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## *Latvian Comic Science Fiction 1960–1990*

BĀRBALA SIMSONE

**Abstract.** The theme of the present paper is a tendency in Latvian literature that flourished from 1960s to the late 1980s and has so far not been subjected to research. It is the phenomenon of short stories with science fiction elements appearing in humor magazines of Soviet Latvia, mainly in *Dadzis* (The Thistle) and *Dadža kalendārs* (The Thistle's Almanac) as well as in the short story collections by the regular authors of these periodicals. In these stories renowned Latvian satirists such as Andrejs Skailis, Žanis Ezītis, Miermīlis Steiga and others use the disguise of science fiction to ridicule the negative aspects of Soviet reality that the authors of “serious literature” rarely dared to touch upon. Although this phenomenon obviously existed only for a couple of decades, it must be recognized as a specific hybrid genre the writers created and used to talk about problems everyone knew and almost nobody talked about.

**Keywords:** humor; periodicals; propaganda; science fiction; short story

### Introductory Remarks

Reviewing the rather modest array of Latvian science fiction, it seems that the time period from the end of World War II until the renewal of independence has been sort of “empty” since during these years original works in the science fiction genre have been markedly scarce and occasional in nature. It was different in the pre-war period when several adventure/sci-fi novels were published, and the time after the restoration of independence when science fiction began to appear in the works of various authors both as a distinct genre and a metaphorical means of expression. But it is easy to miss one trend connected to science fiction that flourished exactly during the aforementioned period – from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. Those are short stories corresponding to the sci-fi canon that were regularly published in humor magazines – *Dadzis* (The Thistle) and *Dadža kalendārs* (The Thistle's Almanac), as well as the comic short story anthologies by the *Dadzis*'s regulars. It was during this time that short satirical stories with plots based in sci-fi saw the height of their popularity: they were largely written by notable Latvian satirists such as Andrejs Skailis (penname of Andrejs Vīte), Žanis Ezītis

(penname of Andrejs Puriņš), Maija Kudapa, as well as other renowned prose authors: Dagnija Zigmonte, Miermīlis Steiga, and others. (It should be noted that several authors used pseudonyms when writing for these periodicals which makes the authorship of some stories difficult to ascertain.)

The present paper offers an overview of the phenomenon of comic sci-fi and its chief aspects in the said time frame. The reviewed material comes predominantly from the *Dadža kalendārs* and short story anthologies; some pieces published in the magazine *Dadžis* are analyzed as well, although the magazine features only shorter fiction, like humorous sketches, while stories are rare – most likely a result of shortage of space. Nearly all issues of *Dadžis*, though, feature the column “Science and technology news”, where “Candidate of Sciences A. Īsais” (the pseudonym of Andrejs Skailis) informs the readers about domestic problems. These columns often feature professor Dižprātiņš, a character created by Skailis, and the text usually features elements not uncommon to science fiction. For instance, upon realizing that the glass lid of the recently-bought coffee grinder is of bad quality, but it is nearly impossible to buy a replacement, A. Īsais states that in these circumstances it would be much more convenient to grind coffee in a state of zero gravity.

Reviewing the comic science fiction stories, it is, of course, easy to discern each author’s style and favored themes – for instance, Andrejs Skailis usually discusses social issues and uses elements of crime fiction, while Maija Kudapa pays more attention to family matters. But the specifics of each writer’s style is a question ample enough for a research of its own. So the present paper will concentrate mostly on the thematic variety that these authors exploited in their works and the features they had in common.

