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## THE NEW WORLD AFTER THE FLOOD. THE RAIN MOTIF IN THE NOVEL *LAME FATE* BY ARKADIJ AND BORIS STRUGACKIJ: PROPOSAL FOR AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS

**Abstract:** *In* *Lame Fate* (*Chromaja sud'ba*), a novel by Arkadij and Boris Strugackij written between 1965 and 1966, a secondary narrative—a novel within a novel—unfolds alongside the main storyline. This embedded narrative, titled *Ugly Swans* (*Gadkie lebedi*), was initially rejected by censors due to its political undertones but was later published in a Latvian magazine in 1987 under the title *The Rainy Season* (*Vremja doždja*).

Set in an unnamed town subjected to relentless rainfall, *Ugly Swans* explores the catastrophic consequences of a great flood, which is widely attributed to the actions of the *mokrecy* (*clammies*), mysterious beings confined to a leper colony. The incessant rain is primarily perceived as a manifestation of divine retribution. Notably, only children remain unaffected by its destructive force, instead experiencing the rain as a natural, protective, and nurturing element. The rain, depicted as both a tangible and symbolic menace, ultimately compels the adult population to abandon the city. In doing so, it cleanses the accumulated corruption of civilization, eradicating any remnants of the old world. However, after the deluge subsides, a new era emerges—one bathed in sunlight, signifying renewal and the birth of a new world.

This paper aims to examine the motif of rain in *Lame Fate* through an ecocritical lens, identifying not only its fundamental thematic implications but also the broader environmental consciousness evident throughout the Strugackij brothers' body of work. By contextualizing the rain motif within the novel, this study seeks to illuminate its significance within the Authors' broader philosophical and literary vision.

**Keywords:** *Soviet literature, Soviet science fiction, Strugackij, Lame Fate, rain.*

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## **1. Introduction: the ecological theme in the novel *Lame Fate* and the rain motif**

The intricate, frequently contradictory relationship between humanity and its natural or urban environment is a recurring theme in many of the novels published by the Strugackij brothers during the 1960s and 1970s. This era was characterised by a blend of philosophical and fantastical themes, which were consistently viewed through a satirical lens, and by introspective reflections on the encounter with the Other.

In the novel *The Inhabited Island* (*Obitaemyj ostrov*, 1969), the relationship between man and the environment is synthesised in the cosmos and in a starry sky that is never visible; in *The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel* (*Otel' "Upogibščego al'pinista"*, 1970), it is embodied in the mountain and its pitfalls. In *The Snail on the Slope* (*Ulitka na sklone*, 1971), the forest is the setting. In *Roadside Picnic* (*Piknik na abočine*, 1972), the limited areas of the contaminated earth are the setting. In *The Doomed City* (*Grad obožjennyj*, 1975), the city and a dark sky without stars or moon are the settings.

The image that symbolises this relationship in the above-mentioned novels is neither a mere background nor a mere accessory frame, but a motif that is precisely structured: firstly, a realistic motif<sup>2</sup>; secondly, an authentic hooking device that promotes connections between the various possible semantic levels of the narrative itself. Each of its occurrences, in its original or modified form, evokes further secondary associations, which in turn activate a continuous process of reflection. The realistic motif is also a structural and narrative element of significance, explaining and consolidating the theme to which it is linked by providing concrete details (Daemmrich, 1985). It is evident that within the corpus of Arkadij and Boris Strugackij's oeuvre, specifically the titles that fall within the "third phase" (second half of the 1960s) and the "fifth phase" (1980s)<sup>3</sup>, *Lame Fate* (*Chromaja sud'ba*) is notable for its utilisation of a compelling realistic motif: the rain motif<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>2</sup> Boris Tomaševskij identifies the realistic motif as the illusory function of all narrative, particularly in the context of prose within the fantasy genre. The realistic illusion is expressed in the experienced reader as a demand for truthfulness, which the realistic motif must satisfy precisely. The connotation of truthfulness is frequently attributed to the incorporation of extra-literary elements within the structure of the realistic motif, with references to social, political and moral issues "which have a life of their own outside literature" (Tomaševskij, 1965: p.152).

<sup>3</sup> The periodisation proposed by Kuznecova (2009) is adopted for the analysis.

<sup>4</sup> It is evident that the rain motif is inextricably linked to that of water, a subject that has been extensively explored within the domain of ecocritical studies, specifically within the framework of the Blue Humanities. The contemporary world, as Lowell Duckert observes, emerged from a deluge, and he proposes an intriguing reflection on the perception of rain as a literary or theatrical reworking by

which is intricately woven into the fabric of the novel, resonating across both its narrative levels.

It is intriguing to note the publication in 1950 of Ray Bradbury's short story *Death by Rain*, set on the planet Venus, where a perpetual, murderous rain falls. The narrative follows a group of four astronauts traversing the planet in search of refuge, with only one of them ultimately finding solace within the Sun Dome, a structure constructed long ago by Earthlings<sup>5</sup>.

*Lame Fate* is a notable work by the Strugackij brothers, a unique feature being its exclusive focus on the figure of the writer in the Soviet era, and its distinction as one of the few novels to employ a dual narrative structure. The novel can be regarded as a work within a work<sup>6</sup>, with the former bearing the title *Ugly Swans* (*Gadkie*

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different civilisations and in different epochs. Furthermore, Duckert hypothesises that a deluge is likely to be the eventual conclusion of the world (Duckert, 2017).

The element of water, when placed in the broad context of History, is invariably associated with power (Obertrajs, 2019). The social and political context, in which the utilisation of water and, most significantly, its procurement, is situated, endows this resource with a distinct cultural significance. The construction of large dams and hydroelectric power stations in the Soviet Union during the 1950s and 1960s played a significant role in the development of a pervasive national identity (Obertrajs, 2019). The social value of water served as a fundamental pillar of Soviet power, both as a tangible symbol of its influence and as a means to strengthen the relationship between the state and its citizens, thereby fostering a greater degree of consensus within society (Obertrajs, 2019). For instance, in the 1960s, the Soviet Ministry of Health initiated a research project with the objective of establishing novel quality standards for drinking water (Čerkinskij, 1967). This initiative, as Čerkinskij (1967) noted, served to underscore the significant advancements made in the Soviet Union within the domains of health science and medical practice.

<sup>5</sup> The story was first published in Planet Stories magazine. Subsequent publication occurred under the title *The Long Rain*. In Russia, it was published in 1964 in a translation by Lev Ždanov.

While Bradbury was an important model for the two brothers, the thematic similarities between the American writer and the two Soviet writers can be explained by the common ideological and artistic context of the time (Burcev, Kazakov, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Feliks Sorokin, a member of the Union of Writers of the USSR and author of numerous novels dedicated to the military and the army, having served as an interpreter with the rank of lieutenant during his youth, receives an invitation from the secretariat of the Union of Writers. The invitation requires him to submit either a manuscript or selected pages of one of his texts to the Institute of Linguistic Research in Bonnaja Street in Moscow. The literary essay will be subjected to a special examination carried out by an experimental machine: the Talent Meter. The result of the experiment will be the formulation of a judgement on the value of the production in question and, therefore, on the writer's talent.

Sorokin methodically reviews his unpublished works until he identifies a significant blue folder that contains an unfinished novel which the writer holds in high regard. Immersing himself in the manuscript, Sorokin initiated the second story, entitled *Ugly Swans* (*Gadkie lebedi*). The protagonist of the novel-within-a-novel, Viktor Banev, is also a rather well-known writer, but now tired of his work. He

*lebedi*). It was written between 1966 and 1967, and published in the volume *The Waves Extinguish the Wind* (*Vólny gasjat veter*), which also contains the novel of the same name and the povest' *The Snail on the Slope* (*Ulitka na sklone*). The latter was published in 1989<sup>7</sup> by Sovetskij pisatel', the organ of the Union of Soviet Writers. The work is characterised by a variety of themes, and is marked by a complex,

returns to an unknown authoritarian state, to the city of his childhood, where his ex-wife Lola and his teenage daughter Irma live, and checks into a hotel. Banev experiences a sense of alienation, exacerbated by the incessant rainfall that has been falling on the city for an extended period. Domestic animals have disappeared, and most strikingly, there are *mokrecy*, strange-looking creatures whose eyes, affected by a mysterious pathology, are surrounded by a yellow circle. These creatures appear to lack emotional response, yet they are endowed with intelligence and intuition. Water and books are vital to them. The townspeople perceive the *mokrecy* to be responsible for the corruption of children and adolescents, encouraging them to emulate their example. They also attribute climate change to the *mokrecy*. Two decades before, a leper colony had been established on the periphery of the town, where the lepers reside. Although special permission is required to enter, the *mokrecy* are permitted to leave. The pivotal moment in the narrative is the abrupt and seemingly unexplained exodus of the children and adolescents to the leper colony, where they proclaim their irreversible decision to alter the course of their lives. In response, their parents, overcome with concern, hastily embark on a journey towards the leper colony amidst the pouring rain, endeavouring to reach their children and dissuade them from their newfound plans. The crowd is addressed by a voice, which delivers a stern and solemn speech, instilling a sense of calm. A subsequent development in the narrative is the mass movement of the people of *mokrecy* towards the town centre, constituting an exodus in the opposite direction to that of the adults. Those remaining in their homes, including Banev and the other hotel guests, are compelled to depart, as the *mokrecy* invade all physical and institutional spaces in the city, apparently intent on establishing a new regime. Concurrently, a novel sequence of events commences: the clouds part, the rain ceases, and the sun emerges. Banev returns to the city in a state of profound transformation. He is reunited with his daughter Irma, who is exiting a jet fighter in the company of her friend Bol-Kunac. The conclusion of the novel *Ugly Swans* is enigmatic: Banev bids farewell to the characters and the narrative by uttering the sentence: "все это прекрасно, но только вот что – не забыть бы мне вернуться" (Strugackij, 1989:p.191); in the English translation: "This is well and good, but here's the thing – I'd better not forget to go back" (Strugatsky, 2020:p.404). Concurrently, on a separate narrative level, the story of Feliks Sorokin is being narrated. He elects to submit his manuscript to the Institute of Linguistic Research for evaluation by the PNRT (Probable Number of Readers of the Text) machine. However, the rating assigned to the manuscript is not determined by an impossible measure of talent, but rather by the number of potential readers. It is notable that Sorokin does not submit the contents of the hidden blue folder to the machine, but instead presents some of his translations. The evaluation yielded by the machine, articulated by an unidentified individual, is noteworthy for its unanticipated conclusion: namely, that the author, Feliks Sorokin, harbours no interest in the valuation of his own oeuvre. The evaluator, who is benevolent, conveys a cryptic message: he urges him not to accept the score handed to him by a peculiar-looking man. The title is unnerving and potentially illuminating: *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ugly Swans*, contained in *Lame Fate*, completed in 1967, was intended for publication in an anthology to be published by Molodaja gvardija in 1968. However, the Glavlit (the main censorship body in Soviet times) did not approve its publication. Consequently, the manuscript was disseminated throughout the country via samizdat, and it was only in 1972, when it was printed in Munich by the Posev publishing house, that it was made available to a wider audience. The Posev publishing house itself was founded in 1945 by a group of Russian emigrants belonging to the Union of Russian Solidarists.

