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COMMUNISTS IN SPACE – ABOUT THE FIRST NOVEL OF THE STRUGATSKI BROTHERS

Arkadij recalls the circumstances of the genesis of their first SF novel *Land of the Crimson Clouds*¹ in an interview titled *It is Difficult to be Dreamers* in the following words:

To tell the truth, I can no longer separate in this history the truth from the invention. If one has to believe in our family's legend, things were as follows: – then, twenty years ago, I was a professional translator from Japanese [at the Soviet military intelligence – W.K.], and my brother was an astrophysicist. One day we walked with him and with my wife upon the Nevski Prospect in (then) Leningrad.² Exactly at the same time, a book written by a Ukrainian SF writer was published. It was really very bad. We demolished it with my brother, in every possible way. My wife walked in the centre and listened to our exhortations. At the end her patience became exhausted and she said: every one is able to criticize! Try to write your own book, I bet that you will not be able to write even such a poor novel! We were upset: What!?!... We will write it even without getting up from behind the desk...! So, most likely, we made a bet. I do not remember for how long we worked on our first novel. Half of the book was written by Boris, and half by me. Then we connected the episodes, threw out what was duplicated, and carried the manuscript to the publishing house. To our greatest surprise, in a just year, the book was printed³.

¹ *Strana bagrovych tuch* (*Land of the Crimson Clouds* aka *The Country of Crimson Clouds*) Moskva: Detgiz, 1959. This is part one of the trilogy containing also *A Voyage to Amaltheia* (1960, *Put' na Amalteiu*) and *The Space Apprentices* (1962, *Stazheri*). *Strana bagrovych tuch* was translated to Polish in the early 1960s by Leonid Teliga as *Kraina purpurowych obłoków*.

² Now again Petersburg (translator's note).

³ А. Стругацкий, *Трудно быть фантастом. Беседу записал С. Каиницкий*, „Московский комсомолец” 1980, 17 September, p. 2. Arkadij gives year 1956 as time of writing this novel in an interview *SF Always Current* (А. Стругацкий, *Фантастика всегда актуальна. Интервью брали О. Блохин, С. Замогильный*, „Коммунист” (Саратов) 1982, 27 August, p. 4.). In the brothers' statement on the columns of Leningrad monthly „Аврора” (А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *Фантастику любим с детства. Беседа с писателями*, „Аврора” 1981, nr 2, pp. 150–155) there is a note about the beginning of the work over this novel in year 1955. Boris Strugatski in the quoted remembrances tells about longer work over the novel – from the beginnings of 1955 till

In view of the fact that the book was written in years 1955/1956 (when Arkadij has already left the army), and detailed plan of it was worked out a year earlier – the date of taking the decision about writing can be placed on the turn of 1954 and 1955. Comments by Boris Strugatski published in the recent years (and especially fragments of the brothers' correspondence quoted in them), indicate that the first projects of writing SF novel about Venus originated in the mind of Arkadij Strugatski in neighbourhood of years 1951–1952, and they crystallized in the next year. At the beginning it was supposed to be a truly socrealistic (“fantastic-production”) SF novel.

„Obviously, it was possible, at least in theory, to imagine such scientifically-fantastic variant of *Far from Moscow* [a novel by Vasilij Azajev – W. K.], in which instead of the chief of the building site there will be military governor of the Soviet regions of Venus, instead of Adun – the Coast of Crimson Clouds, instead of oil-bearing island Tajsin –»Uranium Golconda«, instead of pipeline – something, which obtains uranium and sends it to the Earth.” – wrote Arkadij in a letter to his brother, that was dated 5 March 1953⁴. This very fact proves how far back, even into the late Stalinist Era, reaches the origin of the novel. The final writing came, however, later, by both brothers and under more rebellious banners. Numerous later statements of the Strugatskis leave no doubts as to the programmatic character of *Land of the Crimson Clouds*. It was a novel written „against...”, as an expression of discontent with the state of the genre.

April 1957. The publishing process lasted almost 2 years; whereat dissatisfied editors forced the writers to repeated, serious alterations. The book mentioned by Arkadij was SF novel by Vladimir Vladko, *Space Argonauts* (Rostov n. Donu, 1939) (Владимир Владко, *Аргонавты Вселенной*, Ростов-на-Дону, 1939) which was published again, after alterations, in Moscow in 1958. It was really an unusually naïve SF novel. There is some evidence, that it was really this novel, as some episodes of *Land of the Crimson Clouds*, such as the attack of „space radiation”, and events just after the landing, are clearly the polemic allusion to the analogous scenes from the Vladko's book. I will not mention the smaller allusions... Vladimir Borisov (В. Борисов) writes in „translator's note” to the Russian translation of my book on the Strugatskis: „The editorial data of *Space Argonauts* inform: sent to typesetting on 2.08.1956. Released to print on 22.03.1957”. Arkadij Natanovich worked already as an editor; although at a different publishing house, but he knew, for example, K. Andrejev, who edited SF in Trudiezivizdat, where Vladko's book was published. So the brothers could get to know the text of *Argonauts* in typescript. On the other hand, *Land of the Crimson Clouds* was considerably edited by the publishers. Thus the authors could, at last finishing off the text, bring in some him changes after reading Vladko's book” – В. Кайтох, *Братья Стругацкие: Очерк творчества*. Пер. с пол. В. Борисова, [in:] А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *Собрание сочинений в 11 т.*, Т. 12 (дополнительный), Донецк 2003, pp. 409–670, p. 640.

The scale of these editorial changes by Borisov is present in the original text of the novel, as published by Svetlana Bondarienko in the volume *Neizvestnyje Strugackije. Černoviki, rukopisi varanty. Ot „Strany bagrovych tuč” do „Trudno byt' bogom”* – С. Бондаренко, *Неизвестные Стругацкие: Черновики, рукописи, варианты: От 'Страны багровых туч' до 'Трудно быть богом'*, Донецк 2005, p. 10–144. And by the way: I emphasise that in this article all translations of the texts cited are mine, unless it is noted in the bibliography or the text.

⁴ Б. Стругацкий, *Комментарии к пройденному*, [in:] А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *Собрание сочинений*. Т. 1, Донецк 2000–2001, pp. 638–664, p. 642.

* * *

And therefore... what was that state? What was in the Soviet SF of the 1940s and early 1950s that the Strugatskis did not like (and how it could be the object of the brothers' criticism)? What place occupied fantastic literature generally, and its scientific kind (i.e. SF) in the, reigning then in the Soviet literature, socrealistic system of thinking about belles-lettres?

The situation was such, that Soviet fantastic literature did not tolerate in those times other subgenres than SF, which was supposed to be based on rational conceptions of reality. The contemporary fairy tale (fantasy) and the fantasy of horror did not develop in the USSR. The latter, equally with pornography, was used as a current proof of the decline of the Western literature. Amusement SF (for example space-opera) became a victim of general reluctance to popular literature. However, fantastic literature with cognitive value was regarded two-fold: Anatolij Lunaczarski (Анатолий Луначарский), who died in 1933, was the follower of utopian literature. He was of opinion that the development of such literature „makes possible access for the elements – strictly speaking – drifting out of the formal frames of realism, but in no way being in conflicting with the realism, as that it is not a departure to the world of illusion, but one of possibilities to reflect the reality in her development, in her future”⁵. Compatibility of suitably saturated sociological fantastic literature, describing the future society with the theory and the practice of orthodox socialist realism⁶, is for me without any doubt. „We have to know not only the whole reality: past and present, and so this, in which creation we take part. We should also know the third kind of reality – the reality of the future”⁷ – declared Maxim Gorki (Максим Горький) in year 1935.

The Communist party management (the „inner party” – translator's note) recognized, however, this truth really only after its 20th Congress in year 1956, and precisely after the appearance of the first great communist utopian novel: *Andromeda Nebulae* by Ivan Jefremov (1957 – Иван Ефремов *Туманность Андромеды*). Until this moment „scientific fiction” was regarded differently: her „original sin” was that the genre was not realistic, that it did not show what really exists. Warlike thinking of years 1934–1957, apart from realism and

⁵ А. В. Луначарский, *Социалистический реализм*, [in:] А. В. Луначарский, *Полное собрание сочинений в 8 т.*, Т. 8, Москва 1964, pp. 491–523, p. 498.

⁶ For example: leading novel of the 1930s: *Bruski* by Fedor Panfierov (Федор Панферов *Бруски*) clearly reminds utopia – А. Бритиков, *Русский советский научно-фантастический роман*, Ленинград 1970, p. 137.

⁷ М. Горький, *Наша литература – влиятельнейшая литература в мире: Речь на втором пленуме Правления Союза советских писателей 7 марта 1935 года*, [in:] М. Горький, *Собрание сочинений в 30 т.*, Т. 27, Москва 1957, pp. 412–421, p. 419.

antirealism, did not allow third possibility for literature. The result was setback of the genre's development⁸.

The evolution of SF in Russia – as worldwide – has been held under mark of Jules Verne and Herbert G. Wells, as well as under two literary currents that were propagated by them: the technological utopia, depending most often on description of unusual invention, fascinated with possibilities of development of technology and science, as well as sociological utopia, troubled with the future of the society. They had – especially the second – already long development behind, however really only in the second half of 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, when they developed the narrative artistic form, usually of adventure novel⁹. Among 19th century Russian authors interested in this field of writing, usually are mentioned: Duke Vladimir Odojevski (Владимир Одоевский), literary critic and philosopher, author of *Year 4338. Petersburg Letters (4338-й год. Петербургские письма, 1840)* and Nikolai Czernyszewski (Николай Чернышевский), who in his program novel *What to do? (Что делать?, 1863)* introduced a utopian chapter. The Russian symbolists of the turn of the centuries also wrote SF. First of them was Valery Briusov (Валерий Брюсов), who in particularly dark visions of *Republic of Southern Cross (Республика Южного Креста)* and *The Last Martyrs (Земля, 1907)* expressed the intellectual atmosphere of those years – the anxiety about fate of the European culture, menaced by the degeneracy from one side and the development of totalitarian ideologies – from the other.

But at the very source of Soviet SF stands not them, but Konstantin Ciolkovski (Константин Циолковский), who was having a custom of expressing his scientific ideas about flight in cosmos in form of belles-lettres, in which basic scientific and technological facts could be easier digested, using the heroes mouth, instead of mathematical formulae¹⁰. Another father of Soviet SF was Alexander Bogdanov (Александр Богданов), leader of competitive (in the face of sorealism) artistic formation Proletkult (Пролеткульт), who was also an activist of the revolutionary movement: first the collaborator – and later ideological enemy of Lenin, criticizing Marxism from the position of philosophy of Mach and Avenarius. In year 1908 he has published, reprinted in 1918 and

⁸ See bibliography by B. Ljapunov (Б. Ляпунов) added to monograph by A. F. Britikov (А. Бритиков, op. cit., pp. 363–436), which catalogues works of Russian SF up to 1967 along with the native reception.

⁹ I draw inspiration for this and next arguments about the nature of SF and other different kinds of literary fantasy from three sources: A. Zgorzelski, *Fantastyka. Utopia. Science fiction. Ze studiów nad rozwojem gatunków*, Warszawa 1980; Т. Чернышева, *Природа фантастики*, Иркутск 1985; Е. Неелов, *Волшебно-сказочные корни научной фантастики*, Leningrad 1986.

¹⁰ For example: *Grezy o zemle i nebe i efekty vseirnogo t'jagotenija* (Moskva 1895), *Na Lunu. Fantastyczeskaja povest'* (Moskva 1893) and *Vne Zemli. Povest'* (Kaluga 1920).

several times later, a social utopia titled *The Red Star* (*Красная звезда*), where he created a vision of socialist society on Mars.

In the 1920s and 1930s on the map of fantastic genres in world literature, first of all in USA, occurred changes leading to the rise of scientific fiction in her today's shape – the science fiction (SF). Namely: the currents of technological and sociological utopia were at last „mixed” and „demoted”: the elaborated by them motives became only a kind of background for the heroes, as SF was already the genre providing general amusement, without special ambitions to popularize the science. And that process found also reflection in the Soviet literature.

The process of SF „degradation” began in works of Wells, where in some stories there were simultaneously images of well- (utopia) or badly- (antiutopia) organized future world, as well as „miraculous” technical inventions. However, it is proper to note, that earlier Verne described technology, so to say, disinterestedly, in general, without ambitions to look on social development.

In coming into being of the convention of SF genre in England and USA, which according to A. Zgorzelski has been completed little before year 1939 (the researchers more often date the beginning of SF to year 1926, when Hugo Gernsback began to publish magazine „Astounding”), participated such fantastic subgenres as the horror novel – the weird fiction, tale about miraculous invention – the gadget story, and so called fantastic voyage (the last two and partly weird fiction I name the technological utopia, understanding well, that it is a term more within the field of ideology than the literary genology), as well as (obviously) the utopia *sensu stricto*, i.e. sociological SF, which is represented, for example, by Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or Herbert G. Wells' *When the Sleeper Wakes*.

As the most essential phenomenon, which decided about separating of SF from the related genres, I regard the loss by a large group of fantastic works specific for the utopias, the susceptibility to didactic describing of the fantastic phenomenon. The feature that distinguishes SF is placing this phenomenon (phenomena) in the background of proper plot – the events, folding on the drama or the hero's adventures. In other words: SF uses techniques of realistic prose – the most often adventure or sensational, but also social and psychological, and with their help it reaches its own targets: entertainment, ideological, cognitive or other.

In its most mature works, SF reaches even to so – seemly reserved for „high brow” literature, complicated techniques such as convention of the reader and author's common knowledge about place, time and realities, in which the plot sets, despite the fact that the fantastic world, with its nature of things, is the construct not known, even from the documents. This is, however, possible, thanks to well rooted in the readers' consciousness memory of the SF realities,

created by old utopias, which become the common property in this field, and which SF took over, widened and used as a „common good”.

