

# **Humanization of the Science Fiction Alien**

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## 1. Introduction.

Ten years after they landed. All over the world as if there were no-one here. And they did nothing and did not speak as if there were no-one here and nothing under foot. Ten years since we learned that there is intelligent life in the universe but that they did not recognise us as intelligent or alive. They stand on the surface of the Earth like trees exerting their silent pressure on the world as if there were no-one here (Ellis 2016).

Imagine an invasion of super-intelligent extra-terrestrial beings on Earth. Imagine them seeing us as a part of the ecosystem on this planet and nothing more. How would humankind react? How would we, as a species, tackle a situation where our military force and atomic bombs were useless? That is a question we cannot answer. Nevertheless, extra-terrestrial beings are what many human beings long to meet.

What lies behind human longing for there to be intelligent life in the universe besides us? Is it because we fear the vast darkness that surrounds us, or is it just curiosity? There have been speculations on what the universe contains since human beings have started mapping out the stars. Since then we have not ceased our investigation of what the galaxies may, or may not, contain. The curiosity about extra-terrestrial life is essential for the science fiction genre, and it has inspired many writers to make extraordinary works of literature portraying alien encounter stories. The stories are often a struggle for survival for humankind against an alien enemy whose technology and intellect are far more advanced in every way. The science fiction stories that narrate such encounters are often futuristic where the future depicted might be a prosperous one with high hopes for humankind, or it may be a dystopian tale of suffering and pain. Either way, the alien encounter story is a tale of excitement and mystery. It is a

story that transports the reader to a world of adventure with intergalactic journeys and battles for survival. Science fiction is indeed a genre for curious and adventurous people.

Human beings' imagination of extra-terrestrial life is always grounded in our empirical environment. However, the beautiful thing about human imagination and curiosity is that even though we may never know the genuinely alien, we still can let our minds run wild in literature and film. Even though humankind has no way of imagining the utterly alien we still long for it. We never grow tired of the stories and the way they challenge us into understanding that there will always be someone or something different from us in some way or another. This MA thesis, therefore, argues that science fiction aliens are never wholly alien. This thesis will try to convey how we, as human beings, read the science fiction genre and how the humanisation of the alien is a positive thing. The reason for the positivity of a humanised alien is that there is no way a science fiction novel about an alien encounter would be entertaining if the counterpart to the human race were creatures whose characterisation was something wholly unrecognisable to the interpreter of the science fiction work. In order for a novel or movie to be comprehensible, the reader or viewer needs something familiar to be present for him or her to commit to the story. The argument that there cannot be a completely alien alien is a claim based on human knowledge and empiricism. Many critics and readers of science fiction agree with the thought that in some form or another there is humanity in every fictional alien depicted in science fiction literature and film and these critics' thoughts are presented later in the thesis. The humanity in the science fiction aliens can be the resemblance to our species in appearance or behaviour, or it can be the motives of the aliens invading Earth being similar to how we have invaded each other's countries throughout history.

In this thesis, I will read and interpret selected alien-encounter stories and look for humanity in the aliens portrayed. The novels and movies chosen are H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhoods End* (1953), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A*

*Space Odyssey* (1968) and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), in order to argue that there is no alien imagined that is totally and utterly alien. In doing so, the thesis will address the following research questions and sub-questions:

- 1a. Can there be an imagined alien completely untouched by any human trait?
- 1b. Or are all science fiction aliens based on human values, knowledge and reality?
- 2a. Are the alienation and otherness portrayed in science fiction just a projection of human fears and faults onto something imagined and fictional?
- 2b. If so, are these feelings projected in order to gain relief from the fact that human beings in some ways have been alienating each other throughout human history?

The novels and films chosen as the main analytical subjects are from different times with different types of aliens portrayed against different types of society, and I feel they can give a reasonably good idea of how the genre works in general. The thesis will start by investigating the science fiction literary genre's history and development, looking at some of the different literary devices used and some different critical perspectives on the genre. Then the thesis will look into the figure of the alien and how aliens are depicted in different literary works and movies, and apply the information gathered on the subject of science fiction aliens to these texts to develop the argument this thesis makes about the humanity in the imagined alien. The thesis will conclude by coming to terms with the idea that there are no completely alien aliens, and also by exploring the implication that there is no room for them in a genre meant to captivate its fans.

## 2. Science fiction as a genre.

Science fiction is a fictional literary genre that deals with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals. The term was popularized in the 1920s by the American

publisher Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967). It is a modern genre that first emerged in the West after the Industrial Revolution and its impact on people. It led writers and intellectuals to anticipate the technological progress and the changes it would make on the future. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the variations of standard science fiction themes had been developed, and these include space travel, robots, extra-terrestrial beings and time travel as well as established theatrical devices such as prophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, imaginary worlds with elaborate scenarios, strange voyages and dystopian worlds. Science fiction writers seek out new technology and scientific developments in order to write what could be seen as a prognosis of the techno-social changes in the world to shake up the readers' concord with the experienced world and expand their consciousness (Sterling 2019).

## 2.1 Genre history.

Science fiction is a literary genre which prepares us to accept change, to view change as both natural and inevitable. Change has become a constant factor in our society, and the genre's popularity is, therefore, both understandable and encouraged. As pure entertainment, science fiction has a way of attracting vast numbers of readers of all ages and from all stations of life. Science fiction's heritage reaches back into ancient times when fables and myths tried to explain the wonders of the universe but not that this is at odds with the belief that science fiction is future-orientated, or progressivist. Since then, many writings containing elements of science fiction appeared in Western literature, but it was not until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that science fiction could exist as a viable literary form. The Industrial Revolution brought social change with it: possibilities for a better future and the idea that humankind could perhaps have control over its destiny. People began to write stories based upon the possibility of scientific discoveries. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was

believed that there was no limit to what would be invented and discovered, and the development of the science fiction genre was afoot. When Mary Shelley (1797-1851) wrote *Frankenstein* in 1818, she started a trend of leaving behind the supernatural elements of Gothic novels and introduced science to take its place as an ingredient of fiction. The novel, telling a story of man creating life, indicated that the scientist should be able to anticipate the future effects his or her inventions might have on the world. There is still, to this day, debate on whether *Frankenstein* is the first science fiction novel or not. Steven E. Jones writes in his book *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism* that Shelley's novel is not a work of science fiction. He writes that there is little to no hard science incorporated at all and that the novel is instead about the psychology of horror and gothic special effects than science fiction (Jones 121). However, one thing is clear about the argument for it being the very first science fiction novel, and that is that Shelley did indeed create something different than a purely gothic horror novel by incorporating the creation of life into her story which could be seen as a form of science fiction.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great fascination with ideas of science and progress with a generally optimistic mood. The groundwork for the growth of science fiction was laid by writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), and Mark Twain (1835-1910), whom all wrote stories about the new science and the possibilities for the future. Perhaps the most influential and the author most devoted to the genre at the time was Jules Verne (1828-1905). His work was almost the archetypical expression of the 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic interest in science and technology. Verne helped pioneer the genre by intertwining science with invention creating tales of extraordinary voyages like *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) and *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865). Verne captured the optimistic spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and science fiction, though not yet named, gained its own true identity.

Another writer from the same period but moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, of course, Herbert George Wells (1866-1946). With his background as a scientist, he was able to give his work more depth. Wells was very affected by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution which triggered ideas of evolution and progress. These ideas were expressed in his most famous works, i.e. *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), which all warn that there are limits to progress which man should not surpass because of the destructive changes it could have on society. Wells became one of the most famous writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with him science fiction began to take shape and direction. Not only did he show that fiction can anticipate the power of science to change the world, but he also predicted that scientific discoveries would change people's view of their place in the universe (Tymn 41-43).

Science fiction entered a new phase in 1926 when Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967) published the first issue of the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories*. It was the first magazine devoted to science fiction, then termed "scientifiction" by Gernsback, and it was at once a huge success. By the 1930s other science fiction magazines popped up regularly for the growing number of science fiction readers. All of the magazines told stories of the wonders of science and fantastic adventure and in the 1930s and 1940s other magazines containing stories of space exploration, robots and alien encounters entered the newsstands. Science fiction began to take yet another direction in 1936 when John W. Campbell (1910-1971) took over the editorship of *Amazing Stories*, renamed *Astounding Stories*. He urged writers to tap into human relationships, psychology, philosophy and politics to create a more sophisticated style and technique that gave more realism to the stories. Campbell did so well in his publications that writers sought him out as a primary distributor of their work. Among these new writers, there were Isaac Asimov (1920-1992), Robert A. Heinlein (1907-1988), Theodore Sturgeon (1918-1985) and Clifford D. Simak (1904-1988). Guided by Campbell's demands for quality,



science fiction matured and became what fans refer to as “The Golden Age” which continued until the 1950s (Tymn 45-46).

While pre-war science fiction had concentrated on the technical wonders, post-World War II science fiction began to examine the human consequences of scientific advances and the fear that we might become victims of our creations, especially as the social sciences became important for writers in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s the response to social issues was intensified, and the “New Wave” of British and American writers warned of the chaos and despair threatened by the potential for war and internal corruption in a technological and dystopian society. The New Wave was also responsible for several significant and permanent changes in the quality of science fiction writing and helped establish science fiction as a literature of serious social comment (Tymn 46-47). Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1953) falls under the category of post-World War II “New Wave” science fiction literature with its fears of internal corruption and a dystopian future. Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is also a science fiction work made in the aftermath of war under the pressure of the Cold War with the fear of the Soviet Union and their threat against democracy as well as the fear of their infiltration into the American society and the danger this would pose on the American people.

The 1970s produced many writers, and it was a fruitful time for science fiction. For example, Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) emerged during the 1970s with the novels *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), *Flow My Tears the Policeman Said* (1973) among many others (Tymn 47). Since the 1970s, the science fiction genre has continued to grow and sprout new writers and readers. One name that has become very popular in the years following the 1970s is Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006). She has written excellent science fiction, and perhaps her most known work is the Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-1989). Another immensely popular science fiction trilogy also developed into movies is Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010).

James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) is still to this day a very famous science fiction movie and the advancements in the techniques used in making such an aesthetically beautiful movie are still used and perfected. There is no reason to think the science fiction genre is in any risk of demise. Instead, the genre seems to be so rooted and inspired that we will be seeing a lot more of it in the years to come.

## 2.2 Genre definition.

The definitions of science fiction are many and varied in content. Robert A. Heinlein (1907-1988) defines science fiction like this:

Science fiction is speculative fiction in which the author takes as his first postulate the real world as we know it, including all established facts and natural laws. The result can be extremely fantastic in content, but it is not fantasy; it is legitimate and often very tightly reasoned - speculations about the possibilities of the real world. This category excludes rocket ships that make U-turns, serpent men of Neptune that lust after human maidens, and stories by authors who flunked their Boy Scout merit badge test in descriptive astronomy (Heinlein 374).

Another critic of the genre, Erik S. Rabkin (born 1946), defines the science fiction genre as such:

A work belongs in the genre of science fiction if its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an organized body of knowledge (Rabkin 119).

Perhaps the most famous critic of science fiction, Darko Suvin (born 1930), wrote a definition of the genre in 1979 which is still applicable to science fiction writing today. Suvin defines science fiction as:

A literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment (qtd. In Roberts 7).

What this definition tells us is that science fiction as a genre deals with, as Suvin refers to it, cognitive estrangement. Estrangement can be many things. In science fiction writing estrangement can be a strange new world, an alien in the most common sense of the word or estrangement of identity. For Suvin, estrangement serves a necessary purpose in science fiction. It is what makes our experienced world and environment seem different from the one in the science fiction text which consequently makes fiction of the science in the science fiction literature and that the imaginary world allows us to see and understand aspects of our own world more clearly. What makes the estrangement of science fiction interesting is the fact that the reader can disappear into an unfamiliar and imagined world where one's empirical knowledge of reality is challenged.

Janice Liedl, a history professor at Laurentian University in Canada, wrote an article where she claims that if we regard history writing as a genre, we can bridge the traditional form of writing about history to the genre of science fiction. She writes:

If we understand history as a genre characterized by analytic interpretation of the past guiding approaches to the present and future, science fiction has surprisingly close affinities to this model. Recognizing that history functions in a range of forms and

formats, science fiction's alien geographies and chronologies should not be seen as antithetic to history but rather as another field in which historical analysis functions (Liedl 285).

In many ways, history is written in specific ways to explain or define ideology, reality and to generate futuristic hope for the readers, which is similar to science fiction as a genre. The function of history, in many ways, is to be able to learn from how things used to be in the past in order for the future to be a better place. Even though science fiction often portrays a distant dystopian future, the form and function of the writing lead to hope for many readers (Liedl 285-286). By imagining a distant future beyond hope, Liedl argues, we can adjust our mind-set and spark changes which may lead to a better future than the one imagined in science fiction. I also think that an imagined future doing exceedingly well would have the same impact on people, perhaps even more so.

Liedl also quotes John Rieder's article about science fiction and history *On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History* (2010). The thesis will use her understanding of his writing because it will show the point of science fiction as a communal genre very well. The proposition is this: science fiction is a genre which is very much governed by the democracy of the community it inhabits. Readers of the genre are often critically engaged in the development of the genre, and they are a big part of how it evolves. The reader and the writer are in a conversation across time and space defying the conventions of the genre theorists by reinventing itself through the interactions of readers, writers, publishers and critics (Liedl 291). In this way, the science fiction genre is a living thing. Not burdened by conventions and rules, but rather a genre that is open for interpretation from all sides of the conversation.

Since the genre is so hard to define, this thesis will use some of the main ideas from the articles about science fiction as a genre and its definitions to make a broader and including definition to use when investigating the literature chosen for the analysis of the alien in science fiction. Suvin says science fiction is all about estrangement, and so does Rose. Rose also talks a lot about the “respect for the fact” in the genre, which is also essential. Roberts notes that a given text might be understood as science fiction because of how modern it was for its time and how different it is from the writer’s reality as well as it being a hopeful view on the world with aspirations for a brighter future. If we look at how history is written and thought about, Liedl says that we can bridge it together with how we read science fiction. These are great examples of how to define such an undefinable genre. By using these ideas on how science fiction should be read and interpreted, the analyzation of the alien in the science fiction stories and the alienity of it will be more easily revealed.

