Towards the Last Fairy Tale: On the Fairy-Tale Paradigm in the Strugatskys' Science Fiction, 1963-72 (Le dernier conte de fée: le paradigme du conte de fée dans la SF des frères Strougatsky de 1963 à 1972)
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Towards the Last Fairy Tale: On the Fairy-Tale Paradigm in the Strugatskys' Science Fiction, 1963-72

> The history of revolutions..., which politically spells out the innermost story of the modern age, could be told in parable form as the tale of an age-old treasure which, under the most varied circumstances, appears abruptly, unexpectedly, and disappears again, under different mysterious conditions, as though it were a fata morgana. There exist, indeed, many good reasons to believe that the treasure was never a reality but a mirage, that we deal here not with anything substantial but with an apparition, and the best of these reasons is that the treasure thus far has remained unnamed. Does something exist, not in outer space but in the world and the affairs of men on earth, which has not even a name? Unicorns and fairy queens seem to possess more reality than the lost treasure of the revolutions.
>
> Hannah Arendt

1. Introductory Considerations. If the genre terms *fairy tale* and *science fiction* were precisely descriptive, we would expect them to name antithetical genres: the fairy tale revolving around intentional-affective "magical thought"; SF determined by the implications of scientific rationalism. We know, however, that this is not the case. Most of what is classified as SF owes more to the structure of the fairy tale than to any scientific ideas it purports to explore. One can decry this state of affairs as proof of the poverty of most SF writers' imaginations. Stanislaw Lem, in the essays of his published in English translation as *Microworlds,* has argued relentlessly that SF depends on atavistic sacred-mythopoeic paradigms that are wholly inadequate for the state of contemporary scientific knowledge. Still, not only second-rate and commercially-minded writers of SF have cast their tales in the fairy tale mold. Zamyatin (p. 261) called Wells's scientific romances "urban fairy tales"—and he intended the phrase precisely and admiringly.

Some of the most interesting and intellectually sophisticated questions about the relationship of the two literary modes emerge from the work of Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, the leading scientific fantasists of the Soviet Union. Since the beginning of their career in the late '50s, the Strugatskys have explored in their SF the contradictory relationship between the utopianism implicit in the fairy tale and the critical rationalism implicit in science. In the following pages, I will sketch the course of this exploration, from its early "synthesis" in the technocratic utopianism of the early '60s, through the disillusionment and breakdown of the synthesis in the mid-'60s, to its culmi-

nation in the Strugatskys' dark masterpiece, *Roadside Picnic*.[1]

My argument depends on certain definitions of the fairy tale and fairy-tale paradigm which should be clarified at the outset. By fairy-tale paradigm I mean a heuristic model of the pattern of relationships among narrative elements conceived to be characteristic of fairy tales by tale-telling cultures. These elements can be categorized thematically, syntactically, "morphologically," or by motif. Taken in isolation, they may be found in other, related genres; so that it is the total pattern of relationships that distinguishes the genres from each other. The paradigm is not a model of the basic elements common to all fairy tales. Particular tales will deviate from, or "deform," the model in certain respects, and often they will conflate aspects of the fairy-tale paradigm with those of other genres; but the narrative significance of these deviations and conflations emerges from their relation to the paradigms.

Like many archaic genres, the fairy tale has pronounced formal regularities—it "wears its skeleton on the outside" (Honti: 51). These formal regularities also invite certain thematic expectations. Together, these establish the conceptual "base" of the fairy tale upon which each historical variation plays its changes. Thus in the discussion that follows, I will refer to the contemporary "non-marvellous" genre of the socialist realist production novel as a form adhering to the fairy tale's paradigm, although the fairy-tale elements are present in it only in quite displaced form. Similarly, in tracing the development of the Strugatskys' SF, I will discuss the various ways in which they deform the fairy tale's elements, while adhering to its paradigmatic pattern "in the breach"—which then brings into relief the utopian thematics of the fairy tale, whose paradigm remains as a ghostly absence behind the "realistic" displacements.

As for "fairy tale," I use the term not in the strict sense of tales about elemental spirits, but as pragmatic shorthand for the type of tales included in Aarne's catalogue as "magical tales" (Nos. 330-749) and discussed by Vladimir Propp, Honti, Nagy, Lüthi, and others. Since I will be considering the Strugatskys' relationship to the fairy-tale paradigm, and not actual fairy tales from the ethnographic record, I will sometimes use the terms "fairy tale" and "fairy-tale paradigm" interchangeably.

For my purposes, the paradigmatic fairy tale is characterized by certain properties and absences, which are felt by listeners and tellers alike to be characteristic of "magical tales," in contradistinction to myths, on the one hand, and non-magical folktales, on the other. Some of these are:

(1) The mortal, human character of the hero, who is left to his own devices, regardless of his putative worldly position and class-power (as opposed to myth's markedly superhuman exalted hero);

(2) The everyday, "mundane" character of the narrative language which ties it to the mundane community (as opposed to the hieratic tone of myths appropriate for self-differentiating hierarchies);

(3) The inevitability of the happy ending, which entails the fulfillment of some or all human desires and the expunging of evil (as opposed to the *moira* implied by myths);

(4) The non-transcendental character of the happy ending—i.e., the fulfillment of desire occurs in the world, not on a "higher," quasi-divine level of being;

(5) The mutual aid of magical-supernatural beings and the hero, linking the human and natural worlds (e.g., the hero is aided by the supernatural being as a reward for the hero's service to the supernatural being);

(6) A three-phase story, which progresses from a situation of lack (disequilibrium), through a conflict and collision between hero and villain(s) (mediation), to the annihilation of the lack (recuperation of equilibrium, with a positive gain, i.e., the prevention of a recurrence of the initial lack).[2]

2.1 The Fairy-Tale Paradigm in Soviet Ideology. The meaning a given oral or literary genre has for a culture can never be deduced merely by generalizing from its formal properties. The same form can be used, with minor differences in motivation, for quite contrary ideological purposes. What the fairy tale means for Russian culture should be approached historically, via the questions: Who uttered it, and for what purposes? Even so, the genre is not infinitely pliable. Its pronounced formal properties set limits on the fairy tale's message. Essentially, the fairy tale implies a certain set of general relations to its audience, which establishes a set of inherent themes. Whether it is used in the context of pagan, imperial, or Bolshevik ideology, whether it is told seriously or ironically, the fairy tale as a form cannot help but invoke certain attitudes and concepts, such as the wish for a utopia of benevolent power and universally reciprocated affection, a two-world universe divided between the everyday and the extraordinary, a cosmos governed by affective-intentional forces, etc. These attitudes may be judged and ridiculed in the telling, but first they must be called up.

The fairy tale has been a favorite narrative mode in Russian culture, and has been adapted to legitimize many regimes and social conditions. In the 19th century, many scholars and tale-tellers shared with their German counterparts the Romantic view that the fairy tale is the last preserve of archaic, "magical thought." It was held to reflect the *Volksgeist* in a world dominated by the systematizing and internationalizing forces of Enlightenment rationalism. According to this conception, the fairy tale is the "correction of the world" (Honti: 73-74; Nagy, *Hösök*, p. 19) representing a universe responsive to human desire versus myth's image of an impersonally "true" universal order.[3]

The fairy tale thus served as an antidote to both the symbolic systems of religion and the mechanistic world-descriptions of science. Yet to the degree that Russian propagandists of "scientific" utopianism presented their views through the paradigm of the fairy tale, the tale was also used to create an image of science as the treasure chest of magical tools with which history's hero—the Russian nation, the proletariat, or Socialist Man—would create the promised utopia. This is one reason why the "scientific" nature of Marxism-Leninism constantly emphasized by Soviet ideologists has little relation either to scientific methodology or to a Marxist conception of the historical dialectic of science.[4] Unlike the situation in the West, in the USSR

scientific research has long been held to be in the service of the Baconian ideal of science, with the goal of utopian production and distribution of wealth in a classless society as the standard by which scientific work is said to be ultimately judged. Consequently, in Russia the fairy tale has been a far more important structure of intelligibility than empirical rationalism, and it has proved to be an invaluable tool for the formalization and dissemination of Soviet ideology.

The fairy-tale plot's main elements lend themselves to interpretation as symbolic representations of the main moments of the Marxian historical dialectic. In the first place, the ultimate task of the tale's hero is to mediate for humanity, acting as the agent of its transformation from powerlessness (domination by an alien power) to empowerment (Wosien: 104). By struggling with and eventually defeating a villain, the fairy-tale hero destroys the force that initially disturbed the harmony of the human community. He does this by appropriating that force—i.e., using the power of the villain against the villain, and thereby "negating the negation." This parallels the liberatory violence of the agent of human history (in classical Marxism, the proletariat; but in Soviet SF, the scientific intelligentsia) against that fraction of the species that has broken with the whole of humanity in order to appropriate the human essence of others. The hero's victory establishes a new state of happiness transcending the conflict and alienation that had originally produced it.

Secondly, the fairy tale's villain generally gains its power by creating a "lack" with metaphysical significance, by stealing or hoarding the symbolic object of the heart's desire (the princess, the treasure, the golden apples, the shaman's magic horse, etc.), by terrorizing the land, or by forcing the hero to perform perilous tasks. This symbolism is easily adapted to the representation of class oppression, the alienation of work, and the destruction of communal bonds, all of which the socialist transformation is to overcome.

Thirdly, the hero's struggle with internal and external obstacles can become an image of the moral dialectic of the historical agents' self-recognition as a class. The obstacles the hero faces are often alienated versions of the hero himself, such as false heroes, brothers, deceivers, not to mention the symmetrically opposed villain. Other obstacles are created by the hero's improper means, usually to acquire personal power that does not lead to the proper goal.

Fourthly, the hero's co-operation with magical donors implies that there is a tendency in nature allowing it to be co-opted to the human project of transforming nature into culture through the appropriation of natural forces. For Soviet ideology this is an important point. The orthodox Marxist-Leninist concepts of nature have been based on a reading of Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* and *Anti-Dühring* that objectifies the dialectic in physical nature (Marcuse: 143-45; Schmidt: 52-61).

Finally, the happy-ending, with its images of material abundance, leisure, and social concord, agrees with the utopian goals of revolutionary socialism.

A great deal of research has recently traced the folkloristic and specifically fairy-tale "morphology" of contemporary Soviet administration and official culture. Some scholars have discovered the fairy-tale paradigm

even in Soviet legislation and in the training of international business negotiators.[5] In literary culture, the connection between socialist realism and the fairy tale is so close that Katerina Clark (pp. 4-7) has proposed a "Master Plot" for the Soviet novel based on modifications of Vladimir Propp's well-known master plot of the fairy tale defined in *The Morphology of the Folktale*. The case of socialist realism demonstrates the extent to which the fairy-tale paradigm has been the privileged literary tool for propaganda. It is well known that the schema of socialist realism proposed by Zhdanov and Gorky was drawn from folkloristic models. When socialist realism was first proclaimed as the official literary manner, at the First Writers Congress in 1934, Gorky demanded that writers should pattern their heroes on those of folklore (Clark: 34).[6]

2.2 The Strugatskys and Technocratic Utopianism in the Early '60s. The Strugatskys began writing within the tradition of the socialist realist quasi-fairy-tale paradigm, which they adapted to represent the ideals of the generation of scientists and engineers whose leading position in Soviet culture had been validated by the success of the Soviet space program and the de-Stalinization of science. It is already clear in their early work that they intended their SF to "personalize" the future. Their goal was to rescue the vision of a socialist utopia from the monumental distance to which Stalin and the Stakhanovite cult of Socialist Man had placed it, and to return it to a human scale. The Strugatskys thus joined their SF to the general trend of the "humanization of Marxism" in the Eastern Europe of the '60s. Their model for this was space exploration, with its romantic associations with adventure and its heroic associations with the ethics of honest scientific method. In the era of space travel, the Strugatskys seemed to say, class struggle would end, the material and the social causes of scarcity would be defeated, and the Earth would be united in a single utopian society, whose life would be given interest and meaning by its perpetual struggle with nature. The history of science would replace the history of class struggle. The conflicts that were to keep the dialectical movement of history alive were to be the ethical and cognitive problems faced by scientists and explorers as they encountered new worlds and new aspects of nature. There would still be choices, but they would no longer be between good and evil; instead, they would be between "the good and the better" (Suvin "Introduction," p. 4; Sinyavski satirizes exactly this phrase in *On Socialist Realism*, p. 50). With the Strugatskys, science thus became the historical vehicle of a new fairy-tale paradigm, which was more realistically motivated than the old one (since the villains are never absolutely evil, nor are the happy endings absolutely happy), but was identical in structure. This modification not only allowed the Strugatskys more artistic freedom to depict psychologically divided characters and ideologically ambiguous situations. It also gave them a powerful theme that expressed the hopes of the new Soviet technocracy in the late '50s—the multitude of scientists, engineers, and scientific students who were accorded new respect by the successes in outer space.

One cannot appreciate the importance of the Strugatskys' work without understanding the role of the Soviet scientific intelligentsia in the post-Stalin

thaw. In the late '50s and early '60s, this intelligentsia was beginning to liberalize not only the actual practice of science, but also the role of the theory of science in the dominant philosophy of history. After a generation of rejection, new respect was granted under Khrushchev to the view that contemporary developments in science constituted a "second industrial revolution," the so-called Scientific-Technological Revolution (STR), and hence a radical transformation in the forces of production requiring adaptation in the ideological superstructure (Buccholz: 147-53). Propelled by the successes of the space-program, Khrushchev seemed willing to accept the challenge of acknowledging the idea of STR: namely, that Soviet society would have to commit itself to developing its scientific and technical resources in order to assure the final victory of Communism over Capitalism. Young members of the scientific elite, for whom the Strugatskys became literary spokesmen (indeed, of which they were members, since Boris Strugatsky was a computer scientist), believed this new ambition on the part of the regime and the Party promised them that they would be the primary architects of the new socialist utopia. It appeared that they had been enpowered to take on the role of the revolutionary vanguard in a peaceful revolution.[7]

2.3 The Case of *Far Rainbow*. A good example of the Strugatskys' adaptation of the socialist-realist fairy-tale model is their novella *Far Rainbow*, which was published in 1963 and enjoyed great popular success throughout the '60s.[8] It tells the tale of a community of human scientists who have colonized an uninhabited, earthlike planet called Rainbow. The scientists perform experiments in the application of a new science, known as "zero-physics," which theoretically allows the instantaneous transmission of matter through space, a process they call "zero-transmission" or "zero-t." Rainbow is a lovely, paradisal world, where the scientists live with their families, where artists come from Earth to do their best work, where the children live in beautiful school colonies, and where the crops grow abundantly enough to secure the planet's autonomy from Earth under a purely formal civil administration. Scientists rule. It is utopia.

The idyll is disrupted by two forces, one internal, the other external. First, the internal order of the colony begins coming apart at the seams. A scarcity of portable nuclear reactors, known as ulmotrons, which are essential for the zero-physicists' work and must be imported from Earth, leads the scientists to tap and steal each other's supplies. The most intellectually developed human community verges on degeneration into a chaos of infantile selfishness. But far more disruptive is the strange phenomenon known as the Black Wave. After each zero-t experiment, an enormous wave of plasma rises at the planet's poles and moves towards the equator. Usually, these waves can be dissipated by specially designed "energy-gulping" machines. But at the start of *Rainbow*, a particularly energy-exhausting experiment produces a wave of unprecedented size. The gulpers are unable to halt its advance, the wave destroys the crops and steadily approaches the colony's capital, situated on the equator.

At the capital, only one small spaceship is available to evacuate the inhabitants. Because it can accommodate only a very few, panic ensues. The

spaceship's wise pilot, Gorbovsky, who has just landed that day with a shipment of ulmotrons, takes command and issues the order that only the children and their teachers may be evacuated. The physicists must remain on the planet, and perish, and so must their records, with the exception of a set of "warning notes" about the Wave. Gorbovsky and his crew join the doomed colonists to make room for the children, one of whose teachers is an ex-starpilot competent to fly the ship to safety. After the ship departs, the colonists feel overwhelming relief. They accept their fate with joyous bravado as the two waves converge over them.

Rainbow contains interesting elements of a critique which may have seemed audacious at the time the novella was first published. It can easily be read as an allegory about nuclear testing, a matter that was very much under public discussion in the early '60s. The zero-physicists and their obsession with their new science are analogues of the scientists of the Manhattan Project; the zero-t experiments correspond to atmospheric nuclear tests; and the black wave is a not very displaced image of fallout. Rainbow itself is a fantastic version of the Soviet "Science Cities," the enormous artificial cities that Khrushchev had built for concentrating large numbers of scientists and technicians to facilitate the centralization of scientific work. The comic scramble for the ulmotrons satirizes the perpetual shortage of equipment that plagues even the most "autonomous" scientific projects in the USSR.

The point of the satire is not clear, however. The scale of the black wave catastrophe, the depiction of the scientists as problematic characters, and the fact that some of those with Russian names are at least complicitous in allowing the catastrophe to occur (Malyaev, Rob Sklyarov) are significant departures from the the bland nationalistic orthodoxy of most Soviet SF. The zero-physicists—who live, after all, in a classless society—destroy all the life of a surrogate Earth in their attempts to master nature. On the one hand, the authors imply that science's desire to serve humanity can easily lead to world-destroying projects. On the other hand, there is moral heroism ready to save humanity from science. Gorbovsky drops into this confusion literally from the sky. Against the claim made by Lamondois, the project director, that the most valuable thing on Rainbow is the zero-physicists' work, Gorbovsky retorts: "our most valuable asset is our future...the children" (8:109). With Gorbovsky acting as a model, the adults on Rainbow agree to the rescue of their children without regrets. He restores their self-respect by inspiring them to accept their sacrifice courageously. Thus, a *homo ex machina* solves a sticky problem that he had no share in causing. In the same way, there are no regrets for the destruction of Rainbow, which perishes without tragic, or even pathetic, significance. In the end, the catastrophe appears to be less a humanly induced cataclysm than a natural one.

This easy surrender of Rainbow muddles the fiction's critical point. None of the characters is rooted in the planet, and consequently it has no significant human history. It is only a "physicist's planet" (5:65), intended to be expendable by its authors as well as its colonists. Nor do the Strugatskys differentiate clearly in the tale between the critique of scientific hubris and the idealization of scientific courage. Nothing in the tale opposes the shift in emphasis from the scientists' obsession with their world-destroying project

to an upbeat, bittersweet tale of moral heroics and right values preserved. The zero-physicists' redemption seems to come much too easily.

Darko Suvin's interpretation of *Rainbow* as "a clear parable for the price of historical knowledge and progress" ("Introduction," p. 6) may indeed be what the Strugatskys intended. But the tale can also be read as a fairly classical parable of the dangers of overstepping human limits and thereby imperilling the whole species. Yet if the tale is a warning about real science, it is directed more to school children than to adults. It affirms a world in which positive values must win out, even if at great cost to the past. (Consider Gorbovsky's comparison of his queasiness before announcing his decision to evacuate only the children—a decision that involves his own death—to "something like those last moments before a final exam" [8:103].) The confusion created by the artificial resolution required by the juneviles-adventure fiction mode in which the story is told leaves the moral far from clear. Moreover, the threat to humanity and the Earth posed by a science alienated from the values that spawned it is not allayed in *Rainbow* by the scientific community itself.

2.4 *Far Rainbow* as a "Humanized" Production Novel. This ambivalence is the perhaps inevitable result of an experiment in infusing the idealized form of the socialist-realist fairy tale with innovative critical elements. With a few—but, as we shall see, significant—deviations, *Rainbow*'s action can be decomposed precisely into the moves of Clark's Master Plot of the orthodox socialist realist production novel.

The production novel had been the privileged form of fiction under Stalin. It generally told the tale of an energetic positive hero (or, more rarely, a heroine) who arrives at a development project bogged down by bureaucratic inertia or sabotage. In a realistically motivated version of the classical fairy tale, the hero's task is to restore the will to produce and to build socialism that the villainous enemies of the Revolution have sapped. The hero then undergoes trials and temptations, receives the help of a donor-like authority figure in touch with the laws of history and nature, and combats the villains. In the end, the hero succeeds in restoring revolutionary energy, will, and discipline.

This genre satisfied several important ideological needs at once. Because of its simplicity and invariant form, it easily absorbed popular literary elements and created the effect of "epic wholeness" appropriate for mythicizing official Soviet ideology (Clark: 9-10). By the same token, it eschewed the complications of psychological motivation and the complex relationships among milieu, character, and narrative form that were the trademark of Western modernism and its referent, the alienated consciousness of bourgeois social relations. The "Master Plot," or archetype, of the socialist realist production novel as Clark describes it is simpler than Propp's master plot of the fairy tale, and it lacks explicitly magical elements. Still, the production novel's structure of narrative action is identical to that of the fairy tale. The tasks are more realistically, even prosaically, motivated. So are the villains and the donors. But the prescription that the production novel end with the completion of the task, embodying the victory of Soviet civilization, shows

that the historical wish-fulfillment of the happy ending is more important than any other epic element.

Clark divides the action of the production novel (typified by Gladkov's *Cement* [1926]) into several phases, each of which has its appropriate moves. In the first phase, the Prologue or "separation," the hero arrives in, or returns to, the microcosm in which he must effect his eventual heroic mediation. Then, in the phase of "setting up the task," the hero sees that all is not well in the microcosm—specifically, the tasks of production are not being fulfilled. The hero then designs a scheme for the righting of the wrongs. Next, according to Clark (p. 257), "when the hero presents his plan to the local bureaucrats, they say it is too 'utopian'—that it would be impossible to fulfill it in terms both of technical feasability and available manpower and supplies." The third phase, the "transition" or period of trials, begins when the obstacles appear to the hero's plan. These Clark divides into two categories: prosaic and dramatic/heroic, or mythic. The prosaic include problems with supplies, manpower, and equipment; bureaucratic corruption or slackness; worker apathy and discontent. The dramatic/heroic include such things as natural disasters, enemy invasions, class enemies, counter-revolutionary terrorists, struggles with an antagonistic bureaucracy, etc. The hero may also face problems in his love life or in controlling his emotions. The final moment of the transition is the hero's journey to the "center" or to Moscow to seek help from more authoritative people than are available in the microcosm. The fourth phase is the Climax, when the fulfillment of the task is threatened. At first, the hero's task appears unrealizable, usually when one of his dramatic/heroic obstacles seems to threaten its completion. In the course of the encounter with this obstacle, an actual, near, or symbolic death occurs. Also in this phase, the hero may have moments of grave self-doubt. A fifth phase, of "incorporation," follows the climax. Here the hero has a talk with his mentor, who gives him the strength to carry on. In the last move, the Finale, or "celebration of incorporation," the task is completed, usually marked by a ceremony of celebration. The love plot is resolved; a funeral is held for the tragic victims killed during the climax; and the hero "transcends his selfish impulses and acquires an extrapersonal identity" (Clark: 259). Finally, "in a speech marking the completion of the task, or in some intangible form, such as the birth of a child, the theme of regeneration and of the glorious time that awaits future generations is introduced as a thematic counterpoint to sacrifice and death" (Clark: 260).

Through ritualized literary elements, the production novel represents certain Marxist-Leninist axioms, assimilated to Stalinist Russian nationalism. It depicts the highest values of the Soviet orthodoxy: work, in the form of communal industrial production (in opposition to individualism and the selfish practice of power); commitment to the building of socialism and the struggle against reaction; and acquiescence to the power of the central authorities. The first two of these values are consonant with humanistic Marxism, and the Strugatskys freely adopted those characteristics of the production novel that represented them. The third value, however, was difficult to harmonize with the first two. Especially during the de-Stalinization period and in the cultural struggles of the early '60s, the young intellectuals blamed

the failure to create a true socialist society on their elders' blind acquiescence to the Party's and Stalin's despotism. The Strugatskys used the socialist realist paradigm for the new values of this period by adapting the first two values to the themes of scientific exploration. In their work, the exploration of the cosmos and the establishment of contact among intelligent life-forms replace the goal of Soviet industrialization and the conquest of hostile nature for use by socialist society. The building of socialism is projected into the dialectic of the human future—that is, the adventure of humanity *after the revolution*. The question of authority—perhaps the fundamental problem of Soviet ideology—the Strugatskys tried to solve by constructing ideally "human" heroes, able to combine deep sympathy for the human species with great scientific understanding.

Rainbow is a far more genial and complex work than the tendentious Stalinist novel. One could argue that it deviates quite strongly from the fairy-tale paradigm, since most of its protagonists die at the end, leaving the chilly bionic immortal, Camill, alone on a wasted planet. *Rainbow* has perhaps more affinities with the ballad than the fairy tale—the narrative, in fact, closes with the zero-pilots singing a "Ballad of Far Rainbow" as they prepare to die. But if it is a ballad, it has been "rotated through" the fairy-tale form. The characters celebrate their "happy deaths," as if their sacrifice and courage were the heart's desire they had been seeking all along; only Camill is unhappy, for he cannot join them in death and thereby match Gorbovksy's model of humanism. *Rainbow* clearly attempts to go beyond the naïveté of the orthodox socialist realist form with this reversal of expectations. It might also be read as a compromise between the orthodox form and the anti-fairy-tale inversion of socialist realist conventions. The latter, exemplified by Dudintsev's influential *Not by Bread Alone* (1957), retains the elements of the classical production novels, but inverted: the hero is ultimately destroyed by the enchanted world of bureaucracy and despotism. In *Rainbow*, the Strugatskys seem to offer an alternative both to the bankruptcy of Stalinist *partijnost'* (party-consciousness) and the pessimism of the anti-Stalinist novel: a tragic socio-historical problem with a happy ending. It is nonetheless constructed from same structural elements as the socialist realist production novel, and its action naturally falls into the conventional parts described by Clark.

The novella's two foci of action, Gorbovsky and the Rainbow colonists, each develop according to the archetypal pattern, dovetailing throughout the narrative. Gorbovsky's sequence of actions has few surprises. Nostalgic for some earthy communality, from which his many years as a starpilot have separated him, he arrives on Rainbow (which is also a "return" of sorts, since he is visiting an old friend, and because Rainbow is so reminiscent of Earth) in the middle of a "production crisis"; he "sets up the task" of creating order among the scientists, and ultimately of rescuing the children; in a "transition" phase, he confronts "prosaic" obstacles created by the zero-physicists' anarchy, and the overriding "dramatic/heroic" obstacle of the Black Wave; he is rather ideally free of fears and doubts in the "climax," although he does exhibit some anxiety about his decision to evacuate only the children; he is "incorporated" into the colonists' community by choosing to stay on Rain-

bow with them, and he joins them in their "celebration" at the tale's conclusion. For their part, the zero-physicists also begin "separated" from the basic problems of the human species; they, too, must set up the task of dealing with the Black Wave, and with their own shortcomings (Patrick's intellectualism, Sklyarov's emotionalism, Rob and Tanya's lovers' quarrel, the panic and cowardice of some of the colonists); once they accept Gorbovsky's decision, they are reincorporated as a community, as well as with the rest of the human species, to whom they now send their heirs; finally, they indulge in a celebration of their recovered moral goodness.

