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**Erik Simon**

## The Strugatskys in Political Context

(This essay, first published in German in *Quarber Merkur*, #93-94 [2001], is a much enlarged version of my 1992 article of the same title. Although I have something to say about nearly all of the Strugatskys' works, this is not a review of their oeuvre; rather, I will comment on political aspects and contexts, especially regarding the politics of publishing, that are little known outside Russia. I base my remarks in part on information that I have received from Soviet authors, editors, and sf fans from the mid-1970s to the end of 1991. The most helpful sources for the publication history of some works were the *SF Encyclopedia* edited by V. Gakov [vol. 1, Minsk, 1995], various marginalia from the Russian Internet, and especially the two-volume *Strugatsky Encyclopedia* by V. Borisov et al. [Moscow & St. Petersburg, 1999].)

I can still remember when, in 1984, we were visited by an official from the Ministry of Culture in Moscow, who came to dissolve our SF Club. Before that, the club had been evicted from its room in the library: the space would be needed to shelve books which had been banned from circulation. Anyway, we had been called together to meet our high-ranking guest. And the guest told us under the seal of the strictest confidence that the Strugatskys had either already been banned or that they would be banned soon.

“But why? They have written so many Communist books!”

“The books that they have written are indeed Communist, but they are anti-Soviet....”

That was a damned strong verdict.—Andrei Lazarchuk in the introduction to his short novel *Everything is Alright* (1998).<sup>1</sup>

One finds remarks like the above by many Russian sf authors of the 1980s and 1990s. Astonishingly often, three points recur: the authors state that they have been influenced by the Strugatskys (and offer convincing proof in their writings); most were active in SF Clubs and had had personal experience with the political handling of sf by the authorities; and all attest that the Strugatskys had an influence that went far beyond the circle of sf aficionados.

But unlike most others, Lazarchuk is also compelled to report that the Clubs, which were revived during the *perestroika* years, perished without outside pressure in the 1990s, “because the environment changed and there was no place for an SF Club any longer”; and that, whereas most students were once able to quote whole passages from the Strugatskys' work by heart, in the late 1990s he found that, out of eighty students, only two had read anything by them.

The Strugatskys were eminently political authors (much more so than, say, Polish author Stanislaw Lem, who often treated central ethical-moral questions in his sf and who occasionally allowed himself to make satirical barbs at socialist reality, but who nevertheless was careful not to relate the two too obviously to each other), and thus Soviet society was their system of reference, their topic, and their addressee. It would be short-sighted, however—and in more than one respect—to assume that with the end of the Soviet Union their work has also become obsolete. For one thing, a sufficiently complex and powerful oeuvre

cannot be reduced to only one aspect, especially when it relies upon autonomous fantastic metaphors instead of merely suitably estranging and camouflaging allegories. Secondly, much of it—indeed, more of it than may be comfortable for a conventional Western view of the world—can also be related to conditions in other places and other times. And thirdly, the human beings who were formed by Soviet society and its contradictory designs—with their life histories, their attitudes, and their values—did not disappear into thin air.

It is therefore hardly necessary to stress the value of the Strugatskys' texts as a testament of their times. If it is mostly the relationships between and among the Strugatskys, their works, and the society of the USSR that I discuss here, it is not least because "the Strugatskys" ceased to exist with the death of Arkady in October 1991, at practically the same moment as the USSR ceased to exist. Boris Strugatsky has repeatedly emphasized that the Strugatskys do not exist anymore; Arkady also held this collective author to be an indissoluble unity. Both published the texts they wrote alone under *noms de plume*.

**1. The 1960s: The Beginnings.** Aside from a few early attempts that have either been lost or only recently published, the Strugatskys' beginnings as sf authors have their roots in the political thaw under Khrushchev, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. The public denunciation of Stalinism (limited though it was to certain particulars) and the first significant improvements in the conditions of life (at least in the big cities) produced a climate of new and high hopes for the future in some sectors of Soviet society. This was especially true of the intelligentsia, whose social status improved, and whose scientific results were no longer prescribed by party ideologists. A form of freedom of research arose; psychology, sociology, cybernetics, and genetics suddenly ceased to be treated merely as Western pseudo-sciences.

This situation was reinforced by spectacular successes in some realms, especially space travel. In an autobiographical piece published in 1986, Arkady Strugatsky called Sputnik an important factor in the beginning of the Strugatskys' literary career. Boris later contested this—but whatever direct influence the launch of Sputnik may have had upon their work, its contribution to the status of Soviet sf as a whole was enormous. If for Western sf space flight confirmed its formerly ridiculed ambitions, its role for Soviet sf was considerably greater. The Sputniks, the Luniks, and Yuri Gagarin's flight brought the USSR an enormous increase in international prestige, which was felt even in the country itself. It increased the self-consciousness of Soviet citizens, confirmed the (until then very precarious) position of the intelligentsia, and seemed to prove the superiority of Communism. Association with a field of such acknowledged importance for the USSR in political, propagandistic, and especially military terms improved the cultural-political prestige of Soviet sf for some time, elevating its position from reluctant sufferance to benevolent toleration. It is not an accident that the topic of space travel initially dominated even the Strugatskys' sf.

It was also space-travel sf that, in the latter half of the 1950s (and to some extent already before Sputnik), weakened the policy on "near-future sf" that had been in place since the 1930s—that short-sighted, pedestrian sf which provided

popular illustrations of the contributions that Soviet inventors, scientists, and engineers were supposed to be making toward the fulfilment of the current Five-Year Plan. That policy banished the future, banished utopia, and, strictly speaking, banished the imagination itself from Soviet sf.

All of these returned, not step by step but with a bang, in Ivan Antonovich Efremov's novel *Andromeda*, published in 1957 (in full in 1958). Like Orwell's dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this is one of those works that cannot be judged by literary-aesthetic criteria alone. Its importance can only be understood when one takes into account the history of its reception and its role in the literature of its time. *Andromeda*, which is set in the thirtieth century and begins as a typical sf space adventure, depicts a prospering Communistic world civilization that foregrounds the utopians' cognitive drive, their creative power, and their sense of responsibility. Its concept of a "Great Ring," a galaxy-wide communication net of all inhabited worlds far beyond the reach of manned space travel, had a sensational impact.

The book instantly became the target of violent ideological attacks, not so much because it had dared to refute accepted theorems (though it was also charged with that), but because in its spatial and temporal perspectives it went far beyond the tasks and arguments of party politics and their day-to-day propagandistic implementation. The personal prestige of the respected geologist and paleontologist Efremov, as well as the support of other scientists, made it possible to repel these attacks, and the book set a precedent in Soviet sf. It paved the road not only for the Strugatskys but also for all the other important authors who emerged in the late 1950s and the 1960s in Soviet sf, and who determine its image even today. This was especially true abroad, where the next generation of Soviet sf writers, handicapped first by the dreary cultural politics of the Brezhnev era and then by the final loss of cultural coherence in the abyss of the Russian free-market economy, was hardly noticed.

In the Soviet sf of the late 1950s, the old "near-future fantasy" of authors like Vladimir Nemtsov, Alexander Kazantsev, and Nikolai Toman co-existed with the new sf pioneered by Efremov, but it built only partially upon his work, soon branching out into a new tradition of great variety (whose early representatives included Ariadna Gromova, Valentina Zhuravleva, Genrik Altov, Dimitri Bilenkin, Anatoly Dneprov, Sever Gansovsky, Vladimir Savchenko, and the Strugatskys). There was also a third stream beside, or rather between, them: the space-adventure sf of writers like Boris Fradkin, Konstantin Volkov, and Georgi Martynov, all of whom at first depicted a crude version of class struggle in outer space, involving American agents and/or extraterrestrial capitalists. (Some of the space-adventure authors later succeeded in emancipating themselves from these clichés.)

Near-future sf soon found itself in marked opposition to the other varieties, especially since some of their representatives, in co-operation with party officials who distrusted sf as a whole, launched ideological attacks, first at Efremov and then at the new generation of writers. On the other hand, the relationship between the writers of space adventures, whom Kazantsev soon joined, and the new people appears to have been fairly amicable at first. The sense that these

were different kinds and qualities of sf most likely did not occur to the public before the 1960s. But by then it was obvious. Older authors such as Gregory Gurevich and, naturally, Efremov himself kept pace with this increase in quality, or at least aimed in the same direction, and it was only from the distance of several years that it became clear which writers had not done so.

Around 1960 the differences were hardly noticeable, and if one considers the Strugatskys' first novel, published in 1959, one is apt to think more of Martynov than Efremov. *The Land of Purple Clouds* was a space adventure using the typical clichés of the day regarding hero and plot. Among these are the obligatory rescue attempts for wrecked astronauts and the sacrifice of one's own happiness, often even of one's own life, in the service of science. The accidents themselves are less irritating than is their frequency, which is taken for granted and which is totally inadequate from our current perspective, and the silliness of the occasions that cause humans to risk their lives—to install, for instance, a radar beacon on Venus. That cliché of heroism has often been described and criticized; in their novels *Space Apprentice* (1962) and *Far Rainbow* (1963), written shortly thereafter, the Strugatskys themselves both made it their theme and renounced it.<sup>2</sup> But even their first novel and its immediate sequels follow the rules of Socialist Realism (in its specific sf modification of the time), minus the crude class struggle. Only the creation of more differentiated characters and in general a more individual writing style elevated them even then above their contemporaries. If someone in 1960 had, using the yardsticks of today, kept an eye out for promising new sf writers, he or she might have noticed the Strugatskys, but would have been much more likely to notice such authors of short stories as Altov, Zhuravleva, Dneprov, and Savchenko (and perhaps also the difficult to classify and not very prolific, but for his time rather unusual writer, Alexander Poleschuk).