Even if there necessarily is some trouble agreeing which criteria defines science fiction, there some agreed-upon criteria for what literary devices it must contain. These devices could, for example, be certain plot formulae, some form of science incorporated in the text whether it being real science like space rockets or pseudo-science like time travel, and perhaps the most important and most used device of science fiction is that the text depicts a world different from the one we know empirically. The most popular science fiction stories include, as mentioned earlier, time travel, dystopian worlds, post-apocalyptic stories and, notably, space travel and extra-terrestrial encounters. Alien encounter stories are plentiful and widely appreciated by science fiction fans (Rose 3).

Space has always fascinated humankind. Ever since the first astronomers mapped out the stars in our universe, people have never stopped looking for answers in the vast darkness above. The most common questions and the questions most in need of an answer is: Are we

alone in this vast darkness? Are we as humans the only intelligent life in the universe? Mark Rose writes in his book *Alien Encounters* (1981) that if there is a constant factor in science fiction, it is that these stories portray a world that is in some respect different from our own, for instance stories set in the future or on other planets or they describe the impact of some strange element upon our world, as in alien-invasion stories or evolutionary fables (Rose 3). This constant factor of difference that Rose is talking about is a prominent device used to make the science fiction genre and its many elements seem alienating and separate to the known universe the reader finds himself in. This escape into something exciting as opposed to our boring daily lives may, of course, be one of the main reasons why the genre has become so very popular among so many different ages throughout the times. Science fiction stories always have some element of the fantastic. However, Rose also talks about the “realism” of science fiction and its “respect for the fact” it has as opposed to the genre of fantasy (Rose 3). What he means by this, I think, is that the “respect for the fact” that science fiction has to its science is respect upheld to make the story, though of course fictional, seem more feasible; as opposed to fairy-tales and fantasy stories containing wizardry and magic, science fiction has some link to real, attainable science, which in turn gives the world of science fiction a link to our reality. The link to reality is also essential when aliens are involved. When we think about the alien in science fiction as a version of something that could perhaps be real the link to reality helps to see the alien as something authentic rather than something all-together different from what we know. The literary device of using reality as a backdrop is, therefore perhaps one of the most critical devices in science fiction. Because of this link, we can be able to connect even better to the alien characters in the stories.

### 3. The figure of the alien.

Having established how the science fiction genre is defined, we may now turn to investigate the figure of the alien in the genre, in order to enable deeper awareness of the humanization of the alien and why this is a crucial genre device. In science fiction an alien is often a species from outer space very different from us humans in appearance, intellect and demeanour. This thesis will focus on the word “alien” in two ways: the alien as an extra-terrestrial and alien as a symbol of something different.

The science fiction genre, though massive in content, is perhaps most commonly known for the portrayal of the alien and the alien invasion. In Justina Robson’s chapter *Aliens: Our Selves and Others*, from the book *Strange Divisions & Alien Territories* (Robson, et al 2012), argues that when people think of science fiction, aliens are the first thing, besides rayguns and spaceships, that comes to mind. She also points out that not all of the science fiction aliens are the same. Aliens in science fiction can be dangerous predators invading our world, or other worlds for that matter, in order to convey power over others. The alien can at the same time be a benevolent invader, as in Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* where the aliens come to Earth in order to help humanity from self-destruction. The many versions of aliens in literature and film are often entirely different from each other, and at the same time, they can be categorized in the same column. The only thing they seem to have in common is the fact that they are alien and can never be human. They can do or be almost anything we can imagine, but they are never exactly like us (Robson 26). Aliens will always have some inherent humanity imposed on them either by the writer intentionally making it so or by the reader’s interpretation.

Robson continues saying that the science fiction stories are there to examine human nature scientifically. By setting humans and their different behaviours up against aliens in an

alien environment, we can look at how humans react to an imagined scenario. Aliens are also a big part of science fiction because of the vital role they play in the journeys made in the stories. The aliens exist for readers and writers to be able to create unlimited content and push every idea as far as possible. Without the aliens in science fiction, wouldn't the universe simply be planets for humankind to explore? Rocks and mountains spread around the vast darkness that is infinite space? By bringing aliens to life in science fiction, writers have been able to create for their readers a universe full of beings that are interacting with each other and with humans. Stories containing aliens are also able to produce meaningful encounters involving moral, ethics and acceptance. The science fiction alien is, therefore, as Robson suggests, a device that could be used to create a bottomless well of content.

Robson concludes that there are three basic categories of aliens in science fiction: the predator, the interesting other and the real. She describes the predatory as an alien only out to get us. They might be here to eat us, eradicate us to take over our planet or simply kill us (Robson 26-27). Stories of the predatory aliens invading earth are many, and many of the same scenarios are used in all of them. (Robson 29). Robson's second category, the interesting other, are often incredibly intelligent and have technology beyond human comprehension. These aliens may only be interested in wiping us out as well, but the interesting other may also come to earth in order to help humanity in some way. These aliens are looking down on humanity from an elevated seat seeing humans as insignificant unable to make any kind of move against them. This shows how we as humans comprehend ourselves in two ways concerning the universe and its possible other inhabitants: important and insignificant (Robson 32). The third and final category of alien that Robson talks about in her chapter is the real, i.e. an alien imagined as almost untouched by human characteristics. Their biology and behaviour are as alien as we can imagine. These three categories do represent the different types of aliens quite well. They do describe only three different types, but these three



include all of the science fiction aliens and their variations by generalizing the roles they take on. Robson established that with these roles, the different aliens take on in science fiction stories makes it possible for us to see how they are mirrors into our humanity. The predator as the anti-self, the interesting other somewhere between the self and the anti-self and the real may be a mirror into what the human cannot attain. These roles that the aliens play as predator, interesting other and real, highlight us vs them, or even a self vs anti-self comparison, by which we necessarily determine which alien traits we admire, seek to emulate, or fear.

#### 4. Us and them.

Perhaps this subdivision of the idea of the alien can be simplified into two parts, as opposed to Robson's three. Critic and author Gregory Benford have distinguished aliens as either "anthropocentric" or "unknowable". "Anthropocentric" aliens consist of "exaggerations of human traits" and the "unknowable" alien, which is an alien at its "most basic level" (qtd. in Malmgren 16-17). The specification between the two is the degree of alienity and to what extent do the alien follow the same anthropocentric norms as we humans do. That is, do the alien interpret everything as humans would in terms of experiences and values? As Benford notes: the anthropocentric alien serves as a "mirror" for us into our problems by looking at them from a different perspective (qtd. in Malmgren 16-17). The article "Self and Other in SF: Alien Encounters" (1993) by Malmgren goes into how an alien encounter broaches the question of the self and the other. He writes that: "In general, the reader recuperates this type of fiction by comparing human and alien entities, trying to understand what it is to be human" (Malmgren 15). Malmgren suggests there are two main lines of argument pursued in the critique of alien science fiction. One claims that whatever form an alien might take, it is never

really alien. The other has to do with the sets of relations between the human self and the alien self.

The first line of argument, that claims there is no such thing as a totally alien alien, is also related to the charge that alien science fiction tends to lean considerably on stereotypes in its portrayal of the character. There is a richness to the alien encounter stories, and by differentiating them, we can more clearly see the alien for what it is, which is a mirror into our humanity. In this case, the otherness of the “unknowable alien” is a matter of degree, and Benford notes that “one cannot depict the totally alien,” (qtd. in Malmgren 16-17) and Patrick Parrinder mentions that “any meaningful act of defamiliarization can only be relative since a man cannot imagine what is utterly alien to him. To give meaning to something is also, inescapably, to “humanise” it or to bring it within the bounds of our anthropomorphic world view” (qtd. in Malmgren 16-17). Our worldview and perception are based on what we see and know, and there is, therefore, a very slim possibility for absolute otherness.

When talking about the “what” when it comes to the alien, the “what” is defined in human terms, the speculative alien encounter is a little different. When we talk about speculative aliens, they will always be aliens and not just a metaphor. An author of speculative alien encounters shapes an alien actant that exceeds basic norms of character and whose relation to our world is less than logical. These aliens test the restraints of being human and suggest how to surpass the limits and become more than human. They show us what we are not, and by doing so, they imply what we could become (Malmgren 16-17). This creates a particular paradox, as Benford and Parrinder assert, as there is no way anyone can depict the totally alien, as to give meaning to something is to humanize it: that all we know and will ever know is always going to be based on what we know and see to be a fact until we perhaps one day do indeed encounter an extra-terrestrial being that in no way can be familiar to us that will change our anthropomorphic world view.

The second part of the critique has to do with the relationship between the human self and the alien other. Stanislav Lem (1921-2006), the famous science fiction writer and critic, states that primarily American science fiction has been oversimplifying the encounter between the human and the alien by reducing it to a straightforwardly option which is “to rule them or to be ruled by them”. He further points out that the lack of imagination which comes from this us-or-them mentality is that the authors also see the encounters in these terms and are merely giving way to paranoia projecting “their fears and self-generated delusions on the universe”. This, while potentially true for many, does not account for several alterations to the alien encounter groupings, e.g. other as enemy, other as self, other as other. The most enlightened and rewarding alien encounter science fiction explores these various prospects (Malmgren 17-18). I want to note that the “other as other” variation of the alien encounter Malmgren is talking about still has to be an alien other imagined through human empiricism and will most likely, therefore, be humanised in some aspect.

The relationship between the human self and the alien other is then much more than just diverseness. The relationship can be a mirror of our humanity. The two lines of argument critiquing the alien means that science fiction has to be careful not to make the alien out to be a stereotype, but rather present an extensive display of human traits as well as possessing a variety of “the other” in the sense that the alien is different enough from what we see and know in our daily lives to bring us into a fictional world. This way, science fiction is a genre that can captivate readers of all ages through centuries and centuries.

As mentioned, the primary intentions of the alien encounter story are to comment on our social, political and moral conditions. Their conditions are often more prominent than the other devices used, such as the relationships formed between the invaders and the invaded (Pielke 30). The most crucial aspect of most alien encounter stories in science fiction is the

fact that all aliens depicted are almost always different from us in the way they look but similar to us in the way they think and behave. Even though there is little accuracy in the portrayal of aliens in science fiction since we have never encountered one and therefore are unable to unless we do encounter them in the future, the reason for creating them is not to be right about their anatomy but about creating art in the form of fiction.

So when it comes to the question about “us” and “them”, there are so much more to what it means than just how we are and how we perceive “them”. The really interesting thing about the hypothetical relationship between us and some extra-terrestrial alien being is that there is no way of knowing how it would unfold. The things we can imagine about it will always be from our anthropocentric world view with ourselves in the centre of the idea. However, writers have nevertheless been able to create worlds filled with creatures with abilities unattainable to us and with unusual characteristics. These created worlds and creatures have entertained us and taken us on several journeys far away out to space and away from our perhaps dull and ordinary lives.

## 5. Analysing the novels and films.

Science fiction is a literary genre which has amazed people for decades. It is a genre consisting of a wide variety of subgenres telling stories about time travel, the exploration of the universe and the worlds within it and aliens to name a few things. Perhaps the most popular science fiction stories ever told are the ones portraying an encounter between two different species of the universe. Most common of these is the encounter between Terran, which in science fiction is what the people of Earth is referred to as, and some kind of extra-terrestrial being from another world in the cosmos. What these stories are telling the readers is a story about the encounter with something completely different from what the reader knows

to be a reality. At least on the surface of the story, the aliens depicted in alien-encounter stories are often quite different from the human counterpoint. One example is the big metal trees standing tall and silent all over the world in the comic book series *Trees*, even though they are seemingly alien in their appearance and behaviour as opposed to us humans, they are still made of a metal we know and grow plants around them as if they are growing and spreading their roots on Earth.

We as humans see ourselves in an elevated way setting ourselves above all other species. We are at the top of the food chain, and we are the most dangerous predator on Earth. In the science fiction alien-encounter story humans are often, though not always, the inferior species since the aliens portrayed are very often highly superior to us in every way. They have a strong body, maybe even a body resembling a reptile, robot or some kind of dangerous animalistic form of a sentient being. Therefore, we are almost always the inferior part of the encounter, which then leaves us vulnerable to be invaded by predatory aliens with exceptions like the movie *Avatar* where the humans are equipped with war waging spirit and the guns to back it up. In some ways, *The War of the Worlds* is also an exception where the Martian's invade Earth with fire-spitting tripods but eventually die because of the bacteria on Earth to which the human race is immune.

I will now start the analysis going into the books and movies one by one looking at the devices and motifs used in the stories as well as the humanisation of the aliens portrayed in them. The evidence found for alienness and humanity in the aliens portrayed in these novels and films will be based on their behaviour, their appearance and the motives for their actions. The analysis will use the research questions mentioned earlier in the thesis:

1a. Can there be an imagined alien completely untouched by any human trait?

1b. Or are all science fiction aliens based on human values, knowledge and reality?

2a. Are the alienation and otherness portrayed in science fiction just a projection of human fears and faults onto something imagined and fictional?

2b. If so, are these feelings projected in order to gain relief from the fact that human beings in some ways have been alienating each other throughout human history?

Along with these questions, the analysis will also incorporate the idea of the figure of the alien and the three categories developed by Robson where she notes that there are only three different types of figures of the alien present in science fiction literature and film and that these three are predatory aliens, the interesting other and the real. Suvin's definition of the science fiction genre is the one given the most consideration in this thesis because of his attention to cognitive estrangement and how it is what separates science fiction from other genres of literature and film. The notion that the aliens are either anthropocentrically depicted or unknowably depicted is a notion described by Benford about how the imagined alien is either one or the other. The alien is either anthropocentric, which is an alien who is given exaggerated human traits, and the unknowable is an alien at its most basic level but to a degree always familiar in some way. Malmgren's description of the "self" and "the other" and its importance in science fiction will also be used in the analysis. These ideas from different critics of science fiction will give the analysis of the literature and films weight in proving the thesis argument of there being no alien imagined completely untouched by human traits.