Described above processes of shaping the SF genre found – in certain moment – their partial reflection, also in the Soviet literature. After the end of the civil war, in Russian SF in period of her first „boom”, in more ambitious works, and they were almost entirely books by Alexei Tolstoy (Алексей Толстой) and Alexander Belajev (Александр Беляев), crossed (though seldom in such equilibrium, which would decide about really high value of their works) three currents. Let me consider here a novel by A. Tolstoy, *Engineer's Garin Hyperboloid* (*Гиперболоид инженера Гарина*, 1925): in which „hyperboloid”, or some kind of laser, is used by an adventurer, and implemented in order to get gold from under earthly shell – that was, more or less, with agreement with the state of knowledge at that time (and simultaneously enough fantastic in order to intrigue the recipient of the novel, while the chases, wars and murders delivered to the reader a lot of entertainment). The final conquest by Garin of the power over world and its loss on result of the proletarian revolt – made up the utopian component.

Anyway, images of future world of social justice (i.e. the utopian current) in Soviet literature of this and next period were few¹¹. The element of utopia was reduced most often to paintings of near future world revolution or even only selected revolutionary combats. However, Alexandr Belaev, first author in Russian and Soviet literature writing exclusively SF, was a representative of the J. Verne current. In centre of majority of his about 40 works stood the fantastic apparatus such as an unusual industrial undertaking, medical experiment etc., treated seriously, as popularization of possible achievements of human knowledge. Invention was at the centre of the plot, but it was most often reduced to a kind of attractive background, around which sensational action took place. Utopian background was again the image of the revolution. Alternatively, sociological-utopian component could appear in „sociological lighting” of the incidents that happened¹².

Third current, which was held by Soviet experts at particularly low esteem, was the amusement current, represented, for example, by *Mess-Mend or Yankee in Petrograd* (*Месс Менд, или Янки в Петрограде*, 1924) and *Lori-Len, Metallurgist* (*Лору Лен, металлист*, 1925) by Marietta Szagianian (Мариэтта

¹¹ Britikov mentions only: V. Itin, *Land of Gonguri* (В. ИТИН, *Страна Гонгури*, 1922), Ja. Okunev, *Grjaduszczyj mir* (Я. Окунев *Грядущий мир*, 1923) and *Zavtrasznij den* (*Завтрашний день*, 1924), A. Belaev, *Gorod pobeditelja* (А. Беляев *Город победителя*) and *Zelenaja simfonija* (*Зеленая симфония* 1930), E. Zelikovic, *Sledujuscij mir* (Е. Зеликович *Следующий мир*, 1930), Ja. Larri, *Strana sczastlivych* (Я. Ларри *Страна счастливых*, 1931) – А. БРИТИКОВ op. cit., pp. 96–101 and 135–14.

¹² It should be noted here that in the latter part of his life Belaev also tried to show the world of communism.

Шагинян), *Trest DE. History of the Fall of Europe* (*Трест Д.Е. История гибели Европы*, 1923) by Iliia Ehrenburg (Илья Эренбург), *Island Ehrendorff* (*Остров Эрендорф*, 1924) and *Rulers of Iron* (*Повелитель железа*, 1925) by Valentin Katajev (Валентин Катаев)¹³. They were called sometimes the Red Pinkerton novels or the Red Detective Story, as they were the conscious attempts of creation of revolutionary, Soviet sensational novel, competitive in the face of this genre in the West, and also parodying its patterns. They abounded in swarm and rowdy action, directed against the class enemy, were full of satiric episodes and grotesque; their autothematic character often parodied patterns, and themselves, they operated with SF elements, which were not aspiring to pure scientific character in the same degree as the space ships do not aspire in works of space opera type¹⁴.

The Red Pinkerton possessed also the other interesting propriety, which is in the parodistic situations and sifting in the face of set patterns, which had in its intention to teach the mass reader the elements Marxism. Here we have an example from *Mess-Mend*: according to Marxism, work had decisive part in humanizing our animal ancestors. Turned and exaggerated thought produced in Szaginian's novel a motive of millionaires transforming themselves into humanoid beasts, as they produce really nothing! Thus, no wonder, that this direction did not go beyond the 1920s, but had a kind of continuation in the anti-capitalistic satire by Lazar Lagin (Лазарь Лагин).

Parallel (to some extent) development of Soviet and world SF, which was characteristic for the 1920s, was soon to be disturbed. The next 30 years passed in the USSR under the sign of rules of technological current. Amusement current expired – for socrealism, as literature was then too serious matter. The SF writers overcame problems of constructing attractive action by „importing” chases for spies from the production novels. Only rarely, represented by them production questions, technical or scientific, were so interesting that there was really any the possibility of replacement of usual „physical adventures” by „thought adventures” of the heroes.¹⁵ There was an acute shortage of visions of the future communist society – it is, however, worth to remember about emergence in the 1930s of war utopias, exalting the victory of USSR in the expected world war. As a rule, in SF books then published, social world was presented more poorly than in production novels.

¹³ Note that I mention here only the better-known authors.

¹⁴ I attract the reader's attention to consciously unscientific character of fantastic motives, on their only external, superficial scientifically-fantastic character, because this permits to distinguish the Western SF and Red Pinkerton from the more clumsy realizations of technological utopia, where during the lecture we smile in face of the author's most serious intentions.

¹⁵ For example in *Generator of Wonders* (*Генератор чудес*, 1939) by Jurij Dolgushin (Юрий Долгушин).

Why? Maybe because that writers were obliged then to write about the present day? Maybe because that socrealism, as every normative doctrine, required from the writers the upkeeping of the cleanness of genres, and these, in case of epic, were defined according to thematic criterion (for example: productive, kolkhoz¹⁶, or anti-imperialist novel), and since fantastic literature was at the end defined as a prose about scientific and technical inventions – this had to stay so?¹⁷ Maybe because of this, that the creation of utopia would involve presentation of different, than existing in those times, social solutions, which could end with deadly dangerous suspicion? Maybe in the end because of this, that to foresee the future of social reality was harder than to foresee the future technology, and the degree of realism¹⁸ (that is the value of work) was estimated according to exactitude of divinations.

Author of the first known to me synthetic review of Soviet SF, O. Chuze (Хузе), made in year 1951 serious accusation against it, because he found that „the worldwide peace movement was not foreseen in those novels, but this global peace movement is the essential repressing power against the sparking off the new world war”¹⁹. The conclusion was drawn out from this that „the elements of social utopia in Soviet SF can only illustrate underestimation by the writers of scientific predictions, made on the basis of Marxist-Leninist science, about the laws of the capitalistic development and the socialist society”²⁰. So his final comment states:

On the example of unconvincing character of social prognoses in field of social conflicts, steps out clearly the border of proxies of SF. [...] the Soviet belles-lettres can reproduce the tendencies of development of society’s life only on the hard basis of Marxism-Leninism. Oblivion about working of objective laws of development leads to utopia, it deprives the Soviet literature of powerful source of pictorial meeting of reality, it impoverishes with this the truth of life, which is the invariable condition of literature of socialist realism²¹.

¹⁶ Soviet agricultural cooperative (translator’s note).

¹⁷ In a letter to his brother (dated 29.09.1957) Arkadij Strugatski estimated one of the causes of artistic weakness of Soviet SF in the Stalin years: „And one more. [...] They fear deadly (if they at all have any idea about this notion) the shuffle of genres. And this is yet the great advantage and perfect weapon in efficient hands. In principle the knowledge of this is common: SF without adventures is boring, „naked” detective story can be read only by teenagers. But how to use this law nobody knows” – Б. Стругацкий, *Комментарии к пройденному*, [in:] А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *Собрание сочинений*. Т. 1, Донецк 2000–2001, p. 638–664, p. 647). On the poetics of socrealism, see W. Kajtoch, *Z mojego archiwum (Kosiński, Parnicki i... socrealizm*, in: Kajtoch W. (ed.), *Proza, proza, proza... (opowiadania, fragmenty, eseje, notatki)*. III, Kraków 1997, pp. 319–332).

¹⁸ In a sense of being „true to life”.

¹⁹ О. Хузе, *Советские научно-фантастические книги о будущем*, [in:] *Вопросы детской литературы*, Москва–Ленинград 1953, pp. 349–373, p. 354.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 354–355.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 355.

No wonder, that publishing houses preferred to avoid the dangerous zone.

„Improbable, but then this is the fact” – A. Belajev recalled the vicissitudes of publishing *Jump into Emptiness* (*Прыжок в ничто*, 1933) – „that initial editing of the heroes’ profile and realistic element took a lot of place in fantastic literature. But when the vivid scene appeared, thus moving the interpretation of science and technology into the background, on the margin already gleamed the editor’s note: „And this is what for! Better to describe atomic engine”²².

Note that by the realistic element, Belajev meant, according with definition by Engels²³, only „the typical individuals on the background of the typical conflicts”, in other words the agreement of work of art with basic requirements of the socrealistic „mainstream”.

These principles were in force also in closely technical subject matters. If fantastic literature describes the non-existent things, then let them to be in accordance with the current state of knowledge and thus they will come true surely; if – as all genres of Soviet literature – they have to serve society, then let them to serve in the simplest way, aiding development of industry and applied sciences. About stories by Vadim Ochotnikov (Вадим Охотников) from the collection *On the Limits of Possible* (*На грани возможного*, 1947), which title entered into the critical circulation as one of qualifications of mainstream in SF of those years, it was written that:

particularly in them the reader is captured by the concrete and real character of imagination. These ‘fantastic’ apparatuses and mechanisms, about which the author writes, are either on the border of realization, or are already fully possible to realize. This attracts the reader’s thought, pushes him to independent considerations, arouses thirst, to work alone over realization of these or similar projects²⁴.

Publishers asked experts for professional advice, dressed the writings with the scientific epilogues and vocabularies of fantastic and scientific nomenclature, critics with figures in hand checked the possibility of introduction of such, and not different project. In the 1940s it also has appeared, crowning this particular way of thinking about tasks of SF, so called theory of border. It advocated

²² А. Беляев, *Аргонавты Вселенной* [Рец. на роман В. Владко], „Детская литература” 1939, № 5 (see А. Бритиков, *op. cit.*, p. 133).

²³ Engels’ definition, contained in fragment of a letter to Margaret Harkness sounds: „Realism, according to me, assumes outside the truth of details, the truth in reproduction of typical circumstances of typical characters...” – H. Markiewicz, *Główne problemy wiedzy o literaturze*, Kraków 1976, p. 224. Obviously Engels wrote about every kind of realism, i.e. about realism as such, but his words were quoted also in the context of the socialist realism (socrealism).

²⁴ Б. Лавренев, *Реалистическая фантастика*, [in:] В. Охотников, *На грани возможного*. Москва 1947, p. 5–6.

that only such inventions and projects should be the subject of SF books, which will come into force in maximum of 15 years. In different case, author „comes off from reality” and does not serve the development of the Soviet economy, and therefore he or she is cosmopolitan²⁵. Critics confessed to this theory, as well as writers, treating it very seriously. Leader of 1950s Soviet SF, that was published in long runs, one Vladimir Nemcov (Владимир Немцов) preceded his novel *Splinter from the Sun* (*Осколок Солнца*, 1955), which action he built on vicissitudes connected with exploitation of the experimental sun power station, with the following lyrical introduction:

This summer there was no space expeditions to other planets. [...] Man did not yet learn to control the weather and to live till three hundred years, bookings for trip on Mars were not yet announced. It was no anything of the sort simply because our story concerns current events, events of today, which is for us not less important than tomorrow. And let readers forgive author, that he did not want to detach from our time and our planet. Although he tells about technology not yet invented, but does technology really matter here?²⁶.

Besides thematic limitations, the shape of SF was influenced by its acknowledgement for a genre exclusively for the youth, as well as – being the after-effect of non noticing by sorealistic literary criticism of those years of the question of the form of literary work of art – total disinteressement for artistic values (O. Chuze even did not distinguish the SF story from popular science and futurological sketch). And also important was the Soviet thought and economic practice of the epoch, set then (among the others) on the solution of energy problems. Average Soviet SF work of the 1940s and 1950s either described, on a small scale, work over some invention such as the „ray drill” to mine works in *Underground Murmurs* (*Шороху под землей*, 1947) by Ochotnikov (ОХОТНИКОВ); could only broaden the scale of inventions, making them revolutionary for a given field of production, as in case of under-water tank to perform drillings on sea bottom in *Golden Bottom of Sea* (*Золотое дно*, 1949) by Nemcov, or describe the history of investigations over the scientific problem, for example in area of food procurement from chemical raw materials – *History of the Discovery* (*Судьба открытия*, 1951) by N. Lukin (Н. ЛУКИН). Or it could represented giant, liable to alter the face of whole planet, undertaking, modelling their image on so called „great building sites of communism”. One of the favourite motives was the warming up of Arctic in *The Victors of Depths* (*Победители недр*, 1937), and *The Ruler's Exile* (*Изгнание владыки*, 1946) by G. Adamov (Г. АДАМОВ) as well as

²⁵ It was a very serious accusation in the Soviet Bloc, especially in the USSR during the Stalin years (translator's note).

²⁶ Б. Немцов, *Осколок Солнца*, Москва 1958, р. 3.

New Golfstrom (Новый Гольфстрим, 1948) by A. Podosov (А. Подсосов). The latter advanced the project of irrigation of the deserts of the Middle Asia by the way of reversal of run of Siberian rivers, on which project there were some expressions of opinion during the 17th Congress of the CPSU.

As I already mentioned, the authors bewared of pointing to social consequences of introduction of a given invention, using in works, the more satisfying the critics, typical motives for production novels (i.e. the enemies' fight against industrial success of the Soviet state, clash of innovatory and conservative opinions in management of the building site, the heroism in breaking the difficulties and in fighting the consequences of disasters, and heroes' personal complications, for example when the lovers differ in opinions on work and so on). These tales about great fantastic building sites belong thus to so-called SF-production subgenre.

It would be proper at the end of this introduction to turn the attention on specific battle spirit between the participants of events, reflecting characteristic for those times Soviet Marxists' relation to the nature. They confessed then the thesis, that the man fights the nature and one takes easy this – how we would say today – the protection of environment.

In year 1955, the patterns, from which the brothers could take example, bringing in from the state of the genre, described by me very sketchy, because of space constraints, could not arouse enchantment, even at conservative followers of socialist realism. SF-production works suffered from schematism, as works remaining on the border of possible were simply boring, and such was the Strugatskis' opinion. They were terrified by small scale of the subjects: „I remembered a story about a pair of shoes with non-destructible sole”²⁷ – recalled Boris after twenty years²⁸. Nonetheless in thinking of the critics about SF and in its relation to her patron, began already – as I think – setting slowly, the changes, remaining in clear, although difficult to prove, relationship with the „thaw”, and with having to happen soon criticism of the „cult of individual”, and change of economic strategy, as well as with the preparation by management of the CPSU, announced in year 1961 from the tribune of its 22nd Congress, the Third Program of the Soviet Communist Party, so called „Plan of Building Communism”.

And then, yet infrequent, postulating voices appeared, advocating making SF the literature of great dream, having to deal not with the propaganda of the newest inventions, but with the description of the future. There was a project in making, project of committing to this marginal and „suspicious” genre, almost key tasks.

²⁷ Б. Стругацкий (1983), *Мы пишем о земном человеке. Интервью записал П. Огус, „Иртыш”* (Семипалатинск) 1983, 16 April, p. 4.

²⁸ He meant, most likely, a story *Volsebnye botinki* (*Magical Boots*) by V Saparin (В. Сапарин *Волишебные ботинки*, 1958).

There was now accepted, that from literary point of view, the genre hereinto did not grow up to this task. The weakening of limitations was proposed in futurological liberty. SF writer would no longer be obliged to not make a mistake in details, it would suffice to him or her to accurately define general tendencies in the development. He or she would not need to act in accordance with recognized, introduced into life, knowledge about technology. Just the opposite! He or she would have to use the most modern achievements and scientific hypotheses²⁹. There was postulated stretching on SF of all rights and duties of „great literature”, i.e. of socialist realism, reminding simultaneously about its „futuristic” steering. I will add that the tenet was begun then to be comprehended (although rather slowly) not so literally and vulgarly.

The SF literature – it was begun to write – has first of all to create, at last worthy of this name, communist utopia, and in books of technological current, the appropriate place has to get the portraying of the social results of a given achievement. It was proposed something like the execution of the second synthesis of technological, utopian and adventure elements. Books would come into being, which were interesting for the reader, and at the same time, propagating knowledge, and of high artistic value. The artistic value of work is for a socrealist equivalent with the truth of times and characters, and „full blood” (i.e. typical) human beings cannot be created without creation of suitably rich painting of life of the human individuals, with its conflicts, because these are two sides of one coin. The hero’s convincing figure was the condition of stretching, in turn, on the genre of the category of pathos, and thus making him worthy of the pursuance of mission, which was intended for him. To enthusiasm in building of communism can encourage the recipients, among others, the heroes, which they would want to represent as their far descendants.

In year 1955 the postulates, represented here by me (so to say in their developed form), were expressed yet rather silently. With certainty many creators and activists were thinking in old way, since SF was defined as „literature, which is interested in the roads of technical resolution of definite problems, and thus in: the scientific hypotheses, discoveries, and „pure” inventions”³⁰, even in year 1968³¹. First of all, even the author of the sketch from which I take the knowledge about the revolution to happen in several years later, S. Poltavski (С. Полтавский), was not able to represent the unschematic fulfilment of his own postulates. For example his ideal was represented by the people from *Far From Moscow (Далеко от Москвы)* by Vasily Azajev (Василий Ажаев)³².

²⁹ The Principle of „scientific character” of SF had to stay, and, for some, it is continually in force.

³⁰ В. Ревич, *Реализм фантастики*, „Фантастика” 1968. Москва, pp. 270-298, p. 272.

³¹ Statement by Alexandr Kazancev (А. Казанцев).

³² See С. Полтавский, *Пути и проблемы советской научной фантастики*, [in:] *Вопросы детской литературы*. Москва–Ленинград (1955), pp. 106–162.

And therefore, seeking – as all, who begin – some support, the Strugatskis had at their command a rather large conglomerate of new projects in germinal and the obsolete examples. Let us see, what the result was.

* * *

The subject of *Land of the Crimson Clouds* placed decidedly the novel beyond the borders of within limits of possible or close sight subgenre of SF: expedition on Venus in the 1990s... The novel lacked teenage hero and love complications of the characters qualified it – at least in those times – as a book for the „older youth”. However, unclear hint about some scandal on a deep space station, finished with death of Anatoly Jermakov’s³³ wife, and with prohibition of the women’s participation in deep space expeditions, did not fit into poetics of the prose for young readers.

Moreover, it is clearly visible, that the Strugatskis professed new proposals. The novel was to be extremely artistic (i.e. have unschematic heroes), and, at the same time, „scientific”, that is popularizing the most modern knowledge, as well as amusing, keeping the readers in tension. It had also to fulfil the so-called dream about the fullest vision of future society, to dispute with old patterns, both being property of the prose of recent past, and especially of the fantastic literature. The authors also became entangled in the shy criticism of the present day, in which they only certificated the total incomprehension, but about this later.

Large as a debut, sixteen printer’s sheets novel, is divided into three parts. In the *first* the young Russian engineer, Alexei Bykov, arrives, called in, to Moscow, where he amazingly finds out that the Soviet authorities propose to him to take part in a space expedition, where he has to be a driver of a transporter, on which it is planned to reach unusually rich deposits of uranium ores: so-called Uranium Golconda. We get to know a space ship with photonic propulsion, „Chius”, able (with regard on being larger than „old atomic-pulsating rockets”) to begin revolution in interplanetary travel. The trip and space adventures of six daredevils are the subject of the *second* part. The *third* is about the investigation of the planet.

After unusually difficult landing, the expedition divides. Bykov with colleagues travel in the transporter to Golconda, while *en route* one of the brave cosmonauts mysteriously perishes. The remaining heroes reach the location, and build there a provisional cosmodrome for next expeditions. They also carry out the preliminary, geological search of terrain. In return way an underground nuclear explosion destroys the transporter, and the commander, Jermakov, perishes. In the last chapter the surviving *troika*, plagued by the diseases, lack of oxygen and hunger, reach the spaceship, though the pilot of „Chius”, Krutikov, was

³³ Who was expedition’s commander.

forced to move her to the other, safer place. The novel is finished with an epilogue³⁴ describing the proper conquest of the planet – in a letter by geologist Jurkovski, written some four years after Bykov's adventures (the latter was then studying at the Higher School of Space Navigation).

The Strugatskis resolved to, first of all, to borrow from the old Belaev's, and even earlier tradition of the genre – the above mentioned feature pattern, typical for adventure and travel novel. Additionally, to make the reader more „hooked on” the text, the authors introduced the, binding the action, motive of sensational secret – the so-called „red circle”. It will turn out that such circles are being created in the Venusian soil by non-protein based bacteria, which are „feeding on” radioactivity and – when underground atomic explosion approaches – expectantly awaiting around. The transporter was just a victim of such a circle. The sensational element was not already, let's notice, a conventional chase for spies and had to fulfil the postulate of use in SF work of such keystone of action, which was natural for the genre, set in fantastic plot, and bringing the scientific knowledge, in contrast to, so far used, which were alien for the genre.

But as the writers could not give up trying to match the requirements of socialist realism in SF, so they decided to burden this pattern with social problems, so they used the „fantastic-production” pattern. The plot of travel and adventure work, containing only one story line (it divides sometimes on two parallel story lines), is depending on after-effect of adventures – from episode to episode, had to fulfil the part of skeleton for contents typical for socrealistic production novel, where the action is based on intrigue, where there are conflicts and clashes of two forces, which requires, as a rule, multiple story lines, because the reader should remain with the narrator in all fighting camps. The task was difficult. The Strugatskis' solution was transfer the second story line, connected with activity of the „enemy”, into heroes' minds, and thus just pretending that it exists.

And if one looks at *Land of the Crimson Clouds* as on a production novel, then the main class conflict, always present in socrealistic production novels, is here transformed into the other conflict: humanity versus wild nature, which subjugation is the mankind's main task. Wanting to acquit themselves of duty to show such conflict, the Strugatskis from one side invented many really dangerous hazards of the cosmos and the planet, which made the novel good, but from the second side they had to catch so odd mean, as indirect animization of Venus; the heroes without pause underline, that they lead a war with her, that it is really a battle – and victims are compared with war losses. They even threaten the

³⁴ Absent in the Polish edition, most likely because it was definitely too naïve for the Polish readers, already educated on superior works of Stanislaw Lem and translations of leading Western (mostly American and British) SF authors, as well as because of different, more relaxed, nature of „real socialism” in Poland (translator's note).

planet: „We will come back here yet... we will come! You will pay us for our tortures, for death! (...) We will shackle you in steel and concrete! You will work”³⁵.

Results were quite opposite, because in no way it is possible to transform a planet into such enemy as imperialistic agents, and thus above mentioned declamations sound artificially. The solution of conflict was conducted again according to tradition of optimistic tragedy, and in the epilogue as well as in a full of pathos scene, concluding the proper narration, those cosmonauts who survived, listen in to the signals been sent from homing broadcasting stations, installed by them, and they know that their comrades did not perish in vain, because other humans will arrive after them.

Conflict humanity versus nature, conceived as a chief one in the (future) communist society, could only partly defend the novel against accusations of „lacking any conflict” and – as not fully convincing in its realization – required supplements. The brothers introduced thus other conflicts: the followers of progress versus the conservatives as well as individualism versus collectivism.

The flight of „Chius” is a decisive moment in life of society, as postulated in socrealistic poetics. The rocket with great power has to permit mankind to become the hosts of the solar system (the mankind at the moment of beginning of the action was already travelling in cosmos for thirty years – this emphasis was then polemic in the face of tradition of Soviet SF, because expedition described so far had been, as a rule, the first), and to win the great amount of wealth, which will alter the life on their planet. All around the idea of new photonic drive, there has been, since a long time, the fight of opinions. Decision has now to finally happen: if „Chius” will not come back, the conservatives will win and they will halt (or at least significantly slow) investigation of the cosmos.

This matter introduces indirectly a conflict in the crew. Indirectly – because its cementation as a collective (again typical socrealistic motive) was captured into a pattern of conflict between individualism and collectivism. Negative hero’s equivalent (as cosmonaut and Communist cannot be completely negative), described as a person with the weakest, from among the crew, psychophysical endurance, Jurkovski, is of opinion, that „everywhere and always forward went the enthusiasts – dreamers, secluded romantics, and they just laid out directions, they pioneered for administrators, engineers...”³⁶. It was inadmissible for Soviet Marxist of those years and meets with hot polemics from other heroes, considering themselves as „ordinary workers”.

³⁵ А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *Страна багровых туч*, [in:] А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *Собрание сочинений*. Т. 1, Донецк 2000–2001, pp. 34–332, p. 307 and A. i B. Strugaccy, *W krainie purpurowych obłoków*, Warszawa 1961, p. 259.

³⁶ А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, op. cit., p. 120 and A. i B. Strugaccy, op. cit., p. 93.

Had the opinion of Jurkovski won, then the crew would not be able, maybe, to retreat, they would perish, waste the results as well as – the thought plots join here – would bury the idea of photonic drive. The most important, though only „in thoughts” (the real conflict between the crew of space ship is impossible³⁷), the enemy of Jurkovski is the main hero and the most pleasant figure – Bykov. They do not like themselves, but Jurkovski will eventually accept authority of man, whom he so far silently disdained, which testifies about positive internal breakthrough (next typical socrealistic motive).

Introduction to the adventure novel of problems from the production novels created the real danger for the heroes’ personality format, as well as for psychological probability of their conduct and thinking. Because action concerned something else, expedition – the whole set of problems connected with the above conflicts had to be presented and solved with the help of internal monologues and dialogue, sometimes whole tirades almost exclusively connected with above mentioned problems and conflicts. There was also the necessity of delivering popular science information using the same means.

Despite that telling about the ordinary day as well as about so called „great matters” using „big words” is more natural for a Russian than for a Pole, hopeless following of the old clichés and artificiality would have threaten the figures of *Land of the Crimson Clouds*, if not writers’ endeavour to add to positive figures a bit of controversial features (for example: this almost ideal Bykov sometimes is simply afraid) – and inversely. Secondly the Strugatskis were saved by the humour, efficient individualization of language, and endeavour to presentation of situations taken from normal human life. The heroes joke, have their personal problems (wife has left one of them), and sometimes display completely atypical reactions: seeing for a first time a man in pressure suit, panic-stricken Bykov has, quite normally, beaten him³⁸.

In total: the men of communist future, although having some shortages, traces of *a priori* construction according to „production” patterns and the theory

³⁷ The author obviously means here the crew consisting of Soviet Communists (translator’s note).

³⁸ All those experiments caused a lot of anxiety at the publishers. Boris Strugatski recalls: „Our editor, dear Isaac Markovitch Kassel, was most clearly emotionally torn. From the one side the manuscript pleased him. There were adventures, heroic achievements and the victory of mankind over tricky nature was exalted – and all that was based on solid foundation of our Soviet science and dialectical materialism (Marxist philosophy – translator’s note). Seen from the second side, every bit of it, for those times, was clearly not „politically correct”, using today’s phraseology (translator’s note). The heroes were primitive. They permitted themselves to curse. They quarrelled and were on the edge of applying physical violence to them. Tricky nature was merciless. Men went mad and perished. Here in Soviet novel for children the heroes – our men and not some spies, or the enemies of nation – the cosmonauts! – perished, finally and irrevocably. And there was no happy end, no waving of flags, which reconcile everybody and everything in epilogue... This was not acceptable in those times. This was suspicious ideologically – so much ideologically suspicious, that it was almost impossible to publish” – Б. Стругацкий, *Комментарии к пройденному*, p. 646.

of Marxism-Leninism, i.e. according to Marxist (really Leninist – translator's note) ideal of so-called individual developed in every respect, were realistic to such a degree, that they forced the critics to recognize, that Strugatskis show „men of future who maximally remind men of present”³⁹, and to see in this a specific trait of the brothers' authorship, which finally testified that their heroes were convincing. Unfortunately, it concerned only figures from the strict foreground. Other, especially „man of steel” Jermakov, continued recent traditions, which were soon to be recognized as inglorious. Anyway, it is my judgement that the Strugatskis, who were then keeping the faithfulness to the chief principles of poetics of the socialist realism (in the realization of those times), simply did not regard as an artistic mistake, leaving some of their heroes as no more than just carriers of pathos.

The writers did not oppose to set patterns, connected to inclusion to SF works of popular science. Bykov took lectures on different subjects from his companions, alone he recalled basic facts from encyclopaedia and textbooks with exactitude psychologically groundless, that reflected fatally on his personality, and schematized him secondarily. In lecturer's part had to step out sometimes even the narrator⁴⁰. Tasks related to popularization of science were treated in *Land...* seriously, trying to present to the reader virtually all possibilities caused by development of sciences and technologies being either in „swaddling-cloths” (the chemistry of polymers), or little older (the nuclear physics and its applications, especially in generating energy), even mentioning sciences that were quite recently forbidden in the USSR, such as the theory of relativity, cybernetics, modern genetics etc. The World of future was filled with new inventions, not „miraculous”, but fully foreseeable in the 1950s (videophone, plastic overcoat), so the novel corresponded somewhat to the „close sight” subgenre.

By the way, the Strugatskis tried, but about so much, as scholar-theoretician and humanist could⁴¹. Beyond the really exact messages about astronomy and the convincing description of the space phenomena, which was outright incomparable to this, which was in Soviet SF till then, and it does not dazzle with anachronism even today, the readers were suggested the „perspectives of development of science and technology” by the way of creating neologisms, for

³⁹ A. Dneprov, *Naučnaja fantastika dlja issledovanija buduščego*, „Molodoj kommunist” 1961/8, pp. 112–119.

⁴⁰ Malicious critic complained: „*Land of the Crimson Clouds* under many regards reminds me the following books: by Vladko – *The Space Argonauts*, by Volkov – *The Morning Star*, and by Martinov – *Two Hundred and Twenty Days in Starship*. At the Strugatskis', as in all those books, the main hero is a novice, who due to the judgement of fate (i.e. obviously by the author's will) takes part in complex interplanetary journey. The novice had to be, obviously, acquainted with astronomy and theory of space flights... So begins endless quotations from astronomical and other textbooks” – Е. Каплан, *Только не схемы!*, „Литература и жизнь” 1960, 8 января.

⁴¹ Boris Strugatski is an astronomer, and Arkadij was a linguist – expert in Japanese.

example „atomic car”, and by odd ideas in kind of fabric, where „secondary layer mesh of atoms was arranged perpendicularly to the primary layer mesh of atoms”, which was (most likely) a simplistic analogy to the carpenter’s plywood. One should also mention their biological fascinations.

Finally, the Strugatskis tried to match the tasks appointed to the artists by the theory and the practice of socialist realism, i.e. the tasks of participation in social life, not only indirectly, by portraying „materialized” ideal, which was then the part assigned to SF literature, but also directly: by trying to assess the recent years. And they proved very small perceptiveness. Their perspective was self-limited to registration of the outermost symptoms of social evil: „Sometimes I got an impression that we bring back trails behind old customs, we drag them from times when one should to „inflate” men with prattle in order to make them execute the most usual, elementary duties”⁴² – so, for example, the heroes protested, having found out about planned formal dinner before the take-off⁴³. However in the novel the more „deep” features of Stalinist society were transferred uncritically into the comparatively close, but, after all, already communist future.

Here I will try to show what kind of future world it is. Bykov reads a newspaper, which moves him so much, that he wants to take it aboard as reminder and symbol of his native planet:

„Implement modern principles of ploughing more bravely!” called the editorial. „Pupils from Iceland spend holidays on Crimea”, „Undersea sovkhoses⁴⁴ of Far East will deliver 30 million tones of plankton above the plan”, „New one and a half million kilowatts atomic power station begun work in Verchoyansk”, [...] „The hundred-year old skaters compete”. Bykov only browsed through the pages: „Festival of 3D movies from countries of Latin America”, „Building of Anglo-Chinese-Soviet astronomical observatory on the Moon”, „Our correspondent from Mars reports...”⁴⁵.

If one ignores the increase of scale of economic undertakings and to leave out of account concrete historical trinkets, these titles differ from headlines of Soviet newspapers from the 1950s with only one essential detail: the future world lives in peace. This impression the Strugatskis heightened effectively, although in the simplest possible way, thoroughly listing various nationalities of the space heroes. Who ever we will not meet, whom we are about not to hear! Outside the nations of the USSR, we have the English, the Czechs, the Chinese

⁴² А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *op. cit.*, p. 125 and А. и В. Стругаццы, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁴³ Their anxiety was aroused also by denunciations, but with characteristic exception: the heroes of the novel take, as ordinary thing, reporting confidentially to the management if it concerns offences that could harm „the common matter” – in this case the preparations to the flight.

⁴⁴ State farms (translator’s note).

⁴⁵ А. Стругацкий, Б. Стругацкий, *op. cit.*, p. 128 and А. и В. Стругаццы, *op. cit.*, p. 100–101.

(only in editions published before year 1968), the Indians⁴⁶ and the Brazilians. The Third World is especially richly represented, what had to be, for the reader, a sign of overcoming the global economic disproportions. All co-operate; administration of space flights is the task of The International Congress of Cosmogators. Most likely, either global revolution happened already worldwide, or at least the two political systems do not compete, since full disarmament happened. Bykov was a student at a former military school for tank crews. The military drill will hit the thorough reader even worse in the face of this⁴⁷, as well as the exact control of information in Bykov's surroundings and the atmosphere of military camp in the whole space flight organization.

The Draconian discipline of preparations to flight does not look odd, as it is explained by the requirements set for man by interplanetary space. Military style and command could be alternatively the remainder of tradition. But the manager of preparations to expedition, Krajuchin, is the absolute ruler of the whole organization. Every moment we see him when he argues angrily because of delays in realization of some tasks, and alone he looks after every trinket. Along with Jermakov he prepared the horrendous row in the supply department. If necessary, he also acts as a public prosecutor and judge in one person, for example ordering locking the negligent worker in detention.

The writers had no idea, that by portraying mess and disciplinary methods of its overcoming, they transferred into the future the centrally controlled Soviet economics of Stalin years (i.e. the economics of war type) without consideration if it is possible at all to have any achievements in long term successes in such a system of (mis)management, especially in the area of large scale development in the exploitation of cosmos, and whether such a vision is in accordance if not with healthy reasons (good sense), so at least with the theory of communism.

Exact centralizing impresses its stamp on personalities. The shy demands made to the management to consult its decisions with persons directly involved are qualified by fully positive heroes as lower middle-class (*petty bourgeoisie*) remnants and symptoms of shortages of character. Despite susceptibility to heroic achievements, the individuals are neither characterized by independence of thinking, nor by the moral courage. They prefer to not make important decision independently. Characteristic is, for example, that hesitation of Bykov, who did

⁴⁶ From India (translator's note).

⁴⁷ It is possible that numerous „military” behaviours of the heroes are remainders from the early versions of the text. I will appeal again to remembrances of Boris Strugatski: „According to the brightest order, it was demanded to remove any mentions about military in space – „, there was demanded from us that there would be no bearskins, no shoulder boards could appear; even remembrances about them would be unadvisable” – and tank man Bykov „with a few courageous strokes of pen” was transformed into former captain, and at present the manager of transportation [зампотех] at geological expedition” – Б. Стругацкий, *Комментарии к пройденному*, p. 649.

not know if to agree or not, to take part in the expedition, ceased on assurance made by Krajuchin, who informed him that since a long time „he had him at a guess” and that he was convinced that Bykov would manage well. According to Alexei, the superior and state activist „knows better” and thus better knows his abilities than he alone!

Maybe the most drastically illogical, and at the same time having the utmost importance for the development of plot, was the principle of guarding secrets and controlling information, which was ruling in the Krajuchin’s organization, and which is typical for hierarchized social groups of military type. Then why the secrets, network of guards, doorkeepers checking everywhere passes, since the problems of world peace were finally solved? Very careful control of information accessible to the heroes has also no rationale in the logic of the plot. For example: during the preparations to flight, a large part of crew does not know, what the program of the remaining cosmonauts’ training is.

But of course! The heroes even cannot talk to each other sincerely. I explained earlier the grave consequences, which the unhappy end of the expedition could have for the conquest of cosmos. During the radio conversation Krajuchin would like to somehow warn Jermakov, to remind him, how much it will be dependent on this, whether he will manage to be sufficiently careful, but will not decide, because he would have to reveal to his subordinate (foster-son!) the fact of existence of dissent within the Committee management.

Yes... *Land of the Crimson Clouds* is read even today in Russia and Poland, for its adventure layer. The authors’ theoretical, program ambitions, are today however not readable, it is only possible to „extract” them from the text in process of historical and literary analysis. Technological information, cosmographic and similar are obsolete or well-known. But the novel remains to be an interesting document of limitations of human imagination, especially in this, which concerns the social world. Stanisław Lem cast once on American SF special social conservatism⁴⁸. Till some moment in its history, this could be applied, as well, to the Soviet SF.

⁴⁸ „If at least one of all SF writers faltered about nationalization once, at least regarding the main branches of industry [...] – but it has not been so well. It was not at all about this that the Americans should propagate communism as an ideal of utopia [...], but this notion (communism – translator’s note) became deleted from dictionary of SF, if it does not make up the foundations of dystopia of the post-Orwellian kind. Therefore it is proper to fleetingly notice, that the domain of political convictions, avowed by the majority of SF authors, places oneself clearly on the right side (of political spectrum – translator’s note) [...]” – S. Lem, *Fantastyka i futurologia*, Kraków 1973, Vol. 2, p. 435. Isn’t it is analogous, that the Strugatskis, despite of their (at that time) literary „revolutionizm”, even not happen to think about „faltering” about more democratic economic system and more democratic relation to an individual human being?

My judgement is, that the meaning of the novel in the history of Soviet SF of breakthrough years between the 1950s and 1960s, was the most accurately described (on the turn of 1997 and 1998) by its no longer alive co-author (marking simultaneously, that in the brothers' works it made up the episode – if do not count a few short stories – practically isolated): „Land... proved to be the typical tale of transition period – burdened with rough morality and stupid ideological service to SF of „close sight” kind, but simultaneously not lacking attractiveness, imagination, true enthusiasm and naive wish to immediately create something on measure of H.G. Wells, or, at least, Belaev”⁴⁹.

The novel was – according to my judgement – a sure symptom of careful and partial aesthetical revolt, which took place with simultaneous lack of any ideological objections. Fully respecting the basic foundations of socrealism, the brothers mutinied against those aesthetical and genological canons of that direction, which then sentenced SF (and so its creators) to vegetating not only on the margins of literature, but – practically – beyond its limits. They desired *sui generis* promotion of SF in frames of socialist realism. However, neither the socrealism itself, nor the reality in which they lived – did arouse their doubts yet. These had really to come.

Thus there is nothing odd, that after many years, Boris Strugatski made the following judgement on the youthful work of him and his brother:

Let this novel to remain in SF, as a kind of crippled monument of the whole epoch, such as it really was – with her hot enthusiasm and delighted foolishness, – with her honest desire for good, linked to complete incomprehension what the good is, – with her the unbridled readiness to sacrifices, – with her cruelty, ideological blindness and classic, Orwellian doublethink. Because those were the times of ominous good, serving to the killing of life, times of ‘silent coxcombries and wise thoughtlessness’. And those times cannot be crossed out from the social memory. The most stupid, what we could do, would be to quickly forget about them. But one should at least remember those times, as long as their seeds will not rotten⁵⁰.

Translated from Polish by Lech Keller

⁴⁹ Б. Стругацкий, *Комментарии к пройденному*, р. 650.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, р. 651.

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Komuniści w przestrzeni – o pierwszej powieści braci Strugackich

Artykuł jest uaktualnioną, przywołującą nowsze wyniki badań i literaturę przedmiotu wersją fragmentu pierwszego rozdziału monografii *Bracia Strugaccy (zarys twórczości)*, Kraków 1993.

Analizuje on pierwszą wspólną powieść Arkadija i Borisa Strugackich: *W krainie purpurowych obłoków* (1959). Utwór w zamierzeniu pisarzy miał stanowić przykład fantastyki naukowej zgodnej z zasadami realizmu socjalistycznego, w jego lansowanej podówczas, „antyschematycznej” wersji. Był również protestem przeciwko charakterystycznej dla naukowej fantastyki lat stalinowskich konwencji „bliskiego celownika” nakazującej czynić tematem utworu wynalazki techniczne i odkrycia naukowe możliwe do zrealizowania w najbliższej pięcioletce. Nawiązywał też do tradycji A. Bielajewa i stanowił bezpośrednią polemikę z powieścią W. Władko *Argonawty wselennoj*. Zgodnie z zasadami socrealistycznej poetyki w jej wersji swoistej dla powieści produkcyjnej – fabuła utworu częściowo oparta jest na konflikcie między konserwatystami a nowatorami, a sylwetki bohaterów mają być przykładami tzw. typowych przedstawicieli komunistycznego społeczeństwa. Ponadto autorzy często traktują swą powieść jak esej popularnonaukowy. Z drugiej jednak strony dużo uwagi poświęca się przygodowym elementom fabuły, pojawia się humor, widoczne są zaczątki analizy psychologicznej i elementy krytyki stalinizmu. *W krainie purpurowych obłoków* należy więc traktować jako powieść przełomu literackich epok, zawierającą niektóre elementy zapowiadające późniejsze literackie sukcesy Strugackich.