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Reality and science fiction

The question of genre in the novels and novellas
(1961 – 1970) of the Strugatsky Brothers
with special reference to Стажеры and
Отель “У погибшего альпиниста”



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MA Thesis
Mark Husmann
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04 NOV 2005

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1. Introduction

The brothers Arkady Natanovich and Boris Natanovich Strugatsky are indubitably the best-known Russian science fiction authors. By the death of Arkady Strugatsky in 1991 they had written twenty-five novels and novellas (повести), besides plays, articles, critical works and numerous short stories, which have been translated into more than twenty languages (including, interestingly, Esperanto!). They provided film scripts for Alexander Sokurov's Дни затмения (Lenfilm, 1989), which is based on their short novel За миллиард лет до конца света, and Andrey Tarkovsky's most famous film Сталкер (Mosfilm, 1979), adapted from their short novel Пикник на обочине. Grigory Kromanov's ОТЕЛЬ "У ПОГИБШЕГО

АЛЬПИНИСТА" (Tallinfilm, 1979) is based on their novella of

the same title. They also wrote the script for the most extravagant and costly Russian-German Co-production ever

- Peter Fleischmann's Es Ist Nicht Leicht, ein Gott zu Sein

(Hard to Be a God), based on the novel ТРУДНО БЫТЬ

БОГОМ. This is, according to both Soviet and Western

science fiction critics (such as Darko Suvin and Franz

Rottensteiner, to name only two of the best-known), the first

of the Strugatskys' true masterpieces.



Fig. 1: Arkady Natanovich Strugatsky (Аврора; 1981, no. 2, p. 150)

Arkady Natanovich Strugatsky was born on August 28, 1925 in Batumi, Georgia. He was trained as a Japanese specialist in the Military Academy for Foreign Languages in Moscow from 1943 to 1949. After his resignation from military service in 1955 he worked in various research institutes. For most of his life he lived in Moscow.

Boris Natanovich Strugatsky was born on April 15, 1933 in Leningrad. He studied astronomy from 1950 to 1955 at Leningrad University and worked in the Pulkovo observatory as an astrophysicist and specialist for data processing till 1965. He lives in Petersburg .



Fig. 2: Boris Natanovich Strugatsky
(Аврора: 1981, no. 2, p. 150)

The Strugatskys published their first book Страна багровых туч in 1959, and it marks the beginning of an extraordinarily fruitful and long-lasting co-authorship. However, it was not at all what either brother had had in mind when they started writing their first novel in the late 1950s. In an interview with Alexander Fyodorov, Arkady Strugatsky tells an anecdote of how the idea of writing a book first grew out of light-hearted banter, when the Strugatskys were with a group of friends and were criticising two novels they had just read: Аргонавты вселенной by Vladimir Nikolaevich Vladko and Emergency Landing on Venus by Konstantin Volkov. The two novels were in their opinion full of clichés and they tore them to pieces. When some of their friends implied that it is always easier to criticise other people than actually write one's own book, they rose to the challenge. "We could do that!" - "Want to bet?" - "Done!" was the response. The plan for the first book of the first cycle of novels by the Strugatskys was born (Rottensteiner, 1986:15).

Their aim has always been to be realistic in the sense that the "normal" would stand out in an unrealistic setting. The result would be what they call "realistic fantasy":

Современная фантастика содержит в себе два основных направления. Одно из них трактует обширный круг проблем, связанных с темой Человек и Природа, Человек и Вселенная. Это и есть то, что обычно называют научной фантастикой.

Другое направление тесно связано с кругом проблем, трактующих тему Человек и Общество, Человек и Социум. Это то, что мы склонны называть «реалистической фантастикой», как ни парадоксально звучит такой термин.

(From an interview with the Strugatskys, in: Аврора, no. 2, 1981, pp. 150 – 155; for a translation see Appendix E)

What followed is a literary career which has no equal in the genre of science fiction: two authors writing all their major works in tandem over a period of more than thirty years. This seems even more interesting if one considers that the two brothers did not live together, but in different towns no less than 650 km apart (Arkady in Moscow and Boris in Leningrad / Petersburg). Throughout their working life they met in Bologoye - a provincial town halfway



Fig. 3: Arkady Strugatsky (left) and Boris Strugatsky (right) at work (Source: Urs in: Der Spiegel, no. 14, 1988)

between Moscow and Petersburg -, in a café which now has a little sign saying “У Бору и Аркашу”, meaning Boris’s and Arkady’s Place (Rottensteiner, 1986:7).

This thesis will attempt to outline the development of the Strugatskys’ works, with emphasis on the question of genre. As *science fiction* and *fantasy/ the fantastic* are rather complex genres, it will be necessary to take a closer look at all varieties the Strugatskys offer us. I will therefore have a close look at the period from 1961 to 1970 and illustrate the development of genre in the works published during that time. I will also show that the Strugatskys made careful choice of genre, or even created a mixture of genres in order to achieve certain effects. Many of their novellas were thus encoded in an Aesopian manner, conveying a rather dissident message to a dissident readership.

There is a seemingly endless number of definitions of the genres science fiction and the fantastic, as well as numerous sub-categories such as hard and soft science fiction, Gothic science fiction, absurdist science fiction, proto science fiction and different closely-related genres, such as utopias / anti-utopias, fabulation, fantasy, magic realism, science fantasy (for comprehensive definitions Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia is recommended); and to categorise all of the Strugatskys’ works in this sense would be too large a task for this thesis. I shall rather try to illustrate the diversity of their lifework with excerpts from their fiction, with the help of interviews given by the authors, and with articles both by the Strugatskys themselves and by critics. This diversity is of significance, inasmuch as their work always received official approbation as long as it was categorised as science fantasy. Only after a transition into a surrealist depiction of contemporary sociological problems were they attacked by dogmatic critics. The divide between those critics and the audiences both in the East and in the West then became particularly marked (Kasack, 1986:1246).

What is of interest here is the Strugatskys' ability to examine Soviet society from different angles by carefully using a mixture of genres which the Soviet readership would be able to read as a depiction of their society, and which – at the same time – would slip through the net of official censorship. Particular attention will be paid to the following two short novels, because they are mileposts of the Strugatskys' development of genre:

- Стажеры (The Apprentices; see chapter 4)
- Отель “У погибшего Альпиниста” (Hotel “The Lost Mountaineer”; see chapter 5)

Although both were written and published between 1960 and 1970, they very clearly show evidence of debt to a variety of genres. This is particularly interesting, since both of them can be called science fiction novellas. However, the differences in plot and style are so distinct that they can be regarded as parts of different phases. What the two have in common is a strong moral message: in Стажеры the seeds for strong anti-utopian elements in the works to come are planted. These are later developed into social satire,

a way of criticizing people or ideas in a humorous way, or a piece of writing or play which uses this style. (from: <http://www.onelook.com>; accessed 27.July 2004)

These anti-utopian works were seen by the critics and the readership as “романы-предупреждение” – novels warning of future dangers for Soviet society. Although the Strugatskys made clear in various published interviews that their intention never was to openly criticise the Soviet Union as such, Soviet readers were clearly capable of reading their works as brave social satires on Soviet society. These were very different from mainstream Soviet science fiction, “which was – apart from the Strugatskys – rather dull” (personal interview with Marianna Taymanova, 20. July 2004).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will examine why the Strugatskys decided to write fantastic literature, and what is the relationship between their work and non-literal reality.

2. Defining the literary fantastic and science fiction

2.1. The dilemma of definition

Reflecting on the literary genre of the fantastic brings one up against three major problems concerning definition. Firstly, the content of fantastic literature defies definition by nature, as it deals with the supernatural, paranormal, mystical and magical – something which has not yet been explained or which is inexplicable, albeit recognisable. Secondly, these problems have been the subject of debate amongst literary scholars since the beginnings of literary criticism, as Cornwell (1990) outlines in Part One – Background and Theory - of The Literary Fantastic. Consequently, there have been hundreds of attempts (and failures) to define what is fantastic. Most of them are useful in themselves and they can be helpful devices for analysing particular authors or specific literary works. However, they often overlap with other definitions or partly contradict them. This means that one generic system of definitions can agree with another one only in a few, specific areas, and very rarely do two different scholars mean the same thing when they discuss science fiction and fantastic literature. Thirdly, readers as well as publishers (see chapter 2.3.1.) have their own ideas of genre and sub-genre and their definitions, and they have their own terminology. This is by and large the result of marketing strategies. The problem we have here is that this terminology also overlaps with academic terminology.

In addition to these difficulties, the author is confronted with one further, linguistic, problem in this thesis: the Russian terms фантастика and научная фантастика (which apply to all of the Strugatskys' works) are usually translated as fantasy and science fiction. One should be aware that the English terms do not necessarily describe the same kinds of literature as their Russian counterparts, for all the obvious reasons: the differences between Western science fiction and Russian научная фантастика in terms of their publication, sociological function, use of literary devices, etc., are enormous, and these will be clarified later on. Curiously enough, an example of socio-linguistic "feedback" adds to the confusion over literary terms - the Russian language has adopted the term фэнтези¹ from the English language. However, it sometimes refers to a different genre than the term фантастика (see chapter 2.3.2.).

2.2. A short reflection on definitions by Tzvetan Todorov and the French theoreticians

Caillois delivers a solid but arguable basis for the discussion of the definition of the fantastic: according to him, the fantastic appears as a rupture in the universal order. The impossible represents an aggression that threatens the security of a coherence which has by definition banned the impossible (Caillois, 1996). Todorov, however, argues, that there are two kinds of order: one of the real world (natural) and one of the supernatural. Therefore Todorov only labels a literary image as fantastic if it is unclear to which order it belongs. If it turns out to be natural, it can at best be described as uncanny. If it turns out to be supernatural, it belongs to the realm of the marvellous:

¹ For example in: Фантасты живут в реальности, an interview with Boris Strugatsky; interviewer: Tatyana Khmelnik.

Le fantastique occupe le temps de cette incertitude; dès qu'on choisit l'une ou l'autre réponse, on quitte le fantastique pour entrer dans un genre voisin, l'étrange ou le merveilleux. Le fantastique, c'est l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel (Todorov, 1970:29).

Whether Castex calls a fantastic image a “mystery”, Vax regards it as “inexplicable”, or Caillois defines it as something “inadmissible” (Todorov, 1970: 30-31) - most theoreticians accept reality as the basis of a universal order, the idea of which can be violated by a fantastic image.

In the following chapters “fantastic” is referred to in Todorov’s sense, as he appears to provide a most comprehensive definition of the fantastic, which can be applied to the Strugatskys’ works.

2.3. Western and Eastern fantastic literature

2.3.1. Science fiction and fantasy as publishing categories

In Western Europe and the USA, science fiction and fantasy constitute the two major genres within the larger category of fantastic literature. Although there are fundamental differences between those two genres (see chapter 2.3.2.1.) they have often been published in combined editions and sold from bookshelves labelled “Science Fiction and Fantasy”. John Clute and Peter Nicholls points out that

[...] it [science fiction] is certainly a publishing category, and in the real world this is of more pragmatic importance than anything the theorists may have to say about it. On the other hand, the label "sf" on a book is wholly subject to the whims of publishers and editors, and the label has certainly appeared on some very unlikely books. An additional complication arises because some writers fight hard to avoid the label, perhaps feeling that it might deleteriously affect their sales and/or reputations (e.g., Kurt Vonnegut Jr, John Wyndham). Publishers apply similar cautionary measures to potential bestsellers, which are seldom labelled as sf even when that is exactly what they are (although this has been less true in the post-Star Wars period than in, say, the 1970s), on the grounds that genre sf when so labelled, while normally selling steadily, rarely enters the best-seller class (Clute and Nicholls, 1995).

Unlike Soviet writers, Western writers have always been prompted as well as restricted by a powerful market's taste. Whereas members of the Union of Soviet Writers were under the thumb of official censorship, writers in the West had to fulfil the market's demands. Since the beginnings of popular science fiction and fantasy in 1937 (when John W. Campbell became editor of the magazine *Astounding Stories*, which he renamed *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1938), their readership has been largely dominated by 15 to 25-year-old males with a huge appetite for adventure, galactic warfare and sword-and-sorcery. They created a market which was then flooded with literature of largely conservative and reactionary, sometimes even fascist tendencies. In contrast, in the Soviet Union, writers were ideologically bound by the official dogma of Socialist Realism:

Socialist realism is a teleologically-oriented style of realistic art which has as its purpose the furtherance of the goals of Communism. Originating in the aesthetic philosophy of Maxim Gorki, it was from its adoption by the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934 at the Congress of Soviet Writers the official policy of the Soviet Union:
"Socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its

revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism." [...] The art produced under socialist realism is realistic, optimistic, and heroic.

(from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_realism; accessed 27.July 2004)

This meant a constant struggle with dogmatic critics and union secretaries which restricted even the most prominent writers in their creativity and exposed them to censorship. On the other hand, critics were equally restricted, and Brown (1993: 10) argues that their struggle resulted in an "Aesopian language" - a technique of hinting and circumlocution which was used by some sensitive critics to maintain a covert form of dialogue with both libertarian authors and initiated readers.

2.3.2. Distinctions between science fiction, fantasy, научная фантастика and фантастика

2.3.2.1. Science fiction and fantasy

The preceding sections will have indicated that the author regards both science fiction and fantasy as sub-genres of fantastic literature. In both cases there must be a *novum* - an element of something unknown or impossible in the here-and-now reality - which contradicts the reader's common sense and real-life experience, or, as Suvin puts it, "empirical environment":

[science fiction is] a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal

device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment
(Suvin, D., in: Clute and Nicholls, 1995).

Since this definition also fits the genre of fantasy, more accurate distinctions must be made. One obvious approach lies in analysing the tension between the reader's real environment and the fictional environment created by the author. In the case of science fiction we find very often a realistic setting, even though it is in most cases depicted as a futuristic one or on a different planet. Science fiction does not preclude a realistic projection of society into the future - on the contrary. In the majority of works of science fiction we can immediately recognise sociological patterns (such as gender roles, hierarchical structures, etc.) and the author's real-life values. Space flight and even crossing the threshold of the speed of light (which is, as far as we know, impossible) take place within an "atmosphere of scientific credibility" (Moskovitz in: Thomsen and Fischer, 1980:28). As a founding father of this genre Jules Verne should be named:

[He] developed his characteristic technique of inserting quasiscientific explanations into a simply told adventure imbued with the romance of geography.
(Clute and Nicholls, 1995)

Scientific progress (regardless of whether its images are realistic or pure invention) is the main means of explaining the fictional world to the reader of science fiction. In this respect, the literary methods of many science fiction novels bear resemblance to those of historical novels. Only if the reader's imagination is not stretched too far by pure invention does a future world (or a past world) remain credible.

In fantasy, this scientific credibility is in most cases suspended right from the start: the readers find themselves confronted with extremely alien settings (different galaxies, alternative universes, etc.) and societies which do not bear any similarity to their own in real life, in which magicians and semi-god-like warriors are popular characters, and the impossible (magic) is normal. Whereas most science fiction plots take place in the future, fantasy plots frequently take place outside our perception of time.

Nicholls argues:

Sf must by definition follow natural law whereas fantasy may and mostly does suspend it. Fantasy need not be susceptible to "natural" or cognitive explanation; indeed, supernatural explanation is at fantasy's heart (Clute and Nicholls, 1995).

This is important to remember when discussing the works of the Strugatskys, where it is useful to pinpoint the departure from science and the entrance of the fantastic in each story.