## Satire and Science Fiction in Soviet Latvia

In satire, sci-fi elements primarily serve as an instrument of social criticism, a sort of subtextual language of its time that authors use to reflect various troubles and negative aspects of life during the Soviet era – but do it by using science fiction premises (new technological discoveries, time travel, etc.). Since the Communist regime in the USSR insisted on being absolutely ideal and could have no flaws, nor commit anything foolish or intentionally malevolent, fiction depicting such negative aspects of Soviet life could only be classified as fantastic or else the authors would have faced dire consequences. Granted, even with this approach not all domains were open for criticism – authors could metaphorically allude to the dusty corners or cobwebs of a Soviet building, but not to the ramshackle foundation or the nonexistent roof. By combining

elements of science fiction and parody, writers created an exaggerated and unbelievable (fantastical) situations to emphasize the absurdity of some phenomena. They criticized both the officially condemnable issues – speculators, alcoholism, pot-boilers, and employee theft – as well as problems that theoretically did not exist, for instance, bureaucracy, the terrible quality of services, the shortages of everyday supplies and products, wangling, etc. On the other hand, sometimes the authors' irony came dangerously close to the truth, which could have cost them dearly.

Examining the material, it is possible to distinguish several ways that writers of comic sci-fi use to present their work, and I will provide a short overview of some of them. I will not, however, include stories in which the fantastic motif turns out to be just a metaphor or a misunderstanding, although such instances are rather common. For example, in the story *Dinozaurus* (The Dinosaur) by one of *Dadzis's* regulars Katrīna Bozis (Aina Pāvulīte) the title animal and visitor from outer space is discovered to be just a deft apple thief, while in A. Šorinš's story *Spēle* (The Game) the accountant Bullītis's method of traveling through space and time is presumably based on the consumption of strong alcoholic beverages.

### Stories with Classic Science Fiction Motives

Andrejs Skailis, Žanis Ezītis and other authors readily employ traditional elements often used in science fiction for decades. These elements were already familiar to readers of the LSSR because after World War II the USSR saw a consistent upsurge and development of the genre. This cannot, however, be said about original Latvian literature; nevertheless, in Latvia readers had access to works by Russian authors (including Latvian Russians, such as Vladimir Mikhailov and others), as well as carefully selected translations of foreign writers' works. Series such as *Fantastikas pasaulē* (The World of Science Fiction) and *Piedzīvojumi, fantastika, ceļojumi* (Adventure, Science Fiction, Travel) were popular in Latvia and contained stories and novels by both Western and Soviet authors; naturally, the former were heavily censored and always accompanied by explanatory fore- and after-words. Readers living in this cultural space were well-acquainted with the traditional sci-fi themes, such as time travel, contact with extraterrestrial civilizations etc. So by using these elements Latvian humorists ensured, firstly, that their works would read as parodies, since alongside global themes they spoke of mundane and prosaic occurrences, and, secondly, that they would gain recognition, as Soviet Latvian

readers were well versed in the specifics of the genre and the reality of Soviet life – two aspects that were closely intertwined in these texts.

In several of his stories Andrejs Skailis discusses the issue of extraterrestrial civilizations; of course, in each of them the science fiction elements simply provide a thin veil for the unflattering aspects of life in the Soviet Union. In the story *Drūmās pī-būtnes* (Grim Squee-tures) the year is 1981 and a young scientist is about to embark on a journey to the Tapir Constellation since this constellation had earlier released a cucumber-shaped space rocket that passed Earth, emitting squeaking sounds – this strange occurrence needs to be explored more closely. At first, Earthlings attempt to make contact with the aliens using radio waves, transmitting formulas and musical compositions, literary texts and lectures to the faraway constellation, but the aliens show no reaction. A postgraduate student Antons Krākums proposes a hypothesis that the alien creatures are simply so intelligent that they have become very depressed. While Krākums is trying to attune himself to the strangers' mood, his attempts are hampered by a bunch of cheerful boys playing football. In the conclusion, the aliens answer not the scientist's efforts of establishing contact, but the boys' team captain's proposal for a joint game. The match is organized on the alien planet, and the scientist is allowed to attend as a "shouter", i.e., a fan. The story points at the – often fruitless – tendency of the Soviet scientists to propose complicated solutions for simple matters; it can also be interpreted from a humane point of view, emphasizing the importance of friendly relationships over intellectual designs. Lastly, it is a fitting reference to the Soviet idea of sports – especially team sports – being seen as a nearly magical means of uniting different groups of people.

In his short story *Modrība* (Vigilance) Žanis Ezītis uses extraterrestrials as a metaphor to highlight the common "courtesy" of everyday people, especially service staff. In the story, a despairing cafeteria worker seeks help from her colleagues when an utterly abnormal person arrives to have lunch in the cafeteria: he responds to the staff members' rudeness with apologies, asks for the corresponding spoon when eating dessert... At last, they realize what is going on: "– Run along now to the Academy of Sciences, dearie, – she said. – I've been suspecting for a long time that flying saucers are more than just rumors... And thus, contact was made with an ambassador from the Andromeda Galaxy who had arrived incognito on Earth. Unfortunately, as he had only learned about life from etiquette books, traveling incognito was impossible."<sup>1</sup> (Ezītis

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<sup>1</sup> This and further quotes by Latvian writers have been translated into English by Laura Dreize.

1974: 30) By stating clearly that such a polite person cannot possibly belong to the human society and so must be an alien, the writer makes obvious fun of the fact that the everyday conversations in Soviet people's lives often were, especially among members of service staff and customers, very far from being polite.

Skailis examines another popular sci-fi theme in his story *Aklimatizēšanās* (Acclimatization) – genetic engineering. The creation of genetically modified organisms and their introduction into the wild creates a vicious circle, as the neutralization of one species demands the presence of another. Thus, tortomice are replaced by hedgepards, who in turn are substituted by the jagupit, the cachaceros, and so forth, until it becomes necessary to once again multiply the tortomice, and the circle starts form the beginning. The story offers a humorous take on the absurdity of many Soviet novelties in the daily life.

Another one of Skailis's stories, bearing the pointed title *Izvazāšana* (Dishing Out), presents yet another common problem of the time. The fantastical elements are present only at the beginning – a factory produces “synthetic elephants” to be used in household chores, and, just as any other supplies made in Soviet factories, they are illegally “dished out” by the workers, i.e., the elephants are secretly smuggled out to be sold outside the premises. When one of the workers gets caught, the trial turns into a farce: his lawyer insists on the main problem being that his client had tried to get the elephant out through the main gate, although everyone knows there are easier ways to do it. Thus, dishing out itself is not the root of the problem (as everyone perceives it as a completely normal occurrence), but the consumption of alcohol is, because the drinking has clouded the mind of the accused so that he commits the “normal” theft in an abnormal way. Nobody worries about the fact of the theft itself since it is universal.

Skailis and other humorists rarely aim their irony at facts that lie outside the reality of Soviet life. Among the few exceptions is the story *Trīs banāni* (Three Bananas). The millionaire Cvibelbreks steals from the inventor Makpliks his “atomic modifier”: a device that can change the atomic structure of things, i.e., transform one element into another. Cvibelbreks ships large quantities of aluminum to a remote island, determined to use the miracle device to convert it all into gold. However, en route to the island the plane crashes, as he had not anticipated that the plane's aluminum parts would become gold as well. The inventor offers his creation to another avaricious capitalist Vanderšibers who is, of course, also interested only in his personal gain rather than scientific developments. When Vanderšibers tries to trick the inventor and steal the device, Makpliks cunningly takes him in and gets him arrested, as all the gold

bars have turned back into aluminum. The story seems to be directed outside the borders of the Soviet regime and plays upon the binary “us versus them” opposition characteristic of the time, juxtaposing the clever scientists and the evil, greedy capitalists, but upon closer inspection the story contains few elements that would characterize the situation as unique to the Western society, apart from the formal criteria. Of course, the work could also be considered a tribute to the era.

### Stories with Fairytale Elements

Another array of themes readily exploited by comic sci-fi authors during the relevant time period is fairytale motifs. This aspect is, of course, more closely related to the fantasy genre, but in this paper an attempt is made to analyze the fantastical elements as a whole, since in many instances the lines between both genres are blurred. It is often evident that the author has been concerned not with creating a work that would fall in with the canon (especially because the fantasy genre in post-war Latvia for a long time was “terra incognita”) but with using any fantastical motifs necessary for weaving the intended plot.

In the story *Pūķa Eistāķija dzīve un ciešanas* (The Life and Sufferings of Eustachius the Dragon) a dragon out of Latvian folklore is living in the Tupeši village; he had once upon a time been bought by the owner of the house. The house is now inhabited by writers that the dragon often robs, stealing from them the deficit product essential in the evening get-togethers – sausages. To punish the dragon, the writers make him become a writer himself, as it is supposed to be the most difficult job in the world. In compliance with this punishment the dragon composes a manuscript about his life and sufferings and has his text evaluated by a famous writer. In spite of the author himself being a dragon, the writer criticizes the work, finding errors in the visual portrayal of dragons and their habits, and suggests that the manuscript be rewritten, taking into account what experienced authors have said on the matter. Here Skailis mocks the “expertise” of the leading writers in all domains of Soviet culture and the necessity for the culture workers to quote the political leaders such as Lenin or Stalin on practically all matters including those that had nothing to do with politics.

In another story by Skailis, *Zilonis* (The Elephant), a quite normal kolkhoz worker Mārtiņš Blusa inexplicably turns into an elephant after having had too much to drink. This fact dramatically alters not only his own life but also the lives of his relatives – as soon as they mention that their uncle is an elephant, all doors are suddenly wide open for them. “The colleagues, upon hearing the

news, shook the Blusas's hands with much enthusiasm. Būda, the chairman of the local committee, insisted the uncle should be fictitiously declared a resident of the Blusas's room in the communal flat, as elephants are probably entitled to additional space." (Skailis 1987: 282) In this case the elephant is, of course, a metaphor for a relative of a higher standing (here, in the literal sense of the word); but after Mārīņš regains his human form and the prestigious status is lost, everything goes back to the way it was before.

In the Soviet era documents, accounts, lists, records and other "papers" possessed an omnipotent power, much more important than the things they registered and described. This aspect is portrayed in the story *Eksponāts nr. 6853* (Exhibit Nr. 6853). While inventory is being carried out at a local history museum, it turns out that a ghost from the 18<sup>th</sup> century has by mistake been entered in the documents as part of the museum's inventory. The chairman tells his employees to find the ghost at any cost to avoid having to report a missing item. The following dialogue illustrates the bureaucratic frame of mind of the Soviet people as well as the basic principle of the atheistic worldview: the answer to the question, what would happen if God was entered in the lists, is this: "While God is just God, I don't believe in Him. When God gets assigned a number and recorded in the books, I'll demand that He be presented to me." (Ezītis 1974: 46) In the end, fearing the impending dressing down, the director of the museum himself starts to fade and becomes a ghost himself; at last, his superiors are satisfied.

In the Soviet regime the authorities were always right, and the "self-criticism" and "re-education" of the representatives of various domains was highly popular even (and especially) when there was no justified cause for this. In the story *Paškritika* (Self-Criticism) by Žanis Ezītis, a pedestrian, tries to explain to a militiaman that he has not violated the traffic law. The militiaman comments that in a moment he would start proving that he is not a camel, and the pedestrian gets so frustrated that he does turn into a camel so as not to offend the militiaman.

In the story *Portfelis* (The Briefcase) a simple man named Ziņģētājs accidentally swaps his briefcase with one that belongs to an auditor. As it turns out, the briefcase possesses miraculous powers: when set on the ground by the gate of a store or a factory, it immediately fills up with the best goods manufactured in said factory. Naturally, it was impossible to make an even clearer allegory for the frequent offering of bribes to higher officials, consisting of deficit products unavailable to the general population.