articulated and inexhaustible philosophical reflection, conducted on the internal narrative level, and surrounded by thematic clues arranged on the external narrative level. The central theme is the intergenerational conflict between fathers and sons, in this case teenagers. This intricately woven narrative features a contraposition between collective subjects, where adults are depicted as the embodiment of a morally and psychologically degraded humanity, while the young are portrayed as being animated by a strong constructive energy and harbouring a deep-seated resentment towards the adult world. The marginalised and infected by an eye disease are the *mokrecy*, serving as a transparent metaphor for the *intelligencija*, the educators of the new generation. Finally, the character of Viktor Banev is given the role of mediator between the three factions (Svitenko, 2021).

## 2. Characterisation of the rain motif: its association with the characters

The opposition between fathers and sons corresponds to the dichotomous vision of the present and future of the city as a result of the immoral attitudes of the adults, which now condemns it to destruction.

The rain, which is associated with the downfall of a morally corrupt society and generation, is contrasted with the conflict between the generations, which is seen as a symbol of the superior intelligence and greater sense of justice that the young possess. This conflict has been described as “one of the most courageous confrontations in world fiction with the youth movement of the 1960s” (Suvin, 1988:p.161). As previously discussed, it is the rain that causes the relentless devastation, thus consolidating and explaining the theme of generational conflict and the contrast between the two different temporal dimensions. The semantic relevance of this motif is indicated, on the one hand, by a second title, *Vremja doždja* [The Rainy Season], under which a variant of the novel was published in the magazines *Daugava* (1987, issues 1–7) and *Priroda i človek* (1988, issues 9–11), and, conversely, by the considerable number, approximately one hundred, of precise occurrences and terms with similar or related meanings<sup>8</sup>. This motif can therefore be the subject of ecocritical analysis—as Cheryll Glotfelty already stated in 1996: “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationships between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty, Fromm, 1996: p.XVI)—in order to examine, for example, the representation of nature in the text under consideration. The objective of this

<sup>8</sup>The Corpus Management and Text Analysis software Sketch Engine was utilised to identify instances of the term “rain” and related terms.

study is to ascertain the role that the natural environment plays in the economy of the narrative. In addition, the study will determine whether the values expressed are consistent with ecosophy or ecological wisdom (1996)<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, Lawrence Buell asserts that the concept of “environment” itself expands its boundaries to include urban spaces and the interaction between “built” and “natural” (Buell 2005). In the novel *Ugly Swans*, the prevailing urban environment is evident. The unnamed city, as previously observed, is subject to a continuous downpour.

In its initial appearance, it appears to underscore the disagreeable discourse between Banev and his former spouse Lola: “За окном темнело, и по-прежнему лил дождь, крупный, тяжелый, неторопливый – дождь, которого было очень много и который явно никуда не торопился” (Strugackij, 1989: p.18)<sup>10</sup>. A little further on, he highlights the blue and gold illuminated signs on some buildings, which resemble the commandments of a secular decalogue: “Президент – отец народа”, “Легионер Свободы – верный сын Президента”, “Армия – наша грозная слава” (Strugackij, 1989: p.21)<sup>11</sup>. The deleterious effects of the rain are evident:

‘Улицы были мокрые, серые, пустые, в палисадниках тихо гибли от сырости яблони. Виктор впервые обратил внимание на то, что некоторые дома заколочены. Городок все-таки сильно переменился – покосились заборы, под карнизами высыпала белая плесень, вылиняли краски, а на улицах безраздельно царил дождь. Дождь падал просто так, дождь сеялся с крыш мелкой водяной пылью, дождь собирался на сквознях в туманные крутящиеся столбы, волочащиеся от стены к стене, дождь с урчанием хлестал из ржавых водосточных труб, дождь разливался по мостовой и бежал по промытым между булыжников руслам. Черно-серые тучи медленно ползли над самыми крышами. Человек был незванным гостем на улицах, и дождь его не жаловал.’ (Strugackij, 1989:p.99)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>The novel genre facilitates reader immersion in the depicted natural environment, allowing identification with the varied ways in which characters perceive and introject it (Clark, 2019).

<sup>10</sup>‘It was getting dark out there, and still pouring rain—a heavy, deliberate rain, coming down in large drops. There was a lot of it and it was obviously in no hurry.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.48).

<sup>11</sup>‘The President is the father of the people,’ ‘The legionnaire of freedom: faithful son of the President,’ ‘The army: our mighty force.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.55).

