CHAPTER 11

On the Strugatsky Brothers

Note 2020: I thought about suppressing the initial list, for two reasons. First, it should by now be confronted with the authors' real production in time, which was subject to a lot of censoring and therefore a number of titles appeared late, some of them never, many of them with compromise changes. Second, many data of this kind are by now available in print and/or on the internet. However, I found out that not only would I have to repeat the titles frequently in my discussion, but that what would have been needed was a largely rewritten essay, supplied with a discussion of all their works from 1981 on. Alas, I cannot do this. On the other hand, the writings below are in a modest way historical documents of their own, which may show both what was possible to know outside the authors' inner circle in the 1970s and how it was possible to look at them then – an approach that I would not centrally change today, I think, though occasional reticence used in order not to harm the writers would now be superfluous. Therefore I leave the text more or less as I finally revised it in 1990.

I have also, with a heavy heart, left out here my "Criticism of the Strugatsky Brothers" article, Canadian-American Slavic Studies 1972, which I think of as perhaps the weightiest directly sociopolitical defence of civic freedom of expression from a State oligarchy I have penned. But it is so intimately tied to the meanders of USSR cultural politics that it would necessitate a step-by-step comment for today's reader; time and space forbade that.

The Opus of the Strugatsky Brothers

SF writers are usually prolific – this is, indeed, one of the crucial determinants of their work, where economics and esthetics uneasily embrace. One of the most useful ways of discussing a relatively unknown but

prolific writer is to combine an overview with a depth-probe. I am using this approach to the Strugatskys' opus.

1. The Development of the Strugatskys' Fiction

1.1 1974–1981

The Strugatsky brothers, who collaborate in their writing, are the best and most significant Soviet SF writers who began publishing after the breakthrough of Yefremov's *Andromeda* in 1957–58.[1] Arkady, born in 1925, is a specialist in Japanese and English and worked first for the Institute for Technical Information and later for the State Publishing House in Moscow. Boris, born in 1933, was a computer mathematician at the Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory near Leningrad, but seems to have abandoned work in natural sciences for writing. A number of their works have by now been translated into English and other languages, but little context has been provided for placing such works, which come

1 See for this breakthrough, and the whole previous tradition of Russian SF, chapter 11 of my *Metamorphoses of SF* (MOSF), now enlarged in the Spanish and Italian versions (Mexico 1984 and Bologna 1985), and the discussion of Yefremov in my essay "Three World Paradigms for SF," with further bibliography in those works. A briefest list of book titles exclusively on Soviet SF published up to 1990 is: Britikov, A. (1970) *Russkii sovetskii nauchno-fantasticheskii roman*. Leningrad; *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 18.1–2 (1984), Special Issue on SF in the Warsaw Pact countries, ed. D. Suvin; Chernysheva, Tatiana. (1985) Priroda *fantastiki*. Irkutsk; Heller, Leonid. (1979) *De la Science-fiction soviétique*. Lausanne; Liapunov, Boris (1975) *V mire fantastiki*. Moskva; Nudelman, Rafail. (1989) "Soviet SF and the Ideology of Soviet Society." *Science-Fiction Studies* no. 47: 38–66 [Russian original in *CASS*, v. supra]; Suvin, D. *Russian Science Fiction 1956–1974: A Bibliography*. Dragon P, 1976; idem. (1981) "Second Supplement to Russian Science Fiction 1956–1974." *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 15; Marsh, R.J. *Soviet Fiction since Stalin: Science, Politics, and Literature* (1986).

from various phases of their development.[2] In order to supply such a context, I begin by listing their book-length publications. The order followed is: *Russian title* (literal translation). Place: Publisher, Year of first publication in book form that I know of (unless otherwise indicated). The list is my best guess at the chronological order of actual composition, which in a few cases departs from the order of publication. If no city is mentioned, it is Moscow; NY stands for New York City.

1. *Strana bagrovykh tuch* (The Country of Crimson Clouds). Detgiz, 1959.
2. *Shest' spichek* (Six Matches). Detgiz, 1960.
3. *Put' na Amal'teiiu* (Destination: Amaltheia). Mol. gvardiia, 1960.
4. *Vozvrashchenie* (*Polden'. 22-i vek)* (The Homecoming: Noon, twenty-second Century). Detgiz, 1962. Revised edition expanded to 20 stories as *Polden', XXII vek (Vozvrashchenie)* (Noon, twenty-second century: The Homecoming). Detskaia lit., 1967.
5. *Stazhery* (The Apprentices). Mol. gvardiia, 1962.
6. *Popytka k begstvu* (An Attempted Escape), in anthology *Fantastika*. 1962 god. Mol. gvardiia, 1962. Reprinted together with number 9.

2 Except for book reviews (e.g., by Ursula K. Le Guin in *SFS* no. 12 [1977]) and introductions (e.g., by Theodore Sturgeon to most of the Macmillan translations of the Strugatskys), the English-language reader could until the latter 1970s use only a first version of this essay and my "Criticism of the Strugatskii Brothers' Work," *Canadian-American Slavic* Studies no. 2 (1972): 286–307. Cf. now also Halina Stephan, "The Changing Protagonist in Soviet Science Fiction," in Henrik Birnbaum and Thomas Eekman eds., *Fiction and Drama* (Columbus OH, 1980), 361–78; Vladimir Gakov, "Noon: Twenty-Second Century," in Frank N. Magill ed., *Survey of Science Fiction Literature* (Englewood Cliffs, 1979), 4: 1548–54, and "A Test of Humanity," *Soviet Literature* no. 416 (1982): 154–61; Patrick L. McGuire, "Future History, Soviet Style," in Tom Staicar ed., *Critical Encounters II* (New York, 1982), 104–24; the essays by Nudelman and Chernysheva in the special SF issue of *Canadian-American Slavic* Studies no. 1–2 (1984): 5–30 and 76–84 edited by me; and *The Second Marxian Invasion: The Fiction of the Strugatsky Brothers* (1991) by Stephen W. Potts.