These two factors—that the early works of the Strugatskys showed narrative talent unusual for beginners, but that otherwise they were in no way extraordinary for the time—may have contributed to the strange fact that *Land of Purple Clouds* was awarded a state literary prize while it was still in manuscript form. The two short-story collections published in 1960 (which were, by the way, the Strugatskys' only collections, except for the volumes of their selected works that appeared in the 1990s), including their shorter sequel to *Land of Purple Clouds* called “Destination: Amaltheia” (1963) are as a whole not particularly outstanding. Some of the stories show signs of the authors' desire to explore the human implications and consequences of their sf ideas, beyond their heroes' urge to explore and to prove themselves, and it is in particular the relative simplicity of the Strugatskys' manner at the time that makes their aim unmistakable. In the science fiction of the early 1960s, they were not alone in this, but for many of their colleagues the scientific-technological adventure or the fascination of the sf idea was dominant.

**2. 1962-65: The Strugatskys Become “The Strugatskys.”** With half a dozen novels written in the brief space of time between 1962 and 1965, the Strugatskys ascended to the peak of Soviet science fiction. In early 1967, a large SF Club at

Lomonosov University in Moscow conducted a poll in which 185 secondary-school pupils, 304 university students, 215 representatives of the scientific community, 36 Soviet sf authors, and 33 journalists, editors, and literary critics participated. The Strugatskys were the fourth most popular sf writers among the secondary-school students (after Lem, Belyaev, and Efremov) and second among all other groups (after Lem among scientists and college students, after Bradbury among the literary professionals). A poll organized by the sf section of the Azerbaijan Writers Union in Baku reached similar results. The evaluation of the 1400 answers from both polls showed that the Strugatskys' *Hard to be a God* (1964) and *Monday Begins on Saturday* (1965) were ranked highest; *Far Rainbow* and *The Final Circle of Paradise* (1965) were ranked sixth and tenth. (Bradbury, Lem, Shekley, and Asimov placed in the other top spots; only in the eleventh and twelfth spots were any other Soviet works ranked and these were by Efremov.)

What had changed since *Land of Purple Clouds* to secure for the Strugatskys the favor of the audience so quickly and without competition? Their mastery over the tools of the literary trade developed gradually and did not reach its peak until the 1970s. *Monday Begins on Saturday*, a pyrotechnic display of comic ideas which is really a work of fantasy, proposed an idea that was without parallel in Soviet science fiction.<sup>3</sup> But readers were also attracted by the authors' cheerful and light manner of storytelling, one of the striking stylistic innovations of the 1960s, observable also in the work of several other Soviet authors (as, for example, writers as different as Vadim Shefner, Yuri Davydov, and Yevgeny Voiskunsky and Isai Lukodianov). This style combines a basic acceptance of Soviet society with a new, freer feeling for life—the satirical elements of *Monday* become stronger as the plot progresses but remain relatively harmless, and many a feature that was thought to be satirical in the West was an exact reproduction of commonplace, everyday reality. All in all, we may assume that, in an epoch in which the themes of Soviet sf changed quickly and dramatically, the success of the Strugatskys was only secondarily the result of their science-fictional ideas; more important was what the Strugatskys made of them. *Hard to be a God*, in particular, owes much of its popularity to the exoticism of its quasi-medieval setting and to its adventure-story plotting. But *Far Rainbow*, which ranks as high as sixth in the polls, is rather lacking in action, and the same can also be said of *Return (Noon; 22nd Century)* (1962).<sup>4</sup>

The novels published before 1965 (with the exception of *Monday*) share a common setting in a world which postulates not only the peaceful coexistence of different social systems in the near future but also the gradual expansion of Communism because of its moral and economic superiority. The twenty-second century is imagined to be a global Communist utopia, "the World of Noon," which also supplies the setting for a number of the Strugatskys' later works. Constant features of this future world include beneficial technological progress, general prosperity, and the ethos of scientific research (including contact with alien intelligence) as one of the most important human activities. The decisive feature in all of these books, however, is the social design.

In *Return*, the Strugatskys attempted to develop the broad panorama of a Communist future. In this they were—despite many differences—the heirs of Efremov. There had been astonishingly few Soviet utopias before his *Andromeda*, and neither they nor their authors had fared well.<sup>5</sup> *Return/Noon* contains some of the narrative features of the classic utopias, in particular its device of having two astronauts from our time (i.e., the authors' near future) return to the Earth of the twenty-second century as surrogates for the reader. The world depicted here is an evolving but basically harmonious society with few conflicts. Characteristic of the novel's episodic structure, even those conflicts that develop the theme appear to be singular and local, usually representing the struggle of the better against the good. In any case, the conflicts are varied (especially in the expanded version, *Noon*), so that the utopia is not presented solely through explanatory lectures (as it is to some extent in Efremov's novel) but through plot and character. The impressive epic serenity that is evoked in Efremov's *Andromeda* by the very grandness of its spatial-temporal perspectives is wholly lacking in *Return/Noon*; the Strugatskys' heroes are much livelier than the rather stereotypical protagonists of Efremov, mainly because they are so much more *common*. By populating their utopia "with humans who exist in contemporary reality" and by emphasizing this repeatedly (in their foreword to the 1967 edition of *Noon*, for example), they countered the notion that the "perfected Communist human being" must be qualitatively different from the current one—a basically chiliastic doctrine that had haunted Soviet propaganda since the October Revolution, and one that was satirized in the 1920s by Ilya Ehrenburg, Mikhail Bulgakov, and Efim Zozulia. The formulation of this character type was probably the first of the Strugatskys' utterances that was conceived to be political. The criticism to which the authors' work had been sporadically subjected from the beginning had for the most part been concerned with—or at least pretended to be concerned with—aesthetic questions (when it was not totally abstruse or engaged in the favorite critical sport of defining what sf had to be and how it should be written).

Against this background of Communist utopias in the future and a similarly idealized Soviet present (notwithstanding satirical comments in *Monday*), in the first half of the 1960s the Strugatskys explored two main themes: the problem of ethical goals and values in everyday life, and that of historical necessity and responsibility. The first, which they approached in several ways, received more attention—as praise of the Communist Work Ethic (especially in *Return/Noon*, *Space Apprentice* [1962], and *Monday*), critique of its idealization (in *Far Rainbow*), and especially in polemics against the clichéd ideal of a purely materialistic affluent society, current in Communism but regularly transferred by the Strugatskys to a capitalist industrial society—as, for example, in an episode of *Space Apprentice* and its oblique sequel, *The Final Circle of Paradise* (1979) which is set in a fictitious Southern European country. On the one hand, *The Final Circle* stressed the "willing suspension of disbelief" specific to sf by imagining that in the foreseeable future the socialist countries might be in danger of becoming affluent societies (an especially fantastic premise in the USSR, where the average standard of living was, after Mongolia's, the lowest among

the COMECON countries) and, on the other hand, that dystopian conditions could exist, by definition, only in the world of parasitic, degenerate capitalism.

Insofar as similar attitudes were also to be criticized in (backward!) Soviet citizens, the Strugatskys could rely on the slogan of *meshchanin*, which denotes (to the chagrin of translators) both the lower-middle class as a social stratum (originally consisting of shopkeepers and the like) and the philistine as a social type. The petite bourgeoisie, which had inspired antipathy already in pre-revolutionary Russia, was, following Lenin, the most popular object of social criticism, critiqued for being a class basically hostile to the revolutionary proletariat but not as easy to eliminate as princes, capitalists, large landowners, and (a few years later) the kulaks, the wealthy farmers. Although the Strugatskys did not contradict Communist doctrine, *The Final Circle of Paradise* caused some irritation. For one critic, it was not sufficiently clear that only the West was targeted; another found (not without justification) that there was no clear distinction between the bad imperialist and the good socialist versions of the "Land of the Idle." One of the more serious objections was that the representation of a capitalist society endowed with all-encompassing material wealth—and totally lacking the omnipresent pauperization of the masses that characterized the West, according to Marx and to contemporary Soviet propaganda (see, for instance, Gansovsky's story "The Sixth Genius," also published in 1965, in which the hero, a jobless West-German physicist, nearly starves to death)—amounted to an apology for capitalism.

The philistine striving for material wealth as the prime purpose in life, rather than a critique of the exploitation of the workers à la Marx, had also been the main criticism of capitalism in an episode in *Space Apprentice*. In that episode the workers ruined their health, not their souls, in their striving for private wealth; *Paradise* develops this theme further, although it does so less blatantly and more cogently and, therefore, more dangerously.

*The Final Circle* had an introduction by Efremov, who placed the novel in a favorable political light by cleverly drawing attention away from the real theme (while, as the private notes of the Strugatskys reveal, also giving them hints about how to allay and mislead censorship, such as promising a sequel that would provide a positive-naïve complement—without, of course, ever intending to write it). Later defenders of *The Final Circle of Paradise* also relied on Efremov's arguments, and even more on his prominence.

A more troublesome problem probably came as a complete surprise to the authors: the question of what attitude the postulated dominant Socialist-Communist world would take toward the soul-killing affluent society. As a recent essay by Boris Strugatsky makes clear, one censor objected to the fact that the hero is a secret agent of the Communist Commonwealth, who considers his operation to be a form of possible (peaceful) interference.<sup>6</sup> The censor held this position to be a version of officially proscribed Trotskyan "export of the revolution" (which had of course always been practiced *de facto* whenever an opportunity offered itself). The director of the publishing house, however, demanded exactly the opposite—an intervention by force was required. First the authors, and then the editor, changed the manuscript accordingly. On this

occasion, the phrase “progressive forces in the country” came into play that couldn’t easily be reconciled with the character of the Strugatskys’ dystopia; on the other hand, the idea that a long and sustained effort at education and persuasion would be necessary was partly eliminated.

In *Escape Attempt* (1962), and centrally in *Hard to be a God* (1964), the theme that the Strugatskys treated rather unwillingly in *The Final Circle of Paradise* appears explicitly and with full conviction: the question of how representatives of a progressive, humanist, and vastly superior society (of Utopian Communism) should act when confronted with inhumane, oppressive regimes of the past (located on other planets). Although in neither novel is this the only theme, in *Hard to be a God* it forms the protagonist’s plot-supporting conflict of conscience. Especially in *Hard to be a God*, the sf idea of medieval fascism on an alien planet, where agents from Earth are clandestine observers forbidden to interfere, produces several themes that have obvious political and ideological features. A central theme of the novel is the protagonist’s inability to suppress his pity for suffering individuals in favor of a purely rational viewpoint according to which everything that happens follows historical necessity and is in the last analysis an inevitable step on the way to a better society.

In the “basis theory of feudalism” repeatedly mentioned in the novel, it is easy to recognize a derivation of Marxist historical materialism; medieval fascism doesn’t fit the Marxist historical paradigm, and this un-Marxist conflation of categories consequently led to one of the first and most obvious objections to the novel, above all since the Strugatskys portray fascism as a form of government based on the militant and philistine bourgeoisie, so inimical to culture. (It should be added here that the Soviet theory of fascism did not consider it to be confined to the form it originally took in Italy; fascism in this view was the ruling form of monopoly capital, which included most of all German national socialism and the regime of Franco. In everyday life “fascism” functioned in much the same way as the Christian devil: as evil triumphant.)

If one were to follow this line of thought (which fortunately hardly any critics dared *expressis verbis*), it might occur to one that, if fascism, or at least fascist thought, was not bound to the closely defined society of late capitalism, then even the glorious Soviet Union might not necessarily be safe from it. At the very least, the mistreatment of intellectuals in the novel—a characteristic part of the Strugatskys’ depiction of philistine fascism—suggested primarily the Soviet model of the time of Stalin. But as a whole, the novel is much more complex than a mere lampoon of Soviet conditions. For instance, the novel also contains a close parallel to the role of the German SA and its later elimination.

As the pre-publication history of *Final Circle of Paradise* shows, in the mid-1960s the question of whether interference in less developed or deviant societies is justified or possible was already a political matter. The authors avoided framing banal alternatives of the “export of the revolution—yes or no?” variety and made their protagonist voice scruples that too drastic an interference would destroy the identity of the society concerned, and that a less drastic one wouldn’t change anything for the better. For critics in the West, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army (with some symbolic contingents of Soviet

satellites) in 1968 unfortunately reduced the novel (and later ones like *Prisoners of Power*) for a time to that simple question. It was first seen as an apology for the Brezhnev Doctrine, and then later as a criticism of it. Even more absurdly, in the Soviet Union as well the Strugatskys were accused—in ways that strictly avoided any straightforward reference to reality, of course—both of propagandizing for the un-Marxist, voluntaristic export of the revolution and of timidly questioning the glorious internationalist duty of fraternal (naturally military) assistance.

Let me note here, however, that although these critiques of *Hard to be a God* and *The Final Circle of Paradise* were articulated soon after the appearance of the books, they they found a permanent place in the campaigns directed at the Strugatskys only later, and only then did they take on an undisguisedly political tone. Darko Suvin was right when he referred to 1964–65 as the *anni mirabiles* of benevolent Strugatsky criticism (299), far outweighing attacks such as Nemtsov's, which were obviously dictated by envy; Nemtsov was a fourth-class author of deadly dull near-future sf who had been prolific in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>7</sup>

**3. The Second Half of the 1960s: The Strugatskys Fall from Favor.** *The Final Circle of Paradise* (1965) was the first of the Strugatskys' novels to encounter not only the usual unintended and accidental publishing difficulties that were quite common in the Socialist countries, but also other quite formidable problems. In the second half of the 1960s, two developments ran parallel and they were without doubt causally connected: the Strugatskys wrote nearly nothing but satires, and they found publishers for hardly any of them.

*Noon, 22nd Century*, the expanded new version of *Return*, published in the same series as the earlier version by the Childrens' Publishing House in Moscow, remained unchanged in its mood and its utopian premise. There were, nonetheless, changes, both in the old chapters and in the newly added stories that had previously appeared separately. These might be explained in part as stylistic improvements, but they also show how political considerations had to be taken into account even in works that were politically harmless. In several places, earlier Chinese names were replaced with Japanese ones. These changes were just as silly as the older requirement that in all international crews the second most important member (after the Russian) had to be Chinese. But on no other issue did the Soviet intelligentsia agree with the Soviet leadership of the Brezhnev period as in its dislike of China, which is hardly surprising in view of the Cultural Revolution. Of the three other Strugatsky works that appeared between 1966 and 1968, two are pure satires: *The Second Invasion from Mars* (1967) and *The Tale of the Troika* (1968). In the third, *The Snail on the Slope* (1966/1968), satire forms one of the plot lines.

*The Second Invasion* repeats as a farce what Wells had depicted as a tragedy in *The War of the Worlds*. It pokes fun at the willing adaptation of people, including a childish, posturing resistance, to every new regime, as long as the dictatorship is moderately easygoing. The Martians here are not after the blood of human beings, only their digestive juices. This short novel, or *povest*, has a

predecessor in Lasar Lagin's *Major Well Andyou* (1962), in which a British officer becomes the collaborator of truly blood-sucking Martians. Like some other works by this talented author, *Major Well Andyou* suffers from a crude billboard-propaganda version of class struggle. The Strugatskys, by contrast, elegantly avoid any statement that would place the novella identifiably in the context of East-West confrontation. The setting of the plot is again a fictitious capitalist country, but the names of the protagonists are borrowed from Greek gods, thus emphasizing the tale's artifice. Unlike in *The Final Circle of Paradise*, there is no direct connection to the world of Communism, and this again elicited the criticism that the authors were politically directionless. On the other hand, it avoided more ticklish questions. The satire appeared in a double volume with a reprint of the older, utopian-Communist *Space Apprentice* (1962), which had been critical of capitalism. This packaging of several works in a single volume is typical of most Strugatsky editions, due mainly to the fact that most of their works are too short for the usual Russian book formats. (Perhaps because of this practice, the authors have on several occasions combined two *povesti*, with mostly separate plots that can stand alone as independent works and in most cases were written separately, into a single novel, without the connecting logic being compelling in every case. Such double works include *The Snail on the Slope* [1980], *The Beetle in an Anthill*, *Lame Fate* [1986], and *Burdened by Evil*.) In the case of *The Second Invasion*, the combination with *Space Apprentice* contributed to a somewhat less provocative total impression. The foreword by fellow sf writer and journalist Roman Podolny provided, under the title "War of the Worlds," a well-meaning global political schema, which in the case of *Space Apprentice* was much better supported by the text. While Podolny's title most obviously referred to the novel by H.G. Wells, it referenced even more directly the ideological-moral struggle between the Communist world of progress and the rest of class society.

In the somewhat Kafkaesque "Administration" plot line of *The Snail on the Slope* and in the *Tale of the Troika* (both published in 1968), the Strugatskys' satire is directed much more clearly at developments in the USSR, specifically the Russian-Soviet bureaucracy as an instrument of arbitrary rule. Both works were subjected to furious and undisguised political-ideological attacks. There were also personal repercussions in the editorial offices, and the periodical issues in which these stories first appeared were banned, i.e., removed from all libraries. (In the case of *The Snail on the Slope*, another contribution in the same issue of the periodical had raised hackles in its own right).<sup>8</sup> It was now clear that the Strugatskys were considered troublesome and unreliable authors. That both works had first appeared in (and for a long while only in) Siberian periodicals with limited regional distribution is a clear indication that the Strugatskys' traditional publishers, the Publishing House for Children's Literature (which also published sf for adults) and the Komsomol Publishing House *Molodaya Gvardia*, refused to publish them. There must have been weighty objections.

The other plot line of *The Snail on the Slope* (the "Forest" chapters) had appeared two years previously without any problems, in an anthology in Leningrad in 1966. The Forest section strikes Communist ideology much harder

than the biting satire of the Administration chapters, which is directed only at the specific phenomenon of bureaucratic administration. The Forest chapters cast doubt upon a central credo of Communist self-understanding—namely, that progress, which is ruled by objective laws, is of necessity always human and moral, and must always be *good*. This section was, however, originally conceived as philosophical, complex, difficult, and ambivalent; only later did the Administration chapters color the rest. In the more serious reviews it became the rule to react critically, but not strictly negatively, to the Forest section and simply to ignore the Administration part.<sup>9</sup> Responding to the unabashedly political attacks on the Administration section by a nincompoop named V. Alexandrov in a Siberian provincial party paper, the critic A. Lebedev defended the Strugatskys in the central and respected literary magazine *Novy Mir* (*New World*), turning the accusation of slandering Soviet reality back on Alexandrov.

After the second half of the 1960s, the parallel existence of different textual versions of science fictions by the Strugatskys becomes more noticeable. *Noon, 22nd Century*, the new version of *Return*, was determined mostly by the authors' desire to enrich the original novel by incorporating previously independent stories and thus to preserve them, now that they had decided they would write only *povesti* and novels. In *The Snail on the Slope*, however, they rejected a nearly finished plot line that incorporated the novel into the future "World of Noon" cycle (with that cycle's favorite protagonist Gorbovsky) and exchanged it for the Administration story line. Their motives for this appear to have been formal and structural (the Forest should stand as an allegory for the future, the Administration for the present), and the result is a heterogeneous mix of genres that offers plenty of material for interpretation but considerably diminishes the aesthetic effect of the whole novel. The rejected Gorbovsky story, with the title "Unrest," did not appear until 1990; it is still readable, but it is harmless and less impressive than the Forest chapters, let alone the later Administration chapters. It must have been clear to the Strugatskys that the Gorbovsky story would camouflage the conceptual dynamite of the Forest chapters; in 1968 they obviously still felt strongly enough to risk the political confrontation that would necessarily follow from the Administration chapters.

By then they had already experienced difficulty getting into print. In the spring of 1967 they wrote *The Tale of the Troika*, for which they did not find a publisher. In the fall of the same year a considerably shorter version with different content, written for an sf almanac, was also rejected. It was published only in the Siberian periodical *Angara*, which had a print run of 3000 copies, minuscule for a Soviet publication. The two versions (both of which have appeared since the beginning of *glasnost* in various forms, including one that mixes the two versions together) differ so markedly that in newer Strugatsky editions they are published side by side. Each one presents itself as a sequel to *Monday Begins on Saturday*. But whereas that novel offered a mixture of fairy-tale world and idealized Soviet reality, *Troika* draws a bleaker picture. As it happens, the published (and shortly thereafter banned) shorter version is basically the more pessimistic one. In the first, the positive heroes are able to infiltrate the bureaucratic system and to progress to the top, producing some ambivalence in

the narrative, but it is told in the lively tone of *Monday*. In the second version these same heroes are broken by and absorbed into the system and can only be saved by the intentionally absurd appearance of two superior and benevolent wizards.

For their novel *The Ugly Swans*, also written in 1967, the Strugatskys could not find a home even in a provincial paper.

**4. The First Half of the 1970s: Enforced Withdrawal.** As far as the Strugatskys were concerned, little changed during the first half of the 1970s. The magazine version of their novel *Prisoners of Power* was followed in 1971 by a book edition from the Childrens' Publishing House, which was not only more complete, but was also revised according to suggestions by both the censorship authorities and the publisher. The most obvious change was the renaming of the protagonist from Maxim Rostislavsky to Maxim Kammerer. Of their subsequent works in this period, there are hardly any versions with textual variations worth noting, for two reasons. First, while most of the Strugatskys' works had appeared previously as stand-alone books, and previous publications in periodicals or anthologies had been serializations, after *Prisoners* the number of their book publications decreased markedly, and the Strugatskys' works appeared now nearly without exception serialized in magazines or, more rarely, collected in anthologies. There were either no book publications at all or publication only after a considerable lag. The periodicals were no longer local publications in Siberia, but central publications like the Leningrad *Aurora* and especially *Znanijsila (Knowledge is Power)*, a popular science magazine with a circulation of more than half a million copies, where the Strugatskys had a loyal and defiant following. Second, it can be assumed that whatever appeared in this magazine had been examined closely and would continue to be scrutinized after publication. The very fact that it had been published, however, bestowed a seal of approval.

There was a clear polarization between what was officially accepted and what was not. Whatever had first appeared in the latter category, like the two texts published in 1968 in Siberia, remained there. This was especially true after the émigré publishing house Posev in the German Federal Republic reprinted both parts of *Snail* in one volume in 1972; Posev also published *The Ugly Swans*, which had not appeared at all in the USSR.<sup>10</sup> The two Posev books must have been a heavy blow for the political esteem in which the Strugatskys were held by the ruling powers. The authors' public protest against this act of piracy, the usual reaction in such cases, could hardly have changed anything. (Although they were henceforth viewed with distrust, they were also treated with more respect and circumspection. At least in the GDR and other socialist countries there is proof of this.) Although there were no basic ideological or political objections voiced against *The Ugly Swans*, after the publication by Posev the work became taboo practically for all time (i.e., until *glasnost* and *perestroika*).

Thereafter *Swans*, *Snail*, and *Troika* (the original version of which had never been published) were circulated in the USSR as well, in *samizdat*, i.e., privately made copies, as were also one or two other Strugatsky stories which had appeared and hadn't been banned, but which were simply hard to find. In the

mid-1980s swindlers took advantage of the scarcity of the officially printed texts, as well as of the rumors of unpublished texts, by offering hackwork as *samizdat* copies of supposedly unpublished Strugatsky stories for horrific sums in the lucrative black market for literature. As a result, the Strugatskys were forced to publish a list of the *povesti* and novels that they had actually written.

In the first half of the 1970s the Strugatskys also wrote *The Doomed City*, a novel which did not circulate in *samizdat*, was most likely never offered to a publishing house, and whose existence was known to only a few. (The first public mention of the novel by the authors themselves seems to have been in 1987 in a magazine, in answer to questions by readers.) The manuscript of that novel, which is probably their best, and is certainly their most complex and most ambitious (and from this perspective their magnum opus), was kept locked in a desk for a decade and a half, surfacing only in 1989. In some respects, the novel resembles the Forest chapters in *Snail*, less in thematic terms than in its stylistic premise and its model-like world. In this novel the political dynamite is partially hidden by the complexity of the concept. There are many allusions to the time of Stalin, but as a whole the novel would have had a good chance of getting published in a more favorable moment. The novel hardly adhered, however, to the then-current notions of Socialist Realism, which changed according to ephemeral everyday politics. More than the possible confiscation of the manuscript, the Strugatskys feared that, if it were published, it would be irreparably damaged, perhaps even destroyed, by malevolent criticism, censorship, and the temptations of self-censorship. This idea can be found in the frame tale of *Lame Fate* (1985/86), in which the hero, following the same line of thought, hides his favorite work in the "Blue Folder."

Also in 1972, when the Strugatskys apparently completed the first draft of *City* (the novel is dated 1970-72, 1975) and Possev published *The Ugly Swans*, Leningrad's *Avrora* published *Roadside Picnic*, another of their best and most successful works. Politically, not much could be raised against the novel, and the few objections to it had to do with its setting in a Western country and the minor role of the Soviet figure. Nonetheless, it is precisely from the appearance of *Roadside Picnic* that we can date the practice of utterly ignoring works by the Strugatskys against which no objections could be raised explicitly. The critical echo abroad was much stronger; the book was favorably received in the USA, and in Europe Lem wrote an afterword. Of course, there were also a few friendly Soviet reviews, and the book received increasing attention, especially after the release of Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979), based as it was on some motifs from *Picnic*, and with a script by the Strugatskys. An sf guide for Soviet librarians published in Moscow, which lists every fart by Kazantsev, mentions nearly all of the works of the Strugatskys up to 1965, only three from 1965 to 1971—and, after that, nothing. The Strugatskys had to wait until 1980 for the first book edition of *Roadside Picnic*, which was published together with two other works.

The early 1970s were perhaps the peak period of the Strugatskys' writing, comparable to the early 1960s in the case of Lem. But if one considers only the works actually published in the USSR, one gets an altogether different picture.

With the exception of *Roadside Picnic*, most of the works published between 1969 and 1974 were considered weak, or at least conventional, compared to those of the preceding five years. *Prisoners of Power* (1969, 1971) was, as Boris Strugatsky reported recently, an attempt by the Strugatskys to write an unobtrusive adventure romp after all their difficulties with the satires. The novel continues the theme of *Hard to be a God*, but, because of its superman-like protagonist it seems much more of an action novel, and the plot thrives on the misunderstandings of the hero even more than does *The Final Cycle of Paradise*. The question as to whether one may interfere with other societies here becomes a mere consideration of ends and means, and one can read social criticism between the lines. The incredible naiveté and ignorance of the ways of the world exhibited by the hero from the bright Communist future has a satirical effect, although it is hard to say to what degree the satire is intended. (Erroneous interpretations by the Utopians because of their naiveté had already been a motif in *Escape Attempt*, but on a lesser scale.) In some other details, such as the institution of the Free Search, i.e., the purely private and holiday-like exploration of space as a hobby, *Power* followed the example of *Escape Attempt* and repeated an early, feckless, and pleasantly cloudless stage of their future world, which lay two epochs in the past in their work. That it is not quite unintentional may be taken for granted (it may be assumed that the censors viewed it this way, hence the need to rename the hero to sound less Russian); and readers could reflect on the image of a dictatorship in which only those not susceptible to the ever-present indoctrination would be able to rule. Even so, for a long while all *obvious* traces of political satire evaporated from the Strugatskys' work.

In general, one has the impression that at that time, with the prospect of not being published at all, the Strugatskys withdrew to familiar terrain that they felt would be harmless and unobjectionable (although it turned out not to be so in every case). They succeeded most clearly with *Space Mowgli* (1976), a politically safe, thematically conventional, but conceptually sophisticated *povest* whose subject matter is contact with a truly alien, uncommunicative civilization, and the ultimate moral price of human knowledge.

Rather a minor work in the manner of *Prisoners of Power*, *The Kid from Hell* (1974) was preceded by several versions of a script for a film which could not be made at the time for ideological reasons. In view of the fact that film production was even more closely monitored than literature (not least because it required much more money), one can think of many possible objections to filming this novel, but hardly any that are plausible. This story of a boy from another planet who has been quasi-fascistically educated and who will not fit into the wholesome Communist future society remains fragmentary and somewhat declamatory. More interesting is a slight, subtle change in the image of the future world. Although only broadly depicted, it leads back to the same concept as *Noon, 22nd Century*, but with some significant differences. In the sunny world of the Noon, where only isolated conflicts occur and where even tragedies disappear in the brightness of the global utopia, shadows have emerged—vague, indefinite, but of discernible influence on the whole mood. Details that contributed to the atmosphere of *Noon* now appear transient: the old

cosmodrome, the rolling streets which are no longer in motion, the robot's memories. (In only *one* other passage—Gorbovsky's apparent deathbed scene in *The Time Wanderers* (1986)—do the Strugatskys convey such a strong feeling of time passing and time past.)

*The Hotel of the Lost Climber* (1982) might be considered a sequel, albeit a rather tame one, to the Strugatskyan experiments with different styles, tonalities, and sub-genres begun in the 1970s. Stylistically sure and densely atmospheric, the novel nevertheless was not an overwhelming success, perhaps because the Strugatskys led their readers astray with their intentionally loose treatment of the conventions and boundaries of the genre. In a novel that abides by all the rules of classic mystery fiction, extraterrestrials (or their robots) turn up as the explanation for everything. In the first publication of this for the most part politically abstinent story, the editors insisted that the gangsters who misuse the unsuspecting aliens be changed into neo-fascists. In a 1983 book edition, in the wake of a new campaign against alcoholism, various editorial changes and cuts were made to prevent the Westerners who appear in the novel from setting a bad example for Soviet workers. This one case (among many) may serve as a reminder that, aside from the relatively constant and calculable political restrictions involved in the publishing world, there were also arbitrary and absurd ones.

**5. Interlude: Medvedev & Co.** Around 1973, the situation not only of the Strugatskys, but also of many other writers, became more difficult as the result of a radical personnel change in the sf editorship of the Komsomol publishing house, *Molodaya Gvardia* ("Young Guard"), which had, by statute, a cultural leadership position in Soviet sf. (Each Soviet publishing house had a "statute" defining its political, economic, administrative, etc. status. This included a "publishing profile" which mandated which kinds of books should be published, for which purposes, and for which readership. So while many other publishing houses might publish sf, and many eventually did, *Molodaya Gvardia* was the only one in whose prescribed profile the publication of sf was expressly mentioned. It was the only one required to do so.) The chief of the sf department in the 1960s had been Sergei Zhemaitis, who was an sf author himself (although not of the first rank), and whose greatest contribution to Soviet sf was that he gave his engaged and knowledgeable editors as free a hand as possible, defending them as much as he was able against the authorities. He was succeeded by Yuri Medvedev, who had previously been a contributor to the juvenile popular-science magazine *Tehnika-molodyozhi*. At the same time, a new editorial staff was named and the particularly worthy Bela Kliueva was fired. Among the new editors was a certain D. Ziberov, who had acquired his no doubt invaluable experience in the field as the editor of the Red Army's magazine for its soldiers.

The hiring of Medvedev was part of a general freezing of the climate in Soviet cultural politics, which included a harsher attitude towards sf. This began after the consolidation of the Brezhnev regime and reached its nadir under Chernenko (after a temporary respite in the 1970s, when it was possible to form SF Clubs in the provinces). In other publishing houses, for the most part the

editors who had contributed to the development of Russian sf were able to hold on to their positions (like Nina Berkova at the Children's Publishing House and the sf people in the popular-science publishing house *Znanie*), but their elbowroom was restricted by publishers who had become more suspicious (and more timid), and they were subjected to stricter interference from the censors.

Medvedev epitomized the policy of obstructionism and slander directed against many of the better Soviet authors (such as Bilenkin and Savcheko), and most consistently against the Strugatskys. Medvedev managed to form an influential mafia consisting of publishers, magazine editors, authors, reviewers, and cultural politicians; moreover, Medvedev, who was of course a member of the Communist Party of the USSR, did not conceal his Great-Russian-nationalist, pan-Slavic, and anti-Semitic preferences. (A colleague in my publishing house related that he had told her during a business trip to Moscow that, as long as he was in charge of sf publishing there, *Molodaya Gvardia* would not publish work by Jews). It seems that Medvedev, given his tendency to expose himself, eventually became an embarrassment even to his protectors, and he was moved into the background. Even so, he obviously selected his own successor, Vladimir Shcherbakov, who after a couple of years took over as chief of the sf department at *Molodaya Gvardia* and continued to be influenced by Medvedev.

In this mafia, the political views and ambitions of Medvedev and his men intersected with silly official campaigns, pseudo-scientific obscurantism, the envy and vanity of hacks and their striving to reserve for themselves the ever rarer possibilities of publication; all this formed an insoluble knot. Medvedev declared that he preferred Siberian authors and Siberian settings, because he projected onto Sibiryaks his ideal image of the Slavic man of action and nobility—in contrast to the Western-infected cosmopolitan intelligentsia in the European metropolises of the USSR. (It should be remembered here that for Stalinists of every stripe the term “cosmopolitan,” when applied to the Russian intelligentsia, meant and means exactly what the term “*verjudet*” [“Jew-infested,” taken over by Jews] meant and means to their National Socialist comrades-in-spirit.) He also played a role in the government campaign for Siberian development—especially for the building of the Baikal-Amur railway line, which, it appears, used up the resources of the country to a considerable degree—and went on for years with increasing shrillness. (An early example of this Siberianism, Mikhail Pukhov's story “The Camp Fire of the Builders” (1975), goes like this: the Siberian super-power plant of the future is switched on and, due to the concentration of energy which warps the dimensions, Siberians of all historical ages are able, if not exactly to join, at least to see each other—from mammoth hunters, through the Cossacks who reached Siberia, through Soviet geologists, to the engineers of the future. All the builders of Siberia are mightily pleased with the work of all the other builders. The end. Only the inmates of the Siberian forced labor camps do not appear anywhere in the story.)

Under Medvedev's successor, nationalism and anti-Semitism decreased somewhat, but obscurantism became even more pronounced. There seems to have been no pseudo-scientific and/or esoteric nonsense (paleo-astronautics, UFOs, the Bermuda triangle, a super-civilization in Atlantis, a “bio-field,” etc.)

in which the physicist and PhD Shcherbakov did not believe, and he defended all these ideas vehemently. Besides sf (including a few good mood pieces, but also some nearly unreadable stuff), he wrote non-fiction, as, for example, an account of how he had nearly drowned and had had a vision of heavenly Asgard, but was saved and later discovered the ruins of an earthly Asgard in Central Asia, i.e., a copy built by Aryans. Even this wasn't entirely apolitical. In his sf novel *The Cup of Storms* (1985), he presented the premise that the Etruscans had been the descendants of the old Russians, who were virtually the inventors of European civilization. That this was not merely an sf idea became clear later, when the same hypothesis was presented by another author in a non-fiction piece in an anthology published by *Molodaya Gvardia*.

That envy and vanity were primary motives for membership in this mafia is clear from the exemplary case of Alexander Kazantsev. It is said of him that he wrote at least twice a year to high officials in the party, the state, and in literary administrations, to denounce the Strugatskys as enemies of both Communism and the USSR. He was perhaps the best established Soviet sf author of the 1950s and initially he seemed well disposed toward the Strugatskys and other newcomers to the field. But he could not keep pace with the development of the genre in the 1960s. He was forgotten until the 1970s, when *Molodaya Gvardia* built him up as a Russian sf classic and published his "Collected Works," along with new pieces by him. Last but not least, as a publisher's reader of good unpublished manuscripts by other writers, Kazantsev had the merit of ensuring that they remained good and unpublished. In the frame story of *Lame Fate*, the Strugatskys present, under the nickname "Abscess," a very old, indeed nearly imbecile *littérateur*, a notorious intriguer and demagogue, who denounces a work of sf as fascist because it features faster-than-light travel. (Einstein had disproved the possibility of motion faster than light; the Nazis were against Einstein; therefore the author must be siding with the Nazis). The novel is preceded by a notice in which the authors declare it "to be their duty to let the reader know" that all persons, institutions, and organizations are purely imaginary. In the book version, the remark with that attestation was removed by the Strugatskys themselves. Kazantsev used exactly this argument in March 1963, at an expanded meeting of the Council for SF and Adventure Literature of the Soviet Writers' Union, as part of a massive ideological attack on Genrikh Altov and Valentina Zhuravleva.

Shcherbakov proved to be more liberal than Medvedev. He oversaw regular and qualitatively quite remarkable sf production at *Molodaya Gvardia*, although he continued to publish authors and themes typical of *Molodaya Gvardia* sf under Medvedev. He made the publishing house accessible again to some authors of rank, who now made their peace with *MG* without, however, joining the mafia: Gansovsky, Bilenkin, Olga Larionova, and to a markedly lesser degree, Bulychev. Especially among the favored Siberian authors there were a few good ones who could hold their positions under Medvedev and Shcherbakov without having to make damaging concessions. Even so, one cannot say that cooperation with the editors improved the fiction, as was often evident in the period before Medvedev. For example, Victor Kolupayev, an sf writer of the first rank, wrote

by far his weakest novel, *Worktrain "Fomich,"* for the above-mentioned Ziberov in 1979. Most devastating for sf was that a whole generation of talented new writers were never given a chance under Medvedev or Shcherbakov and were driven into the *diaspora* of magazines and regional publishers. One reason for this might be that most of them considered themselves to be pupils of the Strugatskys; this is evident from the kind of sf they wrote and which they did not conceal from organized fandom, to which most of them belonged.

**6. The Mid-1970s to the Mid-1980s: Institutionalized Boycott.** The relaxation of the rules at *Molodaya Gvardia* did not apply to the Strugatskys, who were rightly considered to be the most important enemies. The publisher's attitude toward them had been reserved since the end of the 1960s—even before the personnel changes in the sf department. After the double volume of *Space Apprentice* and *The Second Invasion* appeared in 1968, *Molodaya Gvardia* refused to honor already signed contracts. Only after several years were the Strugatskys able to persuade *MG* to print another book of theirs (a slightly cut version of *Roadside Picnic*, together with two older works, in 1980), and that was the last one. The Children's Publishing House continued to publish their books, including some older works in new compilations; *Znanie* accepted some newer works for its sf Almanac. Now and then, books by the Strugatskys appeared from publishers without sf lines.

Most difficult for them was finding a platform for first publications. During the 1960s, sometimes three novels or *povesti* by the Strugatskys would appear in a single year, but only three appeared in the entire decade from 1975 to 1985-86: *Definitely Maybe* (1976-77), *Beetle in the Anthill* (1979-80), and *The Time Wanderers* (1985-86), all published in installments in the magazine *Znanie-sila*. There were also a few shorter works in magazines and anthologies: scripts elaborating motifs from Strugatsky novels and dramas (including a dozen or so drafts of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, some of which also appeared in print), and "Of True and False Friendship" (1980), a longer tale for children. By himself, under the pseudonym S. Jaroslavtsev, Arkady Strugatsky wrote the story, "From the Life of S. Vorontsov" (1984), as well as an sf novel for children, *Expedition to Hell*, based on motifs from a rejected film script. (The first two parts of the novel appeared in 1974 simultaneously in an anthology and in a Russian magazine in Tajikistan, but the concluding third part did not appear for another ten years. It was published in 1984, in the juvenile magazine *Uralski sledopyt* [*Boy Scout of the Urals*] in Sverdlovsk.) In the 1970s, Boris Strugatsky worked on the film *Letters of a Dead Man* with the director and writer V. Rybakov.

Although *Beetle in the Anthill* and *The Time Wanderers* show the Strugatskys at the height of their powers and were tremendously popular with the Soviet audience, in the long run *Definitely Maybe* is probably the most important of the three works published between 1975 and 1985. In it the authors returned to the theme of the Forest chapters of *Snail on the Slope*. Whereas in *Snail* an individual opposed "objective" progress that he recognized as inhuman, in *Definitely Maybe* one individual resists the very laws of the universe, which obstruct certain kinds of research that might endanger the existence of the whole

universe in the far future. In *DM*, the Strugatskys employ a large ensemble of characters who react to the situation in various ways, as well as to a variety of obstacles and influences, and who offer possible interpretations, none of them decisive. Of all the interpretations and explanations that the protagonists of the novel come up with, the only one remaining at the end (but it is not quite convincing either) is the one implying that the Universe itself is responsible for the obstructions.

Although the plot is driven by the question, “what is the moving force behind the events?”, the story is basically about human behavior when it is faced by an overwhelming threat (and by seductive corruption) in an affair with an uncertain end, indeed even an uncertain goal. Readers could sense that the authors were also depicting their own situation, and the story is set, not on a distant planet in the future, but in contemporary Leningrad. Among the proposed explanations (which are later put aside) figure the intrigues of foreign agents. It quickly becomes obvious which secret service and which methods served as models. The novel’s paranoia conveys the impression of realism. And no wonder: just before they began writing the novel (which they had sketched previously in outline) in the summer of 1974, Boris had his first direct contact with the KGB—luckily only as a witness in the so-called “Khefyets case.”<sup>11</sup> (Boris Strugatsky later described at length the difficult, and never completely masterable, balancing act of making statements that implicated neither oneself nor others, in his novel *The Quest for Predetermination* [1995].)

After *Avrora* rejected *Definitely Maybe*, the Strugatskys took it (and subsequent novels) to *Znanie-sila*, which was published in Moscow by *Znanie*, where the authors still had supporters and could publish occasionally in the publisher’s Almanac of SF. At that time, publication of their work was always preceded by extensive wrangling behind the scenes, involving readers’ reports, contrary opinions, denunciations, and endorsements from various institutions. In May of 1976, the powerful party newspaper *Pravda* published—to the astonishment of those not in the know—a piece praising the Strugatskys; this apparently contributed to the fact that *Definitely Maybe* could now be serialized, starting in October. Among those who stood behind the Strugatskys was the cosmonaut Georgi Grechko. In the 1970s he made it widely known that he had taken two Soviet sf books from the 1960s with him on a space flight, the Strugatskys’ *Far Rainbow* and Olga Larionova’s *The Leopard from the Summit of Kilimanjaro*. (The value of an eminent person’s good opinion is best shown in the case of Larionova who was told soon after by a Leningrad publishing house that her new story collection would appear only if Grechko was prepared to write the introduction. The volume appeared in 1981, with Grechko’s foreword, under the title *Fairy Tales of Kings*. Other astronauts, including Vitali Sevastianov and Konstantin Feoktistov, appear to have been allied with *Molodaya Gvardia*, and they contributed introductions as favors for their authors when they were not themselves writing sf (as Yevgeni Khrunov did) that fit perfectly into the usual *MG* mold and was published there.

In 1979 and 1980, the juvenile magazine *Uralski Sledopyt*, which had earlier been the only magazine that made a public discussion of sf possible, published

the results of a poll among Soviet sf authors, in which they had been asked to name the most interesting works of the past few years. No less than nine of the authors polled, including big names like Bulychev, Larionova, and Savchenko, listed *Definitely Maybe* (sometimes together with another work); Sergei Snegov and Sergei Drugal (a younger author) avoided giving a clear answer, but mentioned the Strugatskys in general or in the context of their older works. Five authors gave no answer and only six listed other works (among them three authors connected with *Molodaya Gvardia*, who recommended others of their ilk, and Boris Strugatsky himself, who recommended two younger authors from Leningrad). And yet it would appear that *Definitely Maybe* attracted little official attention. There seem to have been no direct attacks on it.

This may have been a result of one of the basic features of the Brezhnev regime, which has entered history under the rubric of “stagnation.” The liberalization of the thaw period, which had been very timid in any case, was gradually reversed, but, in contrast to the Stalin era, the Brezhnev regime tended to avoid political sensations and show trials and to make purges less conspicuous. In literature, this found expression in the tentative and selective “re-discovery” of once unwelcome writers like Osip Mandelstam and Bulgakov, while less acceptable contemporaries were simply not mentioned.

The guide for librarians published in 1986 (for which the Strugatskys had already ceased to exist in 1971) has already been mentioned. A 24-volume “Library of Fantastic Literature” (in fact, of sf), begun in 1986, not only contains no volumes devoted to works by the Strugatskys, nor even a story from one of the anthologies, but it also makes no mention of them in any of the prefaces and surveys. That series, which was supervised by the State Committee for Publishing and produced by several different publishers, was the official answer to an older and highly regarded series which had been expanded from an initial 15 volumes to 25 and published by *Molodaya Gvardia* between 1965 and 1973 (that is, essentially before the purges there). Its editorial board had included Efremov and Arkady Strugatsky. The chairman of the new Library’s editorial board was Kazantsev; the board itself included the Commander of the Soviet astronauts, General Leonov, and consisted mainly of literary functionaries, among them the three heads of the “Council for Scientific-Fantastic and Adventure Literature” of the Soviet Writers’ Union, Kuleshov, Keshokov, and Parnov. The Strugatskys shared with almost all the important writers of their generation the honor of not being represented in a single volume (and often not with a single story) in the chrestomathy of Kazantsev-compatible Soviet sf.<sup>12</sup>

Altogether, the Library was supposed to include six volumes of Russian and Soviet sf up to Efremov, eight volumes devoted to newer Soviet writers, and ten to foreign sf. Publication began to peter out at the beginning of the 1990s, however, and I do not know whether all the planned volumes did in fact appear. I own only nineteen volumes published before 1990. An Internet search recently revealed the existence of four more volumes, of which three appeared in two books each, but these were published in the mid-1990s and clearly do not follow the original plan, even chronologically—for instance, the new volumes 10.1/10.2 and 12.1/12.2 (all 1995) contain additional works by Efremov and Belyaev, who

were already represented in volumes 4 and 5; volume 13 (1996) is devoted to Bulychev, who is, next to Boris Strugatsky, clearly the most important living Soviet sf writer, but who also was denied a volume of his own in the original plan.

*Beetle in the Anthill* and *The Time Wanderers* are the last novels to be located in the the Strugatskys' future history, i.e., the "World of Noon." Although formally they are sequels to *Prisoners of Power*, they are more closely connected to each other than to the former. Both are case studies of the behavior of human beings when faced with overpowering Others or simply with objective necessity (real or imagined). In this they resemble *The Snail on the Slope* and *Definitely Maybe* rather than the older works in the future history. But their theme was already present in those earlier works, alongside the theme of interference in "backward" civilizations. And in the future cycle as a whole—from *Escape Attempt* through *Hard to be a God*, *Prisoners of Power*, *Space Mowgli*, *Kid*, and *Beetle*, to *The Time Wanderers*—there is a gradual change of viewpoint from that of the manipulators to that of the manipulated.

Beginning with *Kid from Hell*, the image of the "World of Noon" became more subtle, more problematic, and closer to the present in its institutions, as well as in the mentality of its inhabitants. In *Kid*, it turns out that the "progressors," the noble and self-sacrificing supermen who advance progress in clandestine operations on other worlds, are rather unpopular with the masses of the same population of Earth that have sent them out. A security service, which develops a tendency to lead a life of its own apart from the political leadership, turns up and pursues its—of course purely altruistic—goals with pure secret-police methods, stopping short only of murder; political leadership becomes more differentiated and fractious; and in the middle of the twenty-second century, religious movements are again an integral part of social life.

In all of this the Strugatskys successfully avoided damaging the utopian character of their future world. Instead of devolving into satire or dystopia, utopia became manifold, dynamic, and contradictory, so that it now also included some negative aspects—and thus also became more believable. At the same time, the utopian elements increasingly focussed on education, in accord with the great importance the Strugatskys grant in many of their works to teachers for the molding of the personality.

That they finally recognized that their concept is utopian also in the sense that it is impossible to realize is made amply clear by the plan for their final novel, which was prevented from completion by Arkady Strugatsky's death. In it, the island empire that was shown in *Prisoners of Power* to be decidedly misanthropic proves to be a society organized on the principle of *suum cuique*; each person in this society is automatically assigned a place appropriate to his or her moral stature—the really good ones in the centre, the villains at the periphery (which alone is visible from outside), and the average, halfway decent individuals in the middle circle. (Despite this scheme of concentric circles reminiscent of Dante, the concept has more similarities with Swedenborg's idea of heaven and hell.) A human being from the Communist future world of the twenty-second century, who has entered the center and reports there about his world of generally happy

creativity, is given to understand that he must be living, not in reality, but in a purely conceptual imaginary world.

The extraordinary popularity of *Beetle* and *Time Wanderers* seems to derive from the skillful way in which the Strugatskys fused their "World of Noon," which is widely considered a kind of future history, with an inventive and suspenseful mystery plot. Enthusiasts in the Soviet SF Clubs, which had been established in the face of various forms of opposition and resistance and whose communications network, extending virtually over the whole country, made them highly suspect to various authorities, lent a certain publicity to audience reaction. After the publication of *Beetle*, several of these Clubs held "trials" of the literary character Rudolf Sikorsky, in order to understand and evaluate his behavior more deeply. This is only one of many examples of the intensity of readerly reception, which can hardly be imagined in the West, in response to a grievous deficit of information and discussion in society, especially among the intelligentsia (the Strugatskys several times use the term "sensory hunger"), the maintenance of a secure but impoverished material existence, and the lack of the numerous easy and stupid entertainments that are available in modern consumer societies. (In one Russian city with more than a million inhabitants it was said, seriously and probably accurately, that in the 1980s the only alternatives for leisure activity were the SF Club or heavy drinking.)

Although the world-concept of *Beetle* and *Time Wanderers* had shown interesting developments, it was essentially only a background for moral problems, making no direct reference to the political questions of the USSR. This did not prevent the Strugatskys' enemies from claiming that aspects of their imaginary future and the actions of one or another of their characters were the credo of the authors, and that every real or imagined conflict in their fictional world was recommended by them. As was already the case with *Hard to be a God*, they were accused both of advocating interference in foreign affairs and of opposing help given in the spirit of solidarity. (This kind of logic, as most recent history shows, was not only a Soviet prerogative.)

