2. The late '20s and early '30s are a transitional period. At this time Soviet SF is still characterized by the moods and premonitions similar (and genetically related) to those of the early '20s. Some works (e.g., Vladimir Orlovsky's *The Machine of Terror* [1925] and *The Revolt of the Atoms* [1928], Aleksandr Beliaev's *The Air Merchant* [1929] and *The Ruler of the World* [1929]) even bear a resemblance to the apocalypticism of earlier SF. On the whole, however, the scale of the transformation of the world looks considerably more modest. The social space is reduced from the planetary to the local. Time no longer branches out into various utopian extensions of reality, and differences between utopias disappear, supplanted by the one-dimensional approach of the official utopia. Within this framework the plot time of SF works loses its former, artistically productive, heterogeneous quality and, in its progression and length, becomes increasingly identical to real time. This, in turn, limits the utopian horizon. The utopianism itself

becomes scientific-technological rather than socio-historical, and the official utopia serves as a compulsory and faceless social background. In A. Beliaev's works, though giving a grandiose utopian picture of the reconstruction of humanity's biological possibilities, no social cataclysm accompanies the creation of a scientific-technological utopia. A comparison of Beliaev's *The Ruler of the World* with A. Tolstoy's *Engineer Garin's Hyperboloid* is interesting in this regard. The nearly identical fantastic premise of the two novels leads to two, essentially different results. Where in Tolstoy the imposition of one individual's will on the people leads to a grandiose social upheaval, revolution, and indeed a planetary crisis (due to the instability of the old structure of the world), in Beliaev's work the same possibility causes but an evanescent splash of events in a secure world. Here the plot is localized within the limits of an individual or group destiny.

It would seem that such localization could open the way to refining the genre in the direction of psychological analysis. This, however, did not happen. SF's possibilities are narrowed, thwarted by the departure of its founders. The latter, after having delineated the limits and possibilities of the genre and given it its direction (viz., an ideological one) and devices (viz., those of the adventure novel), relinquished their place to the professionals, capable only of using the ready-made instruments of the genre exclusively for applied purposes. As a result, SF gradually moved away from the mainstream and occupied a ghetto of sorts on the periphery of the literary process, with its own—different—laws and requirements. This made it possible to introduce the notion of the "specificities of the genre," consciously cultivated by the official criticism. This approach to SF in fact promoted an even more straightforward subjugation of SF to the service of the demands of ideological education and other extra-literary tasks.

Toward the mid-'30s, the last vestiges of "heroism" (which replaced "catastrophism") disappear, giving way to the triviality of newspaper reports. Even the minutest ripples of utopianism subside, and the scale of time extended into the future is reduced to zero. In practice, the plot's space becomes identical to real—in fact, local—space, demonstrating, as it were, a complete rejection of the possibilities of transforming reality (as we ordinarily associate them with SF). This rejection is especially apparent in a sharp limitation seen in the majority of the works of the period. The fantastic element is reduced to a timid span several years in extension of the officially declared plans—the case, for example, in A. Beliaev's *The Marvelous Eye* (1936), Grigorii Adamov's *The Mystery of the Two Oceans* (1938) and *The Conquerors of the Depths* (1937), Vladimir Vladko's *The Descendants of the Scyths* and *The Argonauts of the Universe* (both 1939), Iurii Smolich's "Yet Even More Beautