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Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

# Incorporation of philosophical ideas in science fiction literature

**Milena Tsvetkova<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Sofia University, Sofia, Bulgaria  
[milenaic@uni-sofia.bg](mailto:milenaic@uni-sofia.bg)

**Margarita Arutyunyan<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>The Pacific National University, Khabarovsk, Russian Federation  
[1569009386@pnu.edu.ru](mailto:1569009386@pnu.edu.ru)

**Natalya Saenko<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Moscow Polytechnic University, Moscow, Russian Federation  
[rilke@mospolytech.ru](mailto:rilke@mospolytech.ru)

**Ludmila Shramko<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup>Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education Saint-Petersburg State University (SPbSU), Saint-Petersburg, Russian Federation  
[l.shramko@spbu.ru](mailto:l.shramko@spbu.ru)

**Dilovar Kalimullin<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Kazan state institute of culture, Kazan, Russian Federation  
[yearsoby@kazgik.ru](mailto:yearsoby@kazgik.ru)

## Abstract

The study aims to investigate the incorporation of philosophical ideas in science fiction literature. The study used the methodology of quantitative research to collect and analyze interpretations and values of the survey. As a result, one of the most common philosophical ideas that can be found in science fiction is the speculation on the freedom of choice. In conclusion, the theme of the butterfly effect can be considered quite frequent, considering the interrelation of actions and their consequences.

**Keywords:** Sci-Fi, Science, Fiction, Philosophy, Students.

# Incorporación de ideas filosóficas en la literatura de ciencia ficción

## Resumen

El estudio tiene como objetivo investigar la incorporación de ideas filosóficas en la literatura de ciencia ficción. El estudio utilizó la metodología de la investigación cuantitativa para recopilar y analizar interpretaciones y valores de la encuesta. Como resultado, una de las ideas filosóficas más comunes que se pueden encontrar en la ciencia ficción es la especulación sobre la libertad de elección. En conclusión, el tema del efecto mariposa puede considerarse bastante frecuente, teniendo en cuenta la interrelación de las acciones y sus consecuencias.

**Palabras clave:** ciencia ficción, ciencia, ficción, filosofía, estudiantes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today the term science fiction labels a separate category of literature. This name applies to most modern fiction including even fairy tales and myths. It is quite different from the times when fantasy was a common term for all forms of fiction. Science fiction should contain elements of science (natural, social, etc.) and/or technology and be extremely resourceful (HERMAN AND HERMAN, 2006). Science fiction can deal with the real or the unreal; events may occur in the past, present or future. Classical mythology was, in its own way, the genesis of fantasy and science fiction, and, like the second, portrayed people as interacting with unique life forms in unusual social and environmental conditions (GILBERT, 2006; MALYSHEVA, 2018).

The term itself helps to identify the essence of the genre. Science as the very concept in science fiction should be decisive. Without this element, artistic fiction can be a common fantasy. Science fiction implies an investigative process. Scientists deal with theories and possibilities, imagining new relationships between variables or situations. The value of this genre lies in the fact that it is a method of scientific research through the stimulation of fantasy. Science fiction can observe modern culture through fantastic extrapolation or create an alien culture in another world, time or dimension. An author can create a completely new culture by making such an imaginary life completely believable.

It has often been noted that science fiction gets some of its alienation effects because of how it uses future (or otherworldly) scenarios as a means of indirectly commenting on the present. This is precisely its most obvious potential political strategy as a genre (JAMESON, 2002). By the nature of their profession, science-fiction writers deal with the future world and circumstances. By creating an alternative future, they explore the reasons why people can be motivated for some kind of results. Like all creators of imagination products, science fiction writers have a natural inclination to explore the psychological aspect of their characters and the forces that inspire them (TERESO ET AL, 2018).

Artworks also offer insights into the origins of views. Motivating people to reflect on the new future, visionaries often appeal to values taken from the past. In a contradictory way, they build their

future based on memories. The tendency to motivate followers, appealing to nostalgic beliefs, manifests itself both in fiction and in real life.

One of the most important and visible aspects of science fiction, perhaps, is its social aspect. It is mainly expressed in the understanding of the ideals of social organization (first, these are utopian and anti-utopian works, positive and negative). In addition, the social aspect of science fiction can be associated with the development of the future, rethinking of the past, with capturing the sociocultural conditioning of world perception and building human relationships (LIEDL, 2014). Some critics argue that science fiction decentralizes history, destabilizing ontological perspectives in order to make readers perceive their world in new and more critical ways (HILLS, 2009).