Rainbow's most significant departure from the master plot is the absence of the hero's journey to the "center" to seek help from authoritative people. It is the mark of Gorbovsky's and Rainbow's "autonomy" (a matter very dear both to the colonial administration and the planet's agronomists in the tale) that the heroic decisions must be made in place, on Rainbow. The moral authority-figure in the Strugatskys' novella is willing to come into the endangered community and make the ultimate sacrifice for it. Gorbovsky thus represents the Generation of the '60s' ideal reversal of Stalinist monumentalization and hierarchical distantiation.

By the same token, there are no "pure" villains in the book. Because class struggle no longer occupies humanity's energies, the scientists' flaws can only harm them and their own offspring. Nor is nature a hostile force, as it is in so many of the '30s' novels of conquering the Arctic or the desert. The Black Wave is simply Rainbow's natural response to the zero-t experiments. It is interesting that, in a reversal of the Stalinist "setting up the task," in which the positive hero drives the workers to attain ideal goals against the defeatists' and saboteurs' advice, in *Rainbow* it is the positive hero who informs the zero-physicists that their plan is impossible because of material limits (i.e., the size of the spaceship). And the most important material limits are placed on zero-transference by Rainbow's nature. These are significant reversals of the socialist realist *topos*, embodying another of the Strugatskys' main themes: that honest science confronts real, even if temporary, *material* limits to development and cognition that require serious moral-ethical reflection, unlike the Stalinist-Lysenkoite delusion of Soviet omnipotence.

Rainbow is a naïve work in the Strugatskys' oeuvre. It still demonstrates the epic wholeness that was held to be one of the virtues of socialist realism. It purports to be an image of a dynamic utopia: a good society that continues to grow through its conflicts with nature and human nature, thereby solving the problem of how to imagine a utopia that is still a part of the dialectical process. To depict qualitative change without sacrificing the image of wholeness, the Strugatskys had to abstract the action of their tale from the recognizable, concrete historical problems of the present—excepting the "safe" issue of atmospheric nuclear testing. They present a resolution on the margins of the world, which has ambiguous implications for the actual society of the present. The destruction that brings forth the new (or rather, the renewed) sense of human species-consciousness in *Rainbow* happens so far from the Earth that there is no reason to fear that it might have any effect on actual earthly reality. The zero-t cataclysm is like nuclear disaster, but it is also quite different. At the very least, a nuclear world-destruction might still be

avoided, perhaps by following the good example of the zero-physicists of the future. Hence the novella's dizzying double-focus: the concrete scene of destruction in *Rainbow* remains alien, but the abstract moral consciousness of the fallible-heroic colonists is the familiar ideal morality of utopian virtue that is to be practiced here and now.

3.1 The Fiction of the '60s: The Degeneration of the Wish. After *Rainbow*, the Strugatskys gradually abandoned the juvenile adventure mode of socialist realism, with its abstract utopianism and virtuous foregone conclusions. Their works began instead to emphasize the obstacles in the way of achieving utopia. In the works before 1964, not only was the victory of the socialist revolution and the institution of a terrestrial utopia assumed, but the whole cosmos was conceived as a scene where the only problems facing humanity are the struggles with nature and contacts with other species. With *Hard to Be a God* (1964), a new theme entered their fiction: the degeneration of the utopian wish, the possibility that humanity may not be able to achieve its utopia because of its incapacity to wish for its own good.

With *God* and *The Final Circle of Paradise* (1965), the Strugatskys brought their settings and situations closer to familiar earthly social settings...and to ethical-psychological dilemmas posed by complex social situations. Although the setting of *God* is another planet, it is populated by human beings who differ from the Earth's only in certain aspects of their history; *Paradise* occurs on Earth, in an imaginary Country of the Fools which mimics Western consumer society. With these more concrete settings, the Strugatskys also began to pay more attention to the problems encountered by their scientific adventurers and less to the uplifting heroic solutions.

The Strugatskys' new interest in the problems retarding the utopian resolution necessarily led to a change in their attitude to the fairy-tale paradigm. In the fairy tale, the problems—i.e., the obstacles the hero meets and his ways of dealing with them—are subordinated to the overriding movement towards a happy ending. It is this inexorable movement towards happiness that gives the fairy tale its moral value in the eyes of its partisans. For the utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch, this is what makes the fairy tale an example of *Vor-Schein*, or anticipatory illusion, which he believed inspires human communities to persevere in the struggle for utopia. For the English fantasist J.R.R. Tolkien, the inevitable "eu-catastrophe" endows the fairy tale and its modern counterpart, fantasy, with the power of regenerative estrangement and the capacity to create an image of confidence in life and the universe when there is no "reason" for it.[9] And it is this sudden, extra-systemic grace that makes the fairy-tale world an image of the possible co-operation of nature and "the liberated man," as opposed to the "fatedness" of human beings depicted by "the nightmare of myth" (Benjamin: 102).

Unlike simple wish-fulfillment, the fairy tale represents the life of the wish in strict form: from the recognition of a lack in "reality" and the methods of satisfying it, complete with the aid of donors from outside the human social world, to its fulfillment. Because the wish of the fairy tale is fulfilled *a priori*, the whole tale is an image of the synthesis of thought and action, desire and reality. The happy ending guarantees not only a feeling of joy and

consolation at the end of the tale. Because the positive resolution is necessary for the tale to be what it is, it also determines that each one of the hero's thoughts and deeds, each move in the tale as we follow it, be defined by its value for reaching the goal. Not just any trick or tool will work for the hero; the supernatural helper must be summoned only in certain situations and only in certain ways, and the helper's aid can often only be obtained by helping the helper first. Unlike myth, in which the rules of human conduct are dictated by supernal authorities without much regard for human desire, the correct course of action in the fairy tale is determined by the humanly desired, social end. One might say that the affective-ethical happiness of the end radiates back into the action, encouraging appropriate good conduct in the hero through its influence. In the words of one of the Strugatskys' protagonists, the novelist Banev of *The Ugly Swans* (1967), "the future extends its feelers into the present" (2:23-24), making the future manifest as a point from which the actions and thoughts of the present will be judged. As the hero overcomes obstacles with the help of this influence from the future, he gains in "spirit," the power derived from happiness. Whenever a character in a fairy tale transgresses the rules, and acts in the interest not of the communal end but for personal gain, he or she loses correspondingly in spirit.

As long as they were writing fantasies of post-revolutionary utopian human beings encountering the "external" problems created by nature, the Strugatskys' stories simply assumed that their characters had sufficient spirit to overcome those obstacles. But as their emphasis shifted from the heroic resolutions to the obstacles created by, and within, the human protagonists themselves in their relations with one another and their own psyches, "spirit" itself—its nature and origin in social life—becomes the main problem. Like tale heroes themselves, the Strugatskys seem to have breezed through the early ordeals of representation, only to come upon an unexpectedly new and unnerving obstacle: the dispiriting influence of the "actually existing" alienation of humanity from nature and other human beings...and from the happy ending of human history. We can put the Strugatskys' somber turn in this way: their protagonists gradually begin to think that the obstacles to the happy ending are so ingrained in the human condition that they may not be able to overcome them and still remain human. Consequently, the heroic task—for the protagonists, their authors, and their audience, equally—is to retain the drive for utopia despite its inconceivability in an alienated world (cp. Jameson: 157).

The theme becomes the classic modernist theme of disillusionment, conceived as the degeneration of the wish—the problems created when the great dialectical fairy tale's hero, Humanity, loses its ability to recognize what it really lacks. Hence *Paradise*'s epigraph from Saint-Exupéry: "There is but one problem—the only one in the world—to restore to men a spiritual content, spiritual concerns" (1:5). With the degeneration of the wish, the dialectical fusion of theory and practice splits, too. Once the inevitability of the fairy-tale ending is cast into doubt, none of the principals can be sure that the informing wish, and the actions taken to fulfill it, are the right ones. Thought and action become uncertain, and incapable of bestowing power. The futuristic humanity which the Strugatskys envision after 1964 can no longer

think critically. It sinks into apathy and conformity, content with personal satisfactions, while militarism, bureaucracy, and consumerism transform the utopian wish into its parody: the dreary dystopia of war, irrational rationalization, and physical comfort deadening to the intellect. The despiritualized humans of the future lose the power to imagine any good beyond their own personal gain, and thus lose the power to wish for the species' happiness.

3.2 Breaking Up the Fairy-Tale Paradigm. The Strugatskys developed a formal correlative for this alienation of theory and practice resulting from the degeneration of the power to wish for the future, by shaking apart the epic wholeness of the fairy tale's form into its parts. These, deprived of the unifying strong force of the happy ending, are separated from one another into distinct narrative "zones."

Each fairy tale is constructed of three fundamental narrative phases, which can be broken down further into associated functions, as in Propp's archetype of the fairy tale. In the initial phase, the lack dominates. This phase depicts an estranged version of the real social world of the reader, whose norms are those of the familiar human universe. The concrete lack it suffers indicates that it is dominated by an extra-ordinary force. Often, this force imposes on it a cyclically repeated pattern which it is the hero's task to break. The second, mediate phase is the scene of the hero's obstacles. This is the world of enchantment, the "other world," where the laws of nature are different from the human world's. Here the hero acquires the aid of the supernatural beings and engages the villain that has caused the lack in combat. The happy ending, the recuperative phase, is the least concrete of the phases, since it is rarely a locus in its own right. It corresponds to the final synthesis. It restores the lost value to the social world, but with an enormous gain over the initial phase. The happy ending embodies an ontological transformation, a humanly achieved redemption of communal life from alienation (Maranda: 16). The hero liberates the social world from its earlier condition of being, its helplessness versus the enthralling evil. With this new freedom, the human world and the supernatural world coexist in harmony, won through mutual aid and shared effort. These three phases occur in two complementary loci of the fairy tale; many tales explicitly speak of them as two halves of the same universe. The hero's task is to mediate—to establish a human link between them, and to dissolve the supernatural domination, the magic spell of myth.

The fairy tale is an "unreflective" form. The affective, cognitive, and instrumental interests it represents through its functions are embedded in the structure and not named as such. Even so, individual storytellers usually do provide motivations for the action of their tales. Motivations, or the reasons why things happen in the tale, are the most changeable aspects of the fairy-tale narrative—so much so that Formalist and Structuralist scholars of the fairy tale deny that it is a defining element.[10] Yet motivations are the propositions with which the tellers reinforce the connection between the tale and the shared culture of the teller and audience. They mark the teller's interpretations of and commentary on the tale, his or her theoretical understanding of the "raw material," which is traditionally viewed as an object with an exist-

ence independent of any one telling or any one teller, and thus often requiring interpretation in the teller's cultural context. These theoretical interpretations have counterparts within the tale's action, in the formulaic rules of conduct and address, which the would-be hero must adhere to or face failure and destruction. Such formulaic norms and cautions indicate that the hero must possess or acquire a consciousness of the logic and the ethics of the magical world in order to fulfill his task. They may be vestiges of incantantion or ritual speech; in any case, they imply that correct thought is inseparable from correct action. A protagonist acting with bad motives (however the teller may describe them) will necessarily violate the magical norms, and will necessarily fail to achieve the goal. The reverse is equally true. In this sense, the happy ending hypostatizes right thinking and right action as a single state of affective goodness.

The motivations, or rationalizations, of the tale may refer to any of the main spheres of human interest implicit in the tale: the affective bonds and desires of social life associated with the lack, the instrumental rationality associated with the magical tools, and the cognition associated with the protagonists' "education" and understanding of the magical and social worlds. But the fairy tale teller does not usually make these interests available for reflection and commentary as conceptual objects, a process that might feed back to and affect the form of the narrative. Hence Bakhtin's notion that the forms whose conventional generic structures create the sense of epic wholeness are inappropriate for the novel, which must have a searching form appropriate for its searching content (Clark: 38). The fairy tale implies as a generic *a priori* an indivisible unity of the affective, cognitive, and instrumental aspects of human life. In each step of his career towards the happy ending, the hero embodies their unity, which he realizes for the world at the tale's conclusion. The only alternative to this is the total breakdown of the whole. The misuse of tools, the abuse of affectional relations, and the faulty understanding of the norms involved in the task all lead to failure. It is an either/or condition. In the socialist realist production novel this unity could be maintained because of the inflexible imperatives of Stalinist ideology: right affection is always embodied in courageous commitment and fidelity to the Party and the people; right instrumentality is always embodied in the completion of the technical project that will build socialism and the nation; and right cognition is always made manifest in *partijnost'*—all of which are aspects of a single Marxist-Leninist utopian completeness.

Beginning with *God*, the Strugatskys broke up the fairy tale's dialectical unity of qualities, which they had emulated in their early works like *Rainbow*, into three separate symbolic "zones" of action that are structurally closely intertwined, but which are held apart by the lack of a unifying resolution provided by the inexorable utopian happy ending. One of these "zones" is the scene of the tale's social reality, the equivalent of the "lack-world." Usually, this image of the real social world of the reader is altered and defamiliarized by social and technological innovations; but it is essentially an allegorical displacement of reality. The second narrative zone is a quasi-"magic circle" where the usual laws of the reality—the norms of the first zone—do not apply and whose principles are inscrutable to the characters.

As a result, in this zone the characters are forced to act "in the dark." This is the chronotope of the *novum*, which in the Strugatskys always appears as an actual alien space, usually a "hole," or a fringe, of the real world. These zones function as rationalized versions of the fairy tale's magical realm. The third of the Strugatskys' narrative zones is appropriately "outside" the narrative action, since it represents the alienation of theory. These are zones of reflection which appear in the novels as episodes in which two or more of the characters debate the theoretical implications of the problems raised by the *nova* of the quasi-magical realms and their implications for the ethical and cognitive life of humanity.