2.3.2.2. Science fiction in the East and in the West

Although there are many differences between science fiction in Western countries and the Soviet Union regarding their publication and their actual contents it can be argued that the formal devices an author uses to create a credible environment are in fact very similar. There are obvious differences in literary quality between, for example, an escapist space-opera adventure story and a carefully constructed, subversive estrangement of a real society. However, both works will employ similar techniques by which an effect of recognition of real-life truths is achieved. In both cases, it is made clear why the fictional world is different

from the real world. Badly written science fiction falls back on a scientifically unsound but often highly entertaining techno-jargon, whereas science fiction of a higher literary value offers explanations which afford insights into our very own society. The reader can view the object of the author's attention (e.g. our own society) through a set of filters: the society may be projected into a future where certain sociological aspects like warfare or gender roles have been eliminated, so that, as in a scientific experiment, any particular problem can be focussed upon:

Она [научная фантастика], свободно оперируя понятиями пространства и времени, произвольно меняет соотношения и пропорции явлений, чтобы ярче выделить, заострить ведущий реальный конфликт, очистив его от случайных наслоений: напр., условный перенос действия во времени и пространстве в «Марсианских хрониках» Р. Брэдбери и в повести «Трудно быть богом» А. и Б. Стругацких позволяет показать совр. [современные] земные проблемы в их глобальном масштабе. (Р. Р. Сурков, 1968: 140; for translation see Appendix E)

2.3.2.3. Научная фантастика and фантастика

The accepted opinion in the Soviet Union was that научная фантастика was more or less фантастика with a scientific touch to it. In fact, many authors and critics, including the Strugatskys themselves, use both terms synonymously. The Краткая литературная энциклопедия (1968: 140-141) defines the terms as follows:

Научная фантастика - условное обозначение обширной отрасли совр. худож. лит-ры [современной художественной литературы] (частично - театра, кино,

живописи); Н.ф. базируется на совр. [современном] уровне науч. [научного] познания и осмысления действительности и широко пользуется методикой совр. [современной] науки - моделированием явлений, приемом мысленного эксперимента - в применении к иск-ву [искусству]. В США возник соответств. термин - «science fiction», привившийся и в др. [других] странах. Многие считают эпитет «научная» необязательным. Эпитет «научная» помогает отграничить Н.ф. от более широкого понятия фантастики - от сказок и мифов, от романтич. [романтической] фантастики (напр., Э.Т.А. Гофмана), от fantasy, широко бытующей сейчас на Западе, от сатиры и от философ. [философской] прозы, где фантастика применяется как худож. [художественный] прием, без попытки ее логич. [логического] обоснования и мотивировки. Н.ф. определилась как массовое явление именно в ту эпоху, когда наука стала играть решающую роль в жизни общества, условно говоря - после второй мировой войны, хотя осн. [основные] черты совр. [современной] Н.ф. наметились уже в творчестве Г. Уэллса и частично К. Чапека.

(for translation see Appendix E)

Like the above-mentioned Wells and Chapek, the Strugatskys use the tools of science fiction to disguise their works. It is safe to assume that official censors would not have allowed open criticism of the Soviet Union to be published (interview with Marianna Taymanova, 20.July 2004). Nevertheless, the Strugatskys went against the mainstream of Soviet utopian literature depicting a bright communist future, and most of their novels and novellas must be seen as романы-предупреждение – warning novels (<http://www.rusf.ru/abs/index.htm>; accessed 27. July 2004).

3. Brief overview of distinct phases in the Strugatskys' works

The Strugatskys' novels and novellas can be divided into phases according to the schema laid out below, and the phases can be defined by the following criteria:

1. The time of writing (which might appear trivial at first glance, since the phases we have postulated do not overlap time-wise; but those works that do not fit into these phases were all written after the late 1960s and during the time of the fourth phase);
2. The characters and how well we are acquainted with them (several characters appear in more than one book, e.g. Alexander Ivanovich Privalov in Понедельник and in Тройка);
3. Plot and style.

The postulated four distinctive phases are²:

Phase 1 (written between 1959 and 1961): Страна, Путь, Полдень, Стажеры;

Phase 2 (written between 1961 and 1964): Попытка, Радуга, Трудно быть богом, Вещи;

Phase 3 (written between 1964 and 1968): Понедельник, Улитка, Нашествие, Тройка, Лебеди;

Phase 4 (written between 1968 and 1985): Остров, Малыш, Пикник, Парень, За миллиард лет, Жук, Волны.

I base my categorisation on the first part of Martin Weber's essay "Satire und Utopie im Privalov-Zyklus der Brüder Strugackij" (Weber, 1990: 3). He describes the four major phases as follows:

1. the early "idyllic" futuristic/utopian stories written in the late 1950s and early 1960s;

2. the more wistful and bleak period of the first half of the 1960s;
3. the extremely satirical and least realistic period from the mid-1960s to 1968;
4. finally the period starting with the first novella of the Maxim Kammerer cycle - Остров.

Weber also mentions two novellas and three novels which do not fit into any of the above phases: Отель, Град, Повесть, Хромая судьба and Отягощенные злом. They were all written after the beginning of the fourth and last phase; none of the characters appear in any other work; their plots are independent with no links to other works, and in the case of Отель the same applies to style and genre.

It cannot be the task of this thesis to illustrate all the literary phases. Having looked at one typical first-phase novella, in this chapter I will discuss in which way the genre of the atypical Отель is different from that of all the other stories.

Although several different versions of Отель exist, I shall be referring to the edition ТЕКСТ, Moscow, 1995, which to my knowledge is the latest publication and contains the novella Отель (this version has no epigraph, which is of great importance to the question of genre, as well as the scenario version [Отель (сценарий)], which includes the epigraph)).

² NB: short titles are given here; for full titles refer to Appendix D.

4. Genre analysis of Стажеры (The Apprentices)

4.1. Introduction

In the author's opinion, it is perfectly appropriate to call the first phase of the Strugatskys' works a cycle, since all of the novellas (Страна, Путь, Полдень, Стажеры) and several stories are set in the same universe, with the same group of protagonists. Although some of those protagonists appear much later in Вещи, this novella can be regarded as a part of a different phase, as the final section of this chapter will show. Стажеры marks the end of the Strugatskys' first cycle (1959 to 1961) of futuristic stories and novellas.

The universe described in Стажеры is, in a physical sense, *our* universe. Our solar system is described realistically in a Jules-Vernian or Wellsian manner - there is nothing supernatural or even odd to be found here, even though the events take place a few hundred years in the future.

Стажеры is the story of the eighteen-year-old Yury, a vacuum-welder (a rather charming remnant of Socialist Realism), who has lost his group of fellow travellers on their way to Saturn. Since there is no regular connection to Saturn, he has to find some other spaceship to take him there. In lucky circumstances he meets Ivan Zhilin, who works on the Takhmasib and introduces Yury to his idols Yurkovsky, Bykov and Krutikov. They offer him a quasi apprenticeship on board their spaceship and agree to give him a lift to Saturn. Their journey, through space and to the planet Mars, is highly perilous.

During this journey we learn about the characters' attitudes to life, work, society. Through their eyes we see a future state, inhabited by people whose mindsets, ambitions,

fears and ideas are yet all too familiar. While accepting a futuristic plot for the sake of a readable storyline, the reader finds that the human condition has not changed much, and is able to see here-and-now human life through the filter of science fiction. Again – this technique allows the Strugatskys to write about a society which the readership is able to identify as Soviet, yet official censorship is bypassed.

4.2. Techniques of mainstream science fiction

In Стажеры as well as in other works, the Strugatskys use techno-jargon sparingly. They rarely indulge in descriptions of futuristic hardware. When they do so, it fulfils the task of contextualising the fictional world. Frequent practice for many science fiction writers is to use sets of conventional science fiction images, which are easily recognised by the reader as futuristic, such as gadgets, weaponry, means of transport which have not yet been developed, but with a firmly established place in science fiction literature and film: transporter beams, ray guns, space ships. This has of course to be seen in a historical context. A *videophone* (Стажеры: 160) e.g. is not a science fiction term for a reader of the 21st century, but certainly was in the 1960s. There are very few of these images to be found in the works by the Strugatskys, and Стажеры is no exception. *Atomcars* (Стажеры: 157), *cars with spread wing-cases* (Стажеры: 159), *photon rockets* and *planetliners* (Стажеры: 172) are only briefly mentioned in order to provide a futuristic setting for the vicinity of the spaceport.

The only passages where the authors produce techno jargon can be found in chapter five. This is the first chapter set on board the Takhmasib - a spaceship driven by a *photon reactor* (Стажеры: 210). Even here the image of an extremely sophisticated technology is

used only in order to point out that humans are in complete control over it and how much their mastery of technology is admired by the apprentice:

Жилин пошевелил коротким носом.

«Чую,» сказал он.

Юра тоже принялся.

«Каша, что ли?» спросил он неуверенно.

«Нет,» сказал Жилин. «Зашалил недублированный фазоциклер. Ужасный шалун этот недублированный фазоциклер. Чую, что сегодня его придется регулировать.»

Юра с сомнением посмотрел на него. Это могло быть шуткой, а могло быть правдой. Жилин обладал изумительным чутьем на неисправности (Стажеры: 203).

It turns out it is not a joke when Captain Bykov says on the next page:

«Иван,» сказал Быков, «недублированный фазоциклер теряет настройку.

Займись.» (Стажеры: 204).

This little episode later turns out to be the introduction to a more profound statement on mankind and technology. Zhilin successfully clears the malfunction and takes Yury to the ship's engine-room:

Он со звоном откидывал и снова захлопывал какие-то крышки, отодвигал полупрозрачные заслонки, за которыми кабалистически мерцала путаница

печатных схем, включал маленькие экраны, на которых тотчас возникали яркие точки импульсов, прыгающие по координатной сетке, запускал крепкие ловкие пальцы во что-то невообразимо сложное, многоцветное, вспыхивающее, и делал он все это небрежно, легко, не задумываясь и до того ладно и вкусно, что Юре захотелось сейчас же сменить специальность и вот так же непринужденно повелевать поразжающим воображение гигантским организмом фотонного чуда.

«У меня слюнки текут,» сказал Юра.

Жилин засмеялся.

«Правда,» сказал Юра. «Не знаю, для вас это все, конечно, привычно и буднично, может быть, даже надоело, но это все равно здорово. Я люблю, когда большой и сложный механизм - и рядом один человек ... повелитель. Это здорово, когда человек - повелитель.» (Стажеры: 210).

The above is a good example of the Strugatskys' general attitude towards technology in literature. For them, it is simply a vehicle to convey human values, and there is no blind faith in technology, since it is humans who are in charge and responsible. Unlike 1940s' US American science fiction, where intergalactic wars were invented in order to feature astonishing apparatuses and replace sociological ideas, the Strugatskys create technology as a background or even as a means to make a moral statement on the meaning of life and one's own purpose in it.

There is still a lot of entertaining adventure motifs to be found in Стажеры, which do not carry a moral message. E.g. the scientists have some trouble with a Martian life-form which they casually call a flying leech:

[...] Пыль на площадке была изрыта, Матти со злостью топтал характерные округлые ямы - следы "летучей тиявки". «Почему она все время лезет на площадку?» думал он. «Ну, ползала бы вокруг дома. Ну, вломилась бы в гараж. Нет, она лезет на площадку. Человечиной здесь пахнет, что ли?» (Стажеры: 178).

As exotic as the idea of a dangerous Martian flying leech sounds, it cannot in my opinion be regarded as a science fiction motif. It is not the distinct new idea that, for science fiction, is the essential ingredient, as Dick puts it in a letter to John Betancourt (Dick, 1995: 9-11). The fact that the setting is exotic does not amount to a challenge of accepted values, morals or political beliefs. In fact, not only is this type of space adventure not subversive, it is, on the contrary, conservative, by its transference of the values accepted by the Soviet reader to a different environment (in time or space) and the assumption that they are still valid. A case in point is the rather militarist approach to the troubles with the flying leeches, which, although they are an almost completely unknown alien species, the scientists decide to hunt down and kill:



Fig. 4: Philip K. Dick
(Clute and Nicholls, 1995)

«Мы очень мало знаем о тиявках,» сказал Ливанов, «Пока мы можем полагаться только на два средства: пули и огнеметы.» (Стажеры: 195).

With the image of the flying leeches the Strugatskys come close to a horror motif:

И наконец Юра увидел. Пиявки были похожи на исполинских серо-желтых головастиков. Гибкие, необычайно подвижные, несмотря на свои размеры и, вероятно, немалый вес, они стремительно выскакивали из тучи пыли, проносились в воздухе несколько десятков метров и снова исчезали в пыли.
(Стажеры: 221).

However, since they are annoying pests rather than a life-threatening danger to the scientists, this image must be regarded as too weak to be truly horrifying; and since there is nothing supernatural or uncanny about them, they are a mere standard motif of mainstream science fiction.

4.3. Fantasy motifs and absurdity

Стажеры is a landmark in the Strugatskys' works, inasmuch as it introduces irony in a large section in chapter 10, subtitled "The tale of the gigantic fluctuation". Here the authors seem to experiment with irony, which is an innovation to their works so far. It is in fact their ability to ridicule certain characteristics of society (in the case of Стажеры, it is faith in science) which they will become famous for in the second half of the 1960s.

"The tale of the gigantic fluctuation" is a story within a story, told by Zhilin. The Strugatskys frequently use this method in their later novels and novellas (for example in Хромая судьба, where half the book is a story within the story), in order to create a tension between the frame story and the story within. Very often there is something fundamentally different about these two levels. In the case of Стажеры, it is an excursion into a completely different genre: fantasy.

In this tale Zhilin meets a stranger at a beach who is desperate to talk to him about his own tragedy. He tells Zhilin about weird accidents which started in his childhood, such as his shattering four glasses and a bowl in his violin classes. He gives a reasonable explanation: acoustic resonance, created by him playing the violin, was responsible. The stranger continues telling Zhilin about such *accidents*, always providing explanations: he would drop slices of bread *always* with the buttered side up, which is not unfortunate in itself, the stranger would explain, but it represents a fundamental violation of the theory of probabilities (Стажеры: 283). His uncle was the first to realise that there was something wrong with him, and by making him toss coins, he found his assumption borne out:

«В первый раз я бросил монетку сто раз, и дядя сто раз. У него орел выпал пятьдесят три раза, а у меня девяносто восемь. У дяди, знаете ли, глаза на лоб вылезли. И у меня тоже. Потом я бросил монетку еще двести раз, и, представьте себе, орел у меня выпал сто девяносто шесть раз. Мне уже тогда следовало понять, чем такие вещи должны кончиться.» (Стажеры: 283).

At first the stranger was merely amused. He describes the phenomenon as follows:

«[...] А это отнюдь не чудо, это вполне реальный, но необычайно маловероятный факт. Это была бы гигантская флюктуация - ничтожно вероятное отклонение от наиболее вероятного состояния.» (Стажеры: 284).

But the incidences became even more incredible:

Увидеть, например, двенадцатикратную радугу было для него пустяком - он видел ее шесть или семь раз.

«Я побью любого синоптика-любителя,» удрученно хвастался он. «Я видел полярные сияния в Алма-Ате, Брокенское видение на Кавказе и двадцать раз наблюдал знаменитый зеленый луч, или “меч голода”, как его называют. Я приехал в Батуми, и там началась засуха. Тогда я отправился путешествовать в Гоби, и трижды попал там под тропический ливень.» (Стажеры: 284).

The stranger, a man of scientific education, fails to define the incidences in proper scientific terms and turns to supernatural explanations:

«Мне казалось очень забавным чувствовать себя средоточием всех чудес на свете.»

«Чем» изумился я.

«Э-э-э... средоточием чудес. Я не могу другого слова подобрать, хотя и пытался.» (Стажеры: 283).