## Stories with Religious Motifs

Stories containing religious motifs make up another interesting aspect of short comic sci-fi prose. In the story *Dievs rada pasauli* (God Creates the World) by Miermilis Steiga the Creator completes this task in a slapdash way, just like any average Soviet worker, and banishes Adam and Eve from Paradise because the first woman has worn him out with her demands. Her womanly nature makes her dissatisfied with everything that is created: she begins pestering the Creator for false eyelashes, a new hairstyle, “nylon lingerie, a brocade tunic-and-pants set, and sparkling patent leather shoes. On the fifth day of the second week God, wiping sweat from his bald head, was sewing a luxurious leopard fur coat for the beauty, but on the sixth he nearly had a heart attack while felling trees for her furniture.” (Steiga 1972: 75) At last the Creator is done with her demands and banishes the capricious lady along with Adam, who in the story has no say whatsoever. This story obviously mocks the stereotyped woman’s everlasting need for new goods rather than religion, of course.

In another story by Steiga, *Noass pasūta šķirstu* (Noah Commissions an Ark), God is depicted as a typical Soviet boss who has trouble managing his subordinates, so the commissioned ark is delivered with no roof – all the roofers are busy “tanking up on firewater”, but if they fail to deliver “Paradise won’t get the bonus”. All the papers are signed to avoid trouble, but when the ark is about to sink in the flood having been filled with rainwater due to the missing roof, Noah finds a solution – he kills the pair of dinosaurs and uses their hides to cover the deck. So humans survive, but dinosaurs become extinct – a typically Soviet way of solving one problem while simultaneously creating another.

In the story *Nedienas ar sargņģeli* (Guardian Angel Woes) by Dagnija Zigmonte the charge exchanges places with his guardian angel and now has to follow him to bars and haul him home; finally, the charge gets fed up with it and decides to make do without an angel.

In all these stories, as can be seen, the religious elements are only superficial and the authors quite openly mock both individual and collective troubles, dressing God and his angels up as normal Soviet people but mostly not mocking religion as such.

## Stories with Literal Metaphors

Another interesting method used by humorists is to depict a metaphor literally, thus creating a fantastical situation. In the story *Galva* (The Head) by Žanis Ezitis the protagonist looks into a mirror during his lunch break and realizes he

has literally lost his head. “The suit, arms, and legs were all in place. The head... The head was missing! Of course, I’m hardly the only one who loses his head come the end of the month. Our boss walks around like a madman up until the middle of the next month. But it’s quite unusual to be walking around with no head.” (Ezītis 1974: 64) His colleagues, though, hardly see it as a problem: “What do you need a head for, anyway? You don’t come to work to think but to work.” (*Ibid.* 65) The attitude towards one’s job and employees is characteristic of the Soviet time when people were supposed to succumb to the orders, not discuss them, i.e., “not use their heads”.

In the story *Skrūvīte* (The Screw) by the same author the protagonist is at first “put up there” for inventing a tiny mechanical device but immediately afterward he gets discredited and his colleague who had exposed his “deception” is quite literally catapulted to the “zenith of his fame”: first he is simply thrown in the air and cheered, but then he gets launched into space. “The ceiling is getting in the way. Bring him out into the open. So that no ceiling keeps him from the zenith of his fame. The colleagues do as they are told. They bring him outside. Up and down... Up and down... [...] My unmasker goes whistling up into the orbit; he’s become a satellite.” (Ezītis 1974: 56) So the author metaphorically depicts the character being praised above all common sense until he becomes, quite literally, a celestial body.