Fantastic literature began its development in the Renaissance (utopia and anti-utopia) and developed throughout the Middle Ages (romantic fiction). Science fiction, as a genre, was born thanks to the scientific and technical progress of the nineteenth century. The pioneers of the genre were Jules Verne, and in the USSR - A. Tolstoy, A. Belyaev, whose works were particularly popular among readers. The peaks of the popularity of science fiction are consistent with the peaks of scientific and technological progress and special propaganda of the role of science in human life. It is difficult to judge objectively about the plot content and quality of Soviet science fiction, since the totalitarian system determined the acceptable content of the works and dictated the sales rate of such literature. Therefore, in many respects,

the popularity of Soviet fiction was stimulated by a planned economy and a tough information policy of the state, which today creates conditions for relying in our study primarily on foreign authorities recognized in the scientific world. Five criteria were put forward by which the science fiction genre is determined:

- It changes over time;
  
- It lacks an essence, unifying characteristics and common origin;
  
- It uses texts in a special way and draws relations between them;
  
- Its identification is different from other genres;
  
- Assignment of genre identity is an intervention in the distribution and reception of texts (RIEDER, 2010).

## **2. METHOD**

Relying on the goals of the research a survey was carried out in close collaboration with the activists of the Russian Union of Youth (RUY) who organized an empirical study under the auspices of Book Day, to form a sample of information. The aim of the study was to

create a cross-section of qualitative and quantitative information about students' literary preferences and to identify a new data set to supplement the annual RUY analytics for internal use. The study was made in the form of a survey of students (MALIK ET AL, 2019).

Based on the goals, to collect the necessary information, it was decided to conduct an empirical study, which consisted of a survey of students. The study used the methodology of quantitative research to collect and analyze interpretations and values of the survey. The first part of the study was carried out in order to find out whether the selected part of the respondents was capable of identifying the philosophical component of science fiction. In the second part, respondents were asked to conduct an oral analysis of several popular works in the science fiction genre to highlight the philosophical topics that respondents see incorporated in the work. This analysis was also conducted in order to determine whether any of the philosophical topics presented in the survey for students were touched upon in the selected works.

Based on the set goals, an empirical study was organized and conducted, which consisted of a survey of students of state universities with a high average passing score. In order for the survey to be representative and comply with the objectives of this study, among the general sample of respondents interesting for the purposes of the RUY study, a part of respondents who are interested in science fiction (literature or cinema) was selected. This action made it possible to avoid a qualitative decrease in results due to the irrelevance of the

questions to the audience. For the survey together with the RUY, 900 bachelor students were selected. The survey sample included only those interested in the science fiction genre. After acknowledging their interest, 550 out of 900 students (45% women and 55% men aged 18 to 21) took part in the research.

Table 1: Students who participated in the research

<b>age</b>	<b>University</b>
8-21	Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
8-21	High School of Economics
8-21	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
8-21	Moscow State University
8-21	Moscow Power Engineering Institute (National Research University)

Since in this case, the specialty of the students surveyed did not matter, the respondents represented various humanities and technical faculties (Journalism, General Medicine, Russian Language and Literature, Linguistics, Power Engineering and others), since the fantastic literature does not require additional preparation and covers a wide range of readers.

### *2.1. Data analysis*

After collecting the necessary information, the analysis of survey data was carried out in the STATISTICA system. This software, developed on the basis of Microsoft Windows, allows you to visualize data in statistical analysis. The size of the error is 1%, about 5 questionnaires were incorrectly filled out (some respondents did not answer all the questionnaire questions or chose more than one answer).

## **3. RESULTS**

The data on the first question turned out to be expectedly high, 95% of respondents agreed that science fiction carries not only an entertaining function. This result can be considered extremely positive, since the awareness of the serious aspects of this genre leads to a more complete perception of it and understanding the problems that can be raised in a particular work. Oddly enough, the results obtained on the next question were not too high. Only 48% of students noted that, in their opinion, through fictional worlds in science fiction, the authors show how reality could change. One of the main reasons for this result may be that such worlds created by the authors are too fantastic, which does not allow recipients to admit the possibility of the existence of something similar in reality.

69% of respondents agreed that works in the science fiction genre reflect and show the existing social order from other sides. It also suggests that they adequately perceive the works in this genre, understanding the possible allusions laid down in them by the authors. Not too many (54%) of respondents believe that modern culture can be analyzed through science fiction. Just as in the case of the worlds, the reason for such a low result may be that in their works, the authors can create a completely new culture, corresponding to a fictional reality and having little in common with the present.

Most respondents (92%) noted that it is possible to analyze social problems through science fiction. This indicator can be considered positive. It states that the respondents are aware of the greater sociality of works in the science fiction genre and are able to analyze this aspect. The data on the following issue also turned out to be high, 88% agreed that through fictional science fiction tests our world for consistency with positive philosophical ideas. This question to some extent echoes the previous one, which also makes it possible to judge the understanding of the social ideas behind science fiction. 90% of respondents agreed that with the help of science fiction philosophical understanding of reality is possible. As in the previous questions, this indicator is positive and suggests that the respondents understand the philosophical ideas underlying science fiction.