The Strugatskys introduce this story with fairly harmless (and easily explicable) oddities. By intensifying the absurd aspects of the miracles and still providing reasonable scientific explanation, they lure the reader into a materialistic trap. The resonance phenomenon is widely known; and shattering glasses with high frequency sounds is easy to explain. Whether or not the reader believes in twelvefold rainbows, tropical showers of rain in the desert or the Brocken apparition, it is up to us to realise that our leg is being pulled. But the question raised is not whether the story told by the stranger is true, but rather: are we able or, for that matter, *willing* to accept miracles as something supernatural or do we believe that everything can be explained by science? Towards the end of this story the Strugatskys reveal their own opinion by reducing the incidences to utter absurdity:

Неоднократно к нему в палатку - он много путешествовал - залетали шаровые молнии и часами висели под потолком. В конце концов он привык к этому и использовал шаровые молнии как электрические лампочки: читал. (Стажеры: 285).

The stranger also claims to have been hit by a small meteorite; that he had suddenly become the source of a strong magnetic field for ten seconds so that he was hit by all kinds of metal objects; and, finally, that an hour ago a friend of his has flown off (Стажеры: 285 - 287). He even offers an explanation:

“Вы понимаете, это же совершенно невозможно,” бормотал феномен.

“Хаотическое движение молекул тела, броуновское движение частиц живого коллоида стало упорядоченным, ее оторвало от земли и унесло, совершенно не представляю куда. Очень, очень маловероятно... Вы мне теперь только скажите, должен я считать себя убийцей?” (Стажеры: 287).

It is this tongue-in-cheek style of raising a philosophical question that makes this passage stand out against the rest of the book. In later works we find this technique further developed (Понедельник, for instance, is a cavalcade of miraculous and absurd motifs and characters) and taken to extremes (in Улитка the whole world is made of fantastic absurdities where *normalities* become something special).

“The tale of the gigantic fluctuation” is a special episode in Стажеры and different from the rest of the text for three reasons: firstly, it is a story within a story, told from Zhilin’s

point of view. Secondly, it raises the philosophical question of the existence of the supernatural in the tradition of fantasy literature and does not present a moral dilemma. Thirdly, the technique by which the Strugatskys express their opinion is irony. Irony is used in other parts of the novella as well, but not to express the Strugatskys' own opinion.

4.4. Conclusion

Стажеры is a "realistic" portrayal of a future universe. By "realistic" we do not mean that it is probable that Saturn's satellites will be colonised at any time in the future, or that there probably are "flying leeches" on Mars. We now know for sure that there are not. But Стажеры was written in 1961, and the possibility of Martian life forms had not then been definitely ruled out by science. By "realistic" we rather mean that the characters are credible and their actions are justified by ethics that are at least familiar, if not acceptable, to us.

Стажеры appears to provide a mixture of genres. We can find conventional science fiction images (such as space travel in photon rockets), adventure motifs (hunting the Martian flying leeches), and even fantasy motifs (the miracles in "The tale of the gigantic fluctuation"). Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Стажеры is a pure science fiction novella. Science fiction is the genre for the main frame of the novella, and all the actions take place within this frame. The adventure plot and even more so the fantasy plot are merely episodes within the main story.

For the Strugatskys science is a tool. In this sense, they differ from most western mainstream science fiction writers of the same era, where science fiction all too often describes gleaming space armadas and a magnificent interstellar feudal empire at war with telepathic creatures from outer space. The task of such space operas is to entertain the readership and let

them escape into a future, fictitious world. In the case of Стажеры, however, science fiction is no more than a vehicle to convey rather common messages about the heroes' moral values and human relationships. Science fiction motifs like the spaceship Takhmasib are needed only to create a plausible environment for the largely realistic plot.

Стажеры is sparing with conventional hard science fiction devices (such as different kinds of gadgetry). Its emphasis clearly lies in portraying the struggle between morally good people (the main characters, including their differences to each other) and morally bad people (such as the capitalist exploiters on board the Bamberga). In this sense, Стажеры resembles a fairy tale. The title "The Apprentices" (note the plural) in my opinion implies that we all are apprentices, both the characters in the novella and the readers who identify with them.

Since the Strugatskys put a lot of effort into creating the perfect picture of a morally sincere and responsible scientist (Yurkovsky), one could easily think that he is set up as an ideal character. But in the end it is the young ones who we really sympathise with. It is Yury who realises that Yurkovsky's and Krutikov's deaths cannot be justified, that life itself is most important:

Подвиг - это хорошо, но человек должен жить. (Стажеры: 344).

Moreover, after all the adventures in space, it is Zhilin who finally has what is probably the most important insight, the point that the Strugatskys most solemnly and wistfully make, at the very end of the book:

"Главное – на Земле..." (Стажеры: 346).

This last note is the end of the Strugatskys' first and most idyllic phase, where conflicts arise almost entirely between the good and the better – the main moral values within Socialist Realism. However, in “The tale of the gigantic fluctuation” the Strugatskys have also introduced techniques of irony and absurdity which they will fully develop in their later, anti-utopian works.

5. Genre analysis of Отель “У погибшего Альпиниста” (Hotel “The Lost Mountaineer”)

5.1. The build-up to an apparent detective story

Отель opens like a typical detective story, like, for example Agatha Christie’s play The Mousetrap. Police Inspector Peter Glebsky arrives at the Hotel “The Lost Mountaineer”, where he is going to spend his two week winter holiday. He is welcomed by Alec Snevar, hotel manager and owner of Bottleneck Valley, where the hotel is situated. The hotel is outside a fictitious town called Muir, and from the names of the characters (e.g. Olaf Andvarafors, Luarvik L. Luarvik, and Brun - a possible short form of Brunhild) we can assume a Scandinavian setting. The monetary unit is *krona* or *krone* (крона) suggesting either Norway or Sweden. Denmark can be ruled out as a setting since it has no slopes steep enough for ski-runs.

Apart from the epilogue, which refers to a period more than twenty years after that of the main part of the book (fifteen chapters), the plot covers a period of only three days. The narrator of the story is Peter Glebsky himself - the protagonist. This character develops into a tragic anti-hero in the second half of the book (see 5.2.). From the point of view of genre, this is remarkable in itself, since Отель is the only story in which the theme of the anti-hero is fully developed: Peter Glebsky turns out to be not only a poor detective with a lack of imagination and wit, but also stubborn and narrow-minded to such an extent that he proves to be less humane than the aliens who intrude upon his skiing holiday and whom we suspect of being a gang of putative criminals (see 5.6.).

The reader is not led to suspect Glebsky's limitations right from the beginning, since his "interrogating" Snevar immediately after his arrival at the hotel seems to be normal behaviour for a policeman. He finds out that the hotel derived its name from an incident which happened six years earlier, when a mountaineer died in an avalanche which had possibly been caused by a rifle shot. The room where the mountaineer stayed has been kept exactly as it was before his death and has been turned into a museum. Glebsky also makes enquiries about the other hotel guests within the first five minutes of talking to Snevar - so far it all looks like perfectly normal behaviour for a curious police inspector who finds it difficult to detach from work.

The guests are Albert Moses, a thickset nouveau riche, and his wife Olga; Simon Simonet, physicist; du Barnstokr, a famous hypnotist; and finally Brun, an adolescent of indeterminate sex and du Barnstokr's nephew or niece. The hotel staff is limited to the landlord himself and Kaisa - we do not know whether she is Snevar's wife or assistant.

The impression of a detective story is intensified when Glebsky, Snevar and all the other guests have their dinner together at the end of day one (chapter 2): they talk about "astonishing things" happening in the hotel. And - since nothing has indicated yet that Отель is a science fiction novella - it is only the habitual Strugatsky reader who will be alerted by the casual mention of UFOs:

-В конце концов удивительное происходит не только в нашем отеле, сказал дю Барнстокр. -Достаточно вспомнить, например, о заменитых летающих неопознанных объектах ... (Отель: 280).

It is not yet clear whether this is a deliberate play on the genre or whether this is a story in which the fantastic is possible. There are elements reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes stories (e.g. The Hound of the Baskervilles) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Fantastic or supernatural elements are not uncommon in those stories, and give an extra dimension to rather rational and predictable plots. Those familiar with Conan Doyle's technique can be absolutely sure that the master detective will find a rational explanation for anything uncanny. This is not the case in Отель. Firstly, the detective-story style of the opening is something unprecedented in the authors' career; and then the way an element of the fantastic is introduced to make it sound ridiculous (just another UFO story) will have had a startling effect on a readership already used to regarding space travel and extraterrestrial life as a proper subject for science fiction.



Fig. 6: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
(Clute and Nicholls, 1995)

In this context the epigraph is of great importance. We find it at the beginning of Отель (сценарий):

“Как сообщают, в округе Винги близ местечка Мюр опустился летательный аппарат, из которого вышли желто-зеленые человечки с трех ногами и восемью глазами каждый. Падкая на сенсации бульварная пресса поспешила объявить их пришельцами из Космоса ...”

(Из газет) (Отель (сценарий): 150),

In my opinion this epigraph counteracts the effect of surprise by putting the reader on the right track from the very start. A reader familiar with the earlier works by the Strugatskys will take the mention of yellow-green manikins in the epigraph as a hint as to how the plot will develop, and will know that the story will turn out to be about extraterrestrial beings and not a Doylian detective story at all.

According to Boris Strugatsky, the epigraph was not meant to be more than a joke at the expense of the official Soviet press:

То, что Вы называете “предисловием” (“Как сообщают, в округе Винги...” и так далее) есть на самом деле шуточный эпиграф, высмеивающий тогдашние манеры советских официальных органов печати. (Boris Strugatsky in a personal letter to the author, 20.6.1998, see Appendix A for the full letter; for translation see Appendix E)

Towards the end of chapter 2 we are again diverted onto the detective-story trail as the dinner conversation returns to the “astonishing things”: apparently somebody had stolen du Barnstokr’s slippers and placed them in the library the next day; Mrs Moses has seen somebody staring into her window; Simonet claims he has found mysterious illegible notes in his technical books. Glebsky tries to demystify the incidents à la Sherlock Holmes:

-Я думаю, что это шутки кого-то из присутствующих, ответил я.

-Странная мысль, неодобрительно сказал Мозес.

-Нисколько, возразил я. -Во-первых, во всех этих действиях не усматривается никаких иных целей, кроме мистификации. Во-вторых, собака ведет себя так, словно в доме только свои. (ОТЕЛЬ: 283)

Later the same night (chapter 3) two more guests arrive: Olaf Andvarafors, who Glebsky calls a Viking, and a certain Mr Hinkus, a solicitor. The mystery is deepened when Moses reports his golden watch stolen. This is the first sign of happenings more serious than the initial “astonishing things” (ОТЕЛЬ: 302).

The genre, at this point, is still uncertain, as this could be one of du Barnstokr’s little tricks. He, for instance, produces a violet out of Glebsky’s buttonhole in the magician’s manner (ОТЕЛЬ: 274). However, when Glebsky finds an anonymous note in his room, warning him about the dangerous gangster Hinkus, aka Filin, there can be no more doubt that he is now involved in a criminal matter and that we are in fact reading a detective story (ОТЕЛЬ: 302).

From here on the story moves fast: Glebsky feels in his element and starts investigating his new case. At the same time he is being developed into a more ludicrous character: he compares himself to a “hero in a spy novel” (ОТЕЛЬ: 303). He searches Hinkus’ room, but although he finds the stolen watch and a lady’s pistol, he comes to the conclusion that someone else wants to throw suspicion on Hinkus. Even a murder threat probably written by Filin and found in du Barnstokr’s room does not alarm him.

Это опять была записка. Корявыми печатными буквами, с орфографическими ошибками, там было написано: “Мы вас нашли. Я держу вас на мушке. Не

пытайтесь бежать и не делайте глупостей. Стрелять буду без предупреждения.

“Ф”. ”

Стиснув зубами сигару, я перечитал это послание дважды и трижды.

(Отель: 305 - 306)

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, a mysterious one-armed stranger, covered in snow, bursts into the hotel. More dead than alive, he asks for Olaf Andvarafor, but Glebsky realises this must be the person Hinkus was waiting for. Earlier on another avalanche had come down from the mountains, cut the valley off from the outside world (we find here another frequently used detective story motif - the cut-off crime scene, as in Agatha Christie's The Mousetrap), and almost buried the one-armed man. When Glebsky goes to the rooftop, where he suspects Hinkus is still waiting, he only finds a snowman dressed in Hinkus' clothes. Now he is definitely convinced that Hinkus is planning a crime, although he is still in the dark as to what kind of crime (Отель: 322).

At this point the scene is perfectly set for a crime plot. A group of people including a police inspector, a rather strange hypnotist (under threat of assassination) with his strangely androgynous nephew/niece, a supposedly dangerous gangster, and a half dead one-armed stranger - all cut off from the outside world and trapped in a hotel. This is the moment the Strugatskys choose for the crime to happen. Snevar and Glebsky go to Andvarafor's room to tell him the stranger is demanding to see him. They find the room locked from inside (yet another classic detective story motif), but Glebsky manages to force his way in and discovers the Andvarafor's body:

Он был явно и безнадежно мертв. (Отель: 325)

It would seem that the Strugatskys have deliberately taken such a long time (60 pages of a total 162) to develop the plot in order to convince the reader that it really is a detective story.

5.2. The anti-hero investigating

Glebsky immediately starts investigating the murder by interrogating the guests. When it is Simonet's turn, Glebsky finds him in his room in a state of panic. He had just been to Olga Moses' room, only to find her dead. The fact that they later find her alive and well does not make Glebsky suspicious:

-Но ведь она была мертва, Петер! Клянусь вам. Она была убита, и мало того...

-Ерунда, сказал я холодно. -Вы были омерзительно пьяны. (Отель: 340)

He realises that the mystery is too difficult for him to solve (Отель: 355), and the authors let the anti-hero describe his incompetence in his own words:

[...] все нити никуда не ведут.

[...] нет ни одного подозреваемого.

[...] но никаких следов на подоконнике, никаких следов на снегу, на карнизе.

(Отель: 368)

Glebsky is not only an incompetent sleuth, but also lacks understanding of human nature. However, he has an ally in Alec Snevar, the landlord, who is always offering him his latest hypotheses. Unfortunately, they are not very helpful. For instance, he quite seriously suggests that the allegedly murdered Olga Moses has come back to life as a kind of zombie. And when the dog Lel brings in a gun loaded with silver bullets, which he has found outdoors in the snow, the situation is, again, beyond Glebsky (Отель: 385).

5.3. The clearing up

The Strugatskys carry the ironic image of an utterly incompetent detective to extremes, when Glebsky accidentally stumbles upon the true background of the story: he still suspects Hinkus and interrogates him. He intends to get him in a corner. Glebsky bluffs and tells Hinkus he knows everything and just needs a confession. The intimidated Hinkus comes out with a bizarre story about his involvement with a gangster boss called the Champion: Hinkus had been a member of a gang of criminals when someone with almost supernatural powers, called Beelzebub, joined them. Rumour has it (in gangster circles, that is) that Beelzebub and his woman have magic powers. Yet they are not allowed to kill, or their powers would fade. This is why Hinkus is surprised that Olaf was killed all the same. At first he thought du Barnstokr was Beelzebub in trickster disguise, but he found out later that Albert Moses is Beelzebub and the incredibly strong woman is his wife Olga. Although he believes in their powers he does not think they are omnipotent:

Он хоть и колдун, но не господь же бог. Летать, например, он не умеет, это уж точно известно. Через стены проходить - тоже... Правда, ежели подумать, баба эта его - или кто она там есть - любой завал могла бы

расковырять в два счета. Присобачил бы он ей вместо рук ковши, как у экскаватора, и готово дело... (ОТЕЛЬ: 404)

Thus, we see that in ОТЕЛЬ the genre is neither straightforward science fiction nor classic detective story. The fact that the story is, as we learn only in its last part, set in a universe where aliens exist and space-travel is possible does not mean that the reader perceives the story as a science fiction story. The authors deliberately mislead the readership and play with their expectations. Yet, ОТЕЛЬ cannot be said to be a parody of the classic detective story. At every turn the Strugatskys confound expectation. There may even have been an element of political thriller, and it is worth mentioning that in a German translation of ОТЕЛЬ - Hotel "Zum Verunglückten Bergsteiger" (Strugazki, A. and B., 1988), we find within Hinkus' confession a most detailed description of the Champion's political background.

5.4. Digression: the Champion's politico-criminal background in Hotel "Zum Verunglückten Bergsteiger"

In the German version of ОТЕЛЬ Glebsky associates the Champion with "The Blue Swastika" (which suggests a name for a fascist subversive gang) and the "bright-eyed Senator", suggesting his connections to corrupt politicians:

Der Champion, das war doch bestimmt das "Blaue Hakenkreuz", und das "Blaue Hakenkreuz" war ganz bestimmt der helläugige Senator. Eine unruhige Zeit, eine seltsame Zeit. Niemand kam heutzutage mehr klar, was Politik, was Verbrechen, was Regierung war. Was konnte da ein ehrlicher Polizist ausrichten? (Strugazki, A. and B., 1988: 166)

[The Champion, that must be the "Blue Swastika", and the "Blue Swastika" - that must be the bright-eyed senator. Troubled times, weird times. Nobody can tell these days what is politics, what is crime, and what is the government. And what can an honest policeman do about that?]³

This "bright-eyed Senator" is later on named as Goldenwasser, which is German for "golden water". In this context of ultra-right wheelings and dealings, there can be no doubt that this is meant to be Barry Morris Goldwater, the US senator at the time of first publication of Отель:

He was the leader of the extreme conservative wing of the Republican party during the 1950s and 1960s. He ran for president in 1964 but was decisively defeated by Lyndon B. Johnson. (The Microsoft Bookshelf '95, CD-ROM)

Senator Goldenwasser had ordered the Champion to rob the "Grönheim archives":

-Die Grönheim-Archive?

Ich wußte in dieser Sache wenig Bescheid und hatte nie damit gerechnet, daß der Champion seine Hand mit im Spiel hatte. Grönheim hatte die umfassendste Kartei von Nazi-Verbrechern angelegt, die nach neunzehnhundertfünfundvierzig in unserem Lande untergetaucht waren. (Strugazki, A. and B., 1988: 172)

[-The Grönheim archives?

³ translation by the author

*I did not know much about this matter and never thought the Champion was involved in this. Grönheim had started the most comprehensive files on Nazi criminals hiding in our country since 1945.]*⁴

Also, the Champion has political motives himself:

Überhaupt, wenn man bedenkt, daß der Champion eigentlich gar kein Champion, sondern der ehemalige SS-Hauptsturmführer Kurt Schwabach war, der sich bei uns versteckt hatte...(Strugazki, A. and B., 1988: 173)

*[Anyway, if you consider that the Champion is actually not a champion at all, but the former SS-Hauptsturmführer Kurt Schwabach, who was hiding here in our country...]*⁵

The implication of high profile politicians involved in the cover-up of Nazi crimes adds a politically explosive dimension to the crime story. I was so intrigued that I wrote a letter to Boris Strugatsky, and asked him why these passages are missing in the Текст edition of 1995, which has been used for this research. As I had suspected they had been edited out in order to make the novella less political, I was only the more surprised when I found out the opposite is true:

Дорогой мистер Husmann!

⁴ dto.

⁵ translation by the author

Роман “Отель У ПОГИБШЕГО АЛЬПИНИСТА” (авторское название - “Дело об убийстве. Еще одна отходная детективному жанру”) на протяжении нескольких лет подвергался усиленному “редактированию”. Ответственные работники разных издательств и редакций всячески выкорчевывали из него “аполитичность”, а также страсть персонажей к распитию спиртных напитков. В результате появилось несколько редакций этого романа, в том числе с неофашистами вместо гангстеров и с кофе вместо грога. Ближе всего к изначальному варианту тот, что опубликован в издательстве “Текст”.

(Boris Strugatsky in a personal letter to the author, 20.6.1998; see Appendix A for full letter; for translation see Appendix E)

5.5. The science fiction solution

As far as Inspector Glebsky is concerned the case is solved: Albert and Olga Moses are dangerous gangsters and belong behind bars. He has Hinkus' full confession but does not realise that the most burning questions yet remain unanswered:

1. Who killed Olaf Andvarafor and why?
 2. Was Olga really killed and revived?
 3. How can Albert and Olga Moses' magic powers be explained?
 4. Who is the mysterious one-armed Luarvik L. Luarvik and what does he want?
-

It is Simonet who does some investigation on his own initiative and finds the answers. He admits that his solution sounds like science fiction, rather than science, yet, it explains everything:

- Никаких вурдалаков. Никакой мистики. Сплошная научная фантастика. Мозес - не человек, инспектор. Тут наш хозяин оказался прав. Мозес и Луарвик - это не земляне. (Отель: 409)

Of course, Glebsky does not believe a word of it. Although this would explain Albert and Olga Moses' powers, Glebsky prefers to discard this incredible explanation, in an attempt to justify his own actions, which are based on ignorance and narrow-minded bureaucracy. It is obvious by now that he is not after the truth, but merely wants to prove he can do his job (Отель: 410).

Simonet gives further explanations: the first people Moses came across after he had landed on Earth were the above-mentioned gangsters. Since he did not know anything about life on Earth, the gangsters were easily able to make the alien believe that they were fighting for a good cause, and then began to exploit him. However, Moses eventually found out the truth, left the gang and fled. He planned to leave Earth on his spaceship, but an accident prevented this. Luarvik L. Luarvik turns out to be another alien - a kind of pilot - and Olga Moses and Olaf Andvarafor are their robots. The accident had created some sort of power drain for these robots and they had to be recharged by means of portable accumulators. Olaf did not reach his accumulator (the mysterious suitcase found next to his "body") in time. He was not murdered at all - he simply ran out of power and needed recharging. Olga had made it

to her accumulator, which explains why Simonet thought he saw her dead, and alive again a few moments later.

It is only from this moment on that Отель can be termed a science fiction novella. Although the whole story is flavoured with all kinds of fantastic motifs (which all turn out to be either jokes by du Barnstokr, or rumours), the authors have been convincing the reader step by step that the book is a whodunit, until the very last chapter. And then - when no realistic explanation (as Glebsky would say) is viable any more - they let the cat out of the bag and offer us “pure science fiction” as a solution.

5.6. The moral conflict

Simonet's hypothesis means that all of a sudden Glebsky's case ceases to exist: there is no murder, because Olaf Andvarafors is not even a living being; and the Moseses are not gangsters, but victims. Although everything is explained Glebsky remains stubborn and hides behind his bureaucratic duties (Отель: 412).

In the following conversation with Albert Moses, however, we find a trace of a guilty conscience in Glebsky. After Moses himself explains the situation, Glebsky knows what he says is true. He just lacks the ability to admit it to anyone but himself (Отель: 413), and in the end, Glebsky lacks the strength and dignity needed to take on responsibility:

-Отстаньте вы от меня. Все вы болтуны. Алек заботится о своем заведении, а вы, Симонэ, просто интеллектual на отдыхе... (Отель: 419)

The Strugatskys deliver their moral message through Snevar: he equates the need to be “разумный” (rational, possessing reason) with the requirements of “совесть человеческая” (human conscience). If one can still have any sympathy for Glebsky it is because he does not like the role he is playing. He knows he is a “мелкая сошка” (small fry), as Simonet calls him:

[...] И где-то на самом доньшке души слабо тлело чувство облегчения - ситуация больше не зависела от меня, ответственность взяли на себя другие.
(Отель: 421)

5.7. The inevitable catastrophe

At first it seems that everything is going to end well: the aliens are given their accumulator, Olaf is recharged, and they are ready to flee from the Champion (Отель: 421). In the end, however, the inevitable happens. As the aliens are skiing through the valley, towards their spaceship, a helicopter overtakes them and opens fire. They all die in a hail of bullets (Отель: 422).

This dramatic ending emphasises the consequences of Glebsky's incompetence. It shows all too clearly that inactivity or rigid adherence to a certain set of rules - even to the letter of the law - can be extremely harmful. Being civilised, therefore, means to be able to discard these rules when necessary, and accepting responsibility. No law can possibly account for all possible events at all times, which is why rational beings have to apply their own common sense, combined with a sense of responsibility, to the critical situation in question. In the case of Отель, this means showing sympathy for the aliens and letting them escape,

even though they were criminals in the eyes of the law. Inspector Glebsky lacks the courage and vision to take responsibility completely and acts in two primitive ways:

1. He does not see that his usual methods of investigation bring no positive results, and that he is trapped in a restrictive set of rules which are not applicable to an unforeseen situation.
2. When Simonet offers a perfect explanation (in the sense that everything is explained), Glebsky instinctively knows what he says is true. Yet he will not admit he was wrong and take the necessary step that would solve the dilemma. On page 415 he says he is not authorised to negotiate with vampires and aliens, yet he is only too ready to apply “his” law to the aliens. This is a much easier way out for him than taking the responsibility for a humane solution.

In creating a human character less humane than an alien from space the Strugatskys make a very ironic point. Moses for instance is ready to sacrifice himself in order to save Luarvik L. Luarvik’s life; the aliens have disguised themselves as humans, and to show themselves in their true form would be very dangerous.

5.8. The human dimension in the epilogue

In the novella’s fifteen chapters Glebsky has been portrayed as a philistine police inspector. He is stubborn, parochial and unsympathetic. Nevertheless, this character’s psyche is still credible. Whatever action he takes, Glebsky knows secretly he is wrong and feels ashamed. In the epilogue, this feeling of shame is manifested at three different levels:

1. Superficial denial: this is relatively unimportant for the message of the story -

Glebsky tells the story to his grandchildren and glosses things over when it comes to the end:

С тех пор прошло больше двадцати лет. Вот уже год, как я в отставке. У меня внуки, и я иногда рассказываю младшенькой эту историю. Правда, в моих рассказах она всегда кончается благополучно: пришельцы благополучно отбывают домой в своей сверкающей ракете, а банду Чемпиона благополучно захватывает подросшая полиция. (Отель: 423)

2. Self justification: after twenty years, part of Glebsky still needs to justify what he has done. He had always been backed up by the authorities and he has retired from his job with a good pension, but he realises that there is also another dimension to the incident, namely, moral standards:

[...] Много-много раз во время скучных дежурств, во время одиноких прогулок и просто бессонными ночами я думал обо всем случившемся и задавал себе только один вопрос: прав я был или нет? [...] Когда при болезни у меня поднимается температура, я снова и снова вижу в бреду это дикое, нечеловеческое зрелище и слышу леденящий душу свист и клекот... Нет, формально все обошлось. (Отель: 425)

3. The truly guilty conscience: it is only when Glebsky asks himself why he feels really bad, although he has done everything according to the law, that he comes

close to the truth. He has never admitted to anybody but to himself that he was wrong:

Совесть у меня болит, вот в чем дело. Никогда со мной такого не было: все делал правильно, чист перед богом, законом и людьми, а совесть болит. Иногда мне становится совсем плохо, и мне хочется найти кого-нибудь из них и просить, чтобы они простили меня. (Отель: 426)

This quiet contrition is sympathetically portrayed. Glebsky is only human after all. He made a mistake which he could not iron out. He suffers terribly from pangs of conscience, but there is no-one left alive to absolve him. The aliens are dead and Simonet, the only person who fully understood what was going on, died during an expedition in the Bottleneck Valley mountains. He wanted to find proof of the aliens' visit and publicise them. Glebsky and Simonet have met several times since that incident, but Simonet has never said a word to Glebsky. It is Simonet's contempt for his lack of empathy as well as the contempt for his unforgivingness that make him suffer. Glebsky's wife tries her best to comfort him, yet in vain (Отель: 427).

5.9. Conclusion

Отель is a science fiction novella, according to the definitions given in chapter 2. In my opinion, it does not really matter that the readership realises this only in the last chapter (except for readers familiar with other Strugatsky works, who might have found a clue in the little epigraph in some versions of Отель; see 5.1.). The novella is set in a fictional

environment, or a fictional universe in which extraterrestrial life-forms do exist and visit Earth.

It would be insufficient, though, to argue that ОТЕЛЬ is science fiction only from this rather formal point of view. The motif of aliens is not only an astonishing science fiction twist at the end after an apparent crime plot has been developed. If, hypothetically, there really had been a murder with aliens turning out to be the murderers, ОТЕЛЬ would in fact be a crime novella. The alien characters are not merely a science fiction gimmick to break the detective story convention or to satisfy the Strugatsky-fandom; the authors are rather making a very strong point about moral standards, about what is humane - and who could be more suitable as victims of a narrow-minded philistine police inspector than innocent extraterrestrial creatures?

ОТЕЛЬ works on various artistic levels. Unique in the Strugatskys' fictional works, the crime plot is carefully developed and takes up the bulk of the book, and the novella reads for most of the time as a detective story jazzed up with motifs similar to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. ОТЕЛЬ is also full of little mysteries (Moses' golden watch and du Barnstokr's slippers disappeared), uncanny *sujets* (the seemingly androgynous Brun) and gothic motifs (Olga turning into a Zombie).

We realise early on that Glebsky, with his all too conventional methods, is not up to the case. Therefore, we watch him gradually making a fool out of himself and relish the scathing irony the Strugatskys use to expose his efforts at detection as an example of unintellectual police methodology. In no other work has the theme of the anti-hero been developed as fully as in ОТЕЛЬ.

Отедь also stands out from other Strugatsky works of science fiction. If we compare Отедь with Стажеры, we find that science fiction in Стажеры is the vehicle that carries the moral message. In Отедь, however, this is not the case. Here, science fiction itself has a meaning. This meaning is understandable to Simonet's open mind, which is able to accept the unlikely truth. He is not as narrow-minded as Glebsky. Therefore, he is able to solve the puzzle and explain what does not make the slightest bit of sense to Glebsky. This truth only comes out at the very end of the book as a revelation.

The main moral issue which the authors address in Отедь is the sense of responsibility. The protagonist fails, because he is not ready to accept his responsibility. This leads to devastating results: the aliens are shot, and pangs of conscience make Glebsky suffer even twenty years after the incident. The genre of science fiction is used here to create the picture of a threshold the protagonist had to cross. This threshold cannot be regarded as a metaphor; it is, on the contrary, realistic, albeit improbable. In theory, anyone could encounter aliens any time. Only a scientifically open mind would save us from going insane and encourage us to make a leap of faith in order to accept something extremely unlikely.

6. The functions of science fiction since 1961

There are genre similarities as well as differences in Стажеры and ОТЕЛЬ. From a formal point of view one could easily argue that both, like all of the other Strugatsky novels and novellas, are science fiction (or “научная фантастика”, as the authors would say). However, the interesting question is, for what reasons they chose the genre of science fiction to deliver (or rather encode) their messages, since this genre seems to serve various different functions within their own oeuvre.

In this chapter I shall attempt a comparison of Стажеры and ОТЕЛЬ regarding their genre and its functions, in order to highlight how important the right choice of genre is for the Strugatskys. In addition, I will outline how these functions have changed since the publication of Стажеры.

Due to the formal restrictions to this thesis, I shall only deal with the periods from 1961 - 1964 and from 1964 - 1968 (the second and third phases postulated by Martin Weber; see p.18) in the latter part of this chapter.

6.1. Стажеры and ОТЕЛЬ “У погибшего Альпиниста” - a comparison

Стажеры is set in a futuristic universe. Nevertheless, this setting is realistic in the sense that the same values are valid as in our “here-and-now” universe. It has been created by the authors in order to provide an alienated setting (the future; space; Mars) for an adventure story, in which bold cosmonauts are still recognisably human beings. In outer space, the

heroes' ethics seem even more human than in a non-science fiction story. Science fiction works here on two different levels:

1. It provides a setting for an adventure story in space - a "space opera". This background gives the authors an excuse for creating playfully entertaining images of photon rockets and flying leeches.
2. It works as an amplifier for moral values. Since the setting is extremely alien, anything human must stand out even more than in a physically more realistic environment. A motif containing a moral dilemma, for instance, can be presented in a more isolated way, so that the reader can focus on it.