Another example of a metaphor turned fantastic is provided in the story *Personiskais viedoklis* (Personal Opinion) by Miermilis Steiga; the protagonist wins the lottery and obtains an unusual luxury – a “personal opinion” that nearly destroys his life and career, as during the period in question it was not customary to have thoughts that differed from the collective ideas. The protagonist’s life becomes increasingly difficult until he gives the personal opinion to his boss who then gets fired because of it. Yet another example of a metaphor turned real is found in the story *Zaļā drauga sargāšana* (Protect the Green Friend) by Z. Donis: here, the protagonist finds a dragon by a ditch; at first it seems to be a living creature but soon turns into the embodiment of the popular metaphor “green dragon”, meaning excessive drinking.

## Stories about Writers

A different aspect of comic science fiction is concerns stories “about writers” that – in a somewhat metafictional manner – depict the complicated relationship between authors, editors, critics, and readers in the context of Soviet life.

Skailis parodies the demands that the Soviet regime set to the writers in his story *Mukmerģes mežezers* (The Forest Lake of Mukmerģe). The novel

composed by the protagonist, a writer named Pucāzis, wholly corresponds with the canon of positivism and Social Realism but for one strange scene – the main character Jānis the Virtuous witnesses naked mermaids dancing by a forest lake; moreover, the scene turns out to be based on true events. The editor is furious – he cannot allow for such a scene to appear in a Soviet novel, so he goes into the woods to re-educate the frisky dancers and talk them into wearing at least a swimsuit; as a result, he gets caught up in the dance until he falls unconscious. After the incident everything ends happily, though – in the strictly manner that the Social Realism demanded from the writers, of course: “There has been no more sight of the mermaids. Pucāzis has regained his moral equilibrium and drastically rewritten his novel. Jānis the Virtuous is checking the lake for specific mud that could be used for pig farming. In the epilogue he and his beloved Zaiga walk hand in hand towards the bright horizons of the future.” (Skailis 1987: 277)

Skailis mocks the artificially composed, two-dimensional, and lifeless works of social realism also in his story *Iedvesma* (Inspiration) about a public services company that offers writers a chance to rent boxes of “synthetic inspiration” for 20 kopeks per day (“the same charge as for getting your floors waxed” (Skailis 1974: 63)). There is one problem though – the works created under the influence of synthetic inspiration are equally “synthetic”: all plots somehow turn out to feature synthetic materials, and even the characters appear to become synthetic. In the conclusion the editor bemoans the feebleness of contemporary literature while the writers blame the poor quality of the company’s offer.

The irrelevance of creativity under the Soviet regime is also emphasized in the story *Profesora Dižprātiņa eksperiments* (Professor Dižprātiņš’s Experiment). The title character invents and switches on a peculiar machine called the Ritmotron that sends muses to visit writers (of random assignment) and offer their help in the creation of timeless works. But the writers are not satisfied – one of them would choose pickles over inspiration, another refuses to feed his muse and tells her to subsist on the “benefits paid by the Literary Foundation”, and rumor has it that the muse of a literary critic spends her days sitting on the roof and staring at the weathervane. “As soon as the wind shifted, the muse quickly flew in through the window of Miesmesis’s study and whispered something into the critic’s ear.” (Skailis 1974: 81) This was a scene that every Soviet reader understood perfectly well since everyone knew that it was essential for the critics to know “which way the wind blew”. In the end unknown villains stop the Ritmotron, as it turns out that muses only make the

writers' life harder. No free inspiration is either possible or necessary when the regime sets the standards of writing.

The quality of the prose or lack of that at the time is also mocked in the story *Aphidodea Burtensis* (*Aphidodea Litrensis*). The literary community portrayed in the story is dismayed: strange parasites are eating the letters out of the works of a certain writer until only blank pages remain. The creatures turn out to like damp spaces and “nest only in novels containing large quantities of literary water” (Skailis 1974: 120). The author tries to rewrite the devoured novel, but neither he nor the critics that had praised him, or his readers can recall the main plot points. In the end one whole copy of the book is found: the owner has tossed it into the stove, and the tiny parasites turn out to avoid fire. That is why “a large warning will be put [on the cover of the second edition]: “BURN IMMEDIATELY AFTER PURCHASE!” We hope literature lovers will do exactly that.” (Skailis 1974: 125)