## 5.1 *War of the Worlds, H.G. Wells (1898).*

Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) was an English novelist as well as a journalist, sociologist and historian. He is best known for his science fiction novels such as *The Time*

*Machine* (1895) and *The War of the Worlds*. Wells worked as a teacher in science, and his first published book was a textbook on biology. Along with his relentless reading, it is easy to see why he became such an incredible science fiction writer. His novel *The War of the Worlds* gave popular mythology to the Martian, and the novel is considered one of the classics of both Wells's career and a classic in the science fiction genre. He was an inventive man, but also a man concerned about the wellbeing of man and society, which is clear when reading his work (Nicholson 2020).

Wells grew up in England during the British Empire's height and was influenced by this when writing *The War of the Worlds*. By the 1800s the British Empire was already very powerful, and their colonisation was still going on. By the end of the century, the Empire made up nearly one-quarter of the world's land surface and over one-quarter of the world's entire population (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica 2020). Wells' novel is very much influenced by the power the British Empire held over their colonised countries and the limited resistance of the colonised. The lines that can be drawn between the novel and reality is the exploitation of peoples and unfair use of power to obtain whatever is desired. In his novel, Wells is portraying the aliens with overwhelming power and technology being implemented on the people of England. The same power over others as the aliens can be linked to the power the British administered over the countries they colonised.

In his article from 1989 on Wells and the scientific imagination, W. Warren Wagar comments on the fierce grip on science in Wells' imagination and how this grip is well illustrated in *The War of the Worlds*. He also notes that the vision most prominent for Wells was evolution, the struggle for survival, the transformation of species resulting from environmental stimuli, the threat of extinction, and the intoxicating, yet sinister, thought that humankind might one day become unrecognizably "advanced", all brain and no heart like the

Martians in *The War of the Worlds*. The Martians are depicted as coldly intelligent octopi whose only nourishment is mammalian blood. The Martians arrive in England with their overwhelming technology treating the people as edible fauna. Humans kill one or two of the Martians, and at the end, the rest of them fall by the hand of another force: the force of nature and the bacteria infesting it to which the aliens are not immune. One could say the humans win the war because of serendipity as a by-product of the real hero, which is the Earth's micro-organisms (Wagar 391-392).

John Plotz argues in his chapter *H.G. Wells, Realist of the Fantastic* from the book *Semi-Detached* (2018), that Wells' realist fiction suggests a "vale of ignorance" that says you might, after all, be the suffering underdog and this is turned into a political message that you think yourself as superior, but you may be the inferior after all. Plotz says that this is the kind of estrangement and recognition of one's provinciality is a crucial twist in *The War of the Worlds* where the only way to grasp the Martian's relationship to Earth is to think of the effect that invading Britons have had on conquered Tasmanians over the previous few decades (1820-1832) (Plotz 180-181). What Plotz is saying here is that Wells' novel has signs of commenting on the political power of his government and how the use of it sets the British people in a superior position over the inferior Tasmanians. In the novel, this ignorance of superiority is soon gone after being invaded by the very dangerous and seemingly undefeatable aliens. It turns out, though, that the Martians are the inferior ones because of their lack of resistance to the bacteria on Earth. What could be seen as Wells' political message here is that the provincial arrogance of the British people should perhaps not be so strong and that they at one point could find themselves in an inferior position in need of recognising that they the suffering underdog.



*The War of the Worlds* is an alien invasion story depicting humankind at its weakest. The story takes place in England and is told in a first-person narrative by the main character of what he sees and experience during this truly dangerous and chaotic time.

Our narrator is the first one to see the creatures from Mars, landing on Earth in pods. He is also one of the first people to see one of the creatures in its true form. He describes the alien as a brownish, slug-like, bear-sized monster with dark eyes. He also notices, being an intelligent man, that the creature has trouble breathing the atmosphere and moving around in the heavy gravitational energy of the Earth. It is still all business as usual in the town even after the known fact of aliens landing in the heather. People seem to be unaffected by the whole thing. For now, at least.

It is in chapter nine that the fighting and panic begin. Soldiers are going from house to house warning the people living close to the two fallen cylinders telling them to get out and get to a safe place. “Apparently the Martians were setting fire to everything within range of their Heat-Ray” (Wells 49). The narrator and his wife quickly start to pack their things and head off to Leatherhead, where his wife’s family lives. Once he has brought his wife to safety, he heads back to his house to collect some things before he is going to look for his brother in London. On his way back, he sees the Martians in their tripods. He describes it like this: “And this Thing I saw! How can I describe it? A monstrous tripod higher than many houses, striding over the young pine trees, and smashing them aside in its career; a walking engine of glittering metal” (Wells 54).

The whole ordeal this man is going through throughout the story is baffling. He is an intelligent man, of course, so he has some advantage when it comes to anticipating how to act and hide, but he is still one tiny human being against several meters high metal tripods

spitting fire. By the time he has returned to his home, the narrator is in awe of the destruction. He looks at the “little world in which I had been living surely for years, this fiery chaos!” (Wells, p. 61) and wonders how it could have changed so much in the last seven hours. He is still questioning how these aliens can commit such destructions and if there is any way at all to stand a chance fighting them.

When we look at this plot, we can see the astonishment of the pure power of the tripods. This astonishment may also have to do with the fascination of the technological progress of the time the work was written in and how interested Wells was in the advancement of humankind. Being a science fiction writer in these times must have been very exciting. What was the human race going to invent next? On the other hand, there would also evidently be scepticism around it. Not being used to the pace of technology yet, the people in this age must have been scared of what it meant to be able to create such magnificent things. Could any of this be dangerous? Would there be ramifications? The fear of destruction in the novel, as well as the curiosity of the narrator, could perhaps be traced back to Wells himself. On page 24 in the novel, the narrator describes himself as a “battleground of fear and curiosity” (Wells 24). Fear because he is unsure about the aliens. Unsure because he knows nothing about what is going to happen next. These aliens are slug-like, animalistic and non-human in every way when looking at them and this, of course, makes the whole thing scarier. Who are they? And most importantly: what are their intentions?

The aliens in Well’s science fiction novel are predatory. They are invading Earth to feed on the population and use the planet for themselves, which makes them our enemy at the moment they land on our planet. There is no possible way of communicating with them or to reason with them. They have another form of language and a very different perspective on moral than humans.

The narrator, still on his way to London to find his brother, meets the artilleryman he met at the beginning of the novel when he was ushering people out of their homes. The artilleryman has made himself a good hiding place. They spend some time together talking about what they have experienced since they last met. The artilleryman still sees no end to the tragic state the people of Earth are experiencing. It is the same as with the narrator. The artilleryman describes it like this: “This isn’t a war, it never was a war any more than there’s a war between man and ants” (Wells 187).

The comparison of men being ants facing the Martians in war is one that can make the reader understand the true danger the characters in the novel are facing. Human beings are at the top of the food chain on Earth and have the power to kill any living thing without breaking a sweat. We, therefore, have nothing to worry about except perhaps for other human beings. When finding oneself in a situation where this is no longer a fact, one has to feel overwhelming helplessness toward one’s own existence. We have to put ourselves in the perspective of an ant to know how it would be to have dangerous predatory aliens invading our planet and destroying our home. Or, perhaps an even more important comparison would be to look at how Wells puts his Londoners in the position of colonized human beings, subjugated by an enemy with superior technology.

When he finally gets to London, the city is in ruins and abandoned. He is stunned by the stillness of it all. He is looking at empty buildings and empty streets walking alone in a capitol feeling scared and alone. He starts hearing a voice in the distance “Ulla, ulla, ulla” and walks towards it to check it out. He sees the tripods standing completely motionless and walks closer to find the Martians, the grey slugs, lying dead on the ground. He reasons that the Martians has died of the bacteria on Earth which they were unprepared for and couldn’t

sustain. He puts it like this: “Slain, after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth” (Wells 206).

As humans are the equivalent of an ant in comparison to the Martians in this novel, it seems that there is no way to be able to either fight them or hide from them. However, as the intelligent mind of the narrator informs us, the Martians are not as indestructible as they seem. In their tripods, they are huge and strong, but anatomically they are weak. Their planetary environment is so different from ours that they are unable to sustain Earth’s air and gravitational pull for long. They, as humans, are not indestructible at all. Rather, they are fragile and defenceless. Defenceless against something so small as germs.

The screams from the Martians seem like fear. Fear of dying and the fear of being left alone, which is a very human reaction to a situation where hope is lost. The superior becomes the inferior, and in turn, the invaders become helpless and the invaded comes out on top.

After this struggle between Terran and alien is finally finished, the people of England can again build up the country with the help of others around the world. The narrator is astonished and touched by the sight of all the people working together, making the tragic aftermath of war an opportunity to come together as one people. It is a human reaction to come together after a struggle. We wage war against each other all the time, but if the chance to help others comes along, it is almost always an instant reaction to do so.

So, what is it that makes the alien “them” not so unlike “us” in this novel? Well, first of all, it is the invading itself with the attempt of conquering humankind for the sole purpose of taking the planet for themselves. This kind of invasion is something we have seen time and time again being done by rich and powerful countries when they rob and colonize poor and defenceless countries. Waging war against someone less powerful in order to gain superiority

over them is sadly something we all know to be common for humanity. The Martians are equipped with heat-rays and humans with bombs. We know it to be a fact that there are countries all over the world, preparing themselves for war being waged at any moment. The fear of being defeated brings with it defence mechanisms able to retaliate if needed.

Perhaps the most human characteristics of all in the Martians is the fragility of their bodies and how they are not able to live in our environment because of the lack of an immune system to survive Earth's environment. There is also fear and helplessness in the aliens when they are dying. When the Martians are lying weak and defenceless on the ground, they are experiencing a very real threat. They are now defeated, and there is no help coming for them. They are now truly reduced to the inferior part of the war of occupying Earth.

*The War of the Worlds* is a novel incorporating the idea of cognitive estrangement in the way that the world described to the reader is one very similar to the one he is surrounded by, only the twist of the plot transforms it into a war-zone where extra-terrestrial beings are threatening the very existence of the human race. In the process of defeating the enemies, the characters in the book all have different experiences, and these experiences affect them in certain ways which is recognizable to the reader. The way these experiences and the reactions caused by them can highlight human nature is a clear sign of the use of cognitive estrangement.

Taking into account the three categories of aliens described by Robson, we can see the Martian's as predators, and this is because they are violent invaders whose prime intent is to eradicate the human race with their own interests in mind. They do not communicate, and their behaviour is very unlike a human. There are plenty of signs of them being intelligent and technologically advanced so categorizing them as interesting other would be possible if it

were not for their total lack of human empathy and communication depicting them as clear enemies.

Malmgren, in his article *Self and other in science fiction: Alien Encounters*, discusses Benford's idea about the two different ways of looking at the alien as opposed to the three that Robson concludes exist. The two very different ideas of what the alien can be seen and how both of them is finally humanised. The two different aliens Benford suggests is the anthropocentric alien who is an exaggeration of human traits, and there is the unknowable alien who is an alien at its most basic level. The Martians are aliens at their most basic, considering their appearance as well as their weak understanding of Earth and its inhabitants. They do not have exaggerations of human traits, but they are mirrors into our humanity when it comes to destruction, invasion and suppression.

Are the Martian's completely untouched by human traits, or are they based on human values, knowledge and reality? The Martians are given human traits and are based on human knowledge and reality. The human traits they are given lies in their violent, war-waging behaviour they direct at the human beings in the invasion of Earth. The same use of force is used by countries invading others in the real world as well. Also, the way the Martian's are weak against the bacteria on Earth says a lot about how they are based on our reality.

Are the alienation and otherness in the novel just projections of human fear onto something fictional? If so, are they projected in order to create relief for the fact that human beings have been alienating each other throughout history? Well, the novel is portraying both alienation and otherness through the two species on either side of the struggle. The human fear of being invaded and killed, the fear of being seen as weak and defenceless are all projected into the story. Are these fears projected to create relief for the fact that they are all things that have been done by human beings to other human beings? Since the novel was written in a time where the British Empire was at its biggest and strongest, it can be seen as a

comment on colonization and the negative aspects of it and that Wells was trying to create a scenario where the invaders would get what they deserved. Whether they create relief or not is hard to say, but the signs of Wells' thoughts on colonization shines through in the descriptions of power incorporated in the novel.

## 5.2 *Childhood's End*, Arthur C. Clarke (1953)

Sir Arthur Charles Clarke (1917-1008) is perhaps best known for his collaboration with Stanley Kubrick on the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* for which he wrote the script and the novel. He has written a lot of science fiction throughout the years which have been read by science fiction fans from all over the world. He has been interested in science since he was a child but lacked the education to do anything with it. He later joined an advanced group called the British Interplanetary Society (BIS) that advocated the development of rocketry and human space exploration. After this, he was involved in many cases involving the development of space exploration (Gregersen 2020).

The novel *Childhood's End* is one of Clarke's science fiction stories considered to be a classic. It incorporates a lot of the distinctive devices used in science fiction such as the technological estimations made, the alien contact, cognitive estrangement and the sense of wonder he has created through the handling of the symbolism is the aliens as allegories to the myths and religions ideas of humanity (Samuelson 4). It concerns the arrival of extra-terrestrial being invading Earth and is why I chose this novel of Clarke to investigate the humanisation of science fiction aliens (Gregersen 2020).

As the British Empire inspired Wells' novel, Clarke's novel is inspired by real events from its time as well. Clarke wrote *Childhood's End* in both a post-war world as well as a world very concerned about the Cold War. The 50s was a decade where in America, the

economy was booming, people moved into suburbs, and a record was made in babies born all through the decade. The future after World War II was anticipated to be prosperous and peaceful and in many ways they were right, but the tensions between the Soviet Union and America brought with it anxiety, and people began to worry. The spread of communism and the threat it held against democracy and capitalism needed to be contained by either threat or force, which was an idea that shaped American foreign policy for decades to come. It was also believed that communism would destroy American domestic life from the inside and the anti-communist “Red Scare” of the 1950s cost tens of thousands of people their jobs (History.com Editors 2010). Clarke, as an author of science fiction in this time, took advantage of the troubling thoughts raging in the American people’s minds. *Childhoods End* is written with inspirations from real events from the decade it was written in and the elements incorporated following this is communism only described in different terms.

*Childhood's End* narrates an evolutionary reconstruction of humanity’s last generation. Earth is being invaded by seemingly benevolent aliens wanting to save humanity from themselves. The Overlords, which is what the aliens are referred to in the novel, hover over the main cities all over the world for six days. On the sixth day, all radio frequencies pick up the voice of the supervisor of the Overlords, Karellen, speaking perfect English and with such intellectual power, informing humankind that the Earth has now been taken over, that when he has finished the nations of Earth knew that their days of sovereignty had ended (Clarke 18). The mysterious aliens invading Earth are not showing themselves to the people of Earth because of the fear their appearance might spread. Physically, the Overlords resemble Satan or one of his demons, their names sound demonic, and their home planet is reminiscent of Hell. They take on a guise of omnipotence and omniscience when first arriving on Earth in order to establish authority over humankind. The humans seem to think that the



Overlords are their own masters and that their technology is beyond their comprehension. The truth is that the Overlords are the Overmind's subjects whose nature truly is omnipotent and whose intentions and reasons for invasion of Earth is still unknown. However, during the fifty years the Overlords have at their disposal before the last generation of the human race is metamorphosed into the Overmind, they do indeed bring a utopian way of life to the people of Earth. They eradicate crime and war; they make it so that every single person on Earth can go to bed with a full stomach and the general living standards are significantly improved.

The Overmind's powers are shown in the few special children of Earth when they all of a sudden can do things normal human children are not able to do, such as the powers of telekinesis and clairvoyance. It is because of these special powers in select children that the Overmind is invading Earth. To harvest them in order to become even more powerful. However, these powers now available to the children are not necessarily significant to the purpose they serve to the Overmind. As Karellen puts it: "We believe – it is only a theory – that the Overmind is trying to grow, to extend its powers and its awareness of the universe. By now it must be the sum of many races, and long ago it left the tyranny of matter behind. It is conscious of intelligence everywhere. When it knew that you were almost ready, it sent us here to do its bidding, to prepare you for the transformation that is now at hand" (Clarke 183-184). These assumptions about the Overmind's plan, and the fact that it always starts with a child, is the only information the Overlords have to go on regarding the transformation of beings into energy for the Overmind. With this information, the Overlords are put into work as angels doing God's bidding but never able to bask in the deity's glory (Samuelson 7). The inability to understand the Overmind is based on the strangeness and vastness of the being which, Samuelson notes, "may become comprehensible with reason and science because after all how can a human writer describe something totally alien?" (Samuelson 7). Samuelson also argues that Karellen is the most human character in the novel. While the human characters

seem like marionettes in a puppet show, Karelle is curious, and his sense of tragedy isolated in immortality gives him more consciousness and shows his mental processes more than all of the other characters (Samuelson 12). He is depicted as a strong and intelligent being whose empathy for the invaded human beings grows stronger day by day. He truly is a humanised Overlord in the way he is portrayed.

The thoughts and motives of Clarke's aliens seem to differ from other science fiction aliens. He had no fears of hostile aliens invading Earth, and so his aliens are generally benign beings approaching humans with intentions of saving them from disaster or helping them in their development (Westfahl 95). Clarke was more inclined to anticipate the kind of alien who is eager to help humanity in certain ways. *Childhood's End* is one example of this (Westfahl 102). The benevolence seen in the aliens in this novel is based on how they are portrayed at the beginning of the novel because they do have malevolent intentions with their plans, but these are not executed until the very end of the story. Before the malevolent plan comes into play, the Earth has been done a great favour when it comes to peace and wellbeing for all, so Clarke's vision of aliens aiding our race is still intact as a whole.

The notion that the Overmind, though extra-terrestrial and evil at heart, can be seen as an allegory for God is because of the mysticism around the two and because of its eternalness, as well as the unknowable factors. The characters in the novel never get to see the Overmind or even be informed properly of its intentions – the only one who sees the Overmind is Jan Roderick who has been looking into the Overlords and their home planet. He finally figures out where it is located and how he is going to get there to continue investigating. When he arrives in orbit of the planet and gets to see the Overmind, he describes it as “a single giant eye” (Clarke 196). This giant eye could be a symbol for the surveillance the Overmind has over its subjects, The Overlords, and that it is able to see anything and everything just like

God can. Some other similarities between the two entities of God and Overmind are that the Overmind helps humanity rid themselves of crime, hunger, war and everything that is destroying the human race as well as the planet they inhabit, and God is helping humans stay away from sins like crime and war which in turn will help humans live more harmoniously. So, even if the Overmind is an alien being described in terms very different from what we know and see in the world, it can still be said to be based on one of humanity's religions.

The Overlords are the guardians of man's metamorphosis. They enforce a utopian world for the last generation of humankind with their advanced technology to guide the human race into becoming the best that they can be (Samuelson 5). The only thing they cannot do is enforce the metamorphosis of the children on their own. They need to find the right children who will be able to go through the changes of the metamorphosis. Like the aliens in *2001: A Space Odyssey* is only able to help develop Moon-Watcher's abilities because of them being already innate (which will be explained in the next part of the thesis), the aliens in *Childhood's End* could only transform the specific children of Earth possessing the potential of metamorphosis needed for them to become a part of the Overmind (Westfahl 106).

So, the aliens in Clarke's *Childhood's End* can be seen as an allegory for God and his angels rather than beings simply extra-terrestrial. Since religion is a human invention, the characteristics of the Overmind and the Overlords are therefore a by-product of the human beliefs in a higher power, and this is only when it comes to how they can be seen. However, when it comes to their intentions, we need to look at the Overlords and the Overmind as two separate aliens because of the chain of authority at play. The Overmind seen as God is humanised through the notion that such a powerful being could only be intertwined with humanity because of reasons of salvation. Though the human race is the salvation for the Overmind and not the other way around this whole thing turns into taking advantage of an

inferior race. Both the Overlords and the human race are inferior to the Overmind, and they are both under its control. The Overmind is using its subjects, the Overlords, to be able to rule the whole species of men by making them believe it is for the best but on the bottom of it all lies the malevolent plan of only gaining the power to itself with no regard for the Overlords or the children whose destiny is to become part of this power.

The Overlords are just puppets controlled by a higher being doing its bidding no matter what it takes. They are intelligent beings and seem to be very much interested in human culture and curious about their nature. During their time on Earth, the Overlords befriend some of the human beings they are in contact with. By doing so their understanding of human life and all of its factors will grow which is something they are very interested in. Karellen, the supervisor of the Overlords, has extensive conversations with the man named Stormgren about life on Earth and is gaining empathy for him. The Overlords are also not in the loop of everything that is about to happen to the children of Earth possessing the special abilities needed to be a part of the Overmind but are dependent on their superior, so they do what needs to be done which is mostly just preparations needed in order to fulfil the original plan of extracting the children of Earth.

As mentioned, we can look at the Overmind and the Overlords as allegories of God and his angels. However, there is also another way of looking at it, and that is if the Overmind is CEO of the company the Overlords its employees and the human being the resource needed for the company to continue profiting. This way, the ranking of the three is once again set in human terms of superior and inferior. Perhaps the human being in this allegory can be seen as a product and not even an inferior part.

If we look at the aliens in the novel as an allegory for God or something else, the characterisation of them all have bits and pieces of human nature in them. The alien being will most likely come across as totally alien for the common reader, but by setting up the

characters to different perspectives, the humanity in them shine through. The beautiful thing about Clarke's aliens is that they are given empathy in a way very few other science fiction aliens are. They have been given an ugly exterior but a beautiful interior, and with their thoughts and actions, they become easy to empathize with and easy to like. So even if the novel ends quite abruptly with the annihilation of the human race, there could still be seen hope in the fact that the children metamorphosed into the Overmind still lives on in some weird science fiction way inside of it.

In *Childhood's End*, cognitive estrangement is prominent. The novel is depicting a world very different from the one surrounding the author. The world narrated is similar to the ways of how society works, and the economic classes are still similar to the ones in reality. The major differences between the world of the novel and the world of the author are highly advanced technology as well as the fact that extra-terrestrial beings invade the world. With cognitive estrangement, the science fiction genre needs to be significantly different from other genres, and it also needs to create a world which will challenge our empirical knowledge of reality which *Childhood's End* does with its portrayal of the world and the characters.

The aliens in this novel could be categorised as both predator and interesting other. The Overlords and the Overmind are perhaps best categorised as interesting other, but they do have some traits that can be seen as predatory. The predator in them is the invading itself and how they use their advanced technology to get what they want. They are interesting others in the sense that they do make friends with some of the human beings and they are capable of seeing the importance and beauty of the human culture. Robson is talking about the interesting other is portrayed to show us how we humans see ourselves in the universe and up against its possible other inhabitants, and that is important and insignificant. In the novel, the

children are important for the Overmind to become stronger, and the rest of the species is insignificant.

If we look at the two categories Benford puts science fiction aliens into it is clear that the Overlords are anthropocentric aliens who have exaggerations of human traits. They are all in all very human when it comes to their behaviour and knowledge. Though their appearance is not human, it is still inspired by our empirical reality and therefore still very anthropocentric. The Overmind, on the other hand, is perhaps on the other side of the scale of the two categories Benford is suggesting. The Overmind is pure energy and a being whose appearance qualifies as an unknowable alien and an alien at its most basic level. It has a human-like way of behaving since it is egoistic and puppeteering its workers as well as the human race.

Are the Overmind and the Overlords completely untouched by human traits, or are they based on human values, knowledge and reality? Well, the question has been answered many times throughout this analysis. They are both given human traits and can be recognisable to the reader even if both the aliens and the story they are being told is fictional. The nature of the aliens is both based on human nature and similar to it. Their appearance is based on human religion and its demons, and their behaviour is also similar to humankind.

Are the alienation and otherness in the novel just projections of human fear onto something fictional? If so, are they projected in order to create relief for the fact that human beings have been alienating each other throughout history? In this novel, it is clear that the alienation and otherness in the story are projections of human fear onto characters of a science fiction story where the aliens as the enemy take on the faults of humanity. Perhaps the invading and infiltration of human life can be linked to the fear of communism as well. Whether or not this novel creates relief for the fact that human beings have been alienating

each other throughout history is debatable, but as a reader of the novel, it is not hard to be reminded of the faults in ourselves and our species.

### 5.3 *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Stanley Kubrick & Arthur C. Clarke

Directed by Stanley Kubrick and script by Kubrick and Clarke *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a classic movie adored by people around the world. The pure artistry of the movie is enough for it to be a masterpiece made for cinema, but the fact that the novel was written as the movie was made is perhaps also a factor in giving the film the notion of being one of a kind.

Kubrick (1928-1999) was an American director and writer whose films are characteristically visually dramatic. He is also known to be very attentive to detail, and his work is often pessimistic and ironic in style. He made *2001: A Space Odyssey* based on a short story written by Clarke. Clarke, alongside Kubrick, helped write the screenplay for the movie. The movie was a masterpiece and is still to this day seen on lists of the greatest movies ever made (Wallenfeldt & Barson March 3, 2020).

Kubrick made *2001: A Space Odyssey* during a decade which seemed to be the start of a golden age but how it turned out was quite the contrary. The Vietnam War became a priority over the War on Poverty in America which brought the country disarray. The African Americans became the focus of the civil rights movement, equal pay became a subject and the summer of love sparked hope in the American people (History.com Editors 2020). *2001: A Space Odyssey* is perhaps not inspired a lot by these events from the decade, but the movie is without a doubt inspired by the moon landing in 1969. It was on July 20, 1969, that Neil

Armstrong (1930-2012) and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin (born 1930) became the first two people to ever walk on the face of the moon (History.com Editors 2020). Kubrick developed his movie the year preceding this historic event which was an event that excited a whole world. Making a movie about the human race travelling to space was perhaps even more attractive to the general audience because of the events about to happen.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* is a movie that shows man’s progress and evolution starting with the ape-men and ending with the transformation of man into a star child which is said to be the beginning of a new era of humankind. All of this progress is sparked by these big black rectangles called monoliths that are strategically placed at momentous moments in man’s evolution throughout the movie. There are four of these moments, and the first monolith appears to the ape-man Moon-Watcher igniting the first spark of intelligence in him and his fellow ape-men and women, and this is also the first stage of the alien experimentation on Earth. The second monolith appears on the moon, trumpeting the human initiation into the space age. The third time the monolith acts as a stargate to push the human representative beyond the limits of time and space. The fourth one accompanies the birth of the star child. The activities of the monoliths speak to the interest the aliens have of the human race and its progress. Without the help of the aliens, Moon-Watcher would probably still become intelligent enough to evolve into a human, and the human would probably still be journeying through space, but the evolution into a star child raising the question of man’s next evolution suggesting new dawn for humanity would probably not happen without the help of the unseen, mysterious aliens.

Kubrick employs a method similar to the “transcendental style” to bring about an ineffable quality that gives the film a quasi-religious air of mystery (Banerjee 39-40).



In a film, seeing is believing. The images create a solid base on which the viewers build up their understanding (Even if we do not see the actual alien, we see the alien's motives and its effect on the human race) (Banerjee 40). Kubrick himself put it like this:

2001 is a nonverbal experience; out of two hours and nineteen minutes of film, there are only a little less than forty minutes of dialog. I tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalized pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional and philosophic content. I don't want to spell out a verbal road map for 2001 that every viewer will feel obligated to pursue or else fear he's missed the point (qtd. in Banerjee 41).

It is worth noting that Clarke's novel, which was written side by side with the making of the movie, is in many ways very different from the movie's modes of expression and not simply because it is verbal. The novel is detailed in analysis and commentary, while the movie is suggestive in operation, deliberately intuitive in its function and mystically vague at the end (Banerjee 41). As mentioned above, Kubrick wanted the movie's meaning to be based on each viewer's response to the emotional and philosophic content. The movie is a very organic piece of art in the form of a film because it does not suggest anything, rather it is up to the viewer to decide what he thinks and to decipher what the ending is all about. The mysterious aliens are then also many different things to different people which make them so much more than just one single entity. This is very interesting since the response to the movie of the various viewer will be different from person to person and the characterisations of the aliens made by these different viewers gives a wide range of alienness.

The unseen aliens in this movie are the central figures that drive the story with their actions. The humans are pawns in the hands of alien chess players (Westfahl 104).

Westfahl argues that:

It would seem that just as the ancient monolith taught Moon-Watcher how to use tools, a nascent ability that humans might have developed on their own, the future monolith teaches Bowman how to turn himself into a star child, another latent power humans possess. Then, just as Moon-Watcher teaches other pre-humans to use tools, the Star Child presumably returns to Erath to teach other humans to make themselves into Star Children, again advancing their evolution in a manner they might have achieved without assistance (Westfahl 105).

The aliens are, therefore, perhaps not as limitless as they may seem on the surface. They are only able to encourage new abilities in Moon-Watcher because of the already innate abilities to acquire the skill on his own (Westfahl 106).

The aliens in the novel are not as mysterious as the aliens in the movie. The aliens in the movie are unseen and do not communicate anything to the humans other than placing the monoliths on the Earth and the Moon. In the novel, Clarke describes the aliens and their motives more clearly than in the movie. The aliens in the novel are described to have found “nothing more precious than Mind” in their universe and is searching the cosmos for other intelligent life. If they did find the kind of intelligent life they were searching for, they farmed them in the sense that they intervened in order to encourage the development of intelligence. They sowed and then had to weed. None of this is known to the humans in the movie (Westfahl 106). One reason for the changes made to the aliens in the novel is because Clarke thought that in order to convey their actions more clearly and make them comprehensible for the readers the aliens and Bowman as the Star Child needed to be less superior (Westfahl 109).

As mentioned, the story is about these monoliths, big black rectangles, that are deliberately placed on Earth when evolution has not come further than ape-men still not using tools and discovered to have been dug down on the moon 4 million years before humankind has finally reached the technological level required to travel the universe. The meaning of these monoliths is unknown to the characters in the movie as well as for the audience. The only thing we know is that they are deliberately put there by someone. The one on the moon has been there for four million years, and it is not until human beings have been able to make technology sufficient enough that they locate it. This is how humankind is made aware of intelligent life in the universe – by discovering a mysterious black monolith buried for millions of years doing nothing except making a high-pitched noise when touched, almost like an alarm – the alien is establishing that they are far more advanced than humans technologically and that they know their way around the universe.

After the monolith on the moon is found, a crew of astronauts and scientists are sent off on a mission lead by an all-seeing, conscious supercomputer named HAL 9000 (Hal for short) to Jupiter and its moons to investigate a transmission seemingly coming from that area. This transmission is believed, though there is no way of knowing, to have to do with the monolith found on the moon. Two of the members of the crew are awake for the whole trip; the rest of them are asleep in hibernation pods until the destination is reached. When the mission crew has travelled some distance, the supercomputer tricks them into thinking that there is some equipment on the ship that is faulty. Dave and Frank, the two men awake for the long journey, investigate the defective equipment only to realize that it seems like it is working the way it is supposed to. With this information, the two men agree that Hal's behaviour is suspicious. He is supposed to be a computer without the ability to fail.

They are right in their suspicions. The computer is not on the same side as the men on the ship and ends up killing all of them except Dave. Hal is also the only one on the ship who has been completely briefed about the mission and its purpose. When Dave and the audience is made aware of this, Dave is already disconnecting the conscious part of Hal.

It seems like Hal has planned to kill the whole crew from the start because of his knowledge of the mission. Perhaps because of some danger he faces? Alternatively, perhaps it has to do with the aliens and their monoliths. There is no way of knowing. What we do know is that he has to conceal the true reasons for the mission to the crew and after a while breaks down into a paranoid state and then starts to kill everyone on the ship. After Bowman learns of the programming error that caused HAL's rebellion, he contemplates that "the fact that HAL's builders had fully failed to understand the psychology of their own creation showed how difficult it might be to establish communication with truly alien beings" (qtd. in Westfahl 108). Even though advanced computers like the one in *2001: A Space Odyssey* are not alien in the common sense of the word they are analogous to aliens in the sense that they can be hard to communicate with and comprehend. As these computers become more and more advanced, they will presumably become less alike humans mentally yet both novel and film make HAL seem very much human fighting to preserve himself against threats he esteems as real to him and his survival (Westfahl 108). Being designed by humans as an important tool in space exploration, the need for HAL to be humanised is perhaps to make him a companion and not simply a computer. For the purpose of the plot, HAL is seemingly humanised for the determination to make the future seem both advanced and strange.

Dave, after he has disconnected Hal, is still on a mission to investigate the transmission coming from Jupiter. We see him flying outside of the spaceship in one of the smaller pods on board when he suddenly is taken into what looks like a force field. He is

surrounded by colours and mountains and seems to be quite disoriented. This journey goes on and on until he suddenly, still in his pod, finds himself in what looks like a bedroom.

The ending here is quite strange, and the meaning of it is not clear. According to Kubrick, Dave is taken by a god-like entity made up of energy and intelligence without any shape or form. The bedroom he finds himself in resembles a zoo made especially for him. He is watched until the day he dies trapped in this windowless prison. He has no sense of time as he sees his whole life passing by. When he dies, he is reborn into what Kubrick calls a super being in the form of an infant. At the very end of the movie, this reborn Dave is looking down on Earth with a kind of Mona Lisa-like smile. Kubrick ends his explanation of the ending by saying that: “We have to only guess what happens when he goes back. It is the pattern of a great deal of mythology, and that is what we were trying to suggest” (Telegraph reporters 2018). Even though Kubrick wants his audience to guess the ending, the theory that Bowman is transformed into a Star Child in order for man to evolve once more, probably into something superior to what they now are, is a pretty valid guess. This explanation of the ending is also mentioned in Banerjee’s article about the movie. It seems that the aliens are deliberately helping the human race in its struggles and finds a way to be able to transform them into some kind of post-human being whose inferior traits could perhaps soon match the said aliens’.

When it comes to the figure of the alien in the movie, the characteristics are many. First of all, it would be useful to comment on the way Hal, the supercomputer, is depicted. He is no alien, but he is an entity both similar as well as different from human beings. He is anatomically different from humans, but he is conscious and seems to think and behave as humans do. He is able to have a detailed conversation with a human being, but perhaps the most striking thing about him is that he has the ability to lie. The concept of a conscious

computer is, in many ways, frightening. Perhaps more so in 1968 than today. Hal's actions and manipulation of the crew is driven by unknown motives which then makes him even more ominous. The actual aliens in this movie never reveal their true nature, though perhaps Bowman could be the only one who knows how they look since he has been up close to them there is no way of knowing how they look. None of the other characters nor the audience is ever made aware of how the aliens look or what their true intentions are. As mentioned earlier, their intentions could be to trigger the ape-men into evolving and trigger the humans into starting their journey out into the universe to finally be able to transform into something more than human. On top of this is their need to analyse the humans, and it could be seen like their interest in human beings, and their progress, is rooted in the curiosity of their primitiveness and their potential. Perhaps also fear of loneliness which can be solved by triggering an evolution. Also, when Bowman is taken away into what seems like a zoo in the form of a bedroom, the aliens can be seen as observers experimenting on the homo sapiens specimen up close.

But what about the rebirth of the homo sapiens and the creation of the post-human? Is there a plan to make the whole human race into Star Children? Are these evolved human beings created by the aliens enhanced positively in every way and will Earth be populated by them or will the Star Children emigrate to the cosmos? Either way, the meaning of this could perhaps be to give humanity a new start and be able to create a new way of life more sustainable than the one they are living now. It could also just be because the aliens see the potential in human beings and just wants to help them get where they need to go. If Kubrick was not sure on the ending himself, or just wanted to leave the interpretation up to whatever the viewer seems fit, the possibilities of the ending having concrete answer are impossible.

Therefore, we will never know why Kubrick's aliens did what they did to the people of Earth. We can only speculate and add whatever meaning we would like to.

This kind of alien is perhaps the most interesting one. The one where we can see signs of human behaviour, but their intentions are never revealed, so their alienness is still very compelling. Some might say that these types of movies, the ones with an open ending, are robbing the viewers of closure. I see it as a device to make the audience part of the meaning-making process. With an open ending, Kubrick is giving people the option of creating whatever scenario imaginable which could be even more rewarding with a science fiction movie than a closed ending – especially the ones containing mysterious aliens whose nature is almost unknown.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* is considered a classic science fiction movie containing mysterious aliens, supercomputers and space travel. It deals with cognitive estrangement because of the depicted world being different from the empirical environment of the filmmaker, so it fits in perfectly with Suvin's definition of science fiction. Along with the futuristic world depicted the movie uses many different aspects of estrangement to challenge the audience's grasp on reality.

With this movie and its aliens, it is a bit different from assigning it to one of Robson's categories of the figure of the alien. It seems fair to exclude the predator category here since the aliens do not behave as an enemy or as destructive invaders, but the aliens in the movie are both interesting other and real. Interesting other because of their advanced technology, their intelligence. They can be seen as real because, as Robson concludes, they are a mirror into what humankind cannot attain. The mysterious aliens in the movie are, without a doubt incredibly intelligent, they are older than human beings and travellers of the galaxy, which is all things unattainable for the human beings in the real world. In the movie, humankind is

starting to travel to distant planets and beginning to colonize the nearest moons and planets. This can be seen as being an anticipation of the future from Kubrick and the hope for a future where humankind will inhabit not only Earth but the universe.

Are the aliens in the movie anthropocentric or unknowable? Well, with the description of the two categories Benford suggests, the aliens in this movie can be seen as unknowable aliens. They are so mysterious and are never shown throughout the movie, which makes them hard to define in any way. They are at their most basic level alien in all senses of the word, and the degree of alienity and otherness they hold is reason enough to see them as true aliens. If an imagined alien were to be described as different from our human nature as possible, Kubrick's aliens would be a good example. However, Kubrick has created aliens whose intentions are the only thing exposed to the audience. He has with his anthropocentric world view, given them these intentions based on his knowledge from his empirical environment.

The aliens are not completely untouched by human traits; they are in some ways based on human values, knowledge and reality. If we look at the beginning of the movie when the aliens are stating their presence in the universe by placing a monolith in the start of the ape-man's evolution and assume that the purpose of this is to assist man in his every endeavour, we could look at this as if the alien's see value in humankind's future. There are no clear signs to the fact that the aliens are based on human reality, but how they are based on human knowledge is easy to see. The two main reasons for the claim that they are based on human knowledge is the fact that when the aliens do lead Bowman into their world, they place him in zoo-like conditions in what looks like a barouche inspired bedroom to examine him more closely. This examination is a very human thing to do in order to do experiments on something to which we are unfamiliar. The second thing that can be linked to human knowledge is the fact that they, without words, are trying to communicate with the human race for reasons of their curiosity about another intelligent lifeform in the universe.



In the movie, the alienation and otherness portrayed are different from the other science fiction works analysed in this thesis. They are both present in the story but is depicted in a way which is quite difficult to pinpoint. The fact that they are communicating with the humans in terms they do not understand is alienating, but perhaps the aliens are not able to do it differently. The otherness is perhaps better to comprehend in the light of the alienation present by looking at the way the two different species interact with each other. One species is aware of what is happening, but the other is not. The interpretation of the monoliths is to the humans only a mystery that needs to be investigated, but to the aliens, they are the means to be able to finish their plan. The projections of fear onto the plot of the story is perhaps the mysterious aliens and the difficulty the human race has to face with the revelation of another species of intelligent life in the universe. If this is something Kubrick meant to convey is uncertain, but it could regardless be something the audience picks up on while watching the movie.

Are the alienation and otherness portrayed in science fiction just a projection of human fears and faults onto something imagined and fictional? If so, are these feelings projected in order to gain relief from the fact that human beings in some ways have been alienating each other throughout human history? In 2001: A Space Odyssey human faults are not depicted. Their fears, on the other hand, is present in how the supercomputer turns on its masters and how the aliens have power over what happens to humanity. Signs of projected feelings in order to gain relief from the fact that human beings have been cruel towards each other is also not present. This movie and its intentions are mostly based on aliens and their imagined power over us.

## 5.4 *Avatar*, James Cameron (2009).

This blockbuster movie is written and directed by the Canadian filmmaker James Cameron (born August 16, 1954). He is famous worldwide for his expansive vision and innovative special effects films, most notably for *Titanic* (1997) and *Avatar*. He studied art as a child, but after studying physics in college, he worked a lot of different jobs including machinist and truck driver before he was inspired to make movies after watching *Star Wars* (1977). His adaptation of the maiden voyage of the Titanic was one of the most expensive movies ever made, but it broke box-office records and won 11 Academy Awards and became the highest-grossing movie in the world. In 2009 he made the movie *Avatar* which was a science fiction thriller noted for its special effects. A major box-office success it surpassed *Titanic* as the highest-grossing movie in the world (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica 2020).

Though there are not many links to draw between the plot context to the reality of Cameron, there are reasons as to why he could have decided to make a movie about the terrible behaviour the western countries have had towards the eastern countries. 2009 was the year the first coloured president was elected in the United States of America. Barack Obama made history when getting inaugurated on January 20, 2009 (History.com Editors 2020). As this major thing happened, to the whole world frankly, the world seemed to have a fighting chance in making racism obsolete. Though it does seem that alienating people different from you will stand the test of time this event seemed to pull on some threads. James Cameron is as mentioned famous for making the story of Titanic into a movie, so his interest in historical events, in general, could be a reason for *Avatar*'s plot being based on colonisation. It could also be true that the plot of the story became what it is simply because of the science fiction

scheme of invasion and the otherness that comes with it creating an exciting plot incorporating war, love and overcoming otherness.

*Avatar* is a tale of an alien encounter from a viewpoint not very often depicted in science fiction. This film is about the human invasion of the distant alien moon called Pandora. The film is set in the year 2154, and a corporation from Earth is mining this distant moon using US marines for protection while the corporation searches for a vital material that can be found on the surface of Pandora. To improve relations with the indigenous race living on Pandora called the Na'vi, and to be able to learn more about the biology of the moon the invaders' scientists create avatars identical to the Na'vi. These avatars are based on the DNA of the Na'vi and are used to build bodies that are replicas of them. These avatars are piloted by human beings with the help of machines that can connect the consciousness of a human brain into the constructed avatar. This is a good example of what the fiction in science fiction is all about – it is comprehensible, but still impossible to accomplish for the human race. For now, at least. The scientists want to befriend the Na'vi to be then able to understand the rich culture they have and how they are connected to their nature in ways the human race is unable to or perhaps has just forgotten how to be able to do. The leading bad guy, Colonel Miles Quaritch, want to use a pre-emptive strike to defeat the Na'vi and collect Pandora's resources to bring back to Earth. By doing this, the most sacred tree for the Na'vi on Pandora, the Hometree, will be destroyed and bear with it immense consequences for the Na'vi and their way of life (Alford 119-120). This is how the conflict of the movie comes into light. The scientists and the humans piloting the avatars become friends with the Na'vi and is soon realising the importance the ecosystem on Pandora has for its inhabitants. The US marines paid to kill them see the situation differently. The Na'vi are, in all definitions of the word, an indigenous race and their connection to nature on their moon is crucial for their culture to be

upheld. The Na'vi connect with nature in a way that gives them access to their ancestors whose consciousness is stored in Hometree. They are also able to connect with the animals on a deeper level as well. The Na'vi does not just kill the animals they hunt but also thank them for providing food. So the conflict then is two sides trying to provide safety for their own people by all means necessary. This shows a compassionate race of alien beings trying very hard to uphold their natural balance with the nature surrounding them. The human invaders are jeopardising all of this with their superior behaviour against the very much inferior counterpart.

The movie is surely criticising colonialism as the humans are invading with force oppressing the inhabitants of Pandora. This new world brings with it a prosperous future for humankind since the humans have already broken down their own planet and are looking for riches on Pandora. The resources on Pandora seems to be the salvation of the human race, though it could also simply be a resource for money and the whole operation is just for profit. The Na'vi and their moon are not seen as important by the human invaders simply because the humans do not need the ecosystem itself, only this one material and the Na'vi is in the way of the corporation and their hired guns. The Na'vi needs to relocate or die. The Na'vi, on the other hand, will give their lives in order to protect their home, which is also what it comes to towards the end of the movie. The two adversaries see the other as the enemy and gear up for a fight. Many lives are given on each side of the conflict, and much of the sacred nature on Pandora is destroyed as well.

Being positioned as “the other” is a big part of the story and is one of the most prominent and important factors about the alienness and humanity in the characters portrayed in the story. When positioning someone as “the other”, you are distinctly separating them

from what you see yourself as which more often than not is done because you see faults in “the other”. “Us” and “them” in this alien-encounter story is very much imposed by human fears and faults. What the Terran people do to the people of Pandora is what countries in power have been doing, and is still doing, to defenceless countries around the world. The Na’vi is a race of extra-terrestrial beings whose lifestyle is very different from the terrestrial beings invading them in terms of technology and society which makes it easy for the human beings to put them in a position of being “the inferior other”. Lawtoo notes in his article about the movie that the nostalgic representations of indigenous humanoids as a source of the authentic values the postmodern self have lost are old fashioned (Lawtoo 138). What he means by this perhaps is that the desire to locate authentic connectedness to nature amongst primitive peoples is very modern. The idea of postmodern human beings losing their sense of connection to the nature around them is an idea used in many stories throughout the years. Lawtoo goes on saying that the authentic values lost to the postmodern man romanticises the “noble savage” and the connection to the organic community in which subjects are united by bonds of solidarity and sympathy lacking in an individualistic, post-industrial world (Lawtoo 138). With a world that is changing very quickly, the human being has no choice but to follow the pace as well. This change in our societies also changes our inner selves a great deal. What can be seen as a normal way of life now may be very distant from the life we should be leading. Not that the societies should regress in any way, but the connection the human being had to the nature around it is lost, and this may, in turn, deprive us of something we forgot we needed.

This alien invasion story is quite different from the other stories included in this thesis because it has two kinds of aliens depicted; two races who see each other very differently. We get to see human beings as aliens from the viewpoint of the Na’vi, which is very interesting

because this sets the audience in a special position. The response to the scenario of our own species fighting a seemingly defenceless alien species for resources needed to survive should be a response that triggers our empathy. However, the Na'vi is a defencelessness as a people whose appearance and behaviour is very similar to what human beings were before modern society, and that should trigger a whole other kind of empathy. The two responses are perhaps also done similarly in many viewers' mind, which could set him or her in a position where choosing sides will be almost morally impossible. It is not until the ending of the movie when the US marines are seen in a very different and malevolent way by the audience, which could perhaps make the choice of taking sides much easier.

According to Robson in her chapter *Aliens: Our Selves and Others*, the science fiction genre is continually trying to examine human nature scientifically by setting them up against an alien species in a scenario where our true nature is shown. With *Avatar*, it is uncomplicated to examine the two species set up against each other with different cultures, values and ways of looking at existence. For the Na'vi existence means to be living in accordance with nature. They have, as mentioned, a very close relationship with their ancestors through the link of nature on their moon. Everything is connected, and if any of it is to be destroyed, they lose their sense of belonging. Human beings, on the other hand, has a completely different view on nature and life. They have treated planet Earth awful and has ended up not being able to sustain life there. The same thing is happening on Pandora when they start their military invasion destroying everything in their path which seems like a destructive pattern lacking any kind of empathy for other beings as well as the lack of understanding that nature is a big part of existence both on Earth and on Pandora. There is no denying that this kind of behaviour is in our nature as a species.

As mentioned earlier, the film is a comment on colonialism, but it also seems to be shedding light on some other known faults of humankind. Such as racism, religion and environmentalism, which are closely connected up with colonialism, with the idea that the world is there for exploitation and profit (Simpson 2010). The movie shows how we, as human beings, tend to disclaim other people's religious beliefs based on irrational fear or prejudices. Our continual inability to be able to coexist with persons of other cultures, religion and worldviews because of fear and inadequate knowledge on the subject shows a destructive pattern in our modern societies which reflects our disregard for differentness.

The majority of the invaders see the Na'vi as uncivilised and in need of their help in order to become what is seen as good enough by the colonisers. The same has happened in every single colonisation of countries throughout history when rich and powerful countries in the West, like England, have used their power over inferior countries in the East such as India introducing their laws, language and culture on the Indians as better than theirs expecting them to follow blindly since in the eyes of the coloniser the colonised require cultural elevation. People looking different and having different beliefs is something we as human beings often have a difficult time accepting and getting used to which is perhaps because of a long tradition of bigotry from earlier generations. These traditions are still a part of many cultures today, but looking at people negatively could also be because of the fear caused by lack of knowledge. These faults in us, and portrayed in the human beings in *Avatar*, are what most of us see as morally wrong. Morality is perhaps the strongest thing in us which is then a great device to use in film and literature to captivate the audience and reader.

Since the human beings could be seen to be the alien in this movie as well from the point of view of the Na'vi, and that the Na'vi is very similar to humans the two species are both recognisable as "the other" as well as "us" which is a very interesting way of making

science fiction movies capturing human nature in two different ways. The Na'vi are a people very connected to each other as well as their surroundings; they have built a world consisting of plural tribes with their families and live lives very similar to Earth's indigenous people. They are intelligent, compassionate beings whose behaviour in general, as well as their appearance, is very much similar to human beings. To say that the human being in this story is one of the best representatives for aliens in this thesis might perhaps be true because of how the human being is depicted fits into many of the arguments about aliens in science fiction and how they usually are described. With Malmgren's article in mind where he mentions Benford's categories of the science fiction alien, it is easy to see that human beings have exaggerations of human traits indeed and are alien at its most basic level when it comes to their behaviour. In many ways, the humans in this story are being characterised with multiple factors of humanisation used in science fiction: they are a mirror into our own problems, they are intended to be commenting on our social, political and moral conditions, and they are predatory aliens invading a planet for their own personal gain. This shows that the alien in science fiction does not need to be an extra-terrestrial being, rather it needs to become either a villain or an ally, or it needs to be benevolent or malevolent against and opposing force.

This movie deals with cognitive estrangement in many ways. The world depicted is one that is very different from the reality of the audience, but it is still depicted in a way which makes it easy to see the world we live in more clearly. *Avatar* is aesthetically beautiful to watch, and it transports the audience to an alien world where nature and the animals are very different from what we know. With cognitive estrangement comes the understanding of the aspects of our world, and with this movie, this holds true. *Avatar* depicts a world where indigenous people are wrongfully invaded by people with destructive military power which is a theme that is seen in the real world many times.



When taking into account the three categories of the figure of the alien developed by Robson, we can establish that the Na'vi are the interesting other. The Na'vi are given many human traits and can be said to be more human in their behaviour than their invaders. As mentioned earlier, the Na'vi are portrayed very similarly to the native Americans and the way they are connected to their surroundings on a level much deeper than the one the modern human being has. Robson says that the interesting other is a mirror into our own humanity and is somewhere between the anti-self and the self. What she means by this and how this can be connected to the movie is in how the two species are portrayed. The human beings in the movie can be seen as some form of anti-self because of faulty behaviour; the Na'vi can be seen as the self because of the values they hold towards each other, the animals and their surroundings. This behaviour is one we should be aiming for.

Benford says aliens are either anthropocentric or unknown and it is easy to see that the aliens in *Avatar* are anthropocentric. The Na'vi are given exaggerations of human traits, and they are a mirror into our problems, allowing us to look at them from another perspective. Benford also talks about the two different categories dealing with a degree of alienness and when it comes to the Na'vi and their portrayal we can see that their degree of alienity lies in their blue skin, the fact that they live on a distant moon and that they can connect with their ancestors through a tree. Otherwise, their behaviour is very much based on our anthropocentric world view.

The Na'vi is very much infused with human traits as well as based on human values, knowledge and reality. This whole movie can be seen as storytelling to the audience about the colonizing of different countries, but it is a science fiction story because of one of the species being from outer space, the humans' advanced technology and the alien world being very different from the one we know.

The alienation and otherness in this story are indeed projecting human fear onto something fictional in order to create relief for the fact that human beings have been alienating each other throughout history. Colonisation, war, oppression and racism are all destructive behaviour we as a race have been doing to each other throughout history and these faults are shown in the movie.

## 6. Discussion

This thesis has investigated the different types of science fiction aliens and whether or not they are humanised in any way. What the thesis is trying to argue is that there are no aliens portrayed in science fiction untouched by human traits. The different aliens in the novels and movies investigated in this thesis have different types of humanised characteristics and different traits that can speak to their alienity as well. It is a fact that there is a slim possibility for authors and filmmakers to be able to imagine and create a totally alien alien because of human empirical knowledge. Even though human imagination is in no way limited, rather the contrary, we will not be able to create something different from the world we experience. Science fiction is a genre that lets both author and reader, filmmaker and audience let their imagination run free in a place where there are beings from outer space, wondrous worlds and technology creating exiting stories portraying heroes and their adversaries on journeys through time and space.

The aliens in the novels and movies analysed in this thesis portray aliens that are both given alien traits and human traits.

The Martians in *The War of the Worlds* are alien because of them being from Mars, because of their advanced technology unattainable to human beings and their inability to communicate with the human race. At first glance, they do seem to be very much alien, but as

mentioned in the analysis, their humanity shines through in many different ways. Their humanity is perhaps most of all shown in that they cannot survive the bacteria on Earth, which is the main reason that they are not invincible and are not as powerful as they seem.

In *Childhood's End*, the aliens can be seen as even more alien and even more human in their behaviour and appearance than the Martians. They are very humanised in the way they are interested in human culture and the way they befriend some of them. The Overlords seem to be torn between the fact that they are under the authority of the Overmind and the fact that they little by little start to see the moral complications of the way they are treating the human beings. The alien part of the Overmind is the fact that it is a being of pure energy and the alienness of the Overlords are their incredibly advanced technology, their ability to speak any language correctly at a moment's notice and that they have abilities unattainable to man.

The aliens, in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* are beings challenging to describe in full because of their mysterious way of keeping themselves hidden from humans. The fact that they are so difficult to define is perhaps what makes them alien. How can an unknown being be described in human terms? Well, there are plausible reasons for humanity in them as well, and these are mostly based on their behaviour. In the very last scene of the movie, the aliens have taken Bowman into what seems like their world where they have placed him in what is a replica of a barouche inspired bedroom from Earth and put him in it for examination. It can also be said that the examination of the human specimen is in order to prepare him for the transformation into a Star Child – the next step in human evolution.

In *Avatar* the Na'vi can be seen as alien in their appearance. Even though their appearance can be seen as based on animals in the real world, they are still different enough to be characterised as alien. Their behaviour, on the other hand, is very influenced by human behaviour. Their society is similar to the ones we had when people were still indigenous living of what the nature provided for them. Also, their humanity is shown in their

compassion and moral for all other beings. The way the Na'vi are depicted is genuinely in a way that mirrors our human behaviour.

The argument that there are no aliens portrayed in science fiction utterly different from our empirical environment could after this investigation and analysis be actual. However, this thesis, as mentioned earlier, would also like to demonstrate that there perhaps are not room in literature and film for aliens whose nature is entirely different from what we know because then the deciphering of the plot and connecting to the story would be difficult, and perhaps impossible. In order for the reader or viewer to connect with the characters in the story, something familiar is needed. Factors of the familiar can be many different things, for example, humour, moral or cognition.

Starting with the novel *The War of the Worlds*, we can see the familiar through the narrator and how he describes what he sees and experiences throughout the story. The connection between the narrator and the reader is one that helps the reader understand the thoughts and emotions occurring in the narrator when aliens are invading his country, and there is nothing to do to defeat them. The narrator also gets in contact with various people throughout the novel, whose fears about the ordeal is relatable to the reader. The whole novel revolves around what the narrator sees and through the eyes of a familiar being whose reactions are similar to the one the reader also would have makes the novel relatable even though the setting is an unfamiliar one.