7. *Dalekaia Raduga* (Far Rainbow), in anthology *Novaia signal'naia*. Znanie, 1963. Reprinted together with number 8.
8. *Trudno byt' bogom* (Hard to be a God), in their *Dalekaia Raduga*. Mol. gvardiia, 1964.
9. *Khishchnye veshchi veka* (Predatory Things of Our Times). Mol. gvardiia, 1965.
10. *Ponedel'nik nachinaetsia v subbotu* (Monday begins on Saturday). Detskaia lit., 1965.
11. *Ulitka na sklone* (The Snail on the Slope) – see further in the text. "Kandid" part published in anthology *Ellinskii sekret*. Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1966; "Pepper" part published in magazine *Baikal*, Nos. 1 and 2 (1968). Book published in Estonian SSR in 1972; the "Pepper" part alone was published in *Ulitka na sklone – Skazka o troike*. Frankfurt/Main: Possev, 1972, an unauthorized edition.
12. *Vtoroe nashestvie marsian* (The Second Martian Invasion), in their *Stazhery – Vtoroe nashestvie marsian*. Mol. gvardiia, 1968.
13. *Gadkie lebedi* (Ugly Swans). Frankfurt/Main: Possev, 1972, an unauthorized edition (no publication in the USSR).
14. *Skazka o troike* (Tale of the Triumvirate), magazine *Angara* Nos. 4 and 5 (1968).
15. *Obitaemyi ostrov* (The Inhabited Island). Detskaia lit., 1971.
16. *Otel' "U pogibshego al'pinista"* (Hotel "To the Lost Climber"). Znanie, 1982 [possibly already in *Iunost'* 1970], filmed in 1979.
17. *Malysh* (The Kid), in anthology *Talisman*. Leningrad: Detskaia lit., 1973; reprinted in their *Polden' … – Malysh*. Leningrad: Detskaia lit., 1976.
18. *Piknik na obochine* (Roadside Picnic), printed together with number 20.
19. *Paren' iz preispodnei* (The Guy from Hell), in anthology *Nezrimyi most'*. Leningrad: Detskaia lit., 1976; as *Prishelets iz preispodnei* (The Alien from Hell), NY: Advent, 1984, probably an unauthorized edition.
20. *Zhuk v muraveinike* (Beetle in the Anthill), magazine *Znanie-sila* nos. 9–12 (1979), 1–3 and 5–6 (1980).

The Strugatskys are also reputed to be the (anonymous) editors of the excellent and pioneering anthology of Soviet SF, *The Molecular Cafe* (1968).

The *first cycle or phase* of the Strugatskys is the interplanetary trilogy numbers 1, 3, and 5 with the same group of protagonists, and the cognate short stories collected in numbers 2, 3, and 4, all published 1959–62. Except for a few early stories, this phase constitutes a "future history" system formally similar to the model of a number of US SF writers, for example, Heinlein and Asimov. It is a not quite systematic series of novels and stories with interlocking characters and locations progressing from the end of the twentieth to the twenty-second century, realistically conveying life on a predominantly communist (classless) Earth and human relations in explorations on and between the planets of the solar system and some nearer stars. Yefremov's monolithic leaders and huge exploits were here supplanted by young explorers and scientists finding romance in their everyday pioneering tasks. Retaining the utopian sense of absolute ethical involvement and personal honor, even the Strugatskys' early protagonists – at times moody or vain, tired or capricious – were much more lifelike than the usual cardboard or fake marble figures in most Soviet SF. Together with the vividly depicted and variegated surroundings, the sure touch for detail and the adventure-packed action leading to some ethical choice, this immediately brought the young authors to the forefront of Soviet SF. But from good juvenile adventure SF, they quickly passed to a richer form in which the adventure level serves as vehicle for sociophilosophical exploration and understanding.

This first Strugatsky cycle is still fairly idyllic. Except for the occasional egotistic and capitalist survivals, conflicts take place – as they formulated it – "between the good and the better," that is, within absolute and generally accepted ethics. Thus the only fundamental conflict left is the epic adventure of man faced with and conquering nature as a "collective Robinson Crusoe" (as critic Iuliy Kagarlitsky phrased it). Yet at the end of the cycle – in *The Apprentices* and some stories such as "Wanderers and Travellers," "The Puzzle of the Hind Foot," and "The Rendez-Vous" – an element of open-ended doubt and of darkness enters into these somewhat aseptically bright horizons. Some protagonists die or retire, some "come home" from cosmic jaunts to Earth and its problems. Though the future is

still envisaged as a golden arrested moment of "noon," historical time with its puzzles, pain, and potentialities of regress begins to seep in as shadows of postmeridian experience lengthen. This adventure model is interlarded with quotations from neo-romantic poets such as R.L. Stevenson and Eduard Bagritsky. In the second phase, an adult exploration of a more complex and painful world concentrates, as one of its novels has it, on the "predatory things of our times," a title appropriately enough taken from Russia's major poetic exploration of relationships in such a world by Voznesensky's *Oza*.

The dialectics of innocence and experience, of utopian ethics and historical obstacles on the way to their enthronement provides henceforth the main tension and pathos of the Strugatskys' opus. In their second phase, consisting of the novels or long stories numbers 6–9 published 1962–65, they were working out the proper form for such dialectics. The black horizon of a history where slavery and high technology go together appears in *An Attempted Escape*, though only as an exception (a backward planet) within the utopian universe of the first phase. In this work the Strugatskys are still defensive about their new tack. Even stylistically, it is halfway between the careful realism of the extrapolative-utopian cycle and a new parable form, so that it reads as a first sketch for *Hard to Be a God*. The protagonist – an escapee from Nazi concentration camps – and the paradoxical society are even less motivated than Mark Twain's Yankee in Camelot. Nonetheless, this story introduces the first full-fledged conflict of utopian innocence and twentieth-century experience using the highly effective device of a protagonist caught in a blind alley of history.

The first two masterpieces of the Strugatskys are the long story "Far Rainbow" and the novel *Hard to Be a God*. In both of them extrapolation gives way to a clearly focused analogic or parabolic model of mature SF. In both, utopian ethics are put to the test of anti-utopian darkness, of an inhuman and apparently irresistible wave of destruction. On the small planet Far Rainbow this is presented as a physical Black Wave destroying the whole joyous community of experimenting creators. Almost all remaining heroes of the first cycle die here; only the children (and the mysterious deathless man-robot Kamill, personifying perhaps a Cassandra-like lonely and powerless Reason) are saved to carry on the unquenchable human hope and thirst for knowledge. The elemental force let loose by the

cheerful seekers and destroying them from behind is valid as a story in its own right, and also a clear parable for the price of knowledge and progress in general, and in USSR history in particular.

The conflict of militant philistinism, stupidity, and sociopsychological entropy with the utopian idea of the Commune is faced without "cosmic" disguises, directly within history – and therefore with richer and subtler consequences – in *Hard to Be a God* by way of a very successful domestication of the Scott-Dumas-type historical novel. The hero is one of a handful of emissaries from classless Earth's Institute of Experimental History on a feudal planet. He is perfectly disguised as a native nobleman, under strict instructions to observe without interfering, and trained outwardly to adapt himself to the existing way of life – a mixture of medieval Europe and Japan – in all details, from language to hygiene. However, the Institute's futurological Basic Theory of Feudalism, which projects a slow linear progress for the planet, turns out to be wrong. The opposition between ethics and history explodes when the protagonist is faced with a regress into organized obscurantism, leading to death and destruction for all poets, scientists, doctors, and other bearers of human values and intelligence in the Arkanar kingdom, and culminating in the slaying of his girlfriend. As in "Far Rainbow," the problem of meeting an unforeseen, calamitous twist of history is posed, rendered verisimilar (here by vividly re-creating the customs, legends, and ways of life in Arkanar, as well as the psychology of the troubled hero), and then left realistically open-ended.

Hard to Be a God amounts to an "educational novel" where the reader learns together with the protagonist the nature of painful conflict between utopian human values – always the fixed Polar Star for the Strugatskys – and the terrible empirical pressures of mass egotism, slavery to petty passions, and conformism. Under such pressures the great majority of the people turn to religious fanaticism, mass murder, or apathy. The resulting situation is reminiscent of the worst traits of Stalinism (a "doctors' plot," stage-managed confessions, recasting of history to exalt the present ruler) and Nazism (storm troopers and pogroms, the Night of Long Knives). The spirit of revolt, as in the rebel leader Arata, is undying, but it has to deal with omnipresent historical inertia. Outside interference cannot liberate a people without introducing a new benevolent dictatorship: the Earthling

"gods" are both ethically obliged and historically powerless to act. The true enemy is within each man: Slavery and Reason, narrow-minded class psychology and the axiological reality of a classless future, are still fighting it out in a variant of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor confrontation. The Strugatskys' mature opus retains the utopian abhorrence of "the terrible ghosts of the past" and belief in the necessity of a humanized future, but it is also intensely aware of the defeats humanity has suffered since the heyday of utopianism in the early 1920s. Thus, from this time on, their work takes its place with the insights of the best SF – from Wells and London to Dick, Disch, and Le Guin – into the dangers of social devolution: it is a warning without pat answers, a bearing of witness, and "an angry pamphlet against tyranny, violence, indifference, against the philistinism that gives rise to dictatorships" (as the Soviet critic Revich well said). Even further, it is a significant rendering of tragic utopian activism in accessible ways, akin in many ways to the ethico-historiosophical visions of the best Hemingway and of poets like Brecht (the protagonist's dilemma in this novel is not too dissimilar from that in *The Measures Taken*), Okudzhava, or Voznesensky. It is no wonder this novel was the most popular SF work in the USSR.

Predatory Things of Our Times returns to the anticipatory universe of the first cycle, with which it shares the protagonist, a Soviet cosmonaut turned UN Secret Service agent. His task is to flush out an evil new influence in the Country of the Fools, a wealthy, demilitarized capitalist state in a world dominated by socialism; this turns out to be addictive stimulation of pleasure centers, born of social demoralization and feeding into it. The story is a half-hearted try at a more precise Earthly localization of the concern with historical blind alleys, but its focus is blurred. The Country of the Fools is midway between an updated USA of Hemingway, Raymond Chandler or gangster movies, and a folktale-like Never-never Land. Though vigorous and swift-paced, it is neither sufficiently concrete for precise sociopolitical criticism – as some Soviet critics were quick to point out – nor sufficiently generalized for a parabolic model of a mass Welfare State. *Hard to Be a God* remains thus, in its clear and historically vivid yet sufficiently estranged localization, in its fusion of medieval and twentieth-to-twenty-first-century, public and private concerns (evident

even in the epigraphs from Abelard and Hemingway), the Strugatskys' best achievement until 1965.

Since explicit criticism of situations nearer home than its "thousand years and thousand parsecs from Earth" would have (among other sociopolitical consequences) meant abandoning publication and their readers, the Strugatskys opted for the second possible way – a folktale-like parable form with increasingly satirical overtones. As different from their work so far, marked by growing precision and width of reference of a single model, their *third phase*, consisting of the looser and more grotesque long tales numbers 10–14, is characterized by a variety of probings, formal maneuverings, and reading publics – from the juvenile to the most sophisticated intellectual one.

A sign of formal mastery, joined to a certain sociopolitical bewilderment, can be seen in the changing Strugatsky protagonist. By this phase he has turned into the privileged point of view. As a rule he is, like Voltaire's Candide, a naive glance at the increasingly estranged and disharmonious world, burdened by the additional twentieth-century problem of how to make sense of the events in a mass society with monopolized information channels. This makes for anxiety as in *The Snail on the Slope*, or activist response, as in *The Inhabited Island*, or a fusion of both, as in *The Tale of the Troika* ("troika" meaning here a triumvirate). In *The Second Martian Invasion*, however, the protagonist, ignorant as Candide, is also happy in his conformist ignorance. This Martian invasion does not need to use Wellsian heat-rays and gases to poison a nation, merely local traitors, economic corruption, and misinformation. As befits the one-dimensional age, the calamity is muted, and thus more convincing and horrible. The whole story is a *tour de force* of identifying petty-bourgeois language and horizons, the almost unnoticeable nuances that lead down the slope of quislingist collaboration with the enemy. It is "a grotesque which does not reside in the style but in the point of view" (Britikov). The ironic incongruity between the protagonist's self-serving phraseology and the ideological judgements on it conveyed to the reader is in the great Russian tradition of the "skaz" form (e.g., Zoshchenko). Stylistically, it is on a par with *Hard to Be a God* and the Kandid part of *The Snail on the Slope* as the Strugatsky's most homogeneous achievement.

If *The Second Martian Invasion* was in the vein of Voltaire or Swift, the anxiety of the two protagonists in *The Snail on the Slope* (one of them named Kandid) is rather Kafkian. The visionary universe of this novel, reduced to a fantastic swampy forest, will be discussed more fully in the second part of this chapter.

Perhaps a central place in the Strugatskys' third phase is due to the "Privalov cycle" – the novels *Monday Begins on Saturday* and *The Tale of the Troika*. In an updated folktale garb, they embody the underlying atmosphere of this phase – a total invasion of human relationships by a lack of linear logic and sense. Modern sciences and modern social relationships in their strangeness for and alienation from the uninitiated majority are equivalent to white and black magic. Conversely, the forms of the magical folktale can be taken as forerunners of, and freely mixed with, contemporary "quantum alchemy." Indeed, the old characters – a penny-pinching Baba Yaga, a sclerotic Talking Cat, a parochial Pike Who Grants Three Desires – are small fry, good only for some mild fun, incidental critique, and atmosphere-setting in comparison to the estranged horrors of scientific charlatanism and bureaucratic power.

Monday Begins on Saturday deals primarily with the use and charlatanic abuse of science. This is sketched in the career of Janus Nevstruev, director of the Scientific Institute for Magic, which studies the problems of human happiness and in whose folktale-lands both books take place: Nevstruev has split into S-Janus the scientist, and A-Janus the administrator who lives backward in time. But charlatanism is personified in Amvroz Ambruazovich Vybegallo, a semi-literate careerist planning the creation of a happy Universal Consumer, who talks in a mixture of bad French and demagogic bureaucratese. His homunculus, the Model of Full Contentedness, has to be destroyed just short of consuming the whole universe. The novel ranges from such a Goyaesque vision of A Dream of Reason Giving Birth to Monsters to an affectionate return to the roots of Russian and other folktales (the Institute is located with great felicity in the legendary Russian North). The loose picaresque form – the "ideational adventures" of the candid protagonist – can be used for hitting out at anything that fits the authors' bill. Thus one section, in which Privalov tests out a machine for traveling through "ideal times," is a spoof of SF from the

utopias and *The Time Machine*, through technological anticipations and Soviet cosmic SF (with considerable self-parody), to western SF behind an "Iron Wall" dividing the Universe of Humanistic Imagination from the Universe of Fearing the Future, where violent warfare with robots, aliens, viruses, etc., reigns supreme.

The Tale of the Triumvirate (or *Troika*) is blacker, concentrating on a bureaucratic triumvirate – originally a commission for checking the plumbing system, much reminiscent of the rise of Stalin – that has usurped power in a country of unexplained social and natural phenomena, which it proceeds to "rationalize" by misusing or explaining them away. Their scientific consultant is Professor Vybegallo, and their main power lies in the Great Round Seal. A brilliantly detailed picture emerges of their prejudices, militaristic mannerisms, and internecine infighting – in short, of a despotic approach turning "scientifico-administrative." Its semi-literate jargon and fossilized pseudo-democratic slogans, its totally incompetent quid-pro-quos and malapropisms are portrayed with a wildly hilarious black humor, which makes this the funniest work of SF I know. It is unfortunate that it has so far not appeared in book form in the USSR, for – as the episode of the Alien most clearly shows – this critique of a degenerated power-situation speaks to all of present-day mankind, psychologically unprepared for contact with a utopian future. In fact, I know of no more sympathetic insight into the true necessities that bring about the elite power than the Troika chairman's speech (under the influence of an apparatus that induces the surfacing of innermost motives) at the Alien's trial. Though somewhat uneven, this is perhaps the weightiest experiment of the Strugatskys.

The works first published 1968–80 (number 15–19 in my initial list) will be discussed here more briefly in order to concentrate on *The Snail on the Slope* as their representative. They can be thought of as a *further Strugatsky phase*, more somber and uneven, combining such disparate elements as juvenile heroics with increasing alienation and desperation. *Prisoners of Power* is a reduction of the mature Strugatsky model to a "new maps of hell" adventure-plot. It is still a very good novel at that level: the candid utopian and juvenile protagonist is marooned on an isolated planet, a closed and violent world (so that the original title of *Inhabited Island* would have been more appropriate than the vague sensationalism of the translation

title) where high technology, especially in new persuasion media, serves a military dictatorship. To fight it, our hero must again undergo this world's ignorance and cruelty, losing some of his innocence. The cumulative unrolling of environment and atmosphere, the brisk plot passing with the protagonist through various social strata of a people bereft of history, all show the masterly touch. But also, the insights into both the Oligarchy and Underground politics and into the genuine fanaticism of the rank and file do not quite blend with the *deus ex machina* happy ending. *The Ugly Swans* was published abroad in an edition repudiated by the authors, but for purposes of this overview I have to assume it as substantially correct. In a Shchedrinian satiric city, persistent rainfall signifies the end of a morally corrupt society and generation, whose children seem to be evolving to higher intelligence and justice with the help of mutant "Wetters." Some have seen the Wetters as an allegory of Jews, but if so, "all poets are Jews," as Marina Tsvetaeva fulgurantly remarked; it seems more encompassing to see these leprous harbingers of the future as any midwives of the New, any utopian intellectuals. As in *The Snail*, boundaries blur, contradictions and metamorphoses between the known (quarrelling police-factions, fascist movements, social corruption) and the unknown abound. The setting is a despotic capitalism but the capital seems to be Moscow, and unrelenting fog blankets all. The puzzles of the New are again left unsolved: all we can infer from the children's final exodus from the corrupt present – as well as from the whole story told through an ambiguous protagonist, a politically suspect writer, and by means of a hardboiled vernacular – is that our species of "ugly swans" is doomed. The novel presents thus an inversion of Andersen's Ugly Duckling as well as of the Pied Piper tale. It has important failures of focusing; yet it is also one of the weightiest and most courageous confrontations in world fiction with the youth movement of the 1960s.

Of the short novels or long stories *Hotel 'To the Lost Climber', Kid From Hell*, and *Space Mowgli*, the first is frankly an entertaining lightweight, a detective mystery with an SF twist: it turns out that all the puzzles were due to alien robots with strange powers – a genological hybrid that rarely succeeds. In the second, the most bleakly impressive of the three, human interference in a grotesque war between two corrupt societies picks out a trained killer from one and fails to change him even after exposing him

to prolonged intellectual and emotional contact with utopian values. This suggests that at least some people can be irreversibly alienated. The third is a "wolfchild" tale, except that a human infant was raised by incomprehensible aliens, and his identification raises false hopes of bridging the gulf between known and unknown.

