори, С. Лема, братьев Стругацких, Н. Стивенсона, П. Уоттса. Используется методология сопоставительного мотивного анализа. В статье отмечается, что представление об инопланетянах в художественной литературе разрабатывается по двум направлениям: либо как о существах весьма близких землянам физиологически и психологически (тип соседа/жителя другой деревни), контакт с которыми возможен и продуктивен, либо как о максимально инаковых, монструозных созданиях (тип

чудовища), контакт с которыми смертельно опасен или невозможен. В качестве фигуры иного, вплоть до статуса инопланетян, в научно-фантастическом тексте рассматриваются и земляне, подвергшиеся мутациям того или иного рода. Характерная черта *homo alius* в научной фантастике – язык, который подается как равным образом мутировавший по типу гибридизации. Восприятие *homo alius* по отношению к человеку обычному в научной фантастике всегда неоднозначно и порождает разнообразные взаимоотношения концептов из семантического поля «свой-чужой».

**Ключевые слова:** земляне; трансгуманизм; чудовище; Г. Уэллс; видовое расхождение; инаковость; Стругацкие; гибридизация языка.

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**Информация о конфликте интересов:** автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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## Introduction

The theme of “the other” as different and alien is fundamental to science fiction. Irina Samorukova convincingly stated: “When we talk about a fantastic plot, we should talk... about the event in which something fundamentally different becomes an essential participant. This difference then unfolds into a fantastic plot” (Samorukova 2013, p. 10). Our understanding of what is “different” is formed through comparison to the usual. Humans are the obvious starting point here. Extraterrestrial life forms as a theme in science fiction arise from this comparison. Some transformations of humans that lead them away from their usual state (physiologically, psychologically, morphologically) toward “the other”, can also form the basis for a science fiction plot. Such transformations fit into the topic of transhumanism, which encompasses the consequences of transcending the boundaries set by nature when the violation of the usual system of properties assumed to be human occurs.

In this regard, it is worth noting the nonce word combination “*homo alius*” that was created and used by the publishers of A. Belyaev’s works as a summarizing title to combine his novels “The Amphibian Man”, “The Last Man from Atlantis”, and “The Man Who Lost His Face” into one volume (Belyaev 2021). The publishers do not offer any specific explanations for the choice of the expression, as it may be intuitive: we are discussing certain significant differences between the characters and ordinary people. This word combination appears to be suitable and useful in describing the subject of our study: the features of the science fiction view of a human – originally an Earthly being – as an alien.

The purpose of this article is to understand how science fiction explores the theme of “the other” as different and alien, in terms of the interaction between concepts of extraterrestrials and Earthlings, leading to a perception of Earthlings as extraterres-

trials. To do this, we will examine the interaction between two key themes: 1) human perceptions of extraterrestrial life, and 2) the modification of human beings over significant periods of time under certain circumstances. The study will be based on the material from a wide range of science fiction literature. A comparative motif analysis will be used to draw reasonable and convincing conclusions from the data.

It should be noted that this approach has not been used until now. Several works explore the origins and specific features of the portrayal of extraterrestrial beings in science fiction from a cultural and philosophical perspective.

K. Ivanov sees the reason for the flourishing of the theme of extraterrestrial life in the 20th century culture in “a complex worldview that at the turn of the 20th century led to the emergence of instrumental cognitive industries such as racial determination, physical anthropology, and ethnogeography”. (Ivanov 2018, p. 186). Fictional extraterrestrial creatures, both individually and as communities, are fascinating objects of comprehension made up to both surprise and mirror Earthlings. The researcher approaches the idea of contact with extraterrestrial life in a predominantly psychoanalytic manner: “You can find continuity in the reverse movement, aimed at finding the ‘Other’, but eventually leading to your own *Self*. First, it is the East for Europeans, then aliens for humans, then the non-anthropomorphic intelligence against the anthropomorphic one, and finally, the non-anthropomorphic entity settling inside us”. (Ivanov 2018, pp. 216–217). L. Romanchuk and V. Dyabina analyze the psychological, religious, social, and political roots of the alien myth, providing a classification of the roles “that are given to space visitors in literature and cinema: liquidators, hunters, rescuers, ‘dark horses’, enslavers, controllers, experimenters, slaves, ‘helpless sheep’, scouts, partners, victims, ‘gardeners’...” (Romanchuk, Dyabina 2024, p. 12).