The Strugatskys' fiction of the '60s and early '70s is marked by the gradual inversion of the values the authors assign to each of these narrative zones. In the earlier works—such as *God* and *Paradise*—the zone of displaced social reality is populated by a perverse humanity: the benighted Arkanar of *God*, apparently doomed to deviate from the known course of sociohistorical evolution, and the Country of the Fools of *Paradise*, which appears to have called a halt to its spiritual development in order to luxuriate in material abundance. The magical zone in these novels is represented by the classless, utopian society of the rest of terrestrial humanity, which enjoys the power of advanced moral consciousness. The quasi-mediaeval Arkanarian rebels view the woods where they observe the helicopters of, and receive money from, the agents of the Institute of Experimental History as an enchanted forest. In *Paradise*, this rationalization of the magical zone is much stronger: the utopian Earth from which the Security Council's agents enter the Country of the Fools is never shown directly. Only Zhilin's responses to the materialistic apathy of the Fools informs us that the rest of humanity has a higher consciousness. Ostensibly, the future utopian society has extraordinary powers. In *God*, these are explicitly confused with fairy-tale magic—and the defamiliarized versions of contemporary social reality (i.e., Arkanar as the Stalinist USSR; the Country of the Fools as the consumption-intoxicated West) must treat them as a historical *novum*. Because of the enormity of the social, psychological, and spiritual problems besetting these versions of ourselves, the happy ending embodied by the utopian agents cannot practice its encouraging, inspiriting power.

Even more troubling than the present's resistance to what should be its inevitable future—a perversion equivalent to the beguiling of the fairy-tale hero by evil forces—are the implications this has for the future. The dialectical unity of the fairy tale falls to pieces if one stage resists the movement of the whole. Just as *Rainbow*, for all its formal and thematic unity, impresses us as ambivalent because the colonists win their moral victory without recognizing that they have destroyed a surrogate Earth, so *God* and *Paradise* cast doubt on the utopian future. Rumata/Anton's ethical questions about whether to intervene in Arkanarian affairs or not are decided ultimately by accepting the authority of the Institute. Why does Rumata remain so troubled? There appears to be no material-historical reason to fear the developments in Arkanar, since the victory of the revolution is known to be inevitable (*God* 6:138), even if it is delayed by the peculiar historical conditions there. More importantly, the earthly utopia is so much more powerful and

technologically advanced that there can be no reason for it to fear anything that Arkanar does. That would be as absurd as if the gods of Olympus were to fear the history of mortals. But Rumata/Anton's dilemma has more than an ideal, spiritual content; since, in the materialist-realist universe of the tale's discourse, the characters are all human, they are all involved in the same human historical process. Rumata's confusion comes from understanding that either the utopia is infallible in its own right—i.e., the agents are really godlike—or they are just as subject to the unknowns of human history as the Arkanarians. Either they cannot be touched by evil, or they are obligated to fight it. (Perhaps the major flaw of the novel is the imbalance of power between Earth and Arkanar, leading one to question what Arkanar can offer the "Dons" from the Institute comparable to Gorbovsky's opportunity to die his happy death.) The historical subtext of the novel shows the dilemma in glaring clarity: either the historical deviation of Stalinist tyranny is "beneath" the utopian concerns of the future-oriented culture of the '60s—the humanistic Marxism of the European New Left and the reform-minded intelligentsia—and hence need not be irritated into new life, or it is a historical threat to the future that requires ethical engagement in the present.

In the same vein, Zhilin's conclusions in *Paradise*—that few of the council members of his utopian society will understand that the affluence-addiction of the Fools is not the work of a malevolent conspiracy, but the result of poor choices and poor thought on a mass scale—reflect poorly on his superiors. The initial plot device, the secret investigation of the Country of the Fools, establishes at the outset that the Security Council is more suspicious than enlightened. Zhilin has little hope that the Fools can be educated to take a humanistic perspective—yet he does not feel that they are any less human than himself. Since he has gone among the Fools to help prevent the spread of goods-addiction to his own society, his whole mission raises serious questions about the insecurity of his utopian home—and about the authors' commitment to the inevitability of the approach of utopia. The often-discussed abstractness of *Paradise* (see Suvin, "Criticism," p. 300) may be a result of this vagueness about the status of the would-be donor: i.e., the Security Council and the utopian society it works for. By placing the power of the donor in question, the Strugatskys also dissolved the fairy-tale form without constructing an alternative.

The inevitability of the protagonists' right action is guaranteed in the fairy tale by the ending's "reverse influence." This inevitability evaporates when the obstacle resists solutions. It is significant that in these works the Strugatskys published in 1964 and '65, the main characters occupy the position of the magical donors. The position of the hero is occupied by the deviant society. If the agents of the utopian future cannot inspire the present to work for its own future, the tale (and history) becomes mired in the middle.

The Strugatskys' narratives always attempt to mediate this problem by presenting theoretical debates and cogitations in prominent parts of the action. Characteristically, the parties to these meditations (always including the central protagonist) elaborate fundamental ethical positions until it becomes clear that the questions they involve are intellectually undecidable, thanks to the limits of humanity's knowledge of the world. These debates

settle nothing except that it is impossible to come to an intellectual-conceptual understanding of the social-historical problems. Thus they repeat the dilemmas of the action in the process of interpreting it.

These bouts of thought, which correspond to the fairy tale's motivations and magical norms, were favorite devices of the Strugatskys even before *God*. They are essential devices in socialist realism as well, although there they are transparently "decideable." But as the Strugatskys' work evolves—beginning with Rumata's dialogue with Budach at the end of *God* on what one should ask of a god (8:196-98)—the debates become increasingly complex and painful, as if to illustrate over and over again the '60s' cliché that "truth is complex." Just as the significance of the novels' action becomes muddled, despite the Strugatskys' brilliant and vivid narratives, the debates cast doubt on the ability of thought to comprehend its own historical conditions and problems. The fairy tale's structure is clearly evident in these works, but it too is "in the dark," groping for a way to discover its own inevitability.

3.3 The Inverted Fairy Tale. Beginning in 1966, with Kandid's tale in *The Snail on the Slope*, the relationship of the narrative zones changes in the Strugatskys' fiction. Their work begins to show the influence of writers whose main theme is the hero's struggle with insurmountable obstacles: Kafka (whose work appeared for the first time—briefly—in a Russian edition in 1964), Hemingway, Orwell, Lem, Kobo Abe. The Strugatskys seem to have found themselves less and less able to assume, not to say depict, a utopian future based on idealistic projections from the present. Rather than moving away from despotism, the Brezhnev-Kosygin regime had filled the power-vacuum of the deposed personality cult with reinforced bureaucratic philistinism. Public support for reform was absent, except among certain segments of the intelligentsia. The mere idea that the present might produce a scientifically adventurous and morally good society seemed the stuff of ideological fantasy. The closest the Strugatskys ever came to its depiction is the magical Research Institute of Thaumaturgy and Spellcraft in *Monday Begins on Saturday* (1966)—tellingly, a fantastic farce in which the utopian beings are magi with benevolent supernatural powers.

In Kandid's tale, the relationship between the magical and real zones reverses itself. The displaced present is represented by the aboriginal villagers of the great Forest. According to Suvin ("Introduction," p. 16), these simple natives represent the non-intellectual masses who are deprived of their history and information about the radical changes that they are made to suffer in their world. Subjected to various forms of what appears to be telepathic mental manipulation, they are incapable of reflecting on their past, and seem doomed to repeat their customs and thoughts incessantly. Even so, they demonstrate human compassion, by healing the pilot Kandid after his helicopter crash and absorbing him into their social structure. The world of the *novum* is represented by the "Splendid Maidens," parthenogenic, telepathic Amazons who are apparently the products of a drastic evolutionary transformation. These "Maidens" gradually assimilate the native women of the Forest, usually by forcible abduction. Meanwhile, they subject the Forest

to inscrutable and cruel engineering projects that radically alter the Forest's topography and climate. Possessing a new mental power to control organic matter and even to create new forms of life, the Maidens have no compassion for the old order of the analytical, male-dominated bureaucracy, which they are bent on destroying.

Kandid's strange tale cannot be boiled down to a univocal cultural-historical referent. In one sense, Kandid represents the intelligentsia, which, finding itself in an unintelligible Forest of social life, must choose between solidarity with the unreflective and stupefied masses or serving an immensely powerful new order hostile to the intelligentsia (see Suvin, "Introduction," p. 12). Kandid feels the choice is already made for him: for the Maidens he can only be a tool, at best, while for the villagers he can be a protector. The historical process may favor the Maidens, but the ethical demands of compassion and solidarity require him to protect his villagers. The most significant change from the earlier works is that the zone of the displaced present society is the world of muddle-headed, helpless villagers; and the *novum*, far from being the utopian future congruent with classical humanistic visions, belongs to the cold, inhuman Maidens, whose grandiose projects and brutal tactics evoke comparisons with Stalin's experiments in crash industrialization and mass collectivization.

The theory-zone in Kandid's tale is also new and strange. Like the natives, Kandid finds it difficult to maintain a train of thought from one moment to the next. Only in the concluding pages does he understand his situation clearly...and there is no assurance that he will maintain that clarity of thought. Parallel to his journey to escape the Forest and return to the Directorate is his journey to understand the mysterious forces transforming the Forest and his place in that alien world. The process of interpretation is extremely difficult. The villagers are unintelligible because they cannot remember the past in a rational pattern. The Maidens are inscrutable because their minds are apparently so different from the human that they are functionally "aliens." Kandid's own mind is also numbed by the Maidens' mental jamming. Consequently, the debates and dialogues are barely coherent attempts to find a common ground of thought. Kandid makes his decision at the end of the tale to stay with the villagers—at least until he can escape the Forest—not on the basis of clear authoritative imperatives like the rule of non-intervention in *God*. Lacking clear information, Kandid discovers he must choose on the basis of his own human understanding of right action, even if he is an evolutionary atavism.

In Kandid's tale, the fairy tale's happy ending is replaced by resistance to the ending. The historical happy end appears to be reserved for the new evolutionary prodigies, for whom the human villagers are merely pesky obstacles. For Kandid, and for the humanity he feels obliged to defend, the obstacle is the scene of life—a happy end for the human species is almost too much even to imagine. And as the happy ending is thus "alienated" by being bestowed on the alien Maidens, the qualitative dimensions of the fairy tale are also deprived of their coherence and separated from one another. Although he is a scientist, Kandid is deprived of cognition. He has no way to process the information he acquires. He makes his choice to protect his villa-

gers on the basis of affection for the community that nurtured him. On the other side, the Maidens' world does seem whole: their affective bonds among one another are extremely strong; their instrumentality is enormously powerful and made in the feminine image (or at least in the Strugatskys' conception of archetypal feminine qualities); and their scientific cognition is clearly "other," and more powerful, than the Directorate's science of "dead things" (*Snail* 8:185). It is whole...but wholly unintelligible to humanity.

In two of the later fictions, *The Ugly Swans* and Pepper's half of *Snail* (1968), this inversion of values becomes even more marked. Pepper's tale is pure muddle: every significant term shifts its meaning, as if resisting all obligations to be a dependable representation. The displaced present is the Kafkaesque Forest Study and Exploitation Authority, "The Directorate," a maze of bureaucratic absurdities just as inscrutable as the bizarre natural phenomena of the Forest it is supposed to study. In Pepper's tale, the Directorate is an image of contemporary scientific work, simultaneously too rigidly anthropocentric to respect the mysteries of the material world and too bureaucratic to make any headway in controlling it for human use. Neither Pepper's actions (which essentially go around in circles) nor the Carollian dialogues he participates in (which he can never comprehend, even though he is a professional linguist) can escape from the inertia of the Directorate. His questioning of the Directorate is eventually resolved when he discovers that he has been made Director, and finds he has been placed on the "administrative vector" which is "the basis of all else" and "has its base in the depths of time" (*Snail* 10:230).

In *Swans*, the reversal is complete. The zone of the displaced present is a wretched provincial town, where the exiled novelist Victor Banev and his circle of convivial drunks waste their lives in the Big Brother-like regime of "Mr President." The zone of the *novum* is the leprosarium, where the "slimies," evolutionary prodigies similar to, but considerably more sympathetic than, the Amazons of *Snail*, are collected to do scientific research for Mr President's military-industrial complex. These slimies are the "ugly swans" of the title—making explicit the fairy-tale origin of the book. In the tale itself, the motif of the Pied Piper crops up several times to motivate the slimies' apocalyptic tranformation of history; they take all of the town's children with them into the evidently paradisal future of their own creation, liberating them from their unworthy parents. In *Swans*, the evolutionary prodigies are redemptive, not destructive. They save the future generations of humanity even while they destroy the irreversibly corrupt present. The novel's protagonist, Banev, like Kandid, "understands nothing" except the importance of decency and the need to wish for utopia (*Swans* 10:187). Banev is one of the few adults assimilated to the winners of historical evolution. But the new world is probably not for him. The slimies act as donors who magically liberate the human children. In the end, however, *Swans* is weaker than Kandid's tale, for the slimies' gift of liberation comes without any significant human participation. The liberated children are not questing heroes; they are creatures of the slimies' education. In our terms, then, the point of the novel is that the utopian transformation—even if it is a glorious one—is alien and inconceivable. It may not be benevolent to humanity as

humanity knows itself. Banev has such strongly divided loyalties—both to the weakness of human beings and to the strength of the slimies—that he remains an outsider in both worlds, with no power to create a world which he would willingly be "inside of."

4.1 ***Roadside Picnic***. The themes and techniques of the Strugatskys' fiction I have been discussing culminate in *Roadside Picnic*, one of the most significant works of recent SF. It is a fable of the despair of the '60s' intelligentsia facing the complete destruction of the reform movement, which was betrayed—as the fable has it—not so much by the Brezhnev regime, as by the moral-spiritual conditions which made that regime possible: the inertia of the masses in a world undergoing a convergence that is a bitter parody of the one Sakharov had hoped for in his memorandum of 1968. This is the convergence of Eastern and Western ennui, the fruit of global acquiescence to purely material satisfactions and the abdication of all higher moral purposes—the victory of "realism" over utopian idealism.

The novella tells of the aftermath of a "Visitation" by mysterious extraterrestrials to the imaginary Canadian town of Harmont (along with four other unidentified spots on the globe), where they stayed for a few hours invisible to human beings. Their arrival was attended by several non-fatal cataclysms. When they departed, they left behind a sharply circumscribed area filled with mysterious, and often dangerous, objects and phenomena, and named the "Zone." As the world gradually quarantines the Zone and its incomprehensible reality, the "treasures" of the Visitation are leaked from it and used to create commodities and weapons. The backbone of the story is the ambiguous Pilgrim's Progress of Red Schuhart, an uneducated but fiercely proud and loyal "stalker," who smuggles forbidden objects out of the Zone to sell to underworld fences. Red returns grudgingly to the perilous Zone again and again to support his family, and to escape from the dreary, apathetic life of the social world to the intensity of the Zone. In a desperate attempt to find a miraculous way to reverse the degenerative mutation of his only child (which is an effect of the Visitation), Red ultimately goes on a murderous quest to the heart of the Zone, searching for a Golden Ball that the superstitious stalkers claim will grant one's dearest wishes. When he reaches the Ball, he is forced to think for the first time in his life about his place in the world and the way the world should be. In the end, he can only utter a wish-prayer to the powers he believes lie behind the Ball: "HAPPINESS FOR EVERYBODY, FREE, AND NO ONE WILL GO AWAY UNSATISFIED!" (4:153).

Picnic is the Strugatskys' most polyvalent and ambiguous work, but its narrative strategy is quite lucid. The tale systematically dislodges each element of the fairy-tale paradigm from its conventional whole and inverts it. Each moment and function of the tale is alienated from its conventional issue, and as a result the whole fairy-tale form is inverted.

In one of the best commentaries on *Picnic*, Stanislaw Lem contends that the realistic elements of the tale, which make it an admirable "experiment in the philosophy of history," are gradually devoured by elements of the "black fairy tale" (*Microworlds*, p. 275).

There is no question that among the Strugatskys' works, *Picnic* is the most obviously bound to the fairy tale's universe of discourse, and this relationship is not concealed. Fairy-tale motifs appear explicitly in the narrative itself, almost always in "black" versions. The stalkers are given to identifying the Zone with "Pandora's box" (2:90) and the mysterious artifacts as the treasure of the *1001 Nights* brought by the Visitor-genie (1:35). The Zone is "the hole into the future" (1:37), a place without time (1:30), the path to the other world: "The further into the Zone, the nearer to Heaven," say the stalkers, only half ironically (1:17). These fantastic identifications are easily rationalized in the realistic manner of the tale, for the uneducated stalkers are notoriously superstitious. But there are also episodes that support these identifications without irony. Red's foray into the Zone with the Institute for Extraterrestrial Cultures' research scientist, Kirill Panov, at *Picnic*'s outset is a version of *Hansel and Gretel*. As a sort of zero-degree scientist, Red determines a safe course and the location of a deadly "graviconcentrate" by tossing metal nuts and bolts ahead of the expedition's car. Their vehicle then follows the path laid out on the return trip to the Institute. The Zone itself is depicted as a rationalized version of an enchanted region, where the grass is a black bramble and shadows extend in the wrong direction (1:19, 26). Inside it is the "treasure"—a rare artifact left by the Visitors—in a sinister garage, "guarded" by monsters: in this case, a pool of "witches' jelly" and the mysterious silvery web that causes Kirill's death. The opening foray is repeated in even more overtly fantastic form in Red's climactic quest in chapter 4.

In the novella's design, the deployment of the chapters imitates—still in an inverted, "black" manner—the formal construction of the tale of the three wishes. Each of the three chapters of Red's tale is built around an implicit or explicit wish, each of which boomerangs, leading to a profound loss (thus inverting the fairy tale's conventional ultimate gain). The action of the first chapter begins when Red wishes to dispell Kirill's depression about his inability to understand the Visitors'technology. Red offers to bring Kirill "back to life" by leading him to an extremely rare artifact, known to the stalkers as a "full empty." The tactic works for a short while: "Kirill came back to life before my eyes" (1:9). Once in the Zone, however, Kirill proves to be too clumsy and confident in his institutional insulation to see the dangers of the garage; and Red is too accustomed to working alone to think of protecting Kirill at every step. Kirill accidentally entangles himself in a web of which he never even takes cognizance. Thus Red's wish to revive Kirill leads instead to Kirill's death.

The second chapter's theme is Red's wish to provide his wife and mutant child with a stable middle-class life. After the Institute begins to use robots for exploring the Zone, Red is unable to survive on his lab assistant's pay. He turns to stalking again, but he insists on maintaining some independence from the criminal gangs that smuggle objects out of the Zone to sell to governments and the private laboratories. This wish for independence and dignity also boomerangs when he is betrayed to the police by a former accomplice. To support his family while he is in prison, Red agrees to sell a jar of "witches' jelly"—which even the Institute's research scientists are forbidden to study—to a gang supplying the military-industrial complex.

The concluding chapter centers on Red's desperate wish to find a miracle that will return his daughter to human form. This wish gradually transforms itself into the utopian prayer that closes *Picnic*, leaving the outcome suspended in the reader's imagination.

Only by discounting the drastic ambiguity of *Picnic*'s ending can one maintain that it is simply a "black" fairy tale. For no fairy tale, not even a parody of one, can support an ambiguous ending. Instead, *Picnic*'s movement through the "black" universe of the inverted fairy tale to an open ending restores the fairy tale's utopian form as a trace, if only in the *possibility* that Red's utopian wish might be fulfilled. If Lem were right, if *Picnic* were a bitter satire of the fairy tale's naïveté, then the narrative would assume, at least implicitly, a moral superiority to the form on which it otherwise depends "parasitically." This superiority would be based on "realism," the satirist's knowledge of the way things "really" are. But far from devaluing the ideal form (i.e., the tale of the successful wish for the heart's desire), *Picnic attacks* the "reality" corrupting the heart so that it no longer can wish for its own happiness. This structural irony is in the romantic tradition: there is no appropriate form for human desire other than the fairy tale, but the fairy tale is impossible in the age of science, space travel, and Visitations by extraterrestrial travellers. Consequently, each of the conventional elements of the fairy tale is grotesque—caught midway in a Manichaean universe, between the archetypal form of desire and the "graviconcentrates" of valueless realism. *Picnic* thus demands to be read not as an inverted fairy tale, but as an ambivalent or "meta" fairy tale—demanding that its readers move with it through a reality emptied of freedom to a radical and self-conscious restatement of the uncertainty necessary if the utopian hope is to be conceived at all.

Taken together, these considerations show *Picnic*'s originality and richness, and the enormity of the distance the Strugatskys travelled between *Rainbow* and *Picnic* without ever abandoning the fairy-tale paradigm completely. Had the Strugatskys consciously set out to subvert each element of *Rainbow*, they could not have done so more thoroughly than they in fact did in *Picnic*. For example, *Rainbow* takes place on a distant planet voluntarily inhabited by a population that willingly accepts the hegemony of the zero-physicists. The heroism of the protagonists of *Rainbow* would have been impossible on a less abstract, lyrical world. So many more of the victims of the Black Wave would have been innocent of zero-physics that the scientists' sins against them would have been unmanageably great. Moreover, the children's rescue required an Earth they could be sent to, a home base with which the zero-physicists could re-establish connections that they had broken in their impatience to break through the limits of Nature. In a sense, *Rainbow*'s action occurs so high up in the ideological superstructure that it does not even threaten the base of species existence. The important thing—as Gorbovsky informs us—is to save the sense of the future, by saving the children. The link between the Black Wave and zero-science is unambiguously direct—which allows the tale to depict a closed moral circle of sin-retribution-release.

In *Picnic*, by contrast, the action is not only earthly, it is *earthbound*.

The Visitation—which the novella's scientific *raisonneur*, the Nobel laureate Pilman, calls the greatest event in human history—does not interest the masses in the least. The scientists of the Institute, for their part, are the opposites of the zero-physicists. Far from having a new theory of space-time that might humanize the cosmos, and a planet to expend on testing it, the Institute's xenologists are flummoxed by the Visitation which has intervened in their world. They have "systems of equations, but no way to interpret them" (3:109). In a sense, the Visitation deprives the Institute's researchers of what theory they previously had. They can do no more than pragmatically fit various artifacts into the everyday life of the consumer society; they have no idea how to penetrate into the essence of the objects, since they do not know the first principles necessary to test them. While *Rainbow*'s zero-physicists work out their superior science detached from the problems and inertia of social history, the characters of *Picnic* live in the dreary middle of existence, unable to see out of their own world even after they have been given sure signs that other worlds exist.

The heroes, too, contrast sharply. Gorbovsky comes from the sky without earthly social obligations and with a mind unclouded by doubt. He assesses the situation clearly, recognizes what must be done, provides the proper tool for doing it, and educes the correct sentiments from the Rainbow colonists. Red, on the other hand, lives in a perpetual muddle, exerting all of his prodigious energies in a losing struggle to make ends meet for himself and his family and to maintain his dignity and personal autonomy in a corrupt world. His life is a depressing search for the tools, the clear thinking, and the right wish that will solve these problems. In *Picnic*, it is the Alien that comes from the sky, not the *homo ex machina*. There is no other home to escape to.

The most poignant inversion—and in the Strugatskys' symbol system, the most significant—has to do with the fate of the children. The zero-physicists' children are saved in the nick of time; the scientists realize that the future of the species takes precedence over all other considerations. *Picnic*'s difference from *Rainbow* could not be made sharper. Red's child is born with animal eyes and "covered with a silky golden fleece" (2:66); her parents affectionately name her "Monkey." Although at first she is bright and garrulous, she gradually devolves literally into a beast, unable to recognize her parents or to speak a human language. At the other pole, the evil gang leader Buzzard Burbridge's stunning daughter, Dina—whom Burbridge claims was one of the wishes the Golden Ball fulfilled for him—is so callous and hateful that Red considers her "a plastic fake, a dummy" (4:127). Where the human protagonists of *Rainbow* accept the need for sacrifice and their own historical responsibility to protect their descendants, in *Picnic* it is *bellum omnia contra omnes*—and "every man for himself, only God takes care of everybody" (2:85).

4.2. The Alienation of the Paradigmatic Elements. To account for the tale's artistic strategies and its intellectual force, we must study the way in which the Strugatskys develop their system for breaking up the epic wholeness of the socialist realist fairy-tale paradigm. The subversion is already evident in the fragmentation of the narrative into five sections (including the

short introductory interview with Pilman). This technique departs from the unity of action and the free-indirect narrative focus on a central character that was the Strugatskys' typical technique after *Rainbow*. Three of the sections are phases in Red's dark quest. The other two center on Pilman. The fragmentation is not drastic. The breaks between periods of Red's life are appropriate for depicting its increasing desperation as it grows from the faint utopian hopefulness in chapter 1 to the murderous drive of the conclusion.

The separation of Pilman's discussion with Noonan (about the nature and effect of the Visitation) from Red's story in chapter 3 also departs from the Strugatskys' usual practice of making the "theory zone" an important moment in the plot of the central protagonist, usually occurring at a moment when he must articulate the various interpretations of the events in which he is taking part. The discussions are necessary to show that the hero has at least understood some of the affective-ethical implications of the *novum*'s intervention in reality, even when the situation can never be fully understood cognitively. Red, who alone in *Picnic* might be in a position to fulfill the hero's mediating function, does not participate in the conversation with Pilman. He does not learn, as the reader does, the various scientific hypotheses about the Visitation. Nor does he hear Pilman's own jocoserious hypothesis, the one privileged by the title.

The distance between Pilman and Red is very great. They never meet—again a departure from the Strugatskys' usual technique of bringing all the main characters face to face. They have, in a sense, nothing to say to each other. The Zone has left theoretical reason, represented by Pilman, impotent and baseless, while human affections, represented by Red, are driven more and more intensely by the need to find a justification in the world. The penultimate chapter (Pilman's talk with Noonan) and the final chapter (Red's final quest) are two versions of the same problem, in which Red and Pilman are mired in different ways. Noonan realizes that the scientists are especially afraid of going down "into the pit":

> They're afraid, too, he thought....The highbrows are also scared. And that's the way it should be. They should be more afraid than all us regular folks put together. We don't understand a thing, and they understand how much they don't. They look into the bottomless pit and know that it's inevitable, they must go down into it. Their hearts catch, but they must go down, and descend they do, but how, and what will they find at the bottom, and most important, will they be able to climb out? (3:115)

Red, for his part, cannot wait for science to determine whether it will ever understand the Visitation. He drives on into the Zone—"the hole into the future"—unable and unwilling to think about his actions until he reaches his goal, the Golden Ball.

The alienation of the tale's structural elements from one another creates a fairy-tale form in which the central elements are left so ambiguous that they are functionally mysterious. *Picnic* deforms the pardigmatic form of the fairy tale, so that the protagonists and the reader do not know for certain what the lack is, who the donors are, and what must be done with their magical gifts. Its ending is so far from happy that is not even the opposite—it is simply "off

the page."

The alienation of the paradigmatic elements embodies the alienation of the qualities of "the whole life" from one another. There are actually three separate stories in *Picnic*. Each seems to proceed oblivious to the others' existence, each representing the fate of one of the dominant human interests when it is alienated from the others. Red's story represents the fate of purely affectional existence; Pilman's, of purely cognitive existence; and the Visitation, of the purely technical. The ideal social and individual life requires the interdependence of all three of these qualities, each of which is impotent or destructive when left on its own. Red's utterance of the utopian prayer-wish at the end of the novel constitutes a moment when these three qualities come together for the first time.

4.3 Pilman: The Alienation of Cognition. In the Strugatskys' work, the theoretical discussions in which motivations for the fantastic phenomena are proposed always involve the application of dialectical rationality to problems that until then have been conceived superstitiously or monologically. The data they are meant to rationalize are almost always too strange to be adequately explained. Still, in the Strugatskys' cosmos the effort to think dialectically is clearly necessary to sustain humanity's desire for freedom and its adaptability to the *nova* it may encounter. The burden of thinking dialectically in *Picnic* is carried by Pilman alone—and this narrative tactic casts doubts on the vitality of dialectical thought in Harmont's lack-world. In their other works, the Strugatskys' central protagonists are usually scientists who often double as romantic explorers or secret agents. (The exceptions are the linguist Pepper of *Snail* and the writer Banev of *Swans*—and scientific theorizing plays a very slight role in those works.) *Picnic* is unique among the Strugatskys' major works in that the scientific theorizing is extremely important for the action, but the central figure is a completely uneducated man.

Pilman's discussion with Noonan about the Visitors has a prominent place in the book, and Pilman's list of the hypotheses that have arisen to explain the Visitation is a *tour de force*. Because of this, and because the Strugatskys' other works assign philosophical dialogues a central place, some commentators view Pilman as equal to Red Schuhart in dramatic importance. But Pilman must be seen in context, in relation not only to Red, but to the only other scientist in the tale, Kirill Panov.

Kirill, made careless by his enthusiasm for creating the conditions for utopia, runs straight into the dangers of Zone. Pilman avoids the Zone's danger altogether. He knows he can offer no testable hypotheses. The roadside picnic theory is not, as he makes clear to Noonan, a scientific idea at all, since it is based on an obviously anthropomorphic moral analogy. He knows that none of the scientists studying the Zone can be considered natural scientists any longer, since xenology—the study of alien intelligence and civilizations—is a spurious science, based entirely on anthropocentric identifications (3:105). Since the Visitors were intentional beings, rather than natural phenomena, their behavior cannot be understood without understanding their motives and minds. Humanity can know only that the Visita-

tion happened and that humanity has responded to it by ignoring it, going on with its business as usual. Pilman is not superior morally because he maintains a cool, ironic distance from the business of the Zone. As he tells Noonan, there is a chance that the dissemination of the Zone's artifacts may be disastrous for the whole world; but he is not in a position to do anything about that. His skeptical open-endedness does not take him any further towards restoring spirit to the world than Kirill's utopian enthusiasm—or even Red's desperation.

Pilman thus represents the irremediable alienation of cognition and theory from the active, irresponsible life of the post-Visitation world. He contemplates with equal serenity the idea that human reason is an evolving reflex, which, when it is fully developed, may make humanity inflexible and vulnerable to all dialectical changes of quality in the cosmos (3:106), and the highly unscientific sentiment that humanity's greatness lies in its ability to survive all of its attainments (3:108). Pilman seems to be equally prepared for new knowledge gleaned from the Visitation and passive survival of the effects of the Visitation's objects entering human society. Pilman is a scientist with no science to do. His business is with surviving the Visitation. He is a scientist who has of necessity become an experimental metaphysician.

Compared with Red, Pilman is a talking head. He is attractive precisely because his complex observations are purely intellectual, and he is not mired in the mud of life. But in *Picnic* the mud of life is augmented by the Zone's objects until it becomes the equivalent of *Rainbow*'s black wave, threatening to inundate everything else. Pilman is no more in the position to be a moral authority than the "Wavists" of *Rainbow*, who coolly observed the behavior of black waves while ineffectually opposing the zero-t experiments. Red's conversion at the end of the tale comments on this. When he is transformed by his despair, he is changed, not into a Pilman-like skeptic, but into the desirer of the heart's desire, the discoverer of the principle of hope.

4.4. The Visitation: The Alienation of Instrumentality. The central mystery of *Picnic* is the identity of the Visitors. It is tempting to accept at face value Pilman's assessment that the Visitors cannot be known if they do not choose to show themselves, and to leave the question of their identity suspended. But how one interprets the ending of *Picnic* cannot be separated from how one interprets the Visitors. I believe that the usual interpretations of the ending (i.e., that Red's final prayer-wish is a sign of his defeat) have been influenced by a too-easy bracketing of the Visitors.

It is indisputable that the Visitors are similar to human beings. Lem has pointed out that the stalkers need no tools to break down the Zone's objects—proof that the objects are on a human scale (*Microworlds*, p. 265). Pilman rigorously holds, nonetheless, that we cannot know anything about the Visitors from these traces alone, since we cannot escape importing our anthropocentric projections into every hypothesis. But as readers we are not limited to the same facts as Pilman. We know that the fictive facts, and the hypotheses that the fictional characters concoct to explain them, are not real responses to events in the history of science, but analogies. We treat the quasi-hypotheses and quasi-data as significant because of their metaphorical

character and the pattern that the authors used for generating them. We expect that that pattern of analogy will be relevant to the writer's social and psychological concerns, rather than mere formal imitations of the history of science. So we must go beyond Pilman and examine whether the Visitors might be more familiar to us as readers of metaphorical SF than they are to Pilman as a skeptical and conservative scientist. Anthropocentric projection is not something a reader of SF can avoid; it is the basis for making sense of the fiction.

In the fairy tale, the lack/curse is dissolved by the hero with the help of the donor's magical tools. The association of the Zone's objects with magical devices (Pandora's box, Aladdin's lamp, and the wish-fulfilling pearl) invites us to place the Visitors in the position of the fairy tale's supernatural donor. As usual in *Picnic*, this fairy-tale motif is ironically inverted: the curse on the lack-world, rather than being removed, is augmented by the ironic superabundance of potentially mediating magical "gifts." The Visitors have left behind artifacts that clearly might teach humanity a great deal about the universe. Some of them stimulate life-processes; others seem to create inexhaustible supplies of energy; still others may function according to as yet unimagined conceptions of space-time. Kirill hopes that the objects will behave in an appropriately fairy-tale/utopian way: that understanding the new science of the artifacts will give humanity rational control over nature by abolishing scarcity, which he evidently assumes is the root cause of human oppression. But in the fairy tale's cosmos, the donor's gift can never be "accidental" or in damaged condition (as Lem speculates the Visitation's objects may be: *Microworlds,* p. 326). Even when the donor is invisible or disguised, its "donation" is always an intentional gift or reward, establishing a link between worlds.

The donor's gifts are the guarantees of reciprocity. They prove the intentional-moral connection of the social lack-world and the enchanted world, between human desire and the forces of nature. But only traces of the Visitors exist, in the magic tools, and these come without operating instructions. Because they are objects without subjects, they have no intentional value. They are deprived of any signs that might give humanity an idea of their purpose and moral charge in a cultural system—even if only in the alien culture of the Visitors. That knowledge might at least create a cultural cusp, an overlapping zone for elaborating similarities of socio-technical and cultural behavior. But "gifts" deprived of purpose are only signs of otherness. There is no way to use them for transforming human consciousness—or even to know whether or not they are destructive "Satanic temptations," as the counter-stalker Gutalin believes (1:39). In *Picnic*, the element of address and encounter—the words exchanged between magical beings and the hero that establish the connection of the human with the cosmos—is completely lacking. The Visitors evidently desired no encounter, no contact; and in this they are apparently doubles of humanity. Neither side is interested in the other. Indeed, whatever the Visitors may be, they are similar enough to humanity to emphasize their otherness. By not making themselves known to the conscious beings on the Earth who are inferentially so much like them, the Visitors have actually refused contact.

Because there is no new structure of values to accompany the Visitation's objects, nothing prevents them from being absorbed by the structure already in place. That assimilation is inevitable...and perversely appropriate. Their traces fit naturally into the web of instrumental reason, commodity production and exchange that dominates the lack-world. In the modern world that Red resents so deeply, it is precisely the desire to use science and technology to create a greater human subject—i.e., a species consciousness overcoming alienation—that is lacking. Like the silvery web that kills Kirill, the Harmont lack-world is a web of objects no longer controlled by human subjects.

Red alone resists this enchantment, until the very end. Until then he considers the Zone's artifacts only as means for creating affective happiness: the "full empty" is for "reviving" Kirill, the swag is for supporting his family, the "witches' jelly" for tiding them over while he is in jail. But by the end, the man who formerly would save the life even of his worst enemy is willing to kill an innocent young man to reach the Golden Ball. This can be interpreted as Red's capitulation to the hopelessness of the world, his enchantment (Salvestroni: 30). But we can also read it as the recognition on Red's part that there are no "pure spirits," especially in a world dominated by objects. Indeed, Red's need to make his wish to the Golden Ball is the ultimate expression of the need to compel the tools to serve the deepest human desires, "the wishes that, if they're not granted, it's all over for you" (4:132).

One reason why the Visitors are absent is that the Visitation itself is an image of the scientific-technological explosion, a process that has increasingly come to seem "subjectless"—an impersonal, indifferent, objective evolution blindly operating according to its own runaway feedback, autonomous of the human desires that created its conditions. The dangers the extraterrestrial artifacts pose to human society are clearly the same as those posed by the irrational military and commercial use of contemporary terrestrial technology. The demoralization they augment is the demoralization of contemporary societies. Pilman's roadside picnic theory thus refers not so much to the landing of extraterrestrials as to the way humanity in the contemporary world uses its own technology—as if it, too, were an alien species that might wish at some future time to fly from a blasted zone of its own making. The Visitation is the catastrophic intervention of humanity's own image of the future into the present: it is "what we will be like." The Enlightenment's dream of humanity evolving into a fully rational species becomes a grotesque parody in the aftermath of the Visitation. Humanity is, instead, in danger of becoming a fully *rationalized* species. Pilman at one point wonders whether its reason may not ultimately become a destructive trait in the long run of the species' evolution (3:106). In Harmont, as in contemporary civilization increasingly alienated by the technology on which it depends, rationality becomes a grotesquely externalized object capable of dominating and enervating it own subject.

Read in this way, *Picnic* demonstrates the Strugatskys' complete disillusionment with the technocratic utopianism of the *Rainbow* period, and with it the hopes the Soviet scientific intelligentsia entertained about the power of the STR to transform Soviet society. In fact, the Brezhnev regime, fearing

the revolutionary effect of science on social theory (demonstrated unambiguously by the central place the theory of the STR occupied in the Czech program of "humanizing socialism" [see Buccholz: 159]), repudiated the technocratic theories of socialist development and returned to the traditional authoritarian position that the political system is to guide the development of science (see Greenberg: 62). In terms of the Strugatskys' thematics, this means that the technology of the modern age develops "on its own," out of human theoretical control, since neither capitalism nor the Soviet state will guide it in the best interests of the species.

In other words, the identity of the Visitors is left a mystery primarily because they are not only like us, *they are us*: they are our image of our own future. The Strugatskys have used the theme of the "return of the future" in many of their works. In the last tale of the 1967 edition of *Noon: 22nd Century*, "What You Will Be Like," Gorbovsky relates to his fellow starpilots how he was once visited in space by one of our descendants, who fixed his ship for him and explained his presence as a gesture of gratitude and confidence-building directed to the past from its own future (*Noon*, p. 318). The same idea is implicit in *God*, although in a darker tone: the narrative wishes to leave us in no doubt that Arkanar will ultimately reach the classless utopian state enjoyed by the terrestrial agents of the Institute of Experimental History. Hence, the presence of the agents on Arkanar should be enough to build morale. In *Monday*, the idea appears whimsically. The young magi of the Institute of Thaumaturgy and Spellcraft speculate that there exist "countermovers," beings who travel back in time from the future. They explain the Tungus meteor crater as the result of the landing of one of the countermoving spaceships (*Monday*, p. 206). The main protagonist of *Swans*, Banev, is explicit: in a table speech to his drunken cohorts, he ironically exhorts them to help "prevent the future from extending its feelers into the present" (*Swans* 2:23-24). Later, he calls the village's children "phantoms from the future" (*ibid.* 5:77). The "return of the future" is so constant a motif in the Strugatskys' fiction that one can argue that it is the underlying premise of their work. They write SF to create images of the future which "return" to influence behavior in the present, by creating a model with which to place the present in perspective. When it is a positive image, it accords with both utopia and the fairy tale—exaggerating the best qualities of humanity in the present and encouraging people to continue to struggle for happiness. But when the mediation is blocked, the future returns as an image of the present stripped of "spirit." And that is what the Visitors are.

The landing, with its blasted Zone and its quasi-psychopathological effects,[11] corresponds to the shock of the STR, of which we are the unconscious agents. Like this uncontrolled process of technological "automatization," the Visitation slowly undermines the "organic," affectional relationships of Harmont, to replace them with parodic inversions. Red's beloved child devolves out of humanity. His father returns from the dead, but as a a non-living simulacrum. Burbridge's daughter would gladly see her father killed. Harmont's institutions gradually replace all human work with machines: both the Institute and the stalkers automate their exploration of the Zone with robots. The only value system left in Harmont is

the network of exchange of magical goods—a fantastic image of Marx's concept of capitalism and the commodity fetish.