Perhaps the most consistent work of this phase is the early *Roadside Picnic*, simultaneously "first contact" SF story, folktale-like utopian quest, and psychological novel, with a rich array of standpoints and vernaculars, in which meaning is sought for the strange and dangerous remnants left by unknown aliens. The protagonist, Red, is one of the smugglers who penetrates the alien Zone to steal artefacts and, perhaps, to find knowledge which is salvation; he finds the alien Golden Ball supposed to grant all wishes, but its ineffective attainment produces only an impassioned shout for general happiness. The alien influence is a catalyst showing up humans as greedy and courageous, ignorant and ingenious. The story has since been strongly reworked, and to my mind impoverished, in a sequence of the Strugatskys' scenarios for Tarkovsky's Christian-existentialist movie *Stalker*.

1.2 Addition 1990[3]

A *fourth* and even more somber phase is almost coterminous with the third one, as it begins in the mid-1960s with the "Maxim Trilogy": *Prisoners of Power, Beetle in the Anthill, and The Time Wanderers*. In it the consoling glow of fable is stripped from abrupt and violent stories as the (at times incongruously) juvenile heroes confront scenes of increasing alienation and desperation. The hopes of bridging the gulf between known and unknown are shattered in the conflict of *Beetle in the Anthill* between ethics and survival, since a returning space explorer is on good grounds suspected of being, unbeknownst to him, programmed by the aliens, possibly to destroy the human race. The racy detection puzzle is told by Maxim, the hero of *Prisoners of*

3 The overview of these late novels is indebted to an encyclopedia article on the Strugatskys which I compiled together with Professor Gina Macdonald, to whom my cordial thanks.

Power, now a middle-aged Terran security officer; at its end, the security chief, ex-space-hero, murders the suspect – just in case. Another, and possibly the most chillingly exasperated invasion of darkness into utopia is *Definitely Maybe*, a tale halfway between supernatural Fantasy and a very black parable. An unknown force disrupts the lives, work, and happiness of the world's leading scientists and seekers after the New. Their groping hypotheses about it include a malevolent supercivilization or the laws of nature asserting themselves to control destiny. Amid increasingly intimate frustration, the tough-minded clarity and a glimmer of utopian resistance persist. In *Gadkie lebedi* (published 1972 in Germany in an émigré edition and transl. A.E. and A. Nakhimovsky in 1979 USA as *The Ugly Swans*, both disavowed by the authors, probably for self-protection; published in Russian 1987 in a Lettonian magazine), the metaphysical swamp of *The Snail on the Slope* is transfigured into a mysterious fog which envelops Moscow, and which seems to engender all manner of intrusions. The fog is a signal of the death of the old world, and a highly dubious harbinger of a new: the children of the tale, justifying its title (a play on the famous fable by Hans Christian Andersen), seem to be entering into metamorphosis and a future which may (possibly) be bright. "Za milliard let do kontsa sveta" (published 1976–77 in the periodical *Znanie-sila*; transl. A. Bouis as *Definitely Maybe: A Manuscript Discovered under Unusual Circumstances* 1978 US) again combines fable and a bleak depiction of the social world as scientists attempt (in a manner evocative of the work of Lem) to parse an implacably unknowable "force" which seems to be paralyzing human progress.

Their last works, published only in the *glasnost* period, were: *Khromaia sud'ba* [*Lame Destiny*] (fixup 1989), which intertwines *The Ugly Swans* with other material from 1986; *Grad obrechennyi [The Doomed City*] (written 1970–87, published 1989), perhaps their weightiest work to date; and *Otiagoshchennye zlom, ili sorok let spustia [Burdened by Evil, or 40 Years After*] (1989), evocative of the work of Mikhail Bulgakov. After the death of Arkady in 1991, it remained uncertain whether or not Boris would continue writing alone.

1.3 A First Conclusion

The Strugatskys' work has been at the heart of Soviet SF. It was a permanent polemic – in their first phase against narrow technological-adventure SF of the Soviet 1950s, in the second against Yefremovian monolithism, in the third against linear progressivism – and thus acted as an icebreaker clearing esthetic navigation for the whole Soviet flotilla. More importantly, their first three phases have built up the most coherent series of models in Soviet SF. From static utopian brightness it moved, through a return to the complex dynamics of history, to a final model where the static norm is felt as immorally anti-utopian. Concomitantly, the protagonist grew from a boy in a golden collective, through the pioneering subject of a painful cognitive education, to a solitary hero as final repository of utopian ethics who decides to fight back against inhumanity. The time horizons also evolved from the extrapolated future, through a clash of past and future in analogic worlds, to a strongly estranged arrested time (e.g., blending a folktale past with futuristic science) where the future values find refuge in ethics as opposed to backward politics and incomprehensible ontology.

There are deficiencies in the Strugatskys' vision. The junction of ethics with either politics or philosophy has remained unclear; the localization of events has oscillated somewhat erratically, the sociophilosophical criticism has sometimes fitted only loosely into the SF framework. Such limitations cannot be glossed over, since they grew in importance in the 1970s, but they may to a great extent be due to the authors' wish not to be banned from publishing. Nonetheless, half a dozen of the Strugatskys' works approach major, cognitive literature. The predatory bestiary into which people without cognitive ethics are transmuted, the strange countries and monsters becoming increasingly horrible as the authors and readers discover that *de nobis fabula narrator* – all such aspects certify to their final source in the greatest SF paradigm, *Gulliver's Travels*.

Perhaps most pertinent within the Russian tradition is the fact that the best of the later Strugatskys reads like an updating of Shchedrin's fables (e.g., *The Bear Governor*) and his chronicle of Glupovo (Idiot City) and its rulers. However, the hero and ideal reader is no longer Shchedrin's *muzhik* (peasant): he is the contemporary scientific and cultural intellectual

bridging the "two cultures" gap, the reader of Voznesensky and Voltaire, Wiener and Wells. Many Strugatsky passages read as a hymn to such young scientists who are also citizen-activists, inner-directed by and toward utopia. In *Monday Begins on Saturday*, for example, they are defined as having "a different relationship with the world than normal people" and believing that the sense of life resides in "constant cognition of the unknown." The central source of the Strugatskys' pathos is an ethics of cognition, sprung from a confluence of utopianism and modern philosophy of science. Such a horizon, of course, transcends Russian borders: it marks the Strugatskys' rightful place in world SF and indeed world literature.

2. *On The Snail on the Slope (1978–1980)*[4]

All the foregoing can serve as the context for the somewhat puzzling *Snail on the Slope*. It is not my intention to explore all the puzzles with which this text abounds, in the best SF tradition. Furthermore, I think some of these puzzles are deliberately ambiguous and cannot be deciphered in any univocal or simplistic way. The following wishes to indicate a reasonable first approach.