<sup>12</sup>‘The streets were wet, gray, and empty. In front-yard gardens, apple trees were quietly perishing from the damp. For the first time, Victor noticed how many houses were boarded up. It was true that the city had changed quite a bit—fences sagged, mold splattered the sides of houses, every colour looked faded, and rain reigned undivided over all. Rain fell as simple drops, cascaded down roofs in a fine mist, accumulated inside gusts of wind, twisting into foggy, whirling columns that trailed from one wall to the next; it shot out of rusty drainpipes with a growl and poured out onto the street, running through grooves it had worn in the cobblestones. Grayish-black clouds crept slowly along,

The rain motif is closely linked to the character of Viktor Banev, who is tasked with perceiving the impending catastrophe and the division in the human microcosm of the city between those who are drowned and those who are saved. The character's arduous existential odyssey, characterised by a labyrinthine array of challenges to be surmounted, enlightening encounters and dialogues, archaic recollections and dreamlike visions, culminates in the acquisition of a heightened state of consciousness, thus positioning him as one of the select witnesses to the emergent world.

Banev is also a liminal figure, a connecting subject between the two generational dimensions of fathers and sons, and is endowed with a peculiar inner visual acuity through which he perceives future changes in situations: the evocation of visions of the past, probably derived from his literary creations, allows him to understand, for example, the different relationship that adults and children establish with the phenomenon of rain. This is exemplified by the following passage, which evokes a poignant reminiscence:

‘А дети шли бесконечной серой колонной по серым размытым дорогам, шли, спотыкаясь, оскальзываясь и падая под проливным дождем, шли, согнувшись, промокшие насквозь, сжимая в посиневших лапках жалкие промокшие узелки, шли, маленькие, беспомощные, непонимающие, шли плача, шли молча, шли, оглядываясь, шли, держась за руки и за хлястики.’<sup>13</sup>

Which is contrasted is contrasted with a joyful and sunny vision:

‘Они уходили радостно, и дождь был для них другом, они весело шлепали по лужам горячими босыми ногами, они весело болтали, и пели, и не оглядывались, потому что уже все забыли, потому что у них было только будущее, потому что они навсегда забыли свой храпящий и сопящий предутренний город.’ (Strugackij, 1989:p.141)<sup>14</sup>

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hanging so low they almost touched the rooftops. Out here, man was an unbidden guest, and the rain made sure he knew it’ (Strugatsky, 2020: p.214–215).

<sup>13</sup> ‘As for the children, they were walking in an endless gray column down a gray, muddy road, walking, stumbling, slipping and falling in the pouring rain, walking, huddled, soaked to the skin, clutching pitiful wet bindles in little blue paws; they were little themselves, helpless, understanding nothing, crying as they walked silently, looking back as they went, hand in hand or clinging to each other’s coats’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.296–297).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Their departure was joyous, the rain was their friend, they splashed through the puddles with warm, wet feet, they chattered happily, singing, never looking back, because they’d already forgotten everything, because only the future lay ahead, because they’d banished all thought of their snoring, snuffling, predawn city.’ (Strugatsky, 2020: p.297).

It is intriguing to observe the correlation between the motif of rain and the character of Diana Banev, a subordinate character in the narrative who is distinguished by her bravery, clarity of thought, and firm resolve. She is capable of defying the forces of nature in order to direct a group of men and women to the leper colony, where the population has congregated to seek refuge from the impending flood (Strugackij, 1989:p.141–142). The latter is foretold by Golem, the chief physician of the leper colony:

‘А дождь будет падать на пустой город, размывать мостовые, сочиться сквозь крыши, сквозь гнилые крыши... потом он смоет все, растворит город в первобытной земле, но не остановится, а будет падать, и падать, и падать... [...] Да, апокалипсис... Будет падать и падать, а потом земля напитается, и взойдет новый посев, каких раньше не бывало, и не будет плевел среди сплошных злаков. Но не будет и нас, чтобы насладиться новой вселенной.’ (1989:p.26)<sup>15</sup>

The secular prophecy corroborates the observation that the apocalyptic creed disseminates in periods and locations where the precariousness of the prevailing order is perceived in terms of society, constituted power and individual life (Thompson, 1996). It is therefore interesting to note that the Strugackij brothers' working notes reveal that in an early version of the novel *Lame Fate*, the original epigraph quoted a passage from the *Apocalypse* of John. The Golem's proclamation appears to draw upon both the biblical account of the Flood<sup>16</sup> and the image of the lush Eden. However, this Eden is characterised by a distinct symbolic significance, as outlined in the creation account: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (*Genesis*, 2–15)<sup>17</sup>. In the Golem's vision, the new earth will be devoid of human presence.

### 3. A discussion of the metaphorical significance of the rain motif

The gradual destruction of the city, a potential metaphor for the annihilation of civilisation, is also presented in the theory of the abyss developed by the health

<sup>15</sup> ‘Then the rain will fall on an empty city, eroding the pavements, seeping through the roofs, the rotting roofs . . . and in the end, it will wash everything away, dissolving the city into primordial silt, but it won't stop there, it'll keep falling and falling and falling . . . [...] Yes, apocalypse . . . It'll keep falling and falling, and then the earth will become saturated, and a new crop will grow, one never seen before, with nary any chaff among all that wheat. But nary a person, either, to enjoy this new universe.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.64).

<sup>16</sup> ‘I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.’ (*Genesis* 6–9, Internet).

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.’ (*Genesis* 2–9, Internet).



inspector Pavor, who illustrates the dramatic situation to Viktor: Mankind will fall into the abyss because it has failed. This failure is evidenced by a biological collapse, marked by declining population, the spread of disease, and self-destruction through drug use. The theory posits that humanity is a victim of its own degeneration, having destroyed its true nature and consequently being destroyed by the artificial nature it has created. Pavor further contends that this failure is also ideological, asserting that the moral systems adopted throughout history have since been abandoned and discredited, and humanity has remained the same uncultivated mass it always was. The conclusion drawn is one of great tragedy, and the abyss, *propast*<sup>18</sup>, is seen as an inevitable conclusion.

The concept of *apocalypse*, as introduced by Golem in his prophecy, is realised at the conclusion of the novel<sup>19</sup> (Strugackij, 1989: p.26). The city will burst like an abscess: it will shed its purulent matter (justice and the police, industry and commerce, the courts and finance, national education, the post office and the telegraph) and its blood (the people).

The motif of rain is associated with *mokrecy*, creatures that are evidently linked to moist or wet environments<sup>20</sup>. The figure of Jul Golem, the self-proclaimed first physician of the leper colony, is one of enigmatic and elusive nature. He provides a description of the species of *mokrecy*, which are beings affected by a genetic eye disease that results in conspicuous changes to the epidermis and the appearance of furuncles, pustules and purulent ulcers. If they are prevented from reading, they starve to death. These enigmatic beings are confined to a specific and peripheral area of the city, a situation that is evidently disapproved of by the mayor, who has reportedly employed leghold traps to catch them. These creatures are the object of fear and prejudice, accused of spreading disease, casting the evil eye, bringing war,

<sup>18</sup> The term *propast*—repeatedly used by Pavor when questioned by Viktor Banev (chapter six)—is interesting for its cultural and symbolic value. It corresponds to the translator's "abyss": "as much topless as bottomless, one of joy and light as well as of misery and darkness" (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1996:p.3). However, historically, the sense of the abyss of Hell precedes that of Heaven. It is found in all cosmogonies as the beginning and the end of an evolving universe. It is noteworthy that the abyss, in the dimension of verticality, synthesises the reconciliation of high and low, origin and end of evolution. This can be identified with deep water, which is both the source of life and a powerful destructive energy, originating from an apocalyptic deluge (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1996). The English version employs a phraseologism ("to go to hell in a handbasket") that serves to soften its tragic connotations.

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that this reference is alluding to the narrative of the destruction of Babel: "Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea." (*Revelation*, 18, 21, Internet).

<sup>20</sup> The term *mokrecy* is a taxonomic term denoting a family of insects belonging to the order Diptera, specifically the suborder Ceratopogonidae. These insects are characterised by their hematophagous nature and their prevalence in aquatic environments, including lakes, ponds, estuaries and marine shores.

death and famine, and even of being able to make toys. Writer Viktor Banev reflects, “погоду они делают, и детей они переманивают [...], и кошек они вывели [...], и клопы у них залетали...” (Strugackij, 1989: p.97)<sup>21</sup>.

‘Вдруг весь зал поднялся. Это было совершенно неожиданно, и у Виктора мелькнула сумасшедшая мысль, что ему удалось, наконец, сказать нечто такое, что поразило воображение слушателей. Но он уже видел, что от дверей идет мокрец, тощий, легкий, почти нематериальный, словно тень, и дети смотрят на него, и не просто смотрят, а тянутся к нему.’ (Strugackij, 1989:p.67)<sup>22</sup>

It could be hypothesized that the *mokrecy* impart to children and young people a profound yet enigmatic understanding, embedded within books that are frequently seized by the local authorities, as well as a heightened sensory awareness of the rain, evoked in Viktor Banev’s indistinct recollection. The rain, incessant and violent, washes and purifies the city, serving as an expression of the old world that the young generation has no intention of destroying. This ideal ambition is revealed by a high school student to Banev:

‘Мы собираемся построить новый. Вот вы – жестоки: вы не представляете себе строительство нового без разрушения старого. А мы представляем себе это очень хорошо. Мы даже поможем вашему поколению создать этот ваш рай, выпивайте и закусывайте на здоровье. Строить, господин Банев, только строить. Ничего не разрушать, только строить.’ (Strugackij, 1989:p.67)<sup>23</sup>

The contemporary vision of humanity, as developed by the *vunderkindy*—the prodigies of the gymnasium where Banev himself was educated—is entirely analogous to that of the Golem: “Вы сожрали себя, простите, пожалуйста, вы растратили себя на междоусобные драки, на вранье и на борьбу с враньем, которую вы ведете, придумывая новое вранье...” (Strugackij, 1989:p.66)<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> ‘The weather, for one thing, plus luring our kids to their side (why?), plus getting rid of all the cats (again, why?). They even made the bedbugs fly...’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.211).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Suddenly, the whole room was on its feet. This was completely unexpected, and Victor had the crazy thought that he’d finally managed to say something that thrilled their imagination. But he could already see the clammy walking toward them, gaunt, light, almost immaterial, like a shade. Victor watched the children gazing at him—more than gazing, they seemed to stretch toward him.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:pp.147–148).

<sup>23</sup> ‘We’re going to build a new one. You’re the cruel ones: you can’t imagine building the new without first destroying the old. But we can, and quite well, too. We’ll even help your generation create your version of paradise, so you can drink and eat to your heart’s content. All that matters are building, only building. We’re not destroying anything. We’re only building.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.148).

<sup>24</sup> ‘You cannibalized yourselves, you wasted your lives fighting with each other, wasted them on lies and a war against lies that you wage by inventing still more lies...’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.145).