In these years the Strugatskys published more rarely and wrote less than ever. This was in part the result of the health problems of both authors, but it was mainly because they knew that they would be able to publish only at longer intervals, and that every new publication would cost them time and nerves and new bouts of squabbling with their critics. The news that the Strugatskys had finished a new work was sufficient to mobilize their enemies. They attempted to discredit the rumors with every possible publisher and magazine in advance, leaving them with no other line of defence than to manoeuvre, to conspire, and to make use of connections with people favorable to their cause. Everything went on behind the scenes (a true public Russian *glasnost* did not yet exist) and decisions were made for the most part on the basis of rumors.

Around 1980 it was often claimed that the Strugatskys were trying to emigrate to Israel. Although they denied it privately as well as publicly, the rumor was not put to rest. A number of letters with forged signatures were distributed to authorities and newspapers stating the Strugatskys' intention to emigrate from the Soviet Union and laced with strong anti-Soviet statements. At

the urgent recommendation of a leading functionary of the Writers' Union, who was at the time also a general in the secret police, Arkady filed a case with the KGB. After several inquiries he was told that the case had been resolved, that there was nothing against the Strugatskys, and that the responsible parties had been warned off. But the KGB did not reveal the identity of the perpetrators, making only oblique reference to them ("the trail leads to Leningrad"). In the meantime the Strugatskys had discovered exactly where the trail led: the signatures had been copied from an old contract that Arkady had signed for both himself and Boris with *Molodaya Gvardia*.

We can assume that in those years the Strugatskys lived mostly on their foreign royalties. Even the small share left to them by the Copyright Agency of the USSR must have been considerable, given their many editions especially in the socialist countries and in the German Federal Republic. Outside the publishing field they have not been, as far as I know, subject to reprisals—at least not serious ones. But it gives one pause that, until the beginning of *perestroika*, they did not accept a single invitation from abroad (with the exception of a trip to Bulgaria, which was in any case the foreign country most accessible to Soviet citizens). It was considered a fact that the Strugatskys were forbidden to travel, although I assume this restriction was never officially pronounced. In any case, the term "forbidden to travel" misrepresents Soviet realities at the outset, for private journeys to foreign countries, even socialist ones, were *de facto*—with some negligible exceptions—generally forbidden to Soviet citizens. The natural form of travelling abroad was (as it had been under Peter the Great) *komandirovka* ("delegating"), the "journey on official agenda"; journeys by large groups of tourists were organized on this model. Somebody would have to have sent the Strugatskys on an official journey, most likely the Writers' Union. That this did not happen was most likely because the Strugatskys did not ask for it (or didn't press for it), probably in order to forestall absurd accusations in their absence.

That this might easily have happened is shown by the case of their mentor, Ivan Efremov, against whom the KGB acted directly. In Efremov's novel *The Hour of the Bull* (1970), an expedition from the Communist Utopia depicted in *Andromeda* encounters a planet that had been by settled by earthlings a long time in the past; here the upper class governs through (pseudo-)Communist slogans and subjects the short-lived masses (individuals have a life-expectancy of only thirty years or so) to totalitarian oppression. Although in one passage of the book these conditions are explicitly compared to the "ant socialism" of the Maoist variety (to which the USSR was opposed at the time), some of the Soviet gerontocrats suspected, one can assume, a hidden lampoon on conditions in their own country (the novel was not republished until the beginning of *perestroika*). During a house search another manuscript of Efremov's was confiscated. *The Hour of the Bull*'s rather timid allusions to Soviet reality do not begin to equal the explosiveness of many of the Strugatskys' works, including those that appeared in the USSR. Since then, an explanation for the KGB proceedings has become known. Apparently, some agents in the KGB believed, or at least claimed to believe, that the important Soviet scientist Efremov was not the real

Efremov, but a Western spy who had been exchanged as an adolescent (!) for the real Efremov. I don't know whether this explanation is correct, but it is at least in accord with the luxuriant growth of *pseudologica fantastica* current in the secret services. Most likely it is not only for thematic reasons that secret agents and secret observers occur with remarkable frequency in the Strugatskys' middle and late works; and even where the secret police's modes of thought and proceedings are described negatively (as in *Beetle*) or the Soviet organs of state security appear as antagonists of the hero (as in *Doomed City* and *Definitely Maybe* to some extent and in Boris Strugatsky's *The Search for Predetermination* finally quite openly), often another co-worker of the same service plays a role (for instance, as narrator) that automatically elicits some sympathy from the reader.

While, on the one hand, their opportunities for publication, at least as far as books were concerned, were lastingly and quite obviously blocked, the Strugatskys were able gradually to stabilize their social—and thus finally their literary—position, not least because they showed restraint when restraint was required. Arkady was for a while a member of the “councils” for science fiction (and related genres) of the Writers' Union of the USSR and the RSFSR respectively, both of which functioned as a kind of consultants' board. Boris was a board member of the Leningrad branch of the Writers' Union and for many years he was responsible for a permanent seminar for young (i.e., new) authors of the region. After SF Clubs were formed again in the USSR during the later Brezhnev years, Arkady represented their interests in the All Union Society of Book Lovers. (This was the state-approved organization also responsible for the SF Clubs. Later, in 1971, shortly before his death, Brezhnev was elected president of the Soviet Coordination Councils founded by the Clubs.) The juvenile magazine mentioned earlier, *Uralski Sledopyt*, which supported the SF Clubs as well as the Strugatskys, founded the first official Soviet sf prize (after the Clubs had already begun to give out less official awards). A jury nominated by the Writers' Union and the editors of the magazine awarded the prize, the “Aelita,” for the first time in 1981. In the first year, as an exception to the rules, the prize was awarded twice. The prize for the best work of the previous years went to the Strugatskys' *Beetle*, while a prize for “lifetime achievement” (which violated the rule that expressly required that the prize be given for a specific work from the past year) went to—Alexander Kazantsev. It was well known that Kazantsev had to get the award in order for the Strugatskys to receive one.<sup>13</sup> If there is one thing that highlights the situation of the Strugatskys at this time even more aptly than this curious compromise, it is the reported origin of the photo in which Arkady and Kazantsev, each with his prize (a sculpture of semi-precious stones) in hand (and Kazantsev with one of those Soviet medals on his breast), appear almost friendly, each facing the other—it is said that the original photo was cut up and the halves glued together the wrong way for publication.

**7. After the Mid-1980s: Emancipation by *Glasnost*.** Gorbachev was already Secretary General when serialization of *The Time Wanderers* began in 1985, but there was as yet little sign of the liberalization of society. It is all the more

remarkable that, although *Wanderers* hardly suggests any reference to Soviet reality in its concrete details, its theme of *homo superior* emerging from humanity and leaving it behind contains two motifs which appear today rather as perceptive anticipations than as a picture of society as it was then: the first is an intense feeling of coming radical changes and re-evaluations, both promising and existentially threatening; the second is a crisis of meaning in the self-understanding of a society that considers itself to be on a difficult but clearly visible road to ever greater progress but that suddenly has to face up to the fact that this way now appears to be a *cul de sac*. (In a way, in the character of Leonid Gorbovsky, the Strugatskys appear to have anticipated their own reaction to *perestroika*: old and tired of life, he has lain down to die, but he finds a new interest in life upon hearing of a discovery which irritates everyone else and makes them afraid.) The literary utopia of the Strugatskys, which began with the idea of a morally exemplary society freed from the basic ills of our time, was at first overtaken by the past and finally by the present; in that moment it succeeded, not in anticipating a slice of the future, but in *feeling* it ahead of time.

In the late summer of 1986, when the Leningrad journal *Neva* published the frame story of *Lame Fate* (which had already been written by 1982), the situation had changed considerably. Even the XXVIIth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR, at which *glasnost* and *perestroika* were officially proclaimed, took place only at the beginning of 1987. That is the only way to explain how this text could appear, in which the Strugatskys, after a long hiatus, turned again to unabashed satire, this time modelled on Bulgakov. Its criticism isn't heavy and total, as it had been in *Troika* or the Administration chapters of *Snail*, and it focuses on cultural and literary life. Still, it is more concrete than anything else in the Strugatskys' oeuvre, and many passages of this rather autobiographical text read like a novel in which living persons figure under feigned names, easily decoded by the cognoscenti. In the first magazine publication the Strugatskys themselves, acting upon the wish of the editor-in-chief, rendered some politically suspect passages harmless. (Furthermore, during Gorbachev's campaign against alcohol, which preceded the announcements of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, mentions of alcohol were edited out of the text.) On the other hand, their commentary on the consulting methods of the figure patterned after Kazantsev is to be found only in this version.

The liberalization of the Soviet media landscape, which proceeded quickly after the declaration of reform at the beginning of 1987 (at first the only tangible change), opened a number of publication opportunities for the Strugatskys. Publishers and magazines now vied for their texts. There were Russian book editions of the works that had been published only by Possev or in magazines, as well as new editions of their other books, some of them in uncensored original versions. *The Doomed City* surfaced, and their last two collaborations—the novel *Burdened by Evil* (1988) and the play “Jews of the City of Petersburg!” (1990)—appeared with hardly any delays. In addition, Arkady Strugatsky's novella “A Devil Among Human Beings,” written under the *nom de plume* “S. Yaroslavtsev,” was published posthumously in 1993. These new works reflect the changes in Soviet society (although the novella by “Yaroslavtsev”—a realistic

and somewhat gloomy picture of Soviet reality since Stalin—does so only incidentally). “Jews of the City of Petersburg!” shows how Soviet citizens have internalized the constrictions of Stalinism, even when they deal with them more or less cunningly; the only free characters in the play are young men who belong to the new mafia that has come into being with the liberalization of small businesses. In *Burdened by Evil* there is, in addition to a pronounced fantastic plot line clearly patterned after Bulgakov, a second plot revolving around an alternative youth culture at the fringes of a Russian provincial town, or more accurately, the relationship of its citizens to this youth culture.

In the late 1980s there was also (compared with the enforced paucity of their public communications before) a flood of interviews with the Strugatskys and magazine pieces by them. Quite a few of these dealt with everyday political issues. Arkady Strugatsky, in particular, used his authority against “Pamiat” (“Memory”), an organization originally founded for discussing Russian history that was soon taken over by dubious figures whose pronounced Great-Russian-chauvinist and anti-Semitic tendencies accorded with the demagogic manoeuvres of the conservative party *nomenklatura*.