The Snail on the Slope novel is divided into two stories, those of Pepper and Kandid. Their plots appear to be only very loosely connected, but the compositional interlocking (chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10 deal with Pepper, and 2, 4, 7, 8, and 11 with Kandid) expresses in fact a deeper interplay of their fortunes and attitudes. Pepper and Kandid have many similarities: both are intellectuals, tolerated or even condescendingly liked, yet thrown as outsiders into nightmarish power situations beyond their control; for both, thinking – that is, an understanding of what is happening in the light of their humanistic ethical and historiosophical principles – is not "a pastime, it's a duty." In fact, in an untranslatable Russian idiom beautifully fashioned by the Strugatskys on the model of "homesickness," they are

4 My analysis of the novel is indebted to discussions with the excellent translator of the Bantam and Gollancz editions, Alan G. Myers. I am also grateful to Roger De Garis, Rafail Nudelman, and Ante Starčević for help with finding publication data about, and texts by, the Strugatskys.

both sick for understanding, they have the "yearning for understanding" or "know-sickness." The world view of both is called "emotional materialism"; as scientists they are materialists, but the painful informational opacity of their environments has caused them to fall back on personally felt ethics in lieu of a dialectical overview. Thus, besides understanding, they both yearn for a minimum of humanist decency: "just people would do for a start – clean, shaven, considerate, hospitable. No high-flown ideas necessary, no blazing talents."

Yet as we gradually find out, Pepper and Kandid have just as significant dissimilarities. Not only is Kandid directly faced with the central novelty and strange experience of this text, the Forest, while Pepper faces it indirectly, through the Forest Study and Exploitation Authority (or Directorate); but, more important, their reactions eventually diverge so radically that they result in diametrically opposed behavior. In relation to the other human agents as well as to the overriding and unmanageable presences of the Forest and the Directorate, Pepper and Kandid finally come to stand for the two horns of the alternative facing modern intellectuals (as the text sees it): *accommodation* and *refusal*.

In relation to other people – perhaps, as opposed to the solitary intellectual protagonists, one could just as well say in relation to *the* people – Pepper has almost from the very beginning a much stronger gut revulsion, which subsumes sex under animalism. Ironically, Pepper is the one who finally succumbs to the seduction of the self-perpetuating power structure. On the contrary, Kandid – though equally, if not more, helpless and intellectually isolated – lives among his more primitive villagers as a strange and eccentric member of their community, at the outset condescended to as "Dummy," but at the end revered as the slightly mad "holy fool" and unparalleled disposer of the "deadlings." Though his marriage to Nava, who is frequently called a "girl" in the sense of a rather young person, is possibly only symbolic, and though it does not last, even such an ambiguous marriage and name are precise symbols for Kandid's precarious partaking of the village community. And for all its rural inertia – so beautifully rendered by the Strugatskys' language in the Kandid part, with its archaic folk images and idioms, infuriatingly repetitive and monotonous as the life whose flavor it conveys – there is to my mind a clear sense of the moral

superiority of this primitive folk community to the egotistic urbanized conformism of the Directorate employees.

Pepper's revulsion is a logical stage on the way to his Fall into Power, ironically marked by his eradication of the Eradicators supervised by the chief eradicator. Kandid's irritation and even fury at the "dozey . . . vegetable way of life" in the Village is paralleled by his adaptation to the heavy and sometimes oppressive but also astonishingly fertile vegetable imagery; Pepper's revulsion from the Directorate apparatus carries a subtle implication of a hysterical splitting of its members into animals on the one hand and machines on the other. In fact, I would read the "machine episode" of chapter 9 as a parable on intellectuals streamlined or reified into serving the military-industrial complex: frustrated by it, destroyed when they attempt to evade it, they are internally subverted by it into scientific or esthetic acquiescence ("Winnie the Pooh" and the Gardener), militarist aggressivity (the Tank), hysteria (the Doll), etc. If something like this reading is acceptable, this seemingly gratuitous episode would fit well into the Pepper story. On the other hand, Kandid, after being ejected from his helicopter, is faced only with biocybernetic, if you wish "organic," novelties, not with inorganic machines. The matriarchal or Amazon civilization of the Maidens (*Podrugy*, another almost untranslatable Russian term, literally something like Women Companions or She-Friends) with its Swampings and Harrowings is no less ruthless than the patriarchal Exploitation Authority, but Kandid's fellow yokels have for all their bumbling preserved more human dignity than the Directorate employees. They sin against the "yearning for knowledge" rather than against other people. And even that sin is overwhelmingly conveyed as being in large part due to the dearth of information and the almost physiological impossibility of generalizing on the part of a social group bereft of history and art and subject to unknown destructive forces. No such excuses prevail for the Authority employees, at least as much sinning as sinned against. Though oppressed by the power, they share in it; the villagers don't.

However, what of the two huge and stifling collective entities, the Forest and the Directorate? The Directorate is a simpler case: a Kafkaian bureaucracy whose facelessness is horrible because it is composed of Everyman, so to speak – it works in, through, and by means of its victims such as Pepper; it is a "vector [with] its base in the depths of time," aptly

symbolized by Acey's tattoos: "What destroys us" and "Ever onward." It is "capable of any extreme" – faith, disbelief, neglect – only not of understanding. Thus, it is the moral antipode of the intellectual protagonists. It exists only because of the Forest, but also only for its eradication and exploitation; furthermore, it is dismally failing to deal not only with the Forest but even with the relatively powerless villagers ("Native Population"). Besides the ineffective biostation, breeding ground of careers, pettiness, "salary and bonuses," rather than of understanding, the Directorate impinges on the Forest only through the new "luxurious four-hole latrine," a drastically clear image (all in chapter 10). Most of the Pepper story happens in total or semi-obscurity. This Kafkian murk is in the Director's anterooms joined by Carrollian nonsense, while the "decoding" of the telephone speech rejoins the savage Swiftian satire at Tribnia (Britain). The Philistine pseudo-utopia of affluence and leisure reminding one of the feeblest Wells or other optimistic forecasting, not excluding Philistine pseudo-Marxists, only deepens the gloom: "… stadia, swimming-pools, aerial parks, crystal bars, and cafes. Stairways to the sky! Slender, swaying women with dark supple skin! … Cars, gliders, airships … Debates, hypnopaedia, stereocinema …" (chapter 5). The obscurity standing for obscurantism is rendered practically impenetrable when the continuity of bureaucratic authority is confirmed by the evidently sincere impossibility of Pepper's to find what Wells would have called a democratic "social receiver" for the Directorate: "Criticize and laugh! They'd do it at length with warmth and ecstasy since they'd been ordered to do it … and in between they'd hurry to the latrine overhanging the precipice …"