4.5 Red Schuhart and the Golden Ball: The Alienation of Affection. If Pilman represents *homo cognitivus*, estranged from technology and the affective life, Red represents *homo affectivus*, a man whose whole life is driven by uncontrolled feelings, fidelity, and a desire to be free of the social constraints that obstruct and corrupt his affections.

In *Picnic*, the Strugatskys carry the principle of cognitive estrangement that Darko Suvin (*Metamorphoses*, pp. 63-84) considers the defining trait of SF to its logical extreme. In the fairy tale, the equivalent of cognition is the hero's understanding of the operating instructions of the magical gifts and the rules of conduct in the enchanted realm. This magical cognition depends, like everything else in the fairy tale, on the desire to recover the lacking treasure. Judged by the rules of the fairy-tale paradigm, there is no place for cognition in Harmont, since the Harmont lack-world is not even aware that it lacks its source of value. Harmonters live in an enchanted sleep. The enchanter is their own ennui and their inability to imagine, not only the shape of a better future, but that there can be any progress of the spirit at all (see Jameson: 153).

In the most optimistic of the Strugatskys' fictions of the '60s, *Monday Begins on Saturday*, the genial protagonist Privalov argues that humanity will always need great cognitive shocks to keep it from falling into the self-satisfied slumber of naïve materialism.

> *We are all naïve materialists*, I thought, *and also rationalists*. We demand that everything should be explained immediately in rationalistic terms; that is, reduced to fit in with the handful of known facts. No one applies a penny's worth of dialectics. It enters nobody's head that between the known data and some new phenomena, there could be an ocean of unknowns, so we declare the new phenomena to be supernatural and therefore impossible.... Nonetheless we remain materialists and there is no harm done! True enough, this can get to be difficult sometimes when a chance wind, blowing across the ocean of the unknown will carry our way some strange petals from unexplored continents. Most often it happens when one finds that which one was not looking for....As a rule, science, in which we have faith (and often blind faith), prepares us well in advance for the coming miracles, so that a psychic shock occurs in us only when we collide with something unpredicted—some hole into the fourth dimension, or biological radio communication, or a living planet....Or, say, a cottage on hen's legs.' (p. 42; italics in original)

The Zone is full of materialistic equivalents of cottages on hen's legs and witch houses. But Privalov's faith in the power of *nova* to break the "magic spell" of naïve materialism no longer holds in the world of *Picnic*. Noonan realizes that, after the Visitation, "millions upon millions of people knew nothing and wanted to know nothing, and even if they found out would ooh and aah for five minutes and then go back to their old routines" (3:124).

Where no one remembers to wish for the heart's desire, the future

becomes less and less imaginable as a standard against which to measure the present. In a reified world, the obstacles to growth turn life back; generation turns into degeneration. The Zone is known to cause both phenotypic and genotypic mutations in the stalkers in unknown ways. Monkey, the product of such a mutation, is a poignant image of Red's despair. Dina is at the opposite pole from Monkey. She is physically stunning, but completely amoral and egoistic. Arnie appears to be the one exception. He is intelligent and respectful, and he seems to have no other sin than the love of adventure that leads him to go into the Zone with Red. Red's use of Arnie as his "minesweeper" is more than a revenge-killing directed against Burbridge and a sacrifice of an innocent youth to a treasure-hoarding dragon. In his extremity, Red joins the others in killing the future to make the present liveable.

Red's calculated murderousness in chapter 4 is striking, since before it, of all the characters in *Picnic*'s character-system, Red is unquestionably the one most committed to affirming life and affectional bonds. (The only other comparable character is Guta, Red's wife. Why the Strugatskys leave a figure as potentially important as Guta so undeveloped raises again the question of why they consistently shy away from the depiction of women in decisive roles.) Although he does not "think" as Kirill and Pilman do—i.e., by consciously reflecting on his situation in the world—Red represents a form of reflexive moral intelligence that even the "thinking" characters lack. He is the only character in the tale who is both willing and in a position to save the lives of others. He does it reflexively: he saves Burbridge's life in chapter 2, despite the hatred he feels for him. He is special among the stalkers because he never betrays anyone. And despite his fierce independence, Red is the only character who actively makes sacrifices to establish and maintain affectional bonds. Again and again, he takes ultimate risks for the people he loves.

If the Visitation represents impersonal instrumental rationality devoid of intention, Red represents the opposite. He has no tools to achieve what he wants, not even the words for articulating it. Just as the effect of the Visitation has been to intensify the breakup of affectional relationships, Red's whole life is an attempt to hold them together.

From Red's point of view, Harmont is the lack-world. Like a cursed kingdom, it is ruled by bands of destroyers of the spirit: gangsters, the military-industrial complex, impersonal employers, philistines. These villains have deprived Red of the "treasures" that would endow his life with value: money, dignity and autonomy, healthy children, a future, utopian hopes, and—above all—the fidelity that gives a human ethical significance to existence. Like Kirill, he needs a "cure," but the world does not have one to offer. The only possibility offered by the tale is "thought." But this means one thing for Red at the end when he is holding the ball, and another for scientific cognition. For the latter—represented by Pilman—thought is a tool for dereifying the complacent and dispirited human egocentrism that the Visitation has accentuated. It "opens up" reality, by entertaining hypotheses with no commitment to any of them. For Red, thought is his recognition that he is in a human affectional web, the "good web" that stands as opposed to the silvery web that kills Kirill, and the web of death and alienation that he

hallucinates in The Borscht after Kirill's death (1:44). Thought for Pilman means detachment; for Red it means awareness of interdependence. But mere awareness of interdependence does not suffice to change reality.

At the end of the tale, Red is the only moral subject capable of acting in Harmont. When he arrives at the Golden Ball, nothing is left of him but his naked subjectivity stripped to its essence. He stinks with the slime and burns of his ordeals; by sending the boy Arnie to his certain death, he has abandoned the morality that had set him apart from others. His memories and newly articulated self-awareness burst in a rage against the whole world that has deprived him of all affectional connections: "He knew that it all had to be destroyed, and he wanted to destroy it, but he guessed that if it all disappeared there would be nothing left but the flat bare earth" (4:153). Red faces an either/or decision that might determine the fate of the world. He has unintentionally taken on himself the role of heroic mediator. Either he must deny all value to humanity or recognize the unity of humanity as a community of subjects. At the conclusion, he appears to be the last man capable of restoring spiritual content in the age of absolute demoralization. He understands nothing except that no partial wish can cure him.

The reader has no way of judging what will follow Red's wish. Its success would cause unimaginable joy; its failure, unimaginable wretchedness. The fate of his wish represents the fate of all utopian and fairy-tale desires. It may be the last disenchantment, infinitely ironic, or an all-redeeming re-enchantment, infinitely blessed. The tale's action is suspended at the limit beyond which distinctions between existential despair and utopian hope, negation and need, cannot be articulated. Red's wish for universal happiness is the last possible utterance for a humanity deprived of its communal source of value, which lies precisely in the utterance of the wish. In Red, the value-giving subject contracts into one desperate, uneducated man holding an object that combines the most advanced extraterrestrial artifact with the most primal human wish-fulfilling tool. It is absolutely spare, since it is the only object left with any meaning, and absolutely full, since it glows with the hope of the whole human species. It is the true "full empty." The suspended conclusion also implies that the question of whether the transformation of social reality into a utopian tale can be realized is not articulable. Left alone with Red's wish, the reader must also participate in Red's exit into the ball, out of the narrative and into personal commitment or moral death. The authors leave the responsibility for the resolution with the reader, to whom Red's *de profundis* is, in the last analysis, addressed.

4.6 The Last Fairy Tale. This reading of *Picnic* differs from most others because it accepts the possibility that Red's wish could come true in the world of the tale, and that this possibility accords completely with the ambiguous manner in which *Picnic* is constructed. Critics as different as Salvestroni and Lem agree that Red's wish is likely to fail. Lem holds that the Golden Ball is the subject of "a naïve belief, one of those popular legends which rose up in the wake of the visit" (*Microworlds*, p. 275). Salvestroni (p. 301) is sure that the "grace" Red desires "more likely than not will not come." For my part, I believe that the internal evidence of the tale directs the

reader to suspend judgment about whether Red's wish-prayer will come true, and by the same token, to entertain the fairy-tale structure of motivations far more seriously than as a mere "naïve belief." The open-endedness of *Picnic* is radical precisely because it requires the reader to entertain possibilities "off the page" of a world as different from the one depicted in *Picnic*'s Harmont as the apocalyptic utopia that concludes *Swans* is.

Lem recognizes that the fairy-tale elements are important for *Picnic*, but he takes them to be inconsistent with the "thought-experiment in the domain of the 'experimental philosophy of history'" that he considers the most valuable quality of the tale (*Microworlds*, p. 260). The Golden Ball must not grant wishes as long as the tale is a realistic thought-experiment. If it can grant wishes, the tale has jumped the track into arbitrary fantasy. Lem also believes that "the Strugatskys by no means desired" the novella's similarity to the fairy tale. I gather Lem bases a good deal of his interpretation on correspondence with the Strugatsky brothers, who have apparently agreed with him on many points (see *Microworlds*, p. 276; and "The Profession...," p. 49). But I believe I have shown that the fairy-tale manner of *Picnic* cannot be considered unintentional in any serious sense. There are too many motifs and structural allusions to the fairy tale, and too few unambiguously realistic moments in the narrative, to justify an exclusively naturalistic interpretation. It is not the sudden introduction of fairy-tale motifs that jars the reader in chapter 4, but the foregrounding of elements that had been in the background in the preceding chapters. And if we view the Visitors not merely as a new version of "alien monsters," but as a symbolic projection of humanity's own alienated technological evolution, the apparent conflict between the "impartial" SF mode and the partisan fairy-tale mode dissolves.

Picnic can be read as a generic criticism of the kind of SF that takes science to be all there is. In the first place, Red is placed in a position that makes science impossible. He is not only uneducated and superstitious, he is also unprotected by the social prestige of institutional science or the laws of bourgeois society. He lives his life in the underworld: the underworld of social life; the Zone, a clear symbolic displacement of Hell; and the psychic underworld of depression, disillusionment, crime, and finally murder. Viewing these aspects together, Red's journey corresponds to the hero's journey through the alienated world, in search of the lost treasure. Pilman's ideas are pure angelisms here. They cannot affect Red, since they do not create value. Red's path—and *Picnic* as a whole—leads to the heart of despair. The only hope remaining is that one can get through despair to the other side. *Whether* such a transformation can take place the tale leaves in suspense. But whatever the outcome, the fate of the whole fictional world—Red, Monkey, Harmont, the Earth—have fused in Red's wish, focussing on the last possibility for reintegration.

The narrative is not only the "vehicle" for this symbolic quest for the happy ending; it, too, is fused into the suspended resolution. Just as Red abandons all hope in reality and his ability to isolate himself from the corruption of Harmont, the narrative gradually casts away more and more of the realistic structure of intelligibility, and its pretense of value-neutrality. Just as Red has had to wander from the initial utopianism represented by Kirill

through a labyrinth to the wish that embodies everything Kirill had desired, the narrative also wanders from the initial expedition into the Zone, with its many fairy-tale motifs, through a world of aimless hypotheses and unintelligible reality-effects, to recapture the fairy tale's value-centeredness. The Strugatskys in *Picnic* inverted the elements of the fairy-tale paradigm in order to pose the possibility of their sublation—the negation of their negation —to a new level of hope in happiness represented by the happy ending. Of course, the tale's conclusion only allows the possibility. A less ambiguous ending would be intolerably trivial. The task of the narrative's journey has been to create the conditions under which the happy ending might be entertained again in a world that has made the conditions for its emergence almost impossible.

When we view *Picnic* in this light, it is clear that the fairy-tale structure, far from being an error, is the dominant subtext of the narrative. The Strugatskys tie the outcome of the tale to one's ability and desire to hope for the happy ending. That is the *sine qua non* of liberation from the species' subjection to its own creations; without that first desire, the tale of the species has nowhere to go.

5. After *Roadside Picnic*. With *Picnic*, the Strugatsky brothers appear to have exhausted the possibilities that the deformed fairy-tale paradigm offered them. In the early '70s, the critical debate in the USSR surrounding the Strugatskys' "pessimistic" SF was at times uncomfortable for them, sometimes involving highly-placed official critics. It was apparently resolved in favor of a semi-official compromise. In Suvin's opinion, the Strugatskys recognized that this "coexistence" of the older, orthodox, neo-Stalinist mode of SF and their own social-philosophical and critical SF had "fairly clear bounds," and that the Strugatskys "have for the time being recognized such boundaries and are keeping within them" ("Criticism...," pp. 304-05).

Even before the publication of *Picnic*, the Strugatskys had returned to the detective/secret agent/adventure romance mode of the *Noon* tales, *God*, and *Paradise*, with *Prisoners of Power* and "Space Mowgli," both first published in 1971. In those tales, the estrangement of reality is held within strict limits. Their worlds are, for the most part, extraterrestrial, humanoid, and fully rationalized, and the earthly human protagonists again take on the role of problematic donors from a utopian, classless society. In "Space Mowgli," we even see a resurrected Gorbovsky.