The functions of science fiction in Отель are different. Here, we find a fictional but credible and realistic setting. The reader is led to believe till the last chapter that Отель is a detective story. All the other motifs of different genres (horror motifs; images of the supernatural) conform to the tradition of the detective story. Unlike in Стажеры, the fact that we are in a "science fiction universe" (where aliens are on our planet) comes as a surprising revelation. Whereas in Стажеры the story, in which an ethical issue is developed, is set in space right from the beginning, the science fiction motif in Отель bears meaning itself. The reader has the "aha-experience" the anti-hero fails to have, as soon as the genre "switches" from detective story to science fiction and the reader suspends disbelief in the aliens. Without the science fiction solution Simonet offers us, nothing that has happened in the apparent murder case makes sense. Therefore Glebsky, by refusing to open his mind, must fail. In other words, the story does not heighten our awareness of the importance of accepted morality, but prepares us to take responsibility for breaking old rules if these no longer seem to accord with reason and conscience.

Both in Стажеры and Отедь we find a mixture of genres. In Стажеры we have “The tale of the gigantic fluctuation” (see 4.3.), a little episode embedded in the rest of the story and of a different genre (fantasy). It seems as if the Strugatskys needed to break away from the structure of their story, which is restricted by science fiction conventions: credibility and scientific explanation. In a way they step beyond these boundaries and have fun by embedding this absurd fantasy tale in an otherwise rational narrative. The technique of letting one of the “real” characters (Zhilin) tell the story is a neat trick by which the authors make sure the credibility of their created universe is not threatened.

In Отедь the mixture is different: the genre suddenly switches from crime to science fiction. Although the protagonist refuses to believe in the existence of aliens, for the reader (who has realised Glebsky is not up to the case because of his narrow-mindedness) the perception of the whole universe suddenly changes. This shows that the Strugatskys exploit genre for a specific purpose, be it for entertainment’s sake or, as in Отедь, to create an allegory for a flexible mind.

The most important idea Стажеры and Отедь have in common is the moral dilemma at the end. In Стажеры two brilliant scientists sacrifice their own lives for the sake of a discovery. They are killed in the attempt to explore what they think is an alien artefact, leaving their beloved ones behind, and a space apprentice who, astonishingly, has a more mature attitude towards life. A profound question is raised: “What are the most important things in life?” In Отедь an ignorant and unsympathetic police inspector messes up mankind’s first contact with intelligent extraterrestrial beings, who turn out to be more humane and willing to make sacrifices than himself. Philip K. Dick wrote several novels and

short stories about the same topic, which he calls “his grand theme”. In a comment on his short story Second Variety he explains:

My grand theme - who is human and who only appears (masquerades) as human? - emerges most fully. Unless we can individually and collectively be certain of the answer to this question, we face what is, in my view, the most serious problem possible. Without answering it adequately, we cannot even be certain of ourselves. I cannot even know myself, let alone you. So I keep working on this theme; to me nothing is as important a question. And the answer comes very hard.

(Dick, 1990: 490 - 491)

In Dick's Second Variety soldiers in a future war face android killing machines, who look exactly like human beings. In order to distinguish between them and living beings, the men have to ask themselves constantly what is human. In ОТЕЛЬ we find a similar *sujet*: we ask ourselves what is ethically humane. We are not looking for a biological identity, but for moral truth. Of course, it is possible to effect such a search by means of other genres. Science fiction, however, allows the author to create as it were a sterile setting for experiment, to focus on one specific question and treat one isolated dilemma at a time.

6.2. The 1960s

In my opinion, the decade starting with Стажеры and ending with ОТЕЛЬ marks the most creative period of the Strugatskys' literary life. After writing Стажеры in 1961 and completing their first, ideologically positive utopian phase, they took a new turn. Стажеры ends with images of doubt about the utopian future, which has been depicted throughout that

first phase. The veteran cosmonauts Yurkovsky and Krutikov are killed in an attempt to explore something which they think is extraterrestrial; so Zhilin comes to his conclusion that the most important things are on Earth. This foreshadows a much bleaker and ultimately pessimistic prevailing mood.

6.2.1. 1961 – 1964

6.2.1.1. Попытка к бегству (Escape Attempt) and Далекая Радуга (Far Rainbow)

Within one year the Strugatskys produced the two novellas Попытка and Радуга, which do not necessarily conflict with the ethics of the first phase. However, they examine them from a different angle.

There is a strong shift in their views on scientific progress. This does not mean that the Strugatskys changed their minds and are now disillusioned with science and technology. On the contrary, in my opinion, what is being conveyed is that scientists should be more responsible and aware of the consequences of their experiments. In Радуга scientists do large-scale physical experiments on a distant planet called *Радуга* (Rainbow). Only “zero-physicists” (experimenting with the transmission of matter without moving it, called “zero-transmission”) and their families live on the planet. Too late, the audacious physicists realise a disastrous side-effect – a huge black wave which destroys everything in its way while it surrounds the whole planet. This motif can be interpreted as a warning against nuclear weapons, since it was still widely believed in the 1960s that a large-enough atom bomb could trigger off an unstoppable chain reaction and destroy our whole planet. However, the Strugatskys do not content themselves with this warning. They also create a more agonising

parable: there is time left for the scientists to send one spaceship off the planet. They are now faced with the ultimate dilemma – should they save the knowledge they have gained from their research, or should they save selected lives? In the end they decide to fill the spaceship with the children who live on the planet. The scientists realise that the most valuable thing for them is neither progress nor their own lives, but life itself – their children's future.

Whereas science fiction often aims at presenting a problem in an encoded and abstract form, in Радуга it is unusually manifest. The powerful image of the black wave leaves the reader with a strong sense of fear of either reckless research or nuclear weapons, or both. We therefore regard Радуга as a typical example of роман-предупреждение – a warning novel.

In Попытка the outlook on technology and society is even more pessimistic. Anton, space pilot, and Vadim, so-called structural linguist, decide to go on holiday on another planet. They are joined by a stranger called Saul, who pretends to be a historian and offers to assist them on their journey. The opening of the story is good-humoured, and serves as a contrast to the harsh reality of their holiday domicile, the planet Saul (they name the so far un-mapped planet after the stranger): a brutal caste of *Стражники* (Guardians) and warriors rule over the *Преступники* (Criminals), the rest of the population, by means of high-tech weaponry.

This picture serves the Strugatskys in two different ways. Firstly, it expresses their doubt that a technically highly developed society is necessarily just. The Criminals are mercilessly exploited, suppressed, and forced to “keep the engines moving” (Попытка: 80). Nobody, not even the Guardians, know how the machines work or even who builds them. However, their control over the Criminals is absolute. They force them to find out how to

work the machines by trial and error (sticking their heads into holes or reaching into running engines), even if it costs them their life (Попытка: 80). In my opinion, this is a powerful way of showing how science and technology may be misused to serve tyranny and harm the essence of life (Marsh, 1986: 228). Strong, anti-utopian images are used to warn us of a future based on unethical use of technology in the tradition of warning novels.

Secondly, the heroes find themselves confronted with their own (human) history. There have been similarly totalitarian times in Earth's past, and here they are re-viewed from an outsider's angle through the heroes' eyes. In this respect Попытка resembles a historical novel.

6.2.1.2. Трудно быть богом (Hard to Be a God)

According to Suvin, Попытка can also be seen as a preliminary sketch for Трудно быть богом, which presents history as a cul-de-sac (Suvin, 1979: 66). Трудно быть богом is a more detailed description of a constantly scheming and intriguing feudal regime. The foregrounded adventure story (half medieval cloak-and-dagger, half science fiction) makes it a more organic book, and it is still one of the most popular works of science fiction in Russia. However, the foundation of the main idea of Трудно быть богом is laid in Попытка, namely, that any outside interference with a society's struggle in history is futile. In the end it is up to the individual within a society to overcome the enemy within this society and to change history's course. The attempts of the Earth heroes in both novellas to fight the unjust systems fail. In Попытка Saul turns to his "scorcher" and destroys some of the Guardians' tanks. Rumata, the protagonist in Трудно быть богом (who is a member of a group of scientists in a spaceship in orbit around a distant planet, observing the medieval unjust society

from there) reaches for his sword in order to save some “good” people, namely friends, a scientist, innocent people, from being killed in a brutal civil war. In both cases, the heroes find it impossible to hold up the course of history. Saul in Попытка sums it up in most succinctly:

-[...] А знаете вы, что такое история? Это само человечество! И нельзя переломить хребет истории и не переломить хребет человечеству.

(Попытка: 84)

It is the framework of a science-fiction setting and plot which allows the protagonists of Трудно быть богом to scrutinise a whole society, as the orbiting spaceship receives their audio/video-signals from the planet’s surface through video cameras built into their eyes. This enables the reader to judge a whole civilisation at once – “live” – and take part in the mental experiment the authors have set up.

6.2.1.3. Хищные вещи века (Predatory Things of Our Time)

Where Попытка, Радуга, and Трудно быть богом have strong anti-utopian elements, Вещи goes one step further towards sociological criticism by spicing up anti-utopian images with satirical overtones. The Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (10th Edition)⁶ defines satire as “a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn”.

⁶Internet document URL: <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=satire>;
accessed: 3. August 2004

Ivan Zhilin, the engineer of the Takhmasib, returns to Earth and to what he called “the most important things” in Стажеры. The world has finally got rid of wars, famines and other scourges of mankind. In a conversation with a Doctor Opir, Zhilin lets his over-optimistic effusion, reminiscent of Huxley’s Brave New World, wash over him, but stays critical of a society enjoying *грезогенераторы* (dream manipulators) and *нейростимуляторы* (neurostimulators). (Вещи: 310)

Exploitation has disappeared, but private ownership still exists in some countries. One of those is the *страна дураков* (country of the fools) somewhere in Europe, where mankind encounters a new danger - *слег* (translated as “slug”) - a powerful drug, which provides perfect happiness for everyone. This sujet had also been introduced in Brave New World. Huxley describes an anti-depressant drug (soma) which replaces religion and makes it easier for workers to endure their emotional repression. Zhilin is charged by the UN Security Council with finding out who produces “slug”, how it is distributed, and, above all, why a society in which all demands are satisfied free of charge (free clothing, food, toys, books, etc.) should want a new drug in addition to alcohol and narcotics. He learns that “slug” is the ultimate drug in the sense that it completely satisfies the mind. To this society of fools which has become utterly bored and sated with life it appears to be just as dangerous as war and famine. The side-effects (for example death by nervous exhaustion) are insignificant compared to serious sociological problems: in a state of total satisfaction the drug users feel they have no problems which need solving. This stasis of the mind results in the rise of gangster syndicates who attack whole cities in order to appropriate the profits to be had from the new drug. The police and the rest of the population are too passive to defend themselves against the gangsters. Society is plunged into chaos - war and destruction (the “predatory things of our age”) once again devastate the country.

Zhilin does not find any satisfying answers. The book ends with Zhilin's decision to stay in the country of fools until the problem is solved once and for all.

The questions the Strugatskys raise in Вещи are of philosophical nature:

1. Does the bourgeois ideology of satisfying everyday needs and providing a certain level of luxury lead to spiritual death?
2. Does it really matter whether a country is devastated by war or by its own abundance?

In a scientific laboratory, scientists create perfect conditions and eliminate the unwanted effects of a natural environment. They are then able to focus on the conditions relevant to their research. In science fiction in general, and specifically in Вещи, the authors conduct a philosophical thought experiment. The motif of a perfect drug is hardly realistic. Yet, it is an important part of an invented society in the test tube of science fiction.

With Вещи, the second phase of the Strugatskys' works ends. Their utopian views on science and technology of the first phase have been revised and they have proceeded into the new field of sociology. By depicting the complex dynamics of history, they come to the conclusion that the course of history cannot be changed by an outsider. Therefore, it is the man or woman within society (i.e. every single individual) who is responsible and must not rely on, or hope for, help from the outside.

The Strugatskys are tackling the question of the individual's responsibility in Soviet society. It is the element of alienation supplied by science fiction which enables them to do this so effectively and circumvent censorship. Their works cannot be reduced to one country or culturo-historical event. There is no doubt that the genre of science fiction is a powerful

tool for focusing on major issues in society and, at the same time, setting something down in terms which have a general applicability. In Трудно быть богом the authors are criticising the concepts of religion and imperialism, and in Вещи they are criticising a consumerist / capitalist Western world and warning Soviet society against putting too much effort into achieving a degree of prosperity.

6.2.2. 1964 – 1968

The tongue-in-cheek style is the most remarkable feature of the books written between 1964 and 1968. It reaches its peak with the Privalov cycle, consisting of Понедельник and Тройка. The authors' sheer lust for jokes based on ancient Russian folk-tale motifs, paired with the ironizing of pseudo-science and bureaucracy make the Privalov cycle in my opinion one of the funniest works of fantastic literature, along with Mikhail Bulgakov's novel Мастер и Маргарита.

6.2.2.1. Понедельник начинается в субботу

(Monday Begins on Saturday)

Понедельник is the first part of the Privalov cycle, which is in turn the central part of the third phase in the Strugatskys' works. Понедельник is a novella in three successive parts, and the novella Тройка reads as the fourth and concluding part of the cycle.

In the first part of Понедельник, "Суета вокруг дивана" (Vanity around the Divan), Alexander Privalov travels through the North of European Russia. He takes along two hitchhikers in his car who, in turn, arrange accommodation for him in a wooden hut,

belonging to the Research Institute for Magic and Sorcery, where they are employed. This is the starting point for a series of jokes with Russian folk-tale motifs: the hut stands on chicken legs and the landlady turns out to be no other than the legendary Baba Yaga - the old witch in Slavonic mythology who is said to be the devil's grandmother who eats small children (Warner, 2002: 73); Privalov encounters the Talking Cat and the Pike who, according to folklore, grants three wishes and who give Privalov a coin (which gets him into trouble later on, since it returns to him after he has spent it); he takes a telephone message for Naina Kievna Gorynych (aka Baba Yaga), an invitation to the annual meeting of republicans, which is nothing else but a witches' Sabbath which takes place on the "Bald Mountain", the witches' traditional meeting-place, at midnight.

The absurdity of these jokes, the witches, and all the other motifs deriving from folklore recall Mikhail Bulgakov's Мастер и Маргарита and the main character Woland's adventures. However, they are insignificant in comparison with the second part, "Суета сует" (Vanity of Vanities)⁷, and the third part, "Всяческая суета" (All Kinds of Vanity). These titles are references to Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament of the Bible - the book in which man speculates about life, which he declares, if it is devoted to earthly things, is vanity:

Слова Екклесиаста, сына Давидова, царя в Иерусалиме.

Суета сует, сказал Екклесиаст, суета сует, - все суета!

⁷ Both the Russian and the English title are translations from the Hebrew; this title was found in: Scofield, Rev. C. I. (ed.) (1917): Holy Bible: Ecclesiastes, Oxford University Press, American branch, New York, p.696. The section mentioned reads in English as follows:

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

Что пользы человеку от всех трудов его, которыми трудится он под солнцем?

(Библия: Книга Екклесиаста, или Проповедника: 666)

These chapters include caustic side-swipes at modern-day charlatanism in the Research Institute for Magic and Sorcery, with its pseudo-scientists (or so-called magicians) and false pretences. This tour de force of the satirical grotesque, which unsparingly exposes materialism and consumerism, has a biblical subtext, as the chapter titles indicate. We have already seen in Вещи that the Strugatskys are fond of satire. In Понедельник, however, the style of commentary is extremely entertaining in its snideness, and, much like Bulgakov when he was writing Мастер и Маргарита, the authors abandon all former affiliations with socialist realism. There is, for instance, Professor Ambrosy Ambruasovych Vybegallo, who does research into happiness. He makes three anthropoid models: the first one is a completely unhappy man who dies after a few days of dragging out his miserable existence. The second one is only materialistically unhappy and achieves a state of happiness by eating huge amounts of herring heads. With the third one the experiment finally gets out of control: the universally happy man grabs and eats everything around him in order to stay happy. When he threatens to eat up the whole cosmos and make time stop in order to stay perfectly happy for ever, the mad scientists can only stop him by means of advanced magic - they unleash a terrible jinni who finally destroys this monster.

In Понедельник The Strugatskys use science fiction devices as omnipotent tools. Anything goes; anything can be invented, cast a spell over, or spirited away. In the case of Понедельник this assumption is not just for amusement. It also provides the authors with scenarios rich in opportunity to expose ruthless scientists as charlatans. Professor Vybegallo poses as a scientist in charge of man's welfare, but he only has his own profit in mind (proof

for this assumption is the fact that his “ideal” anthropoid models resemble his person).

Vybegallo’s research is nothing more than the spouting of communist clichés by which he tries to hide his incompetence. Vybegallo is the embodiment of institutionalised useless science that has lost touch with reality.

The third part also includes a chapter which can be read as a spoof of H. G. Wells’ Time Machine. Privalov, who has managed to get a job at the Institute as computer programmer, is asked to test the newly designed time machine. This one, however, will not take him to another real time, but to a fictional one, as described in literature:

-[...] Вот это руль. Вот это педаль сцепления с реальностью. Это тормоз. А это газ. Вы автомобиль водите? Ну и прекрасно! Вот клавиша... Вы куда хотите - в будущее или в прошлое?..

-В будущее, сказал я.

-А, произнес он, как мне показалось, разочарованно. -В описываемое будущее... Это, значит, всякие там фантастические романы и утопии. Конечно, тоже интересно. Только учтите, это будущее, наверное, дискретно, там, должно быть, огромные провалы времени, никакими авторами не заполненные.

Впрочем, все равно... [...] (Понедельник: 137)

The authors have claimed H. G. Wells as one of their favourite science fiction writers, and - apart from the above-mentioned homage to The Time Machine - they pay their tribute to Wells in another novella: Нашествие (see 6.2.2.3.). However, the Strugatsky novellas are much lighter in tone, and Wells’ darker anti-utopias are rendered with humour, thus illustrating their fondness for coupling dystopias with satire.

6.2.2.2. Улитка на склоне (Snail On the Slope)

After the Strugatskys are done with science, they change direction again. With Улитка they have created a piece of work of almost unsurpassed bleakness. Улитка is a novella in two relatively independent but interlocking parts, named after the protagonists Pepper (translated here from the Russian Пепец) and Kandid. This name, of course, alludes to Voltaire's Candide and suggests the character's sincerity of expression and openness, free from any prejudice. It also serves as an indirect reference to Voltaire himself, thus suggesting that Улитка is a satire of unjust arbitrariness⁸. However, the techniques by which the Strugatskys achieve this are more Kafkaesque than Voltairian.

Providing the setting for Улитка is the only obvious function of science fiction here. The plot is rather short on action, and most of the book deals with the protagonists' nightmarish experiences in an extremely estranged world. Both parts of the novella are set on a foreign planet which is completely overgrown by a swampy forest. The Pepper part is set on a plateau on a hill, overlooking the forest, while the Kandid part is set within this forest. These two different perspectives, a bird's eye and a worm's eye, suggest that the forest itself is the authors' focus of interest.

Science fiction often serves as a set of filters through which the "normal" is seen. For example, in Попытка and Трудно быть богом we see our history through the filter of an

⁸ There is yet another possible interpretation of the name: the genus of the *Candida* are yeastlike pathogenic imperfect fungi; however, it is doubtful that the authors had this meaning in mind; we can assume that it is a coincidence that Kandid - a fungus - is stranded in a world of fungi. Source: The Microsoft Encarta 96 Encyclopedia.

alienated world. The “normal” is the heroes’ ethics which we can either question or identify with. In the case of Улитка, these filters present a picture which is distorted to such an extent that the “normal” seems alien in the utterly hostile environment of the forest. Apart from trees there are masses of poisonous fungi growing everywhere. Nothing seems to last long, because everything simply rots or changes into something else. The undergrowth is crawling with vermin, and there is a variety of dangerous beasts, such as the “cloaca”:

Клоака щенилась. На ее плоские берега нетерпеливыми судорожными толчками один за другим стали извергаться обрубки белесого, зыбко вздрагивающего теста, они беспомощно и слепо катились по земле, потом замирали, сплющивались, вытягивали осторожные ложно-ножки и вдруг начинали двигаться осмысленно - еще суетливо, еще тычась, но уже в одном направлении, разбредаясь и сталкиваясь, но все в одном направлении, по одному радиусу от матки, в заросли, прочь, одной текучей белесой колонной, как исполинские мешковатые слизнеподобные муравьи... (Улитка: 95)

There are native people living in this horror world, but they lead a rather vegetable existence. There is no work to be done, or any distraction from their painful existence. On the contrary, they live in constant fear of the *мертвяки* (zombies - walking dead with homicidal tendencies).

Kandid lands in this forest only by accident: his helicopter crashes into the forest and he is saved by the local people, who call him *Молчун* (the mute), because at first he cannot understand nor speak their language. He lives with a girl called Nava who takes care of him, but he wants to get out of the village and get back to the “Administration” - the above-

mentioned part of the world above the forest. This Administration (the Russian term is made up by the authors: “одержание”, a noun formed from the verb *одержать* - “to gain the upper hand”) is the background for the Pepper part of the novella. The Administration is responsible for “forest study and exploitation”, but is in fact totally absorbed in administrating itself. The Administration is a bureaucratic monster which has lost touch with its purpose. Its members are therefore unable to understand the forest. Pepper’s strongly Kafkaesque story is an attempt to understand the Administration with all its statutes, which are in incomprehensible bureaucratic gibberish (cf. following passage in chapter 10: “Проект директивы о привнесении порядка”) and are constantly changing their meaning.

Everything is expressed in a roundabout way:

-Что происходит? спросил Перец.

-Что полагается, то и происходит, сказал старик, внезапно посуровев.

-Происходит положение за номером шестьсот семьдесят пять дробь Пегас.

То есть побег.

-Какой побег? Откуда?

-Какой полагается по положению, такой и побег, сказал старик, начиная спускаться по лестнице. (Улитка: 143)

Pepper suffers from not understanding anything that is happening around him:

Я живу, вижу и не понимаю, я живу в мире, который кто-то придумал, не затруднившись объяснить его мне, а может быть, и себе. Тоска по пониманию, вдруг подумал Перец. Вот чем я болен - тоской по пониманию.

(Улитка: 99)

The overall title is an image of the uncertainties of knowing: humanity climbs towards knowledge as a snail climbs a mountain (Clute and Nicholls, 1995).

The manifold imagery of Улитка resists a conclusive interpretation. The collage of details, each of which appeal to the readers' emotions and their own experience with red tape and its arbitrariness, is often more mysterious than clear, more atmospheric than concrete.

However, Suvin suggests the rough outline is obvious:

1. Both Kandid and Pepper are intellectuals. They try to communicate, yet they suffer from the lack of response. They both yearn to understand a world in which they are outsiders, but removing the obstacles to understanding is beyond their control. Their positions in their particular societies, however, are different. Pepper hates the Administration of which he is part, because it is incomprehensible and does not make sense to him. Kandid, on the other hand, is saved by the villagers and accepted in their society. He even climbs the social ladder from being a strange mute to a slightly mad "holy fool" when he saves the people from the *мертвяки* (Suvin, 1979: 71).

2. The Administration appears to be just that, although it is depicted in the most satirical way: a bureaucratic institution which gained, by a stroke of genius in the past, almost absolute power, after which it no longer cared for its original responsibilities or the people in its charge. Its sole purpose has become self-preservation. It is this scathing portrayal of administration which prevented Улитка from being published in its intended form (including both parts) until 1988, since both Russian and Western critics did not hesitate to interpret the *oderzhanie* as the Soviet administration (see quote from the critic Lebedev in: Suvin, 1979: 73). After the Kandid part was published in the magazine Байкал in 1968, the editorial board was dismissed (Marsh, 1986: 231). In 1980, Bantam Books

editors went over the top (in the opinion of the Russian Copyright Office) by providing their publication The Snail on the Slope with a blurb which implied the Strugatskys had anti-Soviet intentions:

"Because of an inaccuracy in the cover copy of the Bantam edition of SNAIL ON THE SLOPE, Bantam has decided to withdraw the book from distribution out of concern for the authors until the cover can be corrected." The book carries a cover blurb which states the authors "are now in disfavour with the Soviet government for the bold, outspoken ideas expressed in this novel". (seen in: Locus, 1980:1)

3. The people living in the forest represent the masses of a society unaware of the controlling powers. Although the villagers have no knowledge of their own history and Kandid cannot get much sense out of them, they save his life and integrate him into their society. These people are completely at the mercy of the Administration, the tasks of which are partly directed against their interests. They include, for instance, an utterly absurd "eradication of the forest" (Улитка: 171) and "turning it into a swamp" (Улитка: 33). For a Russian readership this may have civic as well as ecological connotations. Since Leonid Leonov's Русский лес, written between 1948 and 1953 (Kasack, 1992: 645), the forest has also served as the scene for numerous early Russian fairy tales as well as a metaphor for "the people"

Once again, the genre of science fiction can be seen as a means of generalising a very specific idea. Unlike investigative journalists, whose task it is to investigate and expose, the Strugatskys are content with ridiculing and inveighing against a destructive administration. Although an aware reader will of course read Улитка as a satire on Soviet administration, this

intent cannot be proven on the basis of the text alone and, according to the authors, their profound criticism of the kind of arbitrariness depicted in Улитка is not intended to be limited to the Soviet Union. It is a rather universal criticism of a dull and meaningless life at the mercy of god-like bureaucrats who think they stand above the people they are supposed to serve.

6.2.2.3. Второе нашествие марсиан (The Second Martian Invasion)

With Нашествие the Strugatskys find their way out of the bleak and rather depressing mood of Улитка. The humour is still black, but the various references to other literary works and Greek mythology create an interesting atmosphere and the accessible story in the foreground makes it a more entertaining book than Улитка.

The full title of Нашествие reads Второе нашествие марсиан - записки здравомыслящего.

The first part is a clear reference to The War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells. In that novel Earth is invaded by Martians who land their spaceships in the South of England and conquer the whole world by merciless use of heat-rays, destroying anything that gets in their way. The Russian title Второе нашествие марсиан (The Second Martian Invasion) might at first be misleading, because the first invasion (the one Wells described) has not taken place. Нашествие must therefore not be seen as a sequel to The War of the Worlds, but as an



Fig. 7: Herbert George Wells
(Clute and Nicholls, 1995)

alternative or the second version. The second part of the title (Diary of a Sane Man) is a pun on Gogol's Записки сумасшедшего (Diary of a Madman). This is another example of the Strugatskys' tongue-in-cheek style.

The book is written in the format of a diary and contains fourteen daily entries by the diarist Apollon. In this period of two weeks Earth is invaded by Martians, but, as in the beginning of The War of the Worlds, people do not realise immediately what is going on:

- А если война? - спрашиваю я. - Нет, это не война, заявляет он. - Я бы знал.

- А если это извержение? - спрашиваю я. Он не понимает, что такое извержение, я больше не могу и вешаю трубку. (Нашествие: 192)

The entry of the first day ends on the diarist's worrying thoughts:

И тут я все понял окончательно. Происходят большие военные учения - возможно, даже с применением атомного оружия. Стоило огород городить! Господи, уснуть бы теперь спокойно! (Нашествие: 194)

This leaves us with the suspicion that the diarist may not be as sane as the title proposes, and that Нашествие is in fact another satire.

In the following two days, Apollon spends more time worrying about his pension than pursuing his thought of a possible war. However, this war fails to materialise, and instead, there are rumours of a Martian invasion. Apparently they have seized power and destroyed all the cornfields, otherwise there has been no violence. It turns out that the Martians are not

interested in territorial warfare at all, nor do they want, as one earlier rumour suggests, to cut the humans' stomachs out. However, they plan to extract a small quantity of everyone's gastric juice, as this appears to be an energy source for them. They would pay for it, provide the humans with excellent (though blue!) Martian wheat, and not interfere in any other way.

Нашествие satirises the humans' non-resistance. After their initial half-hearted balking they readily fall into line with their new economic dependence and put up with such minor inconveniences as blue bread. They even turn against a handful of rebels (one of whom is Apollo's son-in-law Kharon) and treat them like terrorists. After a while, they willingly sell their gastric juice to the Martians:

Кстати, сегодня в первый раз сдавал желудочный сок. Ничего страшного, только глотать неприятно, но говорят, что к этому быстро привыкаешь. Если сдавать ежедневно по двести граммов, то это составит сто пятьдесят в месяц. Однако! (Нашествие: 255)

The Strugatskys intensify the effect of satire by giving the characters ancient Greek names: there is for instance Apollo - in Greek mythology one of the most important Olympian gods, associated with philosophy, law and fine arts; Apollo the diarist is a retired astronomy teacher and stamp collector, who spends most of his time worrying about his pension and a nasty eczema; Polyphem - the Cyclops who imprisoned Odysseus, who later on makes him drunk and blinds him - in Нашествие is a one-legged war veteran and Apollo's drinking companion; Laomedont - the first King of Troy who refused to fortify the town wall - is now a corrupt mayor; Minotaur - the monster half-man, half-bull, who fed on human beings in the Labyrinth - is now the town's sanitation engineer (Kern, 1979: 1879 - 1883); Kharon - the

ferryman who conveyed the dead to Hades over the river Styx - is the editor-in-chief of the local newspaper who mistakes the Martian invasion for a fireworks rehearsal for forthcoming festivities.

The human characters betray the magnificence of their mythical namesakes by being weak and cowardly and easy prey to the Martian seducers. Yet the reader can often sympathise with these humans who make lame excuses for not resisting the invaders. In my opinion, the novella has a philosophical function: the authors make us admit our own weaknesses to ourselves. They raise the following question:

What would you do if a superior power offered you money, security, democratic freedom, and even a tasty new bread and a less-filling new beer - all in exchange for a small and regular "donation" of gastric juices, sweat, or some other renewable body fluid? Is there any reader in any country who could state categorically that he or she would forcibly oppose such sweet slavery? (Kern, 1979: 1879 - 1883)

For Нашествие the Strugatskys simply had to "hijack" the title of H.G. Wells' famous novel to provide the readership with the science-fiction background which accommodates the plot. However different this plot may be from that of The Time Machine, the latter serves as a constant point of reference, which makes Нашествие an entertaining spoof.

Нашествие also has sociological implications. However, they are not as light-hearted. The Strugatskys make us think over our own situation and principles, thus asking ourselves whether we too are not happily accepting something we had better refuse. This is an

unpleasant question, because we may come to the conclusion that we, in all our contentment, are not spiritually free.

6.2.2.4. Сказка о тройке (The Tale of the Troika)

With Тройка the Strugatskys return to the more anarchic fun of the Privalov cycle. The title itself is a likely allusion to Gogol's Мертвые души, where Russia is described as a troika (Stender-Petersen, 1957: 164), as is the grotesque style of the novella, which is reminiscent of Gogol's later works. Тройка reads like the fourth part of Понедельник, as it is set in the same town (Kitezhgrad) with the same group of main characters. This time Alexander Privalov (the narrator) and his friends Fedya, Edik Amperyan, Roman Oyra-Oyra and Victor Pavlovich Korneev visit the colony of unexplained phenomena. This colony is ruled by the so-called Troika for Rationalisation and Utilisation of Unexplained Phenomena. Its members are Rudolf Arkhipovich Khlebovovodov, Lavr Fedotovich Vunyukov and Farfurkis, archetypal bureaucrats who have turned red tape into an art-form. This bureaucracy achieves precisely nothing, since it does not actually handle anything of importance. All the Troika's "cases" are dealt with in an incomprehensible officialese and the facts are neither acknowledged nor dealt with in any way. All that the three members do is make the cases fit their forms, so that they can eventually refuse to deal with it any further and allocate it to someone else's responsibility. Judgements on the particular cases are pronounced by means of the Big Round Stamp - a satirical symbol of administrative power and arbitrariness:

-Заявку! воззвал Лавр Федотович.

Моя заявка легла перед ним на зеленое сукно.

-Резолюция!!

На заявку пала резолюция.

-Печать!!!

С лязгом распахнулась дверь сейфа, пахнуло затхлой канцелярией, и перед Лавром Федотовичем засверкала медью Большая Круглая Печать, И тогда я понял, что сейчас произойдет. Все во мне умерло. (Тройка: 223)

The colony is teeming with the most extraordinary phenomena: there is, for instance, the talking bed-bug Клоп Говорун, who is constantly ill-tempered and quarrels with everyone (a likely reference to Vladimir Mayakovsky's play Клоп, in which bourgeois conformism among the Communist Party officials is heavily criticised; from: Kasack, W., 1992: 717); there is also a philosophical octopus Спиридон; a liquid blue alien. The Troika, who are in charge of those unexplained phenomena, never attempt to explain them. On the contrary, they go to great length to explain them away, or they declare them enemies of the people. Take the case of Edelweiss Sakharovich Mashkin, who has constructed a so-called heuristic machine, which can answer any kind of question. Not only are the members of the Troika unimpressed, they flatly reject his machine, call Mashkin a killer of the mind and demand his death:

-Но он - убийца, ибо он убивает дух. Более того, он - страшный убийца, ибо он убивает дух всего человечества. И потому нам больше не можно оставаться беспристрастными фильтрами, а должно нам вспомнить, что мы - люди, и как людям нам должно защищаться от убийцы. И не обсуждать должно нам, а судить! Но нет законов для такого суда, и потому должно нам не судить, а беспощадно карать, как карают охваченные ужасом. И я, старший здесь, нарушая законы и правила, первый говорю: смерть! (Тройка: 219)

The whole novel is full of the Troika's acts of monumental dim-wittedness. There is, for instance, Konstantin Konstantinovich Konstantinov, a stranded alien who asks for technical assistance, so that he can return to his planet. He is denied this on the grounds he does not have the right documents to prove that he really is extraterrestrial (the fact that the four-eyed alien appears in front of them out of thin air and that he can read their minds does not impress the Troika). Contact with an alien life-form would be desirable, but since there is no evidence of anything alien, there is nothing they can do. They suggest Konstantinov fly home to his planet and get the necessary documents.

The Troika is ignorant and hostile in the extreme: at one point, Vunyukov and Khlebovvodov even beat up Farfurkis, who appears to be the weakest member of the Troika, for no apparent reason. They only pretend to represent the people (Vunyukov's catch-phrase is "The people do not need this" when he really means he does not want it, be it support for the alien or simply drawing the curtains).

Тройка is written in the same satirical style as Понедельник. Here, it is not the administrative approach to science, but administration itself which is ridiculed. The Troika is the apotheosis of obsessive, blinkered bureaucracy, the members of which do nothing but bureaucratised for bureaucracy's sake. The function of Тройка is in fact similar to that of Улитка - a fundamental criticism of an inhumane administration which abuses power and is out of touch with reality. Science fiction serves as an inexhaustible fund of ideas for humorous and fantastic motifs, in order to take satire to an extreme.

6.2.2.5. Гадкие лебеди (The Ugly Swans)

In 1968 the Strugatskys completed their next novella, Лебеди, which was never published in Russia as a novella on its own, only in a German *tamizdat* edition in Russian in Frankfurt, 1972 (seen in: Salvestroni, 1984: 34). but as one half (five chapters) of the novel Хромая судьба. The other half of Судьба was not completed before 1986. This part consists of another five chapters, which make up the framework in which the protagonist, the writer Felix Sorokin has written a fantasy novella, called Лебеди. He has never published it, as he is afraid of adverse criticism and possible repressive action on the part of the authorities. The other five chapters are the novella itself, which is in turn about a writer called Victor Banev. As only the Banev-chapters were written in 1968, i.e. within the period that this thesis deals with, I will deal only with these and refer to them as Лебеди.

The setting of Лебеди is gloomy: the locale could be interpreted as the Soviet Union (Moscow is mentioned as the capital), but it is somewhat defamiliarized. Banev, an exiled writer, enters a former seaside resort. This formerly sunny place (as we imagine a sanatorium and tourist town e.g. on the Black Sea) is now exposed to never-ending rain and fog. The town has started to rot and some people have a mysterious genetic disease similar to leprosy. Their faces are disfigured and wet, which is why they are called *Мокрецы* (*мокрый*: wet, soggy; the authors have coined the noun *мокрецы* as a Russian-style colloquial name for the ill, something like “wetlings” or “soggies”). They live in the “leprosarium”, an asylum solely committed to the wetlings. They are not only well-educated scholars, but have also become a kind of *Homo Superior* in intellectual terms.

The wetlings have developed a new philosophy and ideology, the aim of which it is to build a new world. This appeals to the children in town, who the wetlings educate until they undergo a mental transformation. These enlightened “new children” are both highly intelligent and intellectual, and devoted to the wetlings and their future in the most idealistic way. One of these “new children” is Irma, Victor Banev’s daughter. While the children, who are normal apart from their boosted intellect, are recognised as prodigies, the wetlings are outcasts and seen as enemies who want to seduce and steal the children from their parents like Pied Pipers. The citizens of the town fight them with legal and illegal methods.

Banev plays the part of the intellectual observer with sympathy both for the wetlings’ bright new future, and for the sceptical and conservative “normal” people, who see their children taken away from them. It dawns on him early in the novella that something magnificent is in the air - he is even proud of his own daughter Irma, who becomes one of the *wunderkinder*. Yet he understands that there can be no place for himself in this utopian future, although he sides with the wetlings, whom he sees as suppressed victims of a conservative society:

Caught here between contending directions - the Mayor urging him to write a tract against the rain-men [the wetlings], Zurmansor [the wetlings’ shadowy cult figure and ringleader] urging him to do so also because such a tract will help his cause more than hurt it - Victor acts in typical fashion: he never writes a word. (Slusser, 1979: 1488 - 1496)

The general mood, created by images of a rotting city soaked by neverending rain, reminds us of Улитка, and indeed Лебеди takes up where Улитка left off. Whereas in

Улитка an utterly alien and repulsive world is depicted, devoid of anything familiar or humane, Лебеди offers us at least hints of reality. This tension between reality and fantasy - Russia versus Utopia - makes us long for understanding or enlightenment and puts us, the readers, in just the same position as Kandid in Улитка. This technique of tension (familiar / alien; here and now / far away in time and space) has already been applied in Трудно быть богом and Попытка in the context of history, where the heroes are stuck between an unjust past and their own modern views on history and ethics. Banev in Лебеди is able to visualise the wetlings' superhuman future and have some sympathy for it. He is, however, morally tied to his own time and people - a convincing depiction of the intelligentsia's dilemma:

Да, ненавижу старый мир. Глупость его ненавижу, невежество, фашизм. А что я без всего этого? Это хлеб мой и вода моя. Очистите вокруг меня мир, сделайте его таким, каким я хочу его видеть, и мне конец. Восхвалять я не умею, ненавижу восхваления, а ругать будет нечего, ненавидеть будет нечего - тоска, смерть... Новый мир - строгий, справедливый, умный, стерильно-чистый - я ему не нужен, я в нем - нуль. (Хромая судьба: 310)

The title Гадкие лебеди can be translated either as *The Nasty Swans* or as *The Ugly Swans*. The former title bears a strongly oxymoronic meaning and refers to the idea of a new way of life which includes aspects hitherto considered as incompatible - like children "liberated" from their parents. The latter takes up the idea of metamorphosis of the ugly duckling ("гадкий утенок") into a beautiful adult swan ("прекрасный лебедь"), which takes place at the end of the book: it finally stops raining, and first the moon and later the sun come out. All the citizens leave their rotting town: administrators, policemen, businessmen,

officials, fascists - the Strugatskys describe the scene as a burst abscess. In the end the town itself dissolves in the new dawn and leaves no trace of its existence. Yet we feel that this is rather a metamorphosis than destruction: there is fresh grass sprouting and the children are still there, miraculously grown-up.

This positive yet enigmatic ending is probably the most optimistic the Strugatskys have produced since they started their career. Although it leaves us with more questions than answers (What happened to all the citizens? Are the wetlings still there? How will the now grown-up children run their new world?) we are left with the impression of a paradise found - or rather created by means of pure intellect. There has not been a revolution destructive to the former society but a transition to a higher level of being. It does not come as a surprise that this *sujet* was taken as a criticism of socialist revolution and society, and that the novel was banned from publication until the end of official censorship and the beginning of perestroika in 1986.

7. Conclusion

For roughly three decades the Strugatsky Brothers were writing books that can be found under *научная фантастика* in Russian bookshops. Literature written and published in the Soviet Union, with its non-existent commercial market, had to satisfy other demands than literature in the USA and Western Europe with their flourishing publishing industry (and an especially lucrative science fiction market). We understand that science fiction in Russia - *научная фантастика* - and science fiction in the West do not mean exactly the same. However, these terms have equally resisted clear definitions throughout the decades, and naturally there are many similarities, the most obvious of which is that both genres deal with something happening *not here and not now*. In many cases this means *in deep space in the far future*.

The Strugatskys, however, refer to their own works as “realistic fantasy”, meaning that the issue dealt with is somehow relevant to the here-and-now world. Even at the beginning of their literary career, which was inspired by public enthusiasm for technology and space travel, the authors did not fill their pages with hard science fiction techno-talk, but rather put more effort into creating credible human heroes. These heroes are allowed to make mistakes, they grow older and, sometimes, wiser with age, and eventually they die. Each is involved in a very real moral dilemma, and the authors ask profound ethical questions that are of a timeless relevance.

During the first phase (1959 - 1961) the heroes are articulate, and the lesson of each novel is driven home with an admonishing finger. The science fiction in that period merely provides the background for a readable adventure story. It is remarkable that within this plain

and realistic period of their works, the Strugatskys already had the desire to break completely free from any scientific logic and their hitherto sombre tone.

“The Tale of the Gigantic Fluctuation” in Стажеры is their first step into the field of fantasy. It pushes us beyond the scientific horizon, thus questioning science’s ability to explain everything, and we have a vague foretaste of the Strugatskys’ skills in the use of the absurd and irony, which only three years later will become the essential ingredients for the Privalov-cycle.

In the period from 1961 to 1964, the overall optimistic attitude towards science and technology of the earlier phase changes. The elements of doubt in Стажеры have turned into more serious warnings, and scientists are now exposed as rather ruthless (Радуга) or callous (Трудно быть богом). At the same time the Strugatskys turn to more politically explosive topics, such as the question of outside interference in an underdeveloped society (in Попытка and Трудно быть богом). Стажеры thus marks the departure from the official dogma of Socialist Realism, and potential dangers for the society, for example posed by amoral scientists, are now foregrounded.

The Strugatskys deal with various sociological and philosophical issues by means of science fiction. For example, they create a typical science fiction locale (a different planet) or use motifs like space travel. Science fiction enables them to achieve a certain effect (like isolating a moral issue and focusing on it as in Радуга, where they appeal to scientists to reconsider their ethics) and not to create a detailed science fiction world in which the story carries no particular moral and has no hidden meaning. Here probably lies the largest difference between the Strugatskys’ science fiction and (Western) space opera with the

authors' tendency to write endless cycles with repetitive plots (The Gor cycle by John Norman⁹ for instance consists of 25 novels). This means that the Strugatskys do not need to draw a picture of a future world which is scientifically credible. Nor is there any *speculation* about the future, one of the most frequently given justifications for writing science fiction, simply because the Strugatskys do not write about the future. They do not see themselves as modern prophets, but as observers of their own society:

Arkady Strugatsky: Earlier we describe a society in which we would have liked to have lived. But now it's the society we fear.

Interviewer: That you fear or that you foresee?

Arkady Strugatsky: It is impossible to foresee anything.

Interviewer: All right, that you reckon will come about.

Arkady Strugatsky: Even less can you calculate what will happen. [...]

(Bossart, 1990: 61 - 75)

This does not mean that the Strugatskys do not project issues relevant to the present into a fantastic future. This technique of encoding delicate issues has been an important tool for writers in a Soviet Union where any writer could be silenced with a stroke of the pen for a too obvious criticism of the authorities. However, the Strugatskys never intended to openly criticise the Soviet Union - or rather: their criticism is too universal to be limited to only one country. The main issues the Strugatskys criticise in their phase from 1964 to 1968 are arbitrariness, bureaucracy and petit bourgeois conformism; and who would deny that they are issues within *any* society?

⁹ Pseudonym used for his fiction by US writer and philosophy teacher John Frederick Lange; source: Clute and Nicholls, 1995.

In my opinion, the Strugatsky Brothers show their talent for varying style and genre most clearly during this phase. Savage irony is used to expose useless bureaucrats and administrators in Понедельник and later on in Тройка; mysterious images in the forest world of Улитка go hand in hand with Kafkaesque *sujets* in the world of the Administration. Here the authors' sympathy with the intellectual's longing for knowledge and understanding is expressed in a powerfully enigmatic way. Arkady Strugatsky admits in an interview in 1981 that he himself finds it difficult to interpret the whole book conclusively (Kasack, 1984: 76), yet we find that the point of the book is not to provide a satisfying answer to all the mysteries but to activate the wish to understand. Nevertheless, after Улитка, the Strugatskys apparently felt the need to produce more accessible and less bleak stories. This explains why the following novellas Нашествие, Тройка and Лебеди are set on Earth in the present or in a very near future.

Whereas the setting in Лебеди creates an uncanny tension with reality, Нашествие creates tension with another work of fiction - H.G. Wells' The War of the Worlds. Those who know their Wells will constantly compare the plot of the original novel with its spoof. This makes it even more fun to read and makes the reader realise how spineless the characters in Нашествие are. In addition to that we encounter the motif of the anti-hero for the first time. The Strugatskys make us *want* to identify with a feeble character, lure us into a carefully set trap: we find ourselves making excuses for the weak character, but, by the end of the book, we are suddenly confronted with a question of the most profound kind, one which has already been asked in Вещи - Are we ourselves spiritually free?

After the publication of Тройка, the Strugatskys in Лебеди again show their talent for creating atmosphere and a fantastic world full of symbolic *sujets*. Since the protagonist is a

writer, it would seem likely that the authors have written a story partly about themselves. The protagonist - half intellectual hero, half passive anti-hero – witnesses and sympathises with the intellectual revolution in a country which has Moscow for a capital but is not explicitly named Russia or the Soviet Union for obvious reasons – official censorship was still in place at the time of publication.

With ОТЕЛЬ, the Strugatskys prove their versatility in adapting to different fictional genres. The book is largely a detective story, but in the end the authors reveal their faith in their genre of science fiction by offering us a hair-raising science-fiction solution to the mystery, which is the only one possible. The protagonist is a police officer who does not have the intellectual capacity to perform the leap of faith (to believe in the existence of aliens) which is necessary to solve the case. He is selfish and narrow-minded. For us, the readers, it is as if we were trapped inside this anti-hero's limited mind, which makes us want to shout out loud "Can't you see what's going on, you fool?".

With Обитаемый остров, the Strugatskys enter a new cycle known as the Maxim Kammerer cycle. This also marks the beginning of their last literary phase, of which this cycle is the pivot. This phase is remarkable in that it contains five novels and novellas which are almost completely independent in respect of genre, characters and setting. These are ОТЕЛЬ (analysed above in chapter 5.), Град обреченный, Повесть о дружбе и недружбе, Хромая судьба, and Отягощенные злом.