The Forest is much more complex, in fact the most multiplex symbol in the novel. Pepper is too remote from it, and sees far too little; Kandid is too near to it, and sees far too much; such an absence as well as such an overload of information turn the Forest into a blur, a black-and-white cerebral one for Pepper and a technicolor one, replete with noises and smells, for Kandid. But even the latter can, after three years of living within it, penetrate no further than skin-deep into the meaning of its half-glimpsed "unpleasant secrets and terrible puzzles," into the lilac fog of its alien abundance: if Pepper's glance is blocked by the Authority, Kandid's is by the strangeness of the Forest itself, which he does not see for its phenomena.

This unresolved opacity makes it impossible, as I suggested earlier, to "decode" the Forest as standing allegorically for any one particular entity. Yet clearly, to the protagonists it matters supremely: it is Pepper's romantic dream, and Kandid's realistic existence; Pepper yearns desperately to get into it, Kandid to get out of it. Neither will succeed; but for both the Forest will remain the central fascination of their existences, a tormenting love/hate (it will only grow dim for Pepper when he becomes absorbed in the Directorate and follows up his nausea at the alien Forest with the assumption of a bureaucratic responsibility for it which – as his eradication decision gives us to understand – will not lead to significant change). The mysterious Forest stands thus for an encompassing strange truth and value (for intellectuals that is the same) surrounding the modern thinking person. Sociologically, it might stand for society; anthropologically, for the people; politically, for the State; but finally, I think that no such categories will account for its multiplicity and ambiguity, although at various points in the text they might be applicable to a certain degree. Finally, subsuming all such partial explanations, the Strugatskys' forest seems to be almost ontologically, life in general, the viscous duration and existence for which Russian has the expressive term *byt'*. Nonetheless, it remains true that the forces in the Forest are also in some ways similar to the menacing mysticism of the Exploitation Authority (even the speech modes of the power-wielders are not too dissimilar). The impressive Newness of the Forest is finally inhuman; the Amazons are a parthenogenetic "higher" species. The authors' final word is given through Kandid's mouth: "What has their progress to do with me, it's not my progress and I call it progress only because there's no other suitable word …"

All this does not mean, of course, that one could not have legitimate doubts, queries or outright disagreements with the novel. The ethics of the Strugatskys' heroes are – as usual – to my mind unexceptionable, utopian-socialist ethics. But their protest against the loss of harmony between ends and means, while rightly postulating that unethical politics are self-defeating, does not leave much room at all for intelligent, that is, ethical, politics. The Forest is for the Strugatskys not a political but an ethical and cognitive symbol. As the authors themselves have written: "The Forest is to be taken as a symbol of the unknown and alien, a symbol of

necessity simplified, of all that is at present hidden from mankind because of our incomplete scientific, philosophical and sociological knowledge."

And then, is not "drilling the principles of fortification into a future builder of Sun cities" (chapter 3) no doubt always unpleasant but perhaps sometimes unavoidable? – for example, when faced with the world symbolized by the contents of the Director's safe in chapter 10: a pistol, a "twisted general's epaulette and an iron cross with oak leaves"? Probably in that case, the classical revolutionary and Russian question "what is to be done?" cannot be solved by pure ethics. The Strugatskys themselves penned what amounts to a credo at the same time as writing this novel. It speaks of SF as

> the literature dealing with the ethics and responsibility of the scientist . . . with what those, in whose hands lies the realization of the highest achievements of human knowledge, feel and how do they relate to their work . . . Each scientist has to be a revolutionary humanist, otherwise the inertia of history will shunt him into the ranks of irresponsible scoundrels leading the world to its destruction.[5]

From their own point of view, Kandid's final opposition between utopian-socialist ethics and an understanding of world and history may in that case not be a useful answer.

On the contrary, Kandid's realization that it is necessary to look both at the Authority and the Forest "from the side" is right on. For this is the classical look of SF as well as of all scientific estrangement, the wide-eyed "it ain't necessarily so" look, which is the beginning of all wisdom – a wisdom desperately needed in our world of somewhat different Authorities and Forests. The numerous uses of such a look make of this somber but unbowed, difficult but rewarding novel one of the most interesting creations of the Strugatsky brothers and of modern SF. Any disagreements that one might have with this or that aspect of their vision is more than compensated for by the humor and relevance of the novel as a whole. It is a legitimate continuation of the Gogol and Shchedrin vein of Russian literature, and of the great Soviet tradition of Il'f-Petrov or Olesha, at the borders of SF and satire as in Mayakovsky's late plays. Fusing this tradition with the stimulus of Swift, Kafka, Lem, and English fantastic literature such as Lewis Carroll, the Strugatskys offer the reader a brilliant work of

5 Review of Gansovsky: see my *Russian Science Fiction 1956–1974* (Dragon P, 1976).

word-art – a mimicry of bureaucratese and academese, of philistine and fanatic jargon, irony and parody, colloquialisms and neologisms. Thus, they are polemic at the deepest literary level, making untenable what they called the "fiery banalities" of the genre.

******

An E-mail to Russia (2003)

Dorogoi Boris Natanovich,

I hear that you are approaching your 70th birthday, and that it is allowed to send you congratulations. I'm very happy that I have been given this occasion to tell you how much Arkadiy Natanovich's and your writing have meant and still mean to me. I don't see how I can do that without succumbing to the temptation of waxing, at this late moment in our lives, somewhat autobiographical. As Oscar Wilde said, I can resist everything except temptation.

In truth, I don't think what follows will be *only* individual. Since I am approximately of the same age as you two, I should say that I, as a critic and historian of SF and similar literary genres, have only had the privilege of turning into arguments what a good part of my generation – at any rate, that part which read you – have felt and thought. No doubt, anybody's personal explanations are refracted through the cluster of characteristics that constitute each of us as a person, but I am a staunch believer in the very large impact the spirit of the age – what the theoreticians call *intentio temporis* – has on all our writings, whether fictional or commenting. We can only choose which of the currents within such a spirit to favor, to follow, and indeed to help shaping. The opus of The Strugatsky Brothers is a sterling example of such following and shaping, as befits all major artists.