After the rain ceased and the clouds dispersed, the sun reemerged, casting intense and unrelenting radiation upon the ruins of the city. The new world emerged at dawn, the day after the great exodus caused by the flood. The black clouds gradually dissipated, and Viktor Banev, alone and surrounded by absolute silence, experienced a new sense of peace and tranquillity as he admired the sun and the dark sky, with everything around him illuminated. Golem, who materialises suddenly in a jeep in which Diana is also travelling, confirms the arrival of the new world: “– Ну что, Голем, грядет новый мир? – Да, – сказал Голем” (Strugackij, 1989:p.190)<sup>25</sup>. It is revealed to him that the *mokrecy* are not there, thereby suggesting that... “Можете считать, что их не было. И не будет” (Strugackij, 1989:p.190)<sup>26</sup>. Certainly! Here's another refined version with alternative word choices: in the new world, the air remains pristine and pure, while the intense sunlight harshly illuminates the desolate and abandoned city, whose deteriorating structures resemble a landscape afflicted by a severe eczema. Consequently, it is the sun, rather than the rain, that ultimately brings about the city's destruction: “все вокруг потрескивало, тихонько шипело, шелестело, делалось пористым, прозрачным, превращалось в сугробы грязи и пропадало” (Strugackij, 1989:p.190)<sup>27</sup>. The land is gradually covered with young grass, with new life. The writer Viktor Banev and Diana walk across the land, exploring the new landscape, and Banev discovers a Diana beside him. “Еще одна Диана, совсем новая, какой она никогда прежде не была, он и не предполагал даже, что такая Диана возможна, – Диана Счастливая” (Strugackij, 1989:p.191)<sup>28</sup>. Nonetheless, the new world may not represent the ultimate reality, but rather another dimension in which Viktor Banev experiences transient periods of contentment. He is cognisant of the fact that he has another mission to fulfil: “И [...] подумал: ‘все это прекрасно, но только вот что – не забыть бы мне вернуться’” (Strugackij, 1989:p.191)<sup>29</sup>. The advent of Irma and her betrothed, Bol-Kunac, in the new era and new world, has been met with a mixture of surprise and acceptance. The four survivors are profoundly changed; they are happy beings, perhaps ready to build a new society with values different from those that caused the destruction of the old world.

<sup>25</sup> ‘So, Golem, is the new world coming?’ – Yeah, – said Golem.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.401).

<sup>26</sup> ‘You can assume they never existed. And never will.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.401).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Everything around was crackling, hissing faintly, and rustling, turning porous and transparent, transforming into drifts of dirt, and disappearing.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.402).

<sup>28</sup> ‘Another Diana, a totally new one, one he'd never seen before. He'd never even suspected that such a Diana was possible—Diana the Joyous.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.404).

<sup>29</sup> ‘And then he [...] thought, “this is all well and good, but here's the thing—I'd better not forget to go back”’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.404).

#### 4. The rain motif and the image of the new world: a proposal for ecocritical reflection

In consideration of the trajectory traversed in the context of the primary occurrences of the rain motif, it may be feasible to propose a series of ecocritical reflections, commencing from the propositions for reflection advanced by Glotfelty (1996) and referenced in this paper.

A primary object of analysis is the representation of nature, which in the novel is neither a simple scenic backdrop nor an accessory decorative motif, but a genuine theme, if considered from the perspective of the reader's reception, as an invariable element of the reader's own experiences, representations and ideological positions, and which becomes evident in the process of reading the text (Žolkovskij, Ščeglov, 1996:p.28).

In *Lame Fate*, as previously mentioned, the natural environment<sup>30</sup> is associated with the New World, characterised by a primeval, silent, tranquil landscape seemingly devoid of human—except for a select few characters—and animal presence. This reborn nature is characterised by delicate herbaceous vegetation, which gradually green the deserted spaces and seems to herald a new era, or perhaps a new civilisation. The landscape in which Banev and Diana traverse, a state of contentment and spiritual rejuvenation, is perceived as a re-envisioning of Eden, not as an act of creation *ex nihilo*, but as a liberation from the oppressive and fatalistic atmosphere of the metropolis. This vision, however, is not without its ambiguities; it may be a metaphorical image or a vision that does not offer complete solace. The notion of child prodigies, expressions of a superior wisdom and bearers of a precious ethical-moral message, is not present in this landscape, and *mokrecy* are also absent. Banev, the author who has the privilege of bearing witness to their existence, perhaps in a literary work, is aware that he must return to his own origins, to the old world. This luminous, sun-drenched, and temperate landscape, with its gentle breezes—in the rain-soaked city, Golem had accentuated the plight of the inhabitants, compelled to breathe water like fish or amphibians, foreshadowing the mass exodus—is reborn after a cruel work of destruction wrought by nature itself, but caused by humankind, who, as health inspector Pavor elucidates, has destroyed

<sup>30</sup> The natural environment is understood here as “the natural, physical environment in which human life takes place. Some would call it nature, our living planet, life on Earth or the geophysical world [...]. The natural environment is all that is created by nature, that surrounds people, where they live, where they go about their daily lives, work and activities, and from which they use elements.” (Lauesen, 2013:p.1735).

itself, annihilating its own physiological and moral being. The reborn nature, thus, emerges from the cataclysm caused by man's evil actions.