However, we have not come across a single paper that deals with the specific problem of transforming a person from the Earth into an alien, which interests us.

### Research Progress

1. There are two main types of representations of extraterrestrial beings, which have their roots in the xenophobia of ancient myths. These fearsome aliens vary in how different they are from humans. The alienness of the inhabitants of another village differs from that of monsters that live in forests or deep seas.

The alienness of the inhabitants of another village is related to the remoteness of that village. Our neighbours are similar to us, while the inhabitants of remote islands and continents beyond the seas are significantly different. According to Herodotus, “the dog-headed and the headless men that have their eyes in their chests” live in Tunisia (Herodotus 2024, 4.191.4). At the dawn of science fiction, extraterrestrial life was paradoxically portrayed as a not very distant neighbour, as a variation of a foreigner, also human, but from another country, different from the native, but not drastically. In the ‘True Story’ of Lucian, there are strange lunar animals, but humans are not remarkable in their physical appearance, and even those who can fly do so not due to their physiology, but rather through the clever use of clothing-like sails (Lucian 1894). Cyrano de Bergerac describes the inhabitants of the Moon: “they were proportioned and shaped like us,” but “I could meet with none of them but who marched upon all four <...> For they were of opinion, that Nature having given to men as well as Beasts Two Legs and Two Arms, they should both make use of them alike”. (Bergerac 1899). In Frances Godwin’s work, the differences – both external and internal – are amplified: “Master thereof being full twenty-eight high, and I suppose his Body would weigh twenty-five or thirty of ours. < ... > Many of them live wonderful long, even beyond Belief, affirming to me, that some survived thirty thousand Moons, which is above a thousand Years” (Godwin 1768).

The differences between the Martians in most science fiction versions are also within a reasonable range. A. Tolstoy describes the “bluish faces” of Aelita and other Martians (Tolstoy 1982). In R. Bradbury’s “Martian Chronicles”, the inhabitants of the red planet have “the fair, brownish skin of the true Martian, the yellow coin eyes, the soft musical voices.” (Bradbury 1990, p. 2). They have unusual abilities that make it easier to communicate with Earthlings: “‘But, my good woman, how is it you speak such perfect English?’ ‘I’m not speaking, I’m thinking,’ she said. ‘Telepathy!’” (Bradbury 1990, p. 17).

H.G. Wells, in “The War of the Worlds”, gave rise to a different type of extraterrestrials – as completely alien – both physically and psychologically. This idea refers to Chthonic monsters, but with a certain scientific justification. “The peculiar V-shaped mouth with its pointed upper lip, the absence of brow ridges, the

absence of a chin beneath the wedgelike lower lip, the incessant quivering of this mouth, the Gorgon groups of tentacles, the tumultuous breathing of the lungs in a strange atmosphere, the evident heaviness and painfulness of movement due to the greater gravitational energy of the earth—above all, the extraordinary intensity of the immense eyes—were at once vital, intense, inhuman, crippled and monstrous. There was something fungoid in the oily brown skin, something in the clumsy deliberation of the tedious movements unspeakably nasty. Even at this first encounter, this first glimpse, I was overcome with disgust and dread.” (Wells 2021). People’s attempts to make contact with Martians, assuming that they “were evidently, in spite of their repulsive forms, intelligent creatures” (Wells 2021), ended in their death from a heat ray.

H.P. Lovecraft expanded the range of alienness by creating stories about the infiltration of various extremely unusual races onto Earth. Here’s just one example: “It was a great crab with a lot of pyramided fleshy rings or knots of thick, ropy stuff covered with feelers where a man’s head would be. That green sticky stuff is its blood or juice < ... > Indeed, the type is composed of a form of matter totally alien to our part of space – with electrons having a wholly different vibration-rate. That is why the beings cannot be photographed on the ordinary camera films and plates of our known universe, even though our eyes can see them” (Lovecraft 2024).

The theme of monstrous alien representatives of other worlds is explored in many science fiction texts. S. Lem in his novel “Eden” and P. Watts in his novel “Blindsight” consider contact between humans and aliens to be impossible due to their completely different ways of perceiving the world, even up to the absence of self-awareness in a human sense. “They’re not even hostile. Not even capable of hostility. Just so profoundly alien that they couldn’t help but treat human language itself as a form of combat.. < ... > evolution across the universe was nothing but the endless proliferation of automatic, organized complexity, a vast arid Turing machine full of self-replicating machinery forever unaware of its own existence. And we – we were the flukes and the fossils.” (Watts 2006). In his trilogy “Remembrance of Earth’s Past”, Liu Cixin uses the “dark forest hypothesis”, which states that any contact between two civilizations can only lead to the destruction of one of them. This means that aliens are unambiguously dangerous (Cixin 2015).

2. Science fiction has a long history of depicting alien life forms, whose physiology and intelligence differ significantly from that of humans. In this regard, a notable theme is the perception of the actual representatives of the human species as aliens, different from the modern inhabitants of the Earth. This alienness is often the result of various types of mutations. Mutated Earthlings become figures of “the other”, up

to the status of aliens, in the coordinates of the reality created in the work.

The beginning of this topic was also set by H.G. Wells, who, in the "Time Machine", described the radical division of humanity into two species, the Eloi and Morlocks, in the future, as a result of the gradual transformation of class divisions into physiological and mental differences. "The too-perfect security of the Overworlders had led them to a slow movement of degeneration, to a general dwindling in size, strength, and intelligence. <...> from what I had seen of the Morlocks – that, by the bye, was the name by which these creatures were called – I could imagine that the modification of the human type was even far more profound." (Wells 2021). Morlocks, who live underground and feed on Eloi, are presented by Wells as a kind of Chthonic monsters: "You can scarce imagine how nauseatingly inhuman they looked – those pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes!" (Wells 2021).

Here we can see a connection between the concept of the absolute alienness, the unsuitability of extraterrestrials for contact and the idea of the monstrousness of the Earthlings who have "fallen away". The vectors set out by Wells are most clearly developed in Neal Stephenson's novel "Seveneves". A catastrophic event of cosmic proportions – the unexplained and spontaneous disintegration of the Moon and the subsequent prolonged period of debris raining down on Earth – wipes out most of humanity. Only a few small groups manage to survive: those who hid in underground shelters, those who took refuge underwater, and those who were sheltered on an orbital station. After thousands of years, these groups' offspring have radically diverged in race and species. For "space" people, this divergence is the result of a carefully planned process of genetic engineering. There is a problem with communication, as the descendants of Earthlings, who have "buried themselves in the ground", see those who have returned from space as strangers and the descendants of traitors with unjustified claims on the planet, and they are ready to fight and die in battle with the aliens. The race that survives underwater is the most distant from the basic human body model and most resembles the sea creatures from Lovecraft's set of sinister races: "As the first one ascended into shallower water, the shape of his body became clearer: round, and, in general, sort of projectile-like. <...> Nothing was visible between their legs save a system of concentric folds within which, Ty assumed, a fairly normal set of genitalia must be hiding. Perhaps just awaiting a suitable invitation to present themselves. < ... > The underlying skulls probably looked the same as those of rootstock humans. But eyes, ears, and nostrils were guarded by systems of muscled flaps that were always in some amount of motion. < ... > These people were to more ordinary humans as bulldogs were to hounds." (Stevenson 2015, p. 862).

In the novel "The Waves Extinguish the Wind" by A. and B. Strugatsky, the divergence of human species is predicted in two indicative scenarios. First, after the general implementation of the fucamization procedure, which enhances body immunity and adaptability, there is a problem with a situation where "humanity, due to fucamization's effects, has split into two genotypes." (Strugatsky A., Strugatsky B. 2023, p. 42). Secondly, researchers of the possibility of contact with supercivilization put forward a hypothesis that "humanity will be split into two unequal parts by some criteria unknown to us, the smaller part will forcefully and irreversibly surpass the greater part, and all of this will come to pass through the will and art of a supercivilization decidedly alien to humanity" (Strugatsky A., Strugatsky B. 2023, p. 17).

Thus, the otherness of a specific group of representatives of the human species, as understood in science fiction, can be determined by either purposeful genetic engineering strategies, or by mutations arising from environmental factors. The influence of the environment can take forms of both changes in living conditions on Earth and during human spaceflight. In Stanislaw Lem's novel "Return from the Stars", both options work. Paradoxically, the astronaut retains the original human qualities and finds himself in the position of an alien. After a long absence, he returns to his home planet and discovers that Earthlings have been pampered by technological progress and a lack of conflict in society. It is achieved through a deliberate "correction" of human nature, which involves removing the tendency towards aggression and risk-taking. The new Earthlings, who resemble the Eloi, perceive the "ancient" astronaut as a loathsome threat: "Don't let it touch me!". He is "possessed by a feeling of incredible alienation" (Lem 2020, p. 4).

Moving to other planets or into space turns Earthlings into "aliens" both nominally and physically. The descendants of the emigrants from Earth in Robert Heinlein's novel "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" cannot live on our planet, as their bodies are no longer adapted to the 1 g gravity. In J. Corey's novel series "The Expanse", the inhabitants of the asteroid belt known as "Belters", whose ancestors also migrated from Earth, are significantly different in appearance from Earthlings due to their constant exposure to zero gravity or low gravity: they are much taller, thinner and have noticeably larger heads.

In the novel "Noon: 22nd Century" by A. and B. Strugatsky, a scientists reflect on this issue: "Dickson worked in space psychology and human space physiology. He was old, he knew a great deal, and he had carried out on himself and others a heap of insane experiments. He had come to the conclusion that a person who has been in space all in all for more than twenty years grows unused to Earth and ceases to consider it home. Remaining an Earthman, he ceases

to be a man of Earth.” (Strugatsky A., Strugatsky B. 1978, p. 154).

The theme of otherness is often explored in relation to socio-political aspects which were first discussed by Wells in “The Time Machine”. R. Heinlein’s Loonies (inhabitants of the Moon) and J. Cory’s Belters refer to the Morlocks to some extent: they are the lowest level in society, the working class that is trying to claim its rights. “Here in Luna we’re rich. Three million hardworking, smart, skilled people, enough water, plenty of everything, endless power, endless cubic. But what we don’t have is a free market. We must get rid of the Authority! < ... > Comrades, harken to me! Every load you ship to Terra condemns your grandchildren to slow death. The miracle of photosynthesis, the plant-and-animal cycle, is a closed cycle. You have opened it – and your lifeblood runs downhill to Terra. You don’t need higher prices, one cannot eat money! What you need, what we all need, is an end to this loss. Embargo, utter and absolute. Luna must be self-sufficient!” (Heinlein 1997, pp. 20, 24).

Heinelein’s Loonies use a specific language that developed on the basis of English with the influence of Russian. In “The Moon...” we can find a number of Russian words written according to the phonetic principle:

“I bowed. ‘Dosvedanyuh, Gospazha, ee sp’coynoynochi.’” (Heinlein 1997, p. 30).

“‘P’jal’st. My temporary files were getting full...’” (Heinlein 1997, p. 40).

“‘Me? Great Bog, nyet!’” (Heinlein 1997, p. 73).

“An ad appeared in Lunaya Pravda announcing lecture by Dr. Adam Selene on Poetry and Arts in Luna...” (Heinlein 1997, p. 169).

This type of language is often a characteristic feature in the portrayal of homo alius in science fiction: their language is depicted as being mutated through hybridization.

In J. Cory’s “Expanse” the inhabitants of the stations in the asteroid belt and of the moons of Jupiter and Saturn also speak a creole language, which is the result of a fusion and linguistic mutation of Earth languages:

“‘Que sa, Giambattista,’ she said. ‘Rocinante, wir. Go es gut alles la?’”

The wolf grinned. ‘Bist bien, sera Nagata suer. Give us your warriors girl, and let us kick these cocks à l’envers a pukis.’” (Cory 2016, p. 394).

In Stephenson’s “Seveneves”, the inhabitants of space cities, descendants of those who fled from Earth, speak a language called Anglish, it was influenced by Russian, even more so than in Heinlein’s novel.

“The ports were individually numbered with glowing digits, and annotated, in the mixture of Latin and Cyrillic used throughout the ring, as to their purposes:

TRANZIT  
IMMIGRAIIION  
MILITARY

CURVEY

СРЕИ СРЕТЗ” (Stevenson 2015, p. 642).

“Thousands of years had passed before anyone, even in the most remote outposts of human settlement, had dared to suggest that religion, in anything like its traditional sense, might be or ought to be revived. In its place a new set of thoughtways had grown up under the general heading of ‘dukh’, a Russian word referring to the human spirit.” (Stevenson 2017, p. 674).