I first came across your work in the Russian journals such as *Tekhnika molodezhi*, *Znanie-sila* and similar which were circulating in Yugoslavia after the lifting of the embargo between "the Soviet bloc" and Yugoslavia in 1956, after Khrushchev's visit to Tito. After 1958 I was preparing my

first book on SF, consisting of a large historico-critical text published in Zagreb journals between 1961 and 1964 (starting with a quotation from Zamyatin), and of an anthology of SF texts going from Lucian of Samosate to twentieth-century SF. At that point, when I was reading all I could find in any language I could understand, an old-fashioned (pre-communist or para-communist) Russophile in Zagreb, Franjo Gaži, loaned me such Soviet journals, in which I found among others some of your first stories. The story "Noč na Marse" ("A Night on Mars") struck me so much that I had it translated and published in that book of mine, *Od Lukijana do Lunjika (From Lucian to the Lunik*, in Croatoserbian an anagram), Zagreb 1964, between the stories of Fredric Brown (USA) and John Christopher (UK). Looking at my anthology again after probably thirty years, I find that each story is preceded, on the model of US SF journals, by a little encouraging comment of mine. I won't inflict all of it upon you, but perhaps I can translate its last sentence: "The high degree of the Strugatskys' artisanal knowledge is visible also in the composition and character drawings of this story, but it was chosen because it is warmer and less technologized than the other ones, dealing (even literally) with the birth of the first new man on Mars." Though my vocabulary has changed since, I don't think I'd retract this thumbnail judgment.

In 1967–68, then, during my teaching in Amherst Massachusetts, I somehow persuaded the New York publisher Random House to publish an anthology of what I called "Warsaw Pact" SF, but the more orthodox US editor Christopher Cerf called it "socialist SF." It should be recalled that this was at the heyday of a strong youth revolt in the USA, when old taboos were crumbling there too and a curiosity about Russia and socialism was widespread. A first part of the book *Other Worlds, Other Seas* (New York 1970) was devoted to four stories by Lem, who thus had his first breakthrough in the English-speaking world, but it included also stories by Al'tov, Yarov, Varshavsky, and Dneprov. I had concluded the Strugatskys' forte was novels, and bent my efforts toward securing them book-length translation in USA (which unfortunately came about only at the end of the 1970s, edited by the excellent Roger De Garis). In order to help this along, and to clarify to myself and others just what were they doing, I then published in the 1970s (alongside a booklet on a *Bibliography*

of Russian SF 1956–74 and an essay on "The Utopian Tradition of Russian Science Fiction") three essays in professional journals: "Criticism of the Strugatskii Brothers' Work," following the ups and downs of the critical reaction in the USSR, and two essays on their literary opus which were fused in the article about them for my book *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (1988) … I shall stop here, for the rest were minor matters, such as translations of those essays into German or Serbo-Croatian, entries on the Strugatskys in half a dozen encyclopedias, or including an essay about them by Tatiana Chernysheva into a periodical issue on "Warsaw Pact SF" I edited.

Why did I do all of this? Why did the tales of the Strugatskys speak to my generation? I'm not sure I fully understand it, for elective affinities are mysterious affairs. As for me, I read and wrote about them out of an appreciation that here was a voice both firmly rooted in Russian and Soviet life, language, and mores (if there is a richer portrayal of Soviet bureaucracy than the one in *The Tale of the Troika*, I have missed it) and yet speaking to everybody in my generation, from Yugoslavia where I hailed from to the US and Canada where I was teaching. For that biune voice spoke of our generous dreams, which I would call utopian-socialist ones, as well as, dialectically, of their increasingly somber fall into anti-utopia. It had all our strengths and no little of our confusion. It made us laugh, sympathize, shudder in disgust, and (even in the most painful moments shown to us) wonder how artistic or literary or indeed – as I would argue – science-fictional cognition could illuminate even the most intricate swamps of our existences. I argued that this double horizon is what gives them universal relevance, even in translations that necessarily slighted their exuberant command of many Russian idioms, from the bureaucratic through the intellectual to the folktale idiolects. Perhaps I can conclude this as I did in my text on *Snail on the Slope*:

> [This novel] is a legitimate continuation of the Gogol and Shchedrin vein of Russian literature, and of the great Soviet tradition of Il'f-Petrov and Olesha, at the borders of SF and satire as in Mayakovsky's late plays. Fusing this tradition with the stimulus of Swift, Kafka, Lem and English fantastic literature such as Lewis Carroll, the Strugatskys offer the reader a brilliant work of word-art – a mimicry of bureaucratese and academese, of philistine and fanatic jargon, irony and parody, colloquialisms and neologisms. Thus, they are polemic at the deepest literary level, making untenable what they called the fiery banalities of the SF genre.

Thus, I did not do what I did for my career (I'm a comparatist and not a Slavist, and anyway to my knowledge no foreign Slavist wrote about the Strugatskys until I started – SF was "paraliterature"), I certainly got no money for it but spent a lot. I simply felt that, for all the critiques I might have on this or that aspect, we were (as Arkadiy kindly told me in Moscow) "our people," I guess a Russification of the yiddish *unser mensch*. Alas, this was the only visit to Russia I managed in my life, a week's stopover between Tokyo – for I shared on a lower level his interest in Japan – and Beograd … And it is at that point, dear Boris Natanovich, that I had my only brief phone talk with you.

Is all of this simply a tale of sunken Atlantis? It may seem so today, when the reigning ideology of our globalized globe has only contempt for the experiences between 1917 and 1989, the "brief twentieth century." But I don't believe that: long-duration problems to which we all spoke, very few better than the Strugatskys, are still open, to problems not solved or botched by socialism there have been added huge new problems of a different type of war, oppression, and brainwashing which your works at least hinted at. History does not progress as an arrow, we have learned, but at best as a spiral and at worst as a meander: it will have to revisit the unsolved problems of huge human waste and destruction. And when it does, it will find the Strugatskys as guides to its visitations.

A proof (if maybe small)? Next week I am going to Rome to talk to the Slavic doctoral seminar at one of its universities about SF. The text everybody will have to read? *Snail on the Slope*!

Happy seventieth birthday, dear Boris Natanovich. This may be small comfort when aging, I know: still, for whatever it's worth, you're not only being read in the twenty-first century, I believe you will also be read in the twenty-second one.

Respectful and warm greetings from your admirer, Darko Suvin

Lucca, April 2003