It therefore seems appropriate to situate the novel within the “environmental and radical ecological discourse” (Garrard, 2004:p.85), where the concept of “ecology” refers firstly to the spiritual and cognitive dimension of man and secondly to the context in which his interactions with the surrounding society and environment are activated (Garrard, 2004). A small community, depicted within the microcosm of the novel, is cognisant of the values that define a culture inspired by the tenets of ecology, signifying a high civilisation. The children and adolescents, in conjunction with the *mokrecy*, are endowed with wisdom and aspire to a new world where the preservation of essential wisdom within the human population, and the provision of physical, aesthetic and creative gratification to humankind, will be attainable (Bateson, 2000:p.54). The students of the gymnasium have been known to voice their disapproval of the characters created by Viktor Banev, citing their failure to emulate the qualities of their real-life counterparts. These critics have asserted that the characters are negligent, desperate, and, most notably, unwilling to embrace change. The prevailing perspective asserts that the contemporary world is characterised by an absence of the requisite adaptability to transition from a static and decadent civilisation to an ecologically sustainable system (Bateson, 2000).

It is noteworthy that the deluge is not the cause of destruction; rather, it is solar heating. The rainwater, despite its abundance and unstoppable nature, its overwhelming virulence, performs a purifying function.

The rain, seemingly imbued with volition and cognition, compels all corrupt and corrupting entities to retreat, while sparing the innocent and morally uncorrupted beings, the *mokrecy*, who are exiled to the leper colony, followed by the children. The edifices of the forsaken metropolis, vestiges of a society once decadent yet now fallen, bear witness to the unveiling and subsequent eradication wrought by the flood. The violent primeval heat, emanating from a blinding sun, completes the reclamation and the final work of devastation. The skeletal remains of the city are then incinerated, liquefied and extinguished in perpetuity. The two *stichija*, (the primordial forces of water and fire), serve to restore the conditions of the nascent state and offer the chosen ones the opportunity to rebuild a new civilisation in the new world.

While *Lame Fate* may be regarded as a precursor of cli-fi literature, in which the cataclysm comprises two interconnected events, it is notable that the catastrophic event is not attributed to human interference in the environment, but rather to self-destructive ethical and moral behaviour. Furthermore, numerous examples of

works dealing with climate change belong to the category of dystopian narratives, as a depiction or prefiguration of a negative or undesirable future (Putra, 2016). In contrast, *Lame Fate* presents the scenario of a new beginning, the dawn of a new world that will offer a new opportunity to those who are willing to seize it and create a new civilisation.

The role of the natural landscape is to reveal a new context, which is essentially a return to the origins, to a pre-civilisation that has not yet been colonised. This environment facilitates interactions characterised by a Batesonian wisdom, underpinned by a profound respect for the individual's physiological entity and moral identity.

It is likely to be a post-apocalyptic novel (Putra, 2016) in which the effects of the catastrophe are only briefly outlined and are left to the reader's imagination. Alternatively, it could be argued that the narrative functions as an example of eco-dystopia<sup>31</sup>, a genre which typically presents apocalyptic scenarios and the subsequent collapse of civilisation. However, the text could be interpreted as contextually heralding a new palingenesis. The apocalyptic event, therefore, marks the climax of history, to be followed by rebirth, that is, the birth of a new world and a new human community, which will make possible the redemption of the sins that caused the apocalypse (Malvestio, 2022).

In relation to the coherence of the values articulated in the novel with the foundational principles of ecosophy, it is noteworthy that the depiction of the city, predominantly characterised by the movements and transfers of the primary characters amidst incessant rainfall, does not embody an ecosophical urban physiognomy (Antonioli, 2017). This is distinguished by the concept of “urban nature”, signifying the presence of communal spaces that facilitate dialogue and

<sup>31</sup> In the context of the intricate issue of the definitions of “utopia”, “dystopia” and “science fiction”, a subject which has been extensively discussed in Peter Fitting's essay (Fitting, 2010), it is important to consider the implications of these concepts.

<sup>in</sup> 1989, the philosopher Vjačeslav Serbinenko advanced the argument that the Strugackij brothers' novel *Ugly Swans* does not represent a utopia, but rather the dream of a utopia, utopianism, which imagines a future that, definitively devoid of human traits, regards humanity as an unpleasant obstacle (Serbinenko, 1989). This observation is of considerable relevance when considering that the novels published in the 1950s and early 1960s were characterised by a utopian vision of the future, the future of communism, of which the Soviet people would be the advocates and protagonists. In 1956–1957, the harbingers of a bright and extraordinary future appeared unmistakable: the 20th Congress of the CPSU; the launch of the first Soviet satellite into space; the publication of Efremov's novel *Tumannost' Andromedy* (*Andromeda Nebula*) (Kaspě, 2018). Serbinenko's *The Snail on the Slope* (1988, completed 1965) captures the transition from utopia to anti-utopia. (Serbinenko, 1989), while Fredric Jameson considers the later *Roadside Picnic*, published in 1972 but completed in 1971, to be “one of the most glorious of all contemporary utopias” (Jameson, 1982).

shared appropriation (Antonioli, 2017). In consideration of the ultimate evolution of the narrative, wherein Banev assumes the role of the protagonist—the city's disappearance and the revelation of the natural landscape—in the context of the imperative ecosophical assertion: “There is no going back, no romantic return to the natural world. We need an unprecedented earthly shift in how human beings relate to others on the planet” (Farrell, 2022:p.116). The fictional scenario portrays an apocalyptic metamorphosis that functions as a grandiose and idealistic metaphor for the future evolution of urban spaces. Rather than predicting the destruction of nature, as was the case at the time when the Strugackij brothers wrote the novel (Komarov, 1978)<sup>32</sup>, the narrative anticipates the reappearance and genesis of a new civilisation. It is noteworthy that the notion of a new civilisation arising from the ashes of the old one is one that remains at the forefront of scientific discourse, despite the paucity of evidence to support such claims:

‘Natural equilibriums will be increasingly reliant upon human intervention, and a time will come when vast programmes will need to be set up in order to regulate the relationship between oxygen, ozone and carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere.’ (Guattari, 2000:p.66)

## 5. Conclusions: The Rain and the Last Judgement

The image of the flood, with its biblical connotations, foretold by Golem, constitutes an intriguing link with the oeuvre of the writer Feliks Sorokin. The overarching theme of this narrative appears to be judgement: the protagonist is preoccupied with the fear of being unable to reach the headquarters of the Institute of Linguistic Research, where the machine that will evaluate his manuscript is located; he fears the judgement that will be pronounced and, above all, he finds himself in possession of a score entitled *The Trumpet of the Last Judgement*. The motif of the flood thus serves as a unifying thread, drawing parallels to the Old Testament context while concurrently proposing a non-divine, more secular interpretation of punishment, ascribed to the *mokrecy*, who are held responsible for climate change, the disappearance of all cats, and the attraction of children. Another intertextual clue that confirms both the link between the two narrative levels and the semantic value of the rain motif, which refers to the concept of *judgement* and the consequent condemnation and punishment, is Dante's quotation

<sup>32</sup> However, it is important to note the activity of independent social movements for environmental protection that arose in pre-Stalin times and survived the years of terror (Weiner 1999; Weiner 2000).

of two tercets from Canto VI of the *Inferno*, reproduced as an epigraph on the title page of Feliks Sorokin's novel, *Ugly Swans*:

‘Я в третьем круге, там, где дождь струится,/Проклятый, вечный, грузный,  
ледяной;/Всегда такой же, он все так же длится [...]/Хотя проклятым лю-  
дям, здесь живущим,/К прямому совершенству не прийти,/Их ждет полное  
бытие в грядущем.’ (Strugackij, 1989:50p.16)<sup>33</sup>

Feliks Sorokin's narrative concludes with yet another intertextual reference, as he engages in discourse with Michail Afanas'evič, a virtual representation of the writer Michail Bulgakov. Michail Afanas'evič exhorts Feliks to complete the novel, the manuscript of which is contained within the blue folder. From the novel *Ugly Swans*, Michail Afanas'evič reads the description of the desolate city, haunted and punished by the great rain. The final image in Sorokin's narrative features an inexpressibly happy man in the restaurant of the Club joining his guest, “подошел к красивой женщине в элегантном костюме песочного цвета” (Strugackij 1989:p.177)<sup>34</sup>. The two writers, Feliks Sorokin and Viktor Banev, are united by the prospect of change, of a new and unexpected horizon in their respective personal destinies.

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<sup>33</sup> ‘I am in the third circle, filled with cold, /unending, heavy, and accursed rain;/its measure and its kind are never changed. [...]/Though these accursed sinners never shall/attain the true perfection, yet they can/expect to be more perfect then than now.’ (Strugatsky, 2020:p.43).

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Департман за стране језике и књижевности и савремене културе

## НОВИ СВИЈЕТ НАКОН ПОТОПА. МОТИВ КИШЕ У РОМАНУ ХРОМА СУДБИНА АРКАДИЈА И БОРИСА СТРУГАЦКОГ: ПРИЈЕДЛОГ ЗА ЕКОКРИТИЧКУ АНАЛИЗУ

### Резиме

У роману *Хрома судбина* (*Хромая судьба*) Аркадија и Бориса Стругацког (Аркадий и Борис Стругацкий), написаном између 1965. и 1966. године, секундарна нарација - роман у роману - одвија се упоредо са главном радњом. Ову уграђену нарацију под насловом *Ружни лабудови* (*Гадкие лебеди*) цензура је првобитно одбацила због политичких конотација, али је касније објављена у једном летонском часопису 1987. године под насловом *Вријеме кише* (*Время дождя*). Радња *Ружних лабудова* смјештена је у неименовани град који је изложен непрекидним кишама. Роман истражује разорне посљедице велике поплаве, која се углавном приписује дјеловању мокреца, мистериозних

бића затворених у колонији губаваца. Непрестана киша углавном се доживљава као манифестација Божје казне. Значајно је да једино дјеца остају неопштећена усљед њеног деструктивног утицаја, они кишу доживљавају као природни, заштитнички и његујући елемент. Киша која је приказана као опипљива и симболична пријетња на крају присиљава одрасло становништво да напусти град. На тај начин, она чисти нагомилану исквареност цивилизације, уништавајући све остатке старог свијета. По окончању потопа, појављује се нова ера, обасјана сунчевом свјетлошћу, што означава обнову и рађање новог свијета. Овај рад има за циљ да испита мотив кише у роману *Хрома судбина* кроз екокритичку призму и да идентификује не само његове основне тематске импликације већ и ширу еколошку свијест која је присутна у цјелокупном опусу Стругацких. Контекстуализацијом мотива кише унутар романа овај рад настоји да осветли његов значај у оквиру шире филозофске и књижевне визије аутора.

► **Кључне ријечи:** совјетска књижевност, совјетска научна фантастика, Стругацки, *Хрома судбина*, киша.

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