In the story *Kikerikas pūšļi* (*The Egos of Kikerika*) Skailis parodies the relationships among writers as well as the hypocrisy of Soviet literary circles. Aliens have arrived in “little flying bowls” and robbed the public library, looking for literary works that would help them “deflate”, as their egos have become overblown in both the literal and figurative sense of the word. Finally, the works of four authors achieve the desired effect, and the grateful intergalactic visitors invite the writers to an award ceremony in their hometown. Unfortunately, the plan falls apart because all four authors are so at odds with each other that no one among them wants to sit next to the other three during the ceremony. The question Skailis purposefully avoids asking outright is – whose ego is really overblown here, the visitors' or their supposed saviors', whose actions do not align with their words?

The perpetually tense relationship between writers and critics is examined in the story *Kritiķa Paivistiņa liktenis* (*The Fate of the Critic Paivistiņš*) by Andrejs Skailis. Weird things happen to the title character at night: one night he is inexplicably transported from the creativity resort to the zoo, another time he winds up at the madhouse. The crime fiction writer Ķēvesgars is determined to solve the mystery, but one night he encounters the devil himself who, as it turns out, is collecting writers' autographs (“Devils, too, are becoming more and more civilized.” (Skailis 1974: 106)) and granting their deepest wishes in return. After Ķēvesgars has made his wish, “the following night, the critic Paivistiņš was found at the soap factory. On his bed there was a writing in red chalk that read, “In the melting pot, at once!”” (Skailis 1974: 107) So, the writers' attitude towards the critics was obvious.

The humorists have not ignored their own profession – satire – either. In the story *Enģeļa Astiandra bikses* (The Shirt of Angel Astiander) by Skailis an unsuccessful satirist complains to an angel about his difficult fate, as nobody loves satirists: “...we’re writing as delicately as we can. We don’t attack anyone outright, just make little quips, pointing out that it’s bad to spit onto the sidewalk, quarrel with your wife, ride the tram without a ticket... And what do we get for our effort? Our readers are yawning!” (Skailis 1974: 127–128) After listening to the satirist’s griping that you can “lose your shirt” like that, the compassionate angel gives him his own shirt, and, all of a sudden, satirists become well-loved – everyone simply begs to be criticized. That is, of course, until the protagonist gets the idea of criticizing the angel himself. The shirt then erupts in blue flames, and satirists become as unpopular as they were before. It was clear to the readers that all criticism and sarcasm in Soviet Latvia could only be directed at “smaller” people not the “angels” that had certain powers.

## Conclusions

The analyzed material shows that comic science fiction was a popular instrument in Soviet literature that allowed to at least somewhat more freely address the themes that for “serious” writers were either prohibited or strictly limited. By using fantastic plotlines and fairytale or religious motives, satirists could successfully emphasize flaws (either those of an individual or the system) that not many dared criticize openly because of the possible consequences. Besides, comic science fiction of this time often merged (although not always smoothly) two genres – satire and science fiction, thus creating a peculiar literary phenomenon which has not been as common neither before nor after the described time frame.

It should be noted that in the 1990s the ways writers discussed the social phenomena, as well as the content of science fiction works, dramatically changed, since it was at this time that the USSR collapsed. There was no more strict censorship and, consequently, no further need for a veiled criticism of the regime that no longer existed – it could now be done openly without subtexts and parody elements. The local science fiction in Latvia thus gradually stopped being a covert parody of the Soviet life and began exploring the themes more common for the international science fiction, such as the development of technologies and their impact on human lives, the changes in social structures and the exploration of space. The genre had joined the mainstream of the science fiction elsewhere; however, on this way losing the specific phenomenon discussed in this paper, perhaps forever.

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