Familiarity is also seen in *Childhood's End*, at least in the beginning of the novel, when the world is described as very similar to the one at the time the novel came out. We can still today see similarities in the novel's society and ours. The way the aliens acquire the English language and the way they strive to get familiar with the human culture is also a factor in how the science fiction novel portraying an alien invasion can be relatable.

The problem with finding familiarity in the aliens in *2001: A Space Odyssey* has to do with the fact that since there are no specific aliens portrayed the audience is not able to find them relatable, but the plot is familiar in other ways. The world portrayed, though futuristic, is similar to the one surrounding the audience. The smallest detail of familiarity could be sufficient for the story to be one that the audience will easily connect to and find exiting.

In *Avatar*, the audience can relate to the characters in a real way. Both human beings and the Na'vi have traits similar to the ones we all possess. The world of Pandora is of course very different from the one we know, but the relationship the Na'vi have to the nature on their moon creates nostalgic feelings about a simpler way of life we humans used to have. The relation the audience gets to the characters in the movie is based on the dire moral situation the two sides of the struggle find themselves in, which speaks to the innate need for resolution and peace most people possess.

There is reason to argue that these factors of familiarity and possibility for relations being made in science fiction novels and movies portraying alien invasions is what makes the stories worth reading and watching. The principle of an alien invasion is unimaginable and causes fear in the regular man or woman, and therefore the need for familiarity is essential for the story to be comprehensible as well as being one that can engage the imagination of the human mind.

The genre is one that is very hard to define, and many critics have been in disagreement on which points would make up a thorough definition. The difficulty of making a definition has to do with the fact that there are so many different science fiction works portraying a story whose primary devices are of science and fiction. As noted, the definition of Darko Suvin is perhaps the definition most critics agree with, this thesis included. His definition of the genre includes the presence and interaction of cognitive estrangement and

that the primary device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment. Perhaps this is sufficient enough to define a genre as well as it is inclusive enough for the genre to be comprehensive in content and not scrutinize every last detail of a science fiction work for it to be acknowledged as real science fiction. Although people are still trying to better the definition, it is still the one Suvin constructed that stands in the highest regard. Suvin noted that an essential part of the definition of science fiction is cognitive estrangement. The science fiction genre is transporting the reader and viewer into a world where his or her reality is challenged with an imagined world where aspects of our world can be seen more clearly. This estrangement based on science is also what distinguishes the genre from any other genre because of the alienating effect it causes. Though science fiction is a genre very much about strange worlds with aliens different from what we know, Suvin did note that to give meaning to something is inescapably to humanize it. This assignment of meaning can be seen in the literature and film analysed in this thesis.

In *The War of the Worlds*, Wells uses cognitive estrangement in a way that keeps with the science fiction tradition. He creates a world where England is pretty much as normal as can be until the Martians invade with immensely superior technology transforming the quiet countryside home of the narrator into what can be seen as a war zone. Keeping the form of science fiction, it also holds the science plausible though extreme. The novel is describing a change in the typical environment adding into it violent aliens whose power is very much superior to that of the humans. The aliens here are predatory aliens invading with great force taking what they want and destroying the rest. As mentioned the humanity portrayed in the novel are, for one, the war waging and how the Martian's, though perhaps more destructive than humans, are with only their egoistic reasons without concern for others are invading an inferior race for reasons of acquiring resources. Perhaps the most striking one though is the fact that they are not as superior as they think – quite the contrary when at the end of the

novel they are being slain by Earth's micro-organisms. The humans being immune because of the Earth being their natural environment got very lucky when the Martian's had not taken this into account when invading. It could be said that the Martians in the story is alien in some ways: their appearance, though based on Earth's slugs, are very different from humans, the communication between the Martians and the humans is impossible and their technology is far more advanced than both the humans in the novel as well as the humans in Wells' reality. Not only does this show that Wells anticipated future technologies but it also shows that aliens in science fiction can be alien enough with little detail to seem entirely different for what we know and see in our empirical environment.

In *Childhood's End*, the aliens are portrayed far more advanced and complex but the depicted world feels similar to reality. What Clarke has done is that he has created a story of a world in the future, still similar to the one we know with exceptions on technology, where the people are invaded by seemingly benevolent aliens who gain confidence and respect by the Earth's inhabitants quickly. This trust is, first of all, because of the awe and fear of the technology they possess and because there would be no way of defeating them if a war was to be waged. The fact that the Overlords are teaching themselves the ways of life on Earth, the cultures and traditions, and befriending some of the human characters could be enough to make the argument that they are humanised. However, as mentioned with the analysis of the novel, there are many more. The Overlords are puppets controlled by the Overmind whose plan is the only thing that matters and also the only motive the Overlords have to behave as they do. This hierarchy is arranged as God (Overmind), angels (Overlords), and the humans as the inferior part could also be seen as a company. The CEO, the employees and the humans as merchandise or product to keep the profit going. Either way, even if the Overmind is a pure energy-based being, it is still controlling its lower-ranked workers like God or a CEO would. Also, it is colonizing Earth in order to extract the biological material needed to make itself

more powerful. This kind of behaviour is similar to the behaviour of the western world towards the inferior countries in the East. The world depicted in this novel challenges the reader to see the aspects of his or her own reality more clearly in the way that is depicting a harmonised utopia humankind should try to attain.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey* Kubrick's aliens are mysterious and is kept unknown throughout the movie. The cognitive estrangement is perhaps most prominent in this movie compared to the other science fiction literature and film analysed in this thesis. The world portrayed in the plot is somewhat how a filmmaker like Kubrick could have anticipated it to be thirty years later if the space race was still keeping the same pace it did back then. Estranged from the Earth, the humans are starting to inhabit the surrounding moons and planets and becoming more and more advanced. The more advanced the humans get, the more estranged from the old ways they get and the more post-human they get. The aliens in the movie are somewhat humanised, although they are never seen and never heard. As an audience, we get to know that it is some extra-terrestrial being who is making contact with the human race in the form of the monoliths they are strategically placing at the right place in the right time at specific altering moments in the evolution of man and the progress of this evolution. Perhaps the most apparent thought to come to mind about these aliens is that they are making themselves known for a specific purpose and that this purpose is seemingly benevolent. As mentioned earlier, the monolith's can be seen as triggers for the Moon Watcher's step into tool-making and a trigger for a technologically developing human race on the verge of space exploration. This space exploration to investigate the radio signal coming from Jupiter is a path carefully laid down by the aliens whose plan is once more bringing the humans through another evolutionary step. With this step, the humans are being born again as star children destined to inhabit the cosmos. If this evolutionary step is just destined to be or if



it is a gift given to the human beings from the aliens cannot be known, the only thing we can now with narrow certainty is that the aliens are there for the humans in a helpful way.

In *Avatar*, the concept of cognitive estrangement is evident. With cognitive estrangement being a concept of an imaginary world empirically different from our own makes us able to see aspects of our world more clearly. In the blockbuster movie, the audience is being transported into a world of fantastic creatures and wildlife where the very human Na'vi can communicate with the animals and trees in a genuine way. The ecosystem is one big organism working together and taking care of every single part as equal to every other. This way of looking at the environment is very different from the way we do and have been for a long time. If we look at the native Americans or the aborigines in Australia, we can somewhat say they have a similar way of living in accordance with nature as the Na'vi on Pandora. With science fiction also often being a genre commenting on political and social aspects of our reality it is easy to see that James Cameron is commenting on a lot of different problems we have going on since modern society began. Colonialism, war, and pollution of nature are some of the problems commented on in the movie, which are aspects of humanity's bad behaviour. Who are the real aliens in this movie? This is a question asked in the analysis of this movie earlier in the thesis. It is still a valid question because there are two species present in the movie: one of the species alien to humans because they are extra-terrestrial beings very different from themselves, and another is invading the Na'vi's home planet being seen in the exact same way. By these standards, human beings would, of course, be alien in the other novels and movies as well, but the point is that there is a rare situation at hand in this story. There is a human invasion which causes a moral divide. Whose side should people in the audience take? Though this is no psychology paper, the question is essential for the argument. To say that there is a more significant percentage of people ending up taking the Na'vi's side is perhaps feasible which backs up the claim that the aliens are humanised

and can be relatable to many people. People who have felt inferior to someone and not being able to fight back, people could be thinking of the wars and colonisations over the years bringing forth an emotion of guilt for the poor people who have suffered. The fact that the story can bring people to think about their actions by commenting on our social responsibility is perhaps one of the strongest human traits incorporated in the aliens.

There is no way of reading these novels and watching these movies and not analyse them as dealing with cognitive estrangement and portraying humanised aliens. The fact that there cannot be a totally alien alien depicted in science fiction could not be debated, and the reason for them to be characterised any other way would also be nearly impossible.

Humour as a form of entertainment is noteworthy to talk about considering the thesis argument. When writing a novel or making a movie that is relatable to the people reading or watching, humour could perhaps be one device to make a connection between the reader and the novel as well as for the audience and the movie. Humour is subjective but tied to each individual's knowledge. Wit and sarcasm will differ from culture to culture, but all in all, humour is something we humans can all find relatable. Humour is also a factor in the science fiction genre that plays a significant role in many bestseller novels such as *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) by Douglas Adams where every alien character is each given a peculiar trait. It is also a prominent factor in several movies throughout the years. There are many cases where the alien invasion is a humorous affair where stereotypical green men invade the Earth with big black eyes and three fingers; for example, the blockbuster movie *Paul* (2011). For the science fiction genre to create literature and film relatable to its wide variety of fans, it must be able to produce content that incorporates aspects of his or her reality. Humour is one way to do this. Even though humour is subjective, we can agree that as

a concept it is universally known, and even though a joke or an offensive line might not be everyone's cup of tea, it will be seen as humour and then relatable to most.

The use of "us and them" in alien invasion literature and film is a crucial device to separate the adversaries on opposed sides in the story. The literature and film analysed in this thesis all include this device in some way. As mentioned earlier, by putting someone in a position of being the other one is inescapably determining them to be different from oneself and the way of living one sees as usual or correct. Perhaps an alien invasion story would not be the same if the "us and them" scheme was not present. For the alien to be relatable in a real way, the distinction between "us and them" is essential. As Malmgren argues about the reader of science fiction comparing the human and alien entities trying to understand what it means to be human shows that whatever form an alien might take it is never genuinely alien. Instead, it is based on what the author knows to be accurate and based on his or her perceived reality (Malmgren 15-17).

Putting someone in a position as being "the other", "them" against "us" will almost always be viewed negatively because of how the term is used today. When we talk about "us and them" we usually think of the other as inferior to oneself. This is a tradition upheld by the western countries since the colonisation of the countries in the east. "They" will always be analysed as different and wrong through the lens that is the perfect way of life lived by "us". These terms are also adaptable to the science fiction literature and film where the distance between "us" and "them" are even broader and more distinct. However, in science fiction, the negative tension in the world are sometimes shifted into awe and wonder more than inferiority and incorrect way of living. Uniqueness and science fiction goes hand in hand, and the positioning of others in an inferior position because of the way they lead their lives is not often a scheme deployed in the genre.

The figure of the alien is a big part of this thesis and necessary to be able to understand the meaning of the alien and how it functions in the science fiction genre. Malmgren talks about science fiction being a genre where the comparing of human and alien lifeforms makes the reader recuperate from this kind of thinking and instead try to understand what it means to be human (Malmgren 15). Pielke also points out the fact that the aliens, rather than being a different being than the human functions as a device that comments on our social, political and moral conditions and are therefore often given human behaviour as we humans can only through the terms of something familiar be able to express the unfamiliar to us (Pielke 29-31). Benford speaks about the alien being either anthropocentric or unknowable and that the degree of alienity between them is quite significant. Either the alien is anthropocentric which is an alien based on human values, knowledge and reality and are given exaggerations of these traits, or it is an unknowable alien who is an alien at its most basic level. The Na'vi in *Avatar* are anthropocentric aliens, and on the other side of the scale, we find the Overmind from *Childhood's End* and the mysterious aliens from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The Martians from *The War of the Worlds* and the Overlords from *Childhood's End* are somewhere in the middle when it comes to the degree of alienity Benford is suggesting. Benford talks about the science fiction alien as being somewhere on the scale, between unknowable or anthropocentric and that wherever they land on the scale they are still given human traits or is based on our empirical environment. This statement holds with all of the aliens mentioned in this thesis.

Robson categorizes the science fiction aliens as predatory, interesting other and real. Even though she has a point, there are other ways of categorizing them and perhaps in a broader range than only three confined types. Depending on how you look at it, the alien can in all instances be an interesting other.

Though the Martian's in *The War of the Worlds* are predatory, their technology and biology may still be seen by the reader as impressive. It is certainly interesting, though of course, frightening, for the narrator in the novel to be a witness to the immense power of destruction the aliens possess.

In *Childhood's End*, the aliens are predators without the people of Earth or the reader knowing. It is not until the end of the novel their true intentions are exposed. The Overlords are until then interesting others to the humans and the humans interesting others to the Overlords. Robson notes that the predator is the anti-self, but I would argue that the aliens are rarely something opposite of a human being. The fact that the interesting other is supposed to be a middle ground of anti-self and self is perhaps plausible. Robson is also saying that the alien is there to examine human nature and to exist as a mirror into our behaviour.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey* "the other" is an unknown mysterious entity whose nature we never get to know. This mysteriousness makes the opinions made about them harder to define, but they are still "the other" when following the anthropocentric structure of the movie and perhaps an interesting other more than a predatory alien.

In *Avatar* both the human race and the Na'vi are in their own way depicted as "the other". Here the two species are dealing with a bizarre new kind of beings whose nature is very different. "The other" is no longer one race, but two set up against each other. The idea of "the other" is in one way a form of distancing ourselves from others and in another a way of making others inferior. This is a standard device used in science fiction as well as it is a common way of behaving towards other cultures and peoples right here on Earth. The Na'vi are without a doubt a depiction of the self in different terms and an interesting other.