The tendency of science fiction to portray “break-away” Earthlings as extraterrestrials, which we have discussed, is somewhat different in Ivan Yefremov’s novel “The Hour of the Bull”. The inhabitants of the planet Tormans are descendants of Earthlings who left their home planet many centuries ago. After that their “ships fell into a region of negative gravity, fell into zero-space, and from there, naturally, slid back, flying hundreds of parsecs in an instant.” (Yefremov 1988, p. 26). Despite a very long period of separation, the Tormansians are not different from Earthlings in terms of their physical appearance or physiology. The differences become apparent in their psychology, both individually and collectively. Yefremov’s exploration of this side of extraterrestrial life fits perfectly with his philosophical approach, which is primarily focused on socio-political critique and design. This results in a unique combination of utopian and dystopian elements.

But the Tormasian language is presented according to the specific features described above. It is also a hybrid of terrestrial languages, “with its semantics and aldeology closely resembling ancient languages on Earth. It has an amazing blend of East Asian words and English, which was common at the end of the EDW” (“Aldeology” is Yefremov’s nonce word meaning the principles that help a particular language maintain its uniqueness. “EDW” means “The Era of Disjoint World”, one of the eras of human history in Yefremov’s novel) (Yefremov 1988, p. 67).

The problematic nature of the otherness of Earthlings, who have somehow “fallen away” from the usual human status, is most thoroughly explored, in our opinion, in the Strugatsky brothers’ novel “The Waves Extinguish the Wind”. A representative of a race of superbeings explains the process of their “hatching” out of Earthlings to the main characters of the Noon Universe Gorbovsky and Komov.

“We do not yet have a widely accepted name for ourselves. Most use the term metahume, as in beyond human... I prefer to call us ludens. First, luden rhymes with human, second, one of the first ludens was Pavel Ludenov, our Adam.” (Strugatsky A., Strugatsky B. 1997, p. 156). The words “metahume” and “beyond human” clearly have a connection with transhumanism. “Luden” has a Russian root, “l’ud-”, as in the word “l’udi” – “people”, “humans”, but it includes the syllable “-en” (reversed “non” in Rus-

sian) and can be seen as an anagram for “nel’ud” meaning “non-human”. Therefore “luden” indicates both a relation and a divergence from the original humanity. Gorbovsky offers an optimistic view of the situation, rejecting the perception of Ludens as completely alien: “Humanity has always advanced into the future led by its best representatives. We’ve always felt pride in our geniuses, not disappointment in not being one of them. And Daniel Alexandrovich may be droning on here about being a luden and not human – that’s all just terminology... You’re human anyway; more than that, you’re the people of Earth, and you won’t get away from it.” Komov points out the excessive calmness of this approach: “You, Leonid Andreievich, sometimes simply amaze me with your frivolity! This is a schism! Schism, do you understand?” (Strugatsky A., Strugatsky B. 1997, p. 160). Thus, the ambiguity of the perception of a homo alius with respect to ordinary people in terms of “friend-foe”, “ally-opponent”, “familiar-unusual”, etc., is outlined.

### Results obtained and conclusions

At the end of our study, we will outline the specific features of how science fiction explores the theme of “the other” as different and alien, in terms of the interaction between concepts of extraterrestrials and Earthlings, leading to a perception of Earthlings as extraterrestrials.

1. The concept of extraterrestrial life in science fiction can take two forms. They can be depicted as beings similar to Earthlings in terms of physical and psychological characteristics (a type of neighbour / inhabitant of another village), contact with them being possible and beneficial. Alternatively, they can be portrayed as totally different and frightening creatures (a type of monster), contact with them leading to death or being impossible.

2. In science fiction, humans can also be seen as figures of “the other”, even to the point of being extraterrestrial, if they undergo various types of mutations. These mutations can result from either deliberate genetic engineering or from environmental factors. Environmental influences can take the form of changes in living conditions on Earth or during human space travel. Due to the extreme divergence of species, Earthlings who have “fallen away” may be perceived as unacceptable monsters.

3. The theme of otherness is often explored in relation to socio-political issues. In this context, Earthlings who have become extraterrestrial beings are seen as the lowest class in society, a working class that struggles to assert their rights.

4. A characteristic feature in the portrayal of homo alius in science fiction is the language, which is often depicted as having mutated through hybridization.

5. The way that homo alius is perceived in relation to normal human beings in science fiction is al-

ways ambiguous, leading to a variety of relationships between the concepts within the semantic field of “friend or foe”.

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