The Strugatskys now also had opportunities to take a public stance on the conditions of sf publishing in the USSR, especially on the shameful role of *Molodaya Gvardia*. There the new freedoms of opinion were used freely to attack the Strugatskys even more openly. Curiously enough, only their “newer works” were damned—including *Hard to be a God* (1964!) and *The Final Circle of Paradise* (1965!). *Molodaya Gvardia* succeeded in placing one of these attacks, labeled as a pronouncement by a semi-official “Council for Science Fiction” established at the publishing house, in the sf anthology *Fantastika 1987*, a venue most unsuitable for polemics. The attacks were also directed against some especially active champions of the Strugatskys, such as the critic Vsevolod Revich. It was the earlier ultra-hardliners in particular who now posed (as is always the case in such situations) as honest democrats and victims of the system. In one of his stories, Yuri Medvedev advanced the claim, as absurd as it was nefarious, that the Strugatskys had sent the KGB after Efremov; another of his works contains a barely camouflaged denunciation of the director Andrei Tarkovsky. The Strugatskys protested in open letters to the sf boards of the Writers’ Union and to the SF Clubs. Other than addressing people who didn’t believe this nonsense anyway, they achieved nothing. Not the slightest change of mind was evident in the directorship of the publishing house. It did, however, get rid of its immediately visible responsibility by outsourcing. An Authors’ Collective was founded for the publication of sf. Although connected with *Molodaya Gvardia*, it was virtually autonomous, having transferred its center to Tiraspol.<sup>14</sup>

After the death of Arkady at the end of 1991, Boris Strugatsky published, under the pseudonym “W. Vititsky,” *The Search for Predetermination, or the 27th Theorem of Ethics* (1995), a fantastic novel with autobiographical elements. It can be read as a pendant and supplement to Arkady’s *A Devil Among Human Beings*, and depicts Russian-Soviet society from World War II until the present. The novel also contains—although rather roughly sketched—a picture of a post-

Communist Russian society located in a near future, but which in many of its features, such as the increasing feudalization of the state and the struggles among particular authorities, looks rather contemporary.<sup>15</sup> He has written many essays on the genre. He is indirectly involved in awarding a prize for sf literature named after the Strugatskys, and he awards another prize personally. He also is chief editor of *Noon*, a voluminous new sf magazine focusing on Russian sf.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Strugatskys were for a time the most translated contemporary Soviet writers; currently they are probably the only Russian sf writers with a considerable oeuvre that is completely and without interruption available in Russian book editions. Aside from many individual publications there have also been three different editions of the "Collected Works" of the Strugatskys. The second edition included a two-volume *Strugatsky Encyclopedia*, with a glossary, notations, and exhaustive bibliography; and also a three-volume anthology of writings by other authors that referred directly to the Strugatskys' works. The third edition includes a volume with early, previously unpublished stories, as well as commentaries by Boris Strugatsky on the writing history of the individual works.

All this confirms the status of the Strugatskys as classics of Russian-Soviet sf. Contemporary Russian sf, which has clearly suffered under the free market (much less than German sf, though), can boast of several highly talented authors. In the long run, however, none of them is likely to achieve the status of the Strugatskys, not even fashionable authors like Viktor Pelevin, who has successfully used sf elements outside the genre. All of them like to beat the dead horse of Soviet Communism.

As far as the more lively horses are concerned, one notices in many currently popular works of Russian literature the fashion for poking fun at the condition of the country without offering more than platitudes; one thus appears cosmopolitan, Western, and fashionably amoral. ("The world is evil, soon we'll all be dead, and if you aren't a swine you must be mad.") Those authors who are not prepared to run with this, and who rely on Christianity as the last available moral position, fall victim only too quickly to *dementia religiosa*. The Strugatskys not only incessantly raised moral issues which could be placed in a very concrete relationship to the reality of their world, but in their late works they also offered profound opinions about the way Soviet society functioned and how it fell apart. That their collaborative oeuvre is only rarely placed in the political context of the post-Soviet era, even by their pronounced admirers and successors, and even though it prefigures quite a few contemporary phenomena, tells us nothing about the authors and their work, but much about the requirements and the standards of their most recent reception.

#### NOTES

1. Lazarchuk's story was published in *The Time of the Pupils*, vol. 1 (Moscow: AST/St. Petersburg: Terra Fantastica, 1998), an anthology of works by other authors set in the worlds of the Strugatskys.

2. To my knowledge, no one has explicitly described how the concept of bridging an obvious discrepancy between ambition and ability through the ruthless exploitation of "human materiel" has its roots in heroic military pathos in general, and in the politics of

Stalin in particular. Certainly Stalin didn't mind starving or killing a few million people in the camps and, after he had had all his able Soviet generals killed, he sacrificed his soldiers in the war—especially in the race against the Americans for future spheres of influence in Central Europe—even more ruthlessly than did Hitler, because he had so many more of them.

3. The action of *Monday* (which is in fact three novellas) takes place in a Scientific Research Institute of Magic and Wizardry located in a small North Russian town and populated by a mix of Soviet scientists, magicians from all over the world, and supernatural beings of all kinds. Magic is treated as subject to scientific investigation; invocations, for example, are based on complicated mathematical calculations (done on an old-style computer), and *mutatis mutandis* the whole atmosphere is surprisingly similar to that of the Harry Potter books.

4. The American edition is based on the later version, *Noon: 22nd Century [Return]* and includes a selection of independent stories, some of which did not appear in previous versions.

5. The two most important ones were Vivian Itin's *Riel's Discovery* (1922, 1927) and Yan Larri's *The Country of the Blessed* (1931). Itin was shot in 1938 as a "spy"; Larri was sentenced in 1941 to ten years in prison, but continued to be detained in a camp even after that time. It was not until 1956 that Itin was rehabilitated—posthumously—and Larri released.

6. "Commentaries on the Way Past" was first published in the Russian sf magazine *Esli (If)* in 1998/99; a more complete version appeared later in the third version of the Strugatskys' *Collected Works*, and also as a separate book (St. Petersburg: Amphora, 2003).

7. Darko Suvin, "Criticism of the Strugatsky Brothers' Work," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, No. 2 (Summer 1972): 288-307.

8. The "Administration" chapters of *The Snail on the Slope* were published in the magazine *Baikal*, nos. 1-2 (1968), in Ulan-Ude. The *Tale of the Troika* was published in the magazine *Angara*, nos. 4-5 (1968), in Irkutsk.

9. This is especially the case in the monograph by A.F. Britikov published in 1970, *The Russian Science Fiction Novel of the Soviet Age*; its compass concludes, one presumes not just by chance, at the end of 1967. The bibliography of Britikov's book, compiled by V. Liapunov, also ends with 1967. It nevertheless includes the Administration section published in 1968.

10. How a copy of the MS reached Germany remains unknown; we must keep in mind that the manuscript was read not only by the relatively small circle of the Strugatskys' friends, but by the staffs of all the possible Soviet publishers and magazine editors as well.

11. In the mid-Seventies in Leningrad the historian and writer Mikhail Kheyfets was arrested by the KGB, and accused of anti-Soviet propaganda for writing an essay about the work of Yosif Brodsky and showing it to some of his friends. He was sentenced to seven years in a forced labor camp, followed by five years of banishment.

12. Eremai Parnov, who had once written sf in partnership with M. Emtsev before turning to adventure fiction with fantastic-occult elements, was the only board member who had served on the earlier Library's board. He was also, incidentally, the only one of the three officials who had ever written sf. Parnov was thought to be in favor with the *nomenklatura*, among whom he used his influence on behalf of the Strugatskys and the people who were close to them. But by this time the only sign of his influence was that one of his novels appeared in volume 11 of the Library. Another volume, an anthology of Soviet sf from the 1950s to the 1970s, contains—besides stories by respectable writers

like Gromova, Dneprov, Gor, Varshavsky, Grigoriev, and Gansovsky—a tired, banal story by a certain D. Shukov who is totally unknown as an sf writer—and yes, there was a D. Shukov on the editorial board ....

13. In subsequent years, the award went to quite respectable but hardly outstanding authors, including Snegov, and in 1985 it was given to the quintessential *Molodaya Gvardia* author Sergei Pavlov. Following a year's hiatus in 1986, when it could not be awarded, the first post-*glasnost* prizes went to leading Soviet authors like Larionova and Gansovsky.

14. Tiraspol is the self-appointed capital of the self-declared, acknowledged-by-nobody republic of Transnistria, a slice of land peopled mostly by Russians and Ukrainians on the east bank of the Dnieper, where the presence of a Russian army made sure that the inhabitants, although considered for the purposes of foreign policy to be citizens of Moldavia, were not subject to the administrative power of the Moldavian government. With new people in charge, the Collective continued the cosmetic changes in the publishing policy. They published a considerable number of sf books, including many anthologies. They relied upon more openness mixed with co-optation, so that many other authors, especially young ones who could have no particular sympathies for his machinations, appeared in the company of Medvedev, who once again became prominent as an editor and author.

15. In 2003 Boris Strugatsky published a second novel, *The Impotent Ones of this World*. Shorter and written much more intensely than the first novel, in a style first adopted by the Strugatskys in *Definitely Maybe*, the new book depicts a group of Russian intellectuals who have different superhuman powers, but waste them on petty purposes.

#### ABSTRACT

The Strugatsky brothers began their career in the early 1960s as writers of genial and down-to-earth utopian sf. Their important novels of the mid-1960s, *Hard to Be a God* and *The Final Circle of Paradise*, were popular successes, but they elicited some criticism from conservative functionaries for their deviation from official ideology. Opposition from their doctrinaire and opportunistic literary enemies steadily grew into outright obstruction. In the second half of the 1960s, the Strugatskys wrote primarily satirical and grotesque fantasies, such as *Tale of the Troika* and *Snail on the Slope*, and found hardly any publishers willing to print them. In the early 1970s, they attempted to write more popular works, but they continued to encounter obstructions, which finally became an institutionalized boycott by the end of the decade. In the 1980s, they were the most popular Soviet sf writers despite the boycotts and slander campaigns, and their oeuvre has been the only one continuously and completely in print by Russian sf writers.