It has not been possible within the constraints of this study to examine the entire Strugatsky oeuvre. However, by an in-depth analysis and comparison of key works of their most prolific and fruitful period, it is hoped that I have demonstrated convincingly the truth of

my main hypothesis: that the Strugatskys' particular brand of science fiction is neither pure entertainment nor futurological "scientific" prediction, but that the genre is used to criticise society by raising sociological, philosophical and political questions, as well as to warn their society of dangers ahead. The device which they skilfully employ is to create an alienated setting and populate it with credible characters which are near enough to reality, so that the issue does not become purely abstract. The foregrounded adventure motifs and occasionally grotesque satire make the novels hugely entertaining. However, the main purpose of the genre of science fiction, in the case of the Strugatskys, is to avoid open social criticism and satisfy censorship requirements. There are many profound observations on society which challenge the reader - and the censor - with the disturbing question: exactly what part are you playing in your society?

It is important to remember that the western concept of science fiction cannot be found in the Strugatskys' works. The Strugatskys employ an Aesopian technique in their writing, allowing their works to be read at various levels – they can be either simple entertainment or a challenge to the authorities. At their most profound, they are anti-Soviet and highly subversive, written for a subversive readership.

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Appendix A: Letters from Boris Strugatsky to the author

1. First letter, 3. May 1996:

Уважаемый Марк!

Я получил Ваше (второе) письмо и спешу ответить на вопросы.

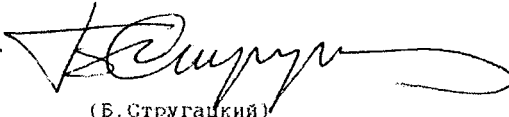
1. Мы испробовали все мыслимые способы писания вдвоем. Наиболее эффективным оказался такой. Мы собираемся в одной точке пространства (у меня, в Ленинграде, у Аркадия, в Москве, или в каком-нибудь Доме творчества), один садится за машинку, другой - рядом, кто-то предлагает фразу, фраза обдумывается, правится, переделывается и - либо отбрасывается, либо заносится на бумагу. Кто-то предлагает следующую фразу... И так - фраза за фразой, абзац за абзацем, страница за страницей по 6-7 часов в день, без выходных, 20 дней подряд (в наши лучшие времена).

2. Я неверующий. К сожалению. Верующему жить гораздо легче - его обороняет Бог. Я верю, что лучшее, что может человеку дать жизнь, это - дружба, любовь и работу. Все прочее - необязательно. Самое страшное, что может случиться с человеком, это - потерять друга. Или любовь. Или любимую работу. Мораль и этика каждого должна строиться на этих неких представлениях. Сделать правильный этический выбор - значит не нарушить вышесформулированные представления. Иногда это сделать трудно, но всегда - возможно.

3. Это бывало по-разному. "Пикник на обочине" возник из ловко придуманного эпизода, а "Отягощенные злом" - из нравственной идеи.

4. Своими учителями считали мы Г. Дж. Уэллса и Алексея Толстого. А. Толстой научил нас русскому языку. Уэллс - доказал, что настоящая фантастика ВСЕГДА сцеплена с реальной жизнью. Чем дальше от жизни - тем хуже литература. Любимых писателей у меня множество: М. Булгаков, Ф. Искандер, С. Довлатов, К. Воннегут, Г. Грин... всех не перечислишь.

Всего доброго,
Ваш



(Б. Стругацкий)

3.05.1996
С.Петербург

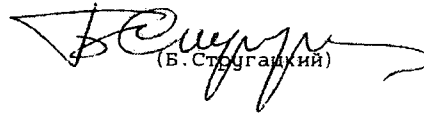
2. Second letter, 20. June 1998:

Дорогой мистер Husman!

Роман "Отель У ПОГИБШЕГО АЛЬПИНИСТА" (авторское название - "Дело об убийстве. Еще одна отходная детективному жанру") на протяжении нескольких лет подвергался усиленному "редактированию". Ответственные работники разных издательств и редакций всячески выкорчевывали из него "аполитичность", а также страсть персонажей к распитию спиртных напитков. В результате появилось несколько редакций этого романа, в том числе с неофашистами вместо гангстеров и с кофе вместо грога. Ближе всего к изначальному варианту тот, что опубликован в издательстве "Текст".

То, что Вы называете "предисловием" ("Как сообщают, в округе Винги..." и так далее) есть на самом деле шуточный эпиграф, высмеивающий тогдашние манеры советских официальных органов печати.

Желаю успеха! Ваш



(Б. Стругацкий)

20.06.1998
С.Петербург

Appendix B: Complete chronological list of the Strugatskys' fictional works

In order to describe major changes as development in style and themes, it is imperative to see the Strugatskys' works as a process in a chronological context. Therefore a list of their fictional works is provided.¹⁰

All references in this thesis are given according to the Harvard method. Exceptions are the works by the Strugatskys for which the shorter work title is given. All those titles refer to the Собрание сочинений.

Спонтанный рефлекс, рассказ; (Spontaneous Reflex); 1958; in "Знание - сила", No. 8, 1958; **Рефлекс**.

Извне, повесть в трех рассказах; (From Without*); 1958; in "Техника - молодежи", No. 1, 1958; **Извне**.

Белый конус Алаида, рассказ; (The White Cone of Alaid); 1959; Moscow, "Молодая гвардия", in the anthology "Золотой Лотос", 1961; **Конус**.

Страна багровых туч, повесть; (Land of the Crimson Clouds); 1959; Moscow, in the series "Библиотека приключений и научной фантастики"; 1959; **Страна**.

Шесть спичек, рассказ; (Six Matches); 1959; in "Знание - сила", No. 3, 1959; **Шесть спичек**.

¹⁰ Entries are given in the following order: Title, lit. genre; (English translation); probably written in the year; place where published (if known), publisher, first publication in the year; work title to be used in this thesis. This list is based on Yvonne Howell's chronological overview of the Strugatskys' prose fiction (Howell, 1994) and Darko Suvin's list given in his informative introduction to Die Schnecke am Hang¹⁰ (Strugatzki, A. and B. Strugatzki (1994), but has been updated and revised. Where no version published in English could be found, the Russian titles have been translated by the author and marked with an asterisk (*). Titles written by A. Strugatsky only and published under the pseudonym S. Yaroslavcev are not included.

Забывтый эксперимент, рассказ; (The Forgotten Experiment*); 1959; in “Знание - сила”, No. 8, 1959; **Эксперимент**.

Частные предположения, рассказ; (Personal Assumptions*); 1959; in “Знание - сила”, No. 8, 1959; **Предположения**.

Испытание СКИБР, рассказ; (The SCYBS Test*); 1959; in “Изобретатель и рационализатор”, No. 3, 1959; **Испытание**.

Путь на Амальтею, повесть; (Destination: Amalthea); 1959; Moscow, “Молодая гвардия”, 1960; **Путь**.

Возвращение (Полдень, XXII век), повесть; (The Homecoming: Noon, 22nd Century); 1960; the chapters of the second part (*Возвращение*) first in the magazine “Урал”, No. 6, 1961; the expanded and revised version containing all twenty stories in the series “Библиотека приключений и научной фантастики”, 1962; **Полдень**.

Чрезвычайное происшествие, рассказ; (An Extraordinary Incident*); 1960; Moscow, in the collection “Путь на Амальтею. Научно-фантастическая повесть и рассказы”, 1960; **Происшествие**.

Стажеры, повесть; (The Apprentices); 1961; Moscow, “Молодая гвардия”, 1962; **Стажеры**.

Попытка к бегству, повесть; (Escape Attempt); 1961-62; in the collection “Фантастика”, “Молодая гвардия”, 1962; **Попытка**.

Человек из Пасифиды, рассказ; (The Man from Pacifida*); 1962; in “Советский воин”, 1962; **Человек**.

Далекая Радуга, повесть; (Far Rainbow); 1962; Moscow, in the anthology “Новая сигнальная”, “Знание”, 1963; **Радуга**.

Трудно быть богом, повесть; (Hard to Be a God); 1963; Moscow, in “Далекая Радуга”, “Молодая гвардия”, 1964; **Труно быть богом**.

Хищные вещи века, повесть; (Predatory Things of Our Time); 1964; *ibid.* Moscow,

“Молодая гвардия”, 1965 (together with ПКБ); **Вещи.**

Понедельник начинается в субботу, повесть; (Monday Begins on Saturday); 1964;

Moscow, “Детская литература”, 1965; **Понедельник.**

Улитка на склоне, повесть (in two independent parts); (The Snail on the Slope); 1965-66; in the intended form including both parts only published in 1988 in the magazine “Смена”, No.

11-15; “Perets”-part (chapters 2, 4, 7, 8, 11) in the anthology “Эллинский секрет”,

Leningrad, “Лениздат”, 1966; “Candide”-part (chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10) in the magazine

“Байкал”, No. 1 and 2, 1968; **Улитка.**

Второе нашествие марсиан, повесть; (The Second Martian Invasion); 1966; in the

magazine “Байкал”, No. 1, 1967; **Нашествие.**

Первые люди на первом плоту, рассказ; (The First People on the First Raft*); 1967; as the first chapter of a novella-bouts rimés in the magazine “Костер”, No. 7, 1968; **Первые люди.**

В наше интересное время, рассказ; (In These Interesting Times*); dates of writing and first publication (if any) unknown; only publication found: in the 2nd supplementary volume of the complete works, “Текст”, Moscow, 1993; **Интересное время.**

Сказка о тройке, повесть; (The Tale of the Troika); 1967; published in various versions,

first in the magazine “Ангара”, No. 4 and 5, 1968; **Тройка.**

Гадкие лебеди, повесть; (The Ugly Swans); 1968; to my knowledge never published separately, only as part of the novel Хромая судьба (see below); **Лебеди.**

Обитаемый остров, повесть; (The Inhabited Island); 1967-68; Moscow, in the series

“Библиотека приключений и научной фантастики”, 1971; **Остров.**

Отель “У погибшего Альпиниста”, повесть; (Hotel “The Lost Mountaineer”); 1969-70; in the magazine “Юность”, No. 9-12, 1970; **Отель.**

Мальш, повесть; (The Kid); 1970; in the magazine “Аврора”, No. 8-11, 1971; **Мальш.**

Пикник на обочине, повесть; (Roadside Picnic); 1971; Leningrad, in the magazine

“Аврора”, No. 7-10, 1972; **Пикник**.

Град обреченный, роман; (The Doomed City); mid-1970s; Leningrad, in the magazine

“Нева”, first part in No. 9 and 10, 1988, second part in No. 2 and 3, 1989; **Град**.

Парень из преисподней, повесть; (The Guy From Hell); 1974; Leningrad, in the magazine

“Аврора”, No. 11 and 12, 1974; **Парень**.

За миллиард лет до конца света, повесть; (A Billion Years Before the End of the World);

1975; in the magazine “Знание - сила”, No. 9-12, 1976 and No. 1, 1977; **За миллиард лет**.

Жук в муравейнике, повесть; (The Beetle in the Anthill); 1978; in the magazine “Знание -

сила”, No. 9-12, 1979 and No. 1-3, 5 and 6, 1980; **Жук**.

Повесть о дружбе и недружбе, маленькая повесть; (A Story of Friendship and Distance*);

1979; Moscow, in the anthology “Мир приключений”, 1980; **Повесть**.

Машина желаний, сценарий; (The Wishing Machine*); 1980; Moscow, in the Science

Fiction anthology “НФ”, issue 25, 1981; **Машина**.

Пять ложек эликсира, сценарий; (Five Spoonfuls of Elixir*); 1984; in the magazine

“Изобретатель и рационализатор”, No. 7 and 8, 1987; **Пять ложек**.

Волны гасят ветер, повесть; (The Waves Still the Wind); 1985; in the magazine “Знание -

сила”, No. 6-12, 1985 and 1-3, 1986; **Волны**.

Хромая судьба, роман; (A Lame Fate); the Victor Banev parts (The Ugly Swans; see above)

were written in 1968, the rest of the novel in this form was not completed till 1986;

Leningrad, “Нева”, No. 8-9, 1986; **Хромая судьба**.

День затмения, сценарий; (Day of the Eclipse*); 1986; in the magazine “Знание - сила”,

No. 5-8, 1987; **День затмения**.

Туча, сценарий; (The Cloud*); 1986; in the magazine “Химия и жизнь”, No. 8-10, 1987;

Туча.

Отягощенные злом, или сорок лет спустя, роман; (Burdened With Evil, or Forty Years Later); 1987; in the magazine “Юность”, No. 6 and 7, 1988; **Отягощенные злом**.

Бедные злые люди, рассказ; (Poor, Evil People*); 1988; passage of the story first in the newspaper “Железнодорожник Поволжья”, 22. Nov. 1989; **Люди**.

Понедельник начинается в субботу, сценарий; (Monday Begins at Saturday); 1989; in the magazine “Уральский следопыт”, No. 5, 1990; **Понедельник (сценарий)**.

“Жи́ды города Пите́ра...”, или Невеселые беседы при свечах, пьеса; (“Petersburg Jews” or Sad Talks at Candlelight); 1990; in the magazine “Нева”, No. 9, 1990; **Жи́ды**.

Отель “У погибшего Альпиниста”, сценарий; (Hotel “The Lost Mountaineer”); 1990; under the title Дело об убийстве in “Пять ложек эликсира”, Moscow, 1990; **Отель (сценарий)**.

Appendix C: Translations of secondary Russian sources (by the author)

1. page 6:

Contemporary fantasy contains two basic trends. One of them deals with the vast range of problems connected with the themes Man and Nature, Man and the Universe. This is what we usually call science fiction.

The other trend is closely connected with the range of problems dealing with the themes Man and Society, Man and Socium. This is what we are inclined to call “realistic fantasy”, however paradoxical this term may sound.

2. page 16:

If it [science fiction] deals freely with the concepts of space and time, it changes at will the correlations and proportions of the phenomena in order to emphasise them in a more powerful way, to stress the main real conflict, clearing it of random deposits: for example, the conventional transfer of action in time and space in The Martian Chronicles by Ray Bradbury and in the novella Hard to be a God by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky allows to show present-day, human problems on their global scale.

3. page 16 - 17:

Научная фантастика is the conventional term for a large branch of contemporary fiction (partly in drama, film and painting); Научная фантастика is based on present-day standards of scientific knowledge and a comprehension of reality and widely makes use of modern scientific methods, such as modelling events, or the method of a mental experiment, in application to art. The corresponding term “science fiction” originated in the USA and is also developed in other countries. Many regard the epithet “научная” as unnecessary. The epithet “научная” helps to separate научная фантастика from the wider concept of the fantastic, from fairy tales and myths, from romantic fantasy (e.g. E.T.A. Hoffmann), from fantasy now



widely spread in the West, from satire and from philosophical prose, where the fantastic is used like an artistic device without its attempt of a logical basis or justification. Научная фантастика was shaped as a mass phenomenon exactly at the time that science begins to play a decisive role in society, generally speaking post-WWII, although the basic features of contemporary научная фантастика already appeared in the works of H. Wells and partly in K. Chapek.

4. page 35:

What you call “foreword” (“As reported, in the district of Vingi...” and so on) is in reality a humorous epigraph ridiculing the manners of the official Soviet press of those times.

5. page 43:

Dear Mr Husmann!

The novel “Hotel Lost Mountaineer” (work title “The murder case” – another lament for the genre of crime) underwent extensive “editing” during many years. Executives of many publishers and editors rooted out in every possible way anything “apolitical”, and with it the characters’ passion for consuming alcoholic drinks. As a result, several versions of this novel appeared, including neo-fascists rather than gangsters, and coffee instead of grog. Closer than any other to the original version is the one published in the edition “Текст”.