The results of the last question were also quite high, 78% of respondents noted that science fiction has an educational function. This suggests that being aware of all the above aspects of science fiction,

the respondents admit that, when together, they can push people to think and rethink any actions, which can be considered an educational function. From the obtained results, it can be concluded that the interviewed age group is fully aware of the philosophical component of science fiction, and is able to comprehend and analyze it. These results are extremely positive; as they say, there is a clear awareness of non-entertainment aspects of the genre.

It can be assumed that the survey data of students at the age of 18-21 can also make it possible to judge that the same perception of the genre is also formed in older people, since the students interviewed can already be considered adults, mature individuals. The second part of the study was the analysis of several works in the science fiction genre for the presence of any philosophical ideas. For the analysis, several films in the science fiction genre were chosen. This is due to the fact that, in contrast to literary works, cinematographic are smaller in volume, which significantly reduces the analysis time. However, as in the books, the films contain a sufficient amount of materials to be studied.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

Since science fiction is quite a popular genre, various studies related to it were conducted. One of them took place in 2017 and was aimed at exploring how this genre is related to history. This article

explores the nature of a fairy tale in the writings of Premudra Mitra (1904–1988), a prolific Bengali writer on young adult fiction and the creator of Ghanada, perhaps one of the most popular adventure fantasy heroes in Bengal (BHATTACHARYA AND HIRADHAR, 2017). The choice of the author for the study was due to the fact that the audience of these stories, young people, is in a double ethical structure: the obvious improbability and unverifiability of stories, as well as a positivist-scientific orientation, with the help of which the situations that have developed in the works are solved, thereby leading to a politically relevant pedagogical paradigm that can embrace and possibly resolve two conflicting structures (BHATTACHARYA AND HIRADHAR, 2014).

Four stories were selected for analysis from Ghanada Samagra, selected from Premendra Mitra's works from more than fifteen volumes of stories. It is difficult to know the exact number of written stories, since many of them were not included in the collections. In addition, some collections contain stories about heroes other than Ghanada. Each of the four stories deals with insects: they are called Mosha (Mosquito), Poka (Locust), Kencho (Earthworm) and Maachi (Fly) (MITRA, 2000). In these works, access to liberal, humanitarian, egalitarian values is carried out through a local hero, firmly embedded in the local environment in front of a local audience or readers. In addition, an appeal to globalized humanity is inevitably discussed within the framework of local functionality, be it food, animals, or an ephemeral event. A transhistorical space arises in which political

practice is intertwined with an ethical position (BANDOPADHYAY, 2003).

Thus, by avoiding the traps of direct pedagogical function, which often transforms into a story about didactic morality, the narrative basis of science fiction provides ways of salvation, thanks to which one can recognize the ethics of the other. Because of the narrative, Mitra's works suggest internal undecidability, a sense of the supernatural, ethically-strengthened dialogue voice of the other, although this other may be infinitely small in the scheme of things (SAWYER, 2009). Writing is not just entertainment and not intellectual leisure. In the infinite darkness of the incomprehensible past and future, writing in the everyday language of life is an extremely burdensome duty (GOSWAMI, 2004).

The appearance of the knowable in the field of the unknowable seems to be the leitmotif that drives Mitra's stories about Ghanada. On the one hand, this awareness is rooted in the paradigms of rationalist science; indeed, the possibility of this fame is critically dependent on such rationality. On the other hand, the transformation of this ordinary, routine, and ordinary known into a fantastic, distant and flickering unknown is also considered as part of the ethics of these works. The author, in a sense, discovers ethics in Bengali science fiction, where the imaginary is viewed not as imaginary, but as something within the framework of everyday opportunities: Ghanada could travel through historical space and time eternally, but remains constantly accessible in the narrative space (KNEALE, 2009).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Thus, science fiction contains a large philosophical component, despite the serious entertainment element. To confirm this, a two-part study was conducted. The first part consisted of a survey of students of state universities. For reliability reasons and credibility of the survey results, it was necessary to single out those respondents who were interested in science fiction (literature or cinema). Initially, 900 bachelor students were selected for the survey. After clarifying the interest in the science fiction genre, 550 students passed the further survey. According to the results of this part of the study, it was found out that the respondents from the selected age category understand the philosophical component of science fiction, and, therefore, are able to comprehend it.

The second part of the study presented an analysis of three science fiction films (Back to the Future, Interstellar and Minority Opinion) on the subject of philosophical ideas. The analysis of these films showed that one of the most common philosophical ideas that can be found in science fiction is the speculation on the freedom of choice. Using fictional worlds and fantasy techniques, the authors try to find an answer to the question: do people make decisions on their own, or are their lives predetermined in advance? In addition, the theme of the butterfly effect can be considered quite frequent, considering the interrelation of actions and their consequences. Further research can be carried out more broadly among adolescents and children, taking into account the characteristics of their perception and

cognitive features. In addition, a similar study can be conducted for other genres to identify in them a philosophical component.

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