The limitation of the imagination of the human mind and the inability to create something totally alien is a fact. Both Malmgren, Robson and Pielke, as well as many of the other critics, points out the limitations of human imagination in their articles on the science fiction alien. However, besides this fact, it is also true that there are no limits to the human imagination. When in accordance with what we do know and our ability to become part of the story, human imagination seems infinite. The argument that there is no room for a totally alien alien in science fiction is with these critics' opinions strengthened. The primary function of the alien in science fiction is therefore not to be completely different from what we know and be analogous with the meaning of the word; instead, the alien is present in the stories for the reader to become more acquainted with himself and herself and the surrounding world.

The respect for the fact in science fiction is something Rose is talking about when it comes to stories of alien encounters. He writes that the way the genre is based on our empirical world is what distinguishes it from fantasy and other genres of literature. Using our world as a backdrop for the story will ultimately create a world which is linked to ours and makes it possible to see how we perceive the aliens (Rose 3-4). This fact also connects to the point made earlier about the need for the familiar in order for the unfamiliar to become recognisable. The way we humans see the aliens in the stories will perhaps also correlate to the way we would look at and react to prospective aliens we will encounter in the future which is, of course, only speculations, but this is one way we humans learn and evolve – by being shown different possible scenarios of events and figuring out how to deal with them. As Liedl notes in her article about how history is told to us can be seen as the same way of telling a science fiction story is related to this fact that we learn from our mistakes even if they are portrayed in an imaginative world. What Liedl point is in this article is that there are certain things similar when it comes to how we perceive the world based on the way history and

science fiction is written. She argues that the typical way of writing history creates the same hope for the future as science fiction does. The hope created comes from the teachable moment when realising how things could have been done differently in the past for the future to be better. The same goes for science fiction in two different ways: the dystopian science fiction story will trigger the feeling of wanting to be a better human being for the future to be bright. Also, the science fiction stories where the future has become utopian because of the advances made in technology and human behaviour shows how the science fiction genre, in general, can be a source of realisation of the self and our surroundings.

If we look at the novels and films included in this thesis, we can see the respect for the fact in all of them.

*The War of the Worlds* is a novel depicting a world similar to the one surrounding Wells when he wrote it. The Martians and their invasion with advanced technology keep the theme of science fiction going at the same time it is correlated to the advancements of human technology at the time the novel was written.

With *Childhood's End*, the same respect for the fact is present. The novel is a prime example of what science fiction is all about. It is portraying a future where humankind has advanced considerably yet the society is still recognisable as well as it is a link into our world on how the humans in the story react to the invasion of alien beings.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey* we can see the anticipated future in Kubrick's mind with the very commercial way of travelling to the moon. The way he has normalised space travel in the movie shows that there is a link between his world's future and the world he is creating in the movie. Technology in this movie is very much based on the technology being invented in the real world, which sets a backdrop for the movie that links it to the surrounding world of the viewer. The aliens in this movie are perceived as mysterious beings whose technology is

immensely advanced, and their motives are unknown. Still, the humans set out on a voyage to find out where they are and what they want, which shows humanity's curiosity and the fact that nothing will cease it.

The respect for the fact in *Avatar* and its world in accordance with the anticipated future of Cameron is shown in how the Earth is in requirement of material from other planets because of the destruction done by human beings as well as how the human invaders see the aliens on Pandora also shows how the human race sees "the other". In this story, the backdrop of reality is very similar in many ways to the faults of humankind throughout the years. The colonisation and the mistreating of our planet are some of the things the movie takes into account.

In science fiction, the backdrop of reality is of importance for the situations in the story to be seen as more factual which in turn is what makes the reader of a science fiction novel or viewer of a science fiction film able to relate to the story on a deeper level.

The science fiction genre is a living thing untouched by conventional rules in the sense that both author and reader is a part of making the genre. Many readers critique and constructively engage in the making of the science fiction universe in all of its literature and film. All science fiction work is open for interpretations and will always generate countless of them for every individual reader. The human mind can read a novel and transport into it wholeheartedly by getting to know the characters and connect with the story on a deeper level because of the familiar feelings or thoughts it might produce. Being able to escape normal and perhaps boring daily lives is one of the greatest things science fiction is doing. There is always some new novel, film or comic book waiting to be experienced and the variety of the work out there is so big that the possibility for anyone to find something entertaining is not tricky.



The relevance of this study is to recognise that the science fiction aliens are imagined beings whose appearance and behaviour is given to them by their creator. The reason for the argument that the aliens can never really be totally alien is in the sense that they are created human beings and that our empirical environment limits the imagination to what we know and see. This fact cannot be escaped because how can we know something we can't experience or see? The fact that the aliens are portrayed in a humanised way is always going to be a fact. However, this thesis is also trying to argue that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Imagine a novel or a movie portraying an extra-terrestrial being utterly alien in every way. This being would be so unrecognisable to the reader or viewer that the deciphering of the plot would be impossible. To be able to follow a plot and to be able to relate to the story and its characters, it needs to be somewhat similar to what we know. Cognition is an integral part of how we understand what we read, and if this is taken away, the experience of the novel or movie will not be the same. Even though the human brain is limited even when it comes to fictive stories, the science fiction genre is not limited by that fact. Instead, it is a genre whose limits are infinite, and it is a worldwide forum where writers, filmmakers and fans are able to transport themselves and others into exiting realms made up of interesting beings, wondrous worlds and extreme voyages.

By looking at the opinions of the critics of the science fiction aliens, it is clear that the argument that they can never be without human traits is an argument many think of as a fact. The aliens in science fiction are mirroring our humanity and can be an example of how we as humans tackle certain situations in real life only the scenario is different. Us humans, read into things in literature and film based on our own culture and social environment. Therefore, the different aliens will be pointing out distinct flaws and moral dilemmas for different people

depending on how it is perceived by the individual reader or viewer of the alien invasion novel or movie.

The major points made earlier in the thesis on how the aliens are humanised also reasons for the impossibility for the success of the totally alien alien in science fiction novels and film. Without cognitive estrangement, the genre wouldn't be able to convey to the reader how his or her world is built up. Without the different figures of the alien and how the different aliens portray different kinds of mirrors into our own self the alien would be unrecognisable and unsatisfactory in the resemblance the reader is looking for in the portrayed characters. The "us and them" part of the alien invasion story is also essential both for the argument that the aliens can be compared to someone foreign and vital because it creates a teachable moment. The treatment of "the other" by putting them in an inferior position is something we know is wrong but keep seeing in our societies to this day. By creating a world where we can relate to beings different from us and see the need for inclusion instead of exclusion, we become better human beings. With respect for the fact intertwined in this, we can see the authors thoughts in how the world works and how it can advance. We can see that there are many ways of interpreting the world around us and how we should treat it concerning to what comes next. People often forget that it is the past that made the present and that in turn, it is the present that makes the future. Science fiction is an excellent source of thought creation around this idea that there are possibilities of making a future that is hopeful rather than chaotic and dystopian. The way the genre can do all of these things is perhaps solely because of the society surrounding it making it a kind of collaborative space where the thoughts and feelings of countless different individuals can give ideas for further exploration of the genre and the wondrous things it creates.

What this thesis has found out about the alienness and humanity of the aliens in science fiction novels and films is that there are countless variations of them and that the characteristics they possess are not either-or. When it comes to humanisation they all retain some of it along with their differentness. By investigating the aliens in the chosen novels and movies, there is evidence of this fact, and by taking into account the critics' thoughts on it, it is even more clear that the aliens in science fiction can never be truly alien. Although, as mentioned earlier, the human imagination can create the most beautiful stories portraying distant worlds with curious beings inhabiting them. These stories read by fans of the genre is a gateway into a world where the aliens are real, and the worlds are fantastic which is the fascinating thing about the human mind and its capability for imagination. Even though we know that the portrayed aliens in the story are not real, we can lean into the story and accept everything being told to us as real. Science fiction is an excellent source for entertainment, and as established by this thesis, it is also a genre that mirrors into our world. The genre is one that includes a lot of different themes and devices to create an imagined world where almost anything is possible.

The science fiction genre is enormous and has a lot of sub-genres, and the science fiction portraying an alien encounter is just one of them, there are also purely technologically based stories like the popular new series *Altered Carbon* (2018-) where the human mind can outlive the body by uploading the human consciousness into chips that are placed in people's necks. What happens in this series is that some of the rich people are able to live forever because they can buy storage for their consciousness so they cannot die even if their chip is destroyed. This turns society into a hierarchy where the rich hold all power and the poor are treated like lesser beings. This portrayal of society is an exaggeration of how the world is now. However, there are striking similarities in how the rich is treating the poor. Another

example of science fiction projecting human fear and faults onto something fictional is the book series (later made into film series) *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010) wherein a distant future society has been separated into districts and the higher the number of the district the less they have and the less they are being given. *The Hunger Games*, as well as *Altered Carbon*, are examples of science fiction commenting on our social, political and moral conditions and it shows how conscious the science fiction writers and filmmakers are of the world surrounding them and the condition it is in. As mentioned earlier about the science fiction genre anticipating the future and that this future can either look dystopian or utopian has to do with the faith in humanity the creator of the science fiction work has and whether or not the changing world makes him or her anticipate dystopia or utopia.

So, to the main thesis questions: can there be an imagined alien completely untouched by any human trait or are they all based on human values, knowledge and reality? With careful analyzation of the novels and films with the backup from other critics' opinions, the answer to this question is: no, there is no alien utterly untouched by human because, yes, they are all based on human values, knowledge and reality and will therefore never be utterly alien.

Are the alienity and otherness portrayed in science fiction just a projection of human fear and faults onto something imagined and fictional? If so, are these feelings projected in order to gain relief from the fact that human beings in some ways have been alienating each other throughout history? Well, by looking at the context of all of the texts and linking the stories told in them to real events in history, it seems probable that this is true for all four. When creating a story that portrays two different species, we can only treat this imagined encounter between them in terms we are familiar with. The terms we know are how we, as human beings, have been making enemies and friends amongst ourselves here on Earth. We

have no idea how an actual alien encounter will be like so basing it on real events from history seems like the only option.

In science fiction, ideas of the world and its future is almost always present and faith in humanity with it. The fact that the fate of the world is in our hands and that science fiction can be a source that makes people think about their behaviour shows the power that novels and movies can have on people. By putting human beings in space to interact with the strange beings living there, we can put our own social, political and moral ideals in contrast to something different that helps us see how we indeed are human beings which could shed light on both the faults of the human race as well as our strengths. The science fiction genre is therefore much more than entertainment – it is a genre displaying humanity and its methods when encountering different beings from outer space. Our faith in ourselves should be firm and the fact that many of the alien encounter stories portray strong and capable human beings shows that there is in fact, a reason to believe in a bright future for humankind. If we ever do encounter real-life aliens, let's hope we do so in a way that will prove our kindness and the knowledge we have acquired throughout the years with respect for "the other" no matter how different they may be.

## 7. Conclusion

This thesis has concluded, after much investigation on the science fiction alien that it cannot be without human traits. First off, it is not possible to imagine something wholly different than what we know since our imagination and understanding is based on our empirical environment, and within this empirical environment, we have yet to encounter extra-terrestrial beings. Everything human beings create, it being art, literature or movies, is

based on our values, knowledge and reality. The only thing new or different added to the works of science fiction is the creator's viewpoint and experiences. The way we humans create and imagine is very much in accord with the way we are brought up and where we are from as well as how we perceive the world. This way, everything we do create is always based on something from our mind, the world surrounding us or ideas given to us from other sources. Second, there is no sensible reason for the totally alien to be a part of literature and film as entertainment since their presence would be incomprehensible to most readers and viewers. For a story to make sense and to be enticing, it needs to incorporate familiar things in order for the reader or the viewer to feel connected. This connection is vital for the thoughts and feelings of the characters to make sense and for the imaginary world to be recognisable for the interpreter. So with this in mind, we can be able to look at the science fiction genre and see humanity from our anthropocentric world view as necessary. As mentioned earlier, science fiction is a genre unlimited and unrestrained by conventions of technology creating worlds to which fans of the genre can escape into and be part of if only for a few moments. Human curiosity and awe of the universe will never cease and the science fiction genre, though fictional, will provide some kind of relief of this in the bottomless well that is human curiosity. Even though the human mind is not able to create something totally alien, we are still able to be entertained and convinced by the stories we read and watch because of our imagination and the fascination of the stories and the hope for them to become real which at least is the case for many of us – that even though we know it to be false, we can transport ourselves into a world where alien encounters are possible and almost feel like the story is true. As fascinating as the science fiction genre is with its aliens, space travel, time travel and ray guns, the human mind is perhaps even more fascinating. To be able to imagine something without any certainty that it is real and to believe, if only for just one second, that it could genuinely exist is truly a magical thing.

Many of the articles and books on science fiction aliens incorporated in this thesis has stated that the alien is being humanised by its creator and this has shown to be true. Robson 2012, Malmgren 1993, Rose 1981 and Pielke 1980 have all stated in their articles that the science fiction alien is present in the literature and film to act like mirrors into our humanity and with this mirror we can see more clearly what it truly means to be human. The real alien can never exist in literature or film. If this could be possible the reason to not include this being in a novel or a movie would be because of the defamiliarization of the story and the lack of entertainment it would provide for the reader of a novel or the audience of a movie.

Another factor proving the argument that the science fiction alien is humanised and that the importance for that fact can be seen in the analysis of the novels and movies. Without the humanisation of the aliens, we would not be able to analyse them by the same standards used when analysing literature and film. By taking into account that the human mind works in specific ways, we should be able to know its boundaries and work around them as best we can. Even though the science fiction alien will never be without human traits, we can still recognise them as different beings than what we usually experience in our world and that by using them as a literary device they will always be a form of entertainment.

In summary, the science fiction alien is never totally alien because of the limitations of the human mind and the need for them to be wholly alien is perhaps superfluous.

I think it would be fascinating to be able to read about an extra-terrestrial being whose nature is not at all based on the human empirical environment. If the story would be entertaining or not is hard to imagine, but the real alien is a fascinating idea though still out of reach for human beings at this time in our existence. Perhaps in the future, we will be on the verge of encountering intelligent life in the cosmos, and after the encounter, the science fiction genre will look very different indeed.

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