Since *Picnic*, the Strugatskys have published relatively few works. The most important of these are *Definitely Maybe* (1976) and *The Beetle in the Anthill* (1980). The former belongs in a class of its own with regard to its generic paradigm, combining elements of the open-ended detective story with a satirical fantasy. *The Beetle* is a reprise of many of the Strugatskys' themes of the '60s. It is primarily a detective tale whose protagonist—the secret agent of *Prisoners of Power*, Maxim Kammerer—searches for the agent Abalkin, who, although ostensibly completely human, had originally emerged from an egg left by the mysterious, cosmos-travelling Wanderers. Whether Abalkin is a superhuman "time-bomb" set by the Wanderers or whether he is a potentially beneficent superman, no one knows—least of all

Abalkin himself, who is a generous, sensitive man suddenly discovering his own mystery. In the end, he is destroyed "just in case," leaving Maxim with oppressive doubts about the ethical courage of his species. Many of the elements of *Picnic*'s deformed fairy tale flicker in *Beetle*. The title itself evokes Pilman's conception of humanity in the Zone as the insects swarming over an abandoned picnic site. But these elements are completely submerged by the foregrounded detective plot and Maxim's ceaseless cogitations. The Strugatskys' brilliant gift for depicting enchanted alien worlds appears for only a moment in *Beetle*, in Abalkin's memories of the blasted planet Hope, whose children are beguiled away by the unseen Wanderers through mysterious gateways, in a dark variant of *Swans'* Pied-Piper motif. Until the Strugatskys bring us more new worlds, we cannot be sure that their latest works represent the end of their critical SF or a new phase of it.

NOTES

1. Following common SFS practice, I have resorted to abbreviated versions of the English titles of the Strugatsky tales I deal with once I have cited them in full. I should remark, however, that the rendering of those titles by their English translators does not always accord with the original Russian. Thus the Strugatskys' title for *The Final Circle of Paradise* is equivalent to *Predatory Things of Our Time*; *Prisoners of Power* is *The Inhabited Island*; *Definitely Maybe* is *A Billion Years Before the End of the World*; and "Space Mowgli" is *The Kid*.

2. Possibly, none of these characteristics is absolute. The Hungarian ethnographer Sándor Erdész has even speculated that a genre of "tragic fairy tale" exists in the Hungarian oral tradition (Erdész: 86). Nagy (*A táltos...*, p. 324, n.4) disputes this, attributing the tragic endings of some of Amy's tales to either his idiosyncratic modes of storytelling or generic conflation.

3. The conception that myth and fairy tale are modal opposites runs deep in the European critical tradition. Myth has been generally identified with narratives demonstrating notions of necessity, the power of *moira* over human aspirations. The fairy tale putatively affirms the opposite, the attainment of human desire through co-operation with nature after several de-mythicizing ordeals. Consequently, the fairy tale is often associated with oppressed peoples' resistance to the hieratic myths of legitimation of the dominant class. In Walter Benjamin's words, "The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which myth placed upon its chest" (p. 102). Nagy emphasizes that the curse of the fairy tale is usually a cyclic, myth-like abolition of human time, which it is the tale hero's task to destroy in order to restore human time (*A táltos...*, p. 127). This distinction was taken up in psychoanalytic criticism's distinction between the paradigmatic myth of Oedipus and the fairy tale's affirmation of the Pleasure Principle. A version of this underlies Bettelheim's definition of fairy tales as paradigms of psychological maturation, versus myth's representation of the ineluctable conflicts between "superego demands and id-motivated action, and with the self-preserving desires of the ego" (p. 37; for Lévi-Strauss's dissenting view, see his *Structural Anthropology*, 2:127-28).

4. The official philosophy of science of the USSR has been based on the conflation of at least four concepts: the principle of the primacy of matter; the objective reality of matter "existing and developing independent of the mind" (Lenin quoted in Graham: 46); the existence of objective dialectical "laws" inhering in material nature; and the receptivity of scientific evolution to philosophical direction by the

Party. None of these major points are in fact derived directly from Marx. The last concept, which was codified by the Stalinist idea that science is an aspect of the superstructure—analogous to Stalin's theory of language (see Buccholz: 148-49)—remained embedded in the 1961 Party Program even though that document acknowledges science as a productive force.

Only recently has the scientific establishment succeeded in freeing itself to some extent from these strictures, through the use of such methods of justification as scientometrics, the decidedly undialectical, "value-free" measurement of scientific successes, derived from the work of Derek De Solla Price (see Rabkin: 75-79).

On the de-dialecticization of the Soviet philosophy of science, see Schmidt: 51-61; Graham: 45-61; Marcuse: 136-59; and Buccholz: 147-53.

5. Urban & McClure: 471-86, and Farrer: 55-75; see also Oinas: 157-75, and Miller: 5-67.

6. The implications of this prescription were made explicit when, in the famous campaign to immortalize Stalin in the '30s, some of the most highly regarded traditional storytellers and singers were brought to Moscow from the provinces to compose tales and ballads in which contemporary Soviet leaders were cast in the role of heroes (Clark: 148). This was not solely because popular and folk forms facilitated the dissemination of Soviet ideology among the illiterate and semi-literate masses. The fairy tale, in its broadest sense (and thus including the heroic *bylina*), describes a world in which human will is capable of transforming hostile nature. It was clear to the Soviet cultural leaders that this world-view was more useful than any historical theorizing in attracting the populace to the tasks of crash modernization.

7. There were abundant hints of this promise in the 1961 Party Program, which concludes with a vision of a peacefully attained, highly technological communist utopia:

> When the Soviet people will enjoy the blessings of communism, new hundreds of millions of people on earth will say: 'We are for communism!' It is not through war with other countries, but by the example of a more perfect organization of society, by rapid progress in developing the productive forces, the creation of all conditions for the happiness and well-being of man, that the ideas of communism win the minds and hearts of the masses. (Triska: 129)

8. A poll of its readers taken by the Soviet journal *Fantastika* in 1967 showed the enormous popularity of the Strugatskys' work in general, as well as of the early *Far Rainbow* in particular. The results (cited in Myers: 46-47) were as follows: (1) *Hard to Be a God*, A. & B. Strugatsky; (2) *Monday Begins on Saturday*, A. & B. Strugatsky; (3) *The Martian Chronicles*, Ray Bradbury; (4) *Solaris*, Stanislaw Lem; (5) *The Invincible*, Stanislaw Lem; (6) *Far Rainbow*, A. & B. Strugatsky; (7) *Stories*, Robert Sheckley; (8) *I, Robot*, Isaac Asimov; (9) *Return from the Stars*, Stanislaw Lem; (10) *Predatory Things of Our Time* [*Paradise*], A. & B. Strugatsky; (11) *Andromeda*, Ivan Yefremov.

9. Bloch and Tolkien, quoted in Zipes: 132-44.

10. Propp's attitude towards motivation is clearly inspired by the Formalist view of the tale as an objective conceptual object. Motivations "belong to the most inconstant and unstable elements of the tale" (Propp: 75). Arguably, this excludes the very thing that gives a tale communal "life." In my remarks, I have accepted Nagy's view (*A táltos...*, p. 323, n. 54) that Propp's notion that "the verbal motivation is an alien element of the tale" can be traced back to the sketchiness of the archival material with which Propp worked. Lévi-Strauss's strategy (p. 143) is to include motivations among the terms and functions that are ordered "hyper-structurally" by myths.

11. In the period between 1964 and 1972, but especially after 1966 with *Snail*, the Strugatskys often depict deformations of reality made to resemble the deranged

perception of schizophrenic thought. Their protagonists stand in a gulf separating two hostile worlds, each of which is defined by the alien and hostile structure of its space. In *Snail*, for example, Pepper is trapped in the Directorate's Kafkaesque world of labyrinthine space, while Kandid is trapped in the grotesque fluidity of the Forest. The Strugatskys generally identify the real with what Lukács called "the unbridgeable 'maleficent space' of the present" extending between subject and object in the reified perceptual universe of capitalism (Gabel: 149). In this reified reality, no significant and permanent change in relations is possible without the intervention of a *novum*. This intervention usually has the characteristics of what is classically known as *Weltuntergangserlebniss* [WUE] (or "world catastrophe syndrome") familiar among schizophrenics (*ibid.*, pp. 288-96). The WUE is always experienced as a heteronomic disruption of a reified world. It can be either catastrophic or redemptive, the complete destruction of the individual's perceived world or the eruption of value into a valueless world. The main point is that it is always heteronomic, and thus analogous to the *novum*. The Strugatskys' protagonists often feel they are involved in a general WUE, and try their best to link it to a dialectical causal chain. Kandid experiences the Forest as a limitless, ever-changing entity that cannot be structured as a totality. The Amazon-like Maidens exert their superior force through a "fluidification" of reality: by controlling oozing saps, fogs, and atmospheric humidity; by the flooding and swamping of villages, ostensibly to create environments for a "mermaid world"; and by reproducing parthenogenically in steaming amniotic lakes. The theme of the dissolution of the reified real through catastrophic fluidity appears also in *Swans*, where the "slimies"' first significant act is to produce an incessant rain that ends only after their apocalyptic victory.

As with schizophrenics, the disruption of the overstable space is usually identified with "aliens"—beings with magical/superior powers with which they are able to save the trapped subject or, more often, to exert invisible, hostile influences. This projection of magical essences onto human beings—which Gabel (pp. 119-36) argues underlies racist (and misogynist) consciousness—the Strugatskys represent in several ambivalent forms. The Maidens of *Snail* are strikingly threatening to masculine "being," and their powers are clearly projections of male castration-fears. Similarly, the "slimies" of *Swans*—the collective "Zurzmansors"—represent the feared powers of Jews (and specifically Jewish scientists), differing from the Maidens only in that they are redemptive and their *bouleversement* ultimately serves humanity's interests.

A most subtle and integrated use of deranged perception to represent the "alien" intrusion into reified reality is the pattern of the inexplicable effects of the Visitation on human beings in *Picnic*. Many of the Zone's objects have the characteristics of hallucinations: shadows pointing in the wrong direction; harmless-looking "fluff," adhering to chimneys and TV antennae, which proves to be deadly; the witches' jelly; invisible, roving implosions of space, etc. Certain others are more subtle. The "resurrection" of the "zombies" is found to be the stimulation of energies throughout the corpses' bodies, so that each part of the moulage's body can function autonomously without actual life or consciousness. It is a well-known schizophrenic delusion that parts of the body may live separately and may be hostile to one another. One of the most interesting schizophrenic effects of the Visitation is the deranged statistical correlation of the early emigrants, those who left Harmont immediately after the Visitation, with accidents and catastrophes suffered by others around them. The statistical derangement consists of reversing the fundamental tautological assumptions of statistics. The inexplicable effect of the Harmont emigrants is the introduction of schizophrenic logic into "objective," non-human phenomena. And thereby it

introduces the delusion of "toxicity in the world," or poisoning madness, through the chaste vehicle of impartial statistics.

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RÉSUMÉ

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay. ***Le dernier conte de fée: le paradigme du conte de fée dans la SF des frères Strougatsky de 1963 à 1972.*** *— La SF des frères Strougatsky s'inspire du paradigme du conte de fée et les multiples façons d'adapter ou de déformer leur modèle soulignent les différentes étapes de leur carrière. Dans leurs premières oeuvres et aboutissant à* L'arc-en-ciel lointain *(1963), ils adaptent la version du réalisme socialiste de ce paradigme, telle qu'observée à travers les romans de la «production», à l'utopisme technocratique de l'intelligentsia scientifique pendant l'ère de la déstalinisation. En «humanisant» le roman de la «production» et en remplaçant la lutte de classes par l'aventure des voyages interplanétaires, ils expriment l'enthousiasme de l'establishment scientifique soviétique face aux succès du programme spatial. Après 1964, avec* Il est difficile d'être un dieu, *l'écriture témoigne d'une déformation problématique du paradigme en se concentrant sur la possibilité que l'humanité ne manifesterait plus le désir d'utopie requis par le monde du conte de fée. Les composantes paradigmatiques du genre sont de plus en plus inversées dans la fiction des Strougatsky pendant les années 60; la fin heureuse semble échapper à l'humanité. Si l'on considère* L'escargot sur la pente *(1966-68) et* The Ugly Swan *(1967), cette fin va jusqu'à exclure le genre humain. C'est dans le chef-d'oeuvre sombre* Le

pique-nique au bord du chemin *(1972) que le procédé de l'inversion est le plus marqué. Plus qu'une parodie du genre, nous sommes en présence ici d'un «méta» conte de fée ou d'un conte de fée ambivalent. Afin de retrouver la Balle d'or, Red Schuhart entreprend une quête qui l'entraînera à travers un monde totalement aliéné où finalement il formulera l'ultime prière/souhait utopique, source de toute l'éthique de l'humanité. Bien que le conte prenne fin au moment où Red prononce son souhait qui rachètera le monde, ce même souhait contient une trace et une possibilité de fin heureuse.* (IC-R)

Abstract.—*The Strugatsky brothers have modelled much of their SF on the fairy-tale paradigm, and the phases of their career are clearly articulated by the ways they adapt and deform their model. In their early works, culminating in* Far Rainbow *(1963), they adapt the socialist realist production novel's version of the paradigm to the technocratic utopianism of the scientific intelligentsia during the period of de-Stalinization. By "humanizing" the production novel and replacing class struggle with the adventure of space travel, they express the elation of the Soviet scientific establishment at the success of the space program. After 1964, with* Hard to be a God, *they write more problematic deformations of the fairy-tale paradigm, centering on the possibility that humanity may lack the utopian desire required by the fairy tale's cosmos. In the Strugatskys' fiction of the '60s, the paradigmatic elements of the fairy tale are increasingly inverted, and the happy end seems to recede further and further from humanity. In* The Snail on the Slope *(1966-68) and* The Ugly Swans *(1967), the happy ending specifically excludes humanity. The process of inversion culminates in the Strugatskys' dark masterpiece,* Roadside Picnic *(1972). The novella is more than a parodic fairy tale; it is an ambivalent or "meta" fairy tale. Red Schuhart's quest for the Golden Ball leads him through a completely alienated world, ultimately to make the desperate utopian wish-prayer that is the source of human ethical value. Although the tale is suspended at the moment of Red's world-redeeming wish, the happy ending persists as a trace and a possibility in that very wish.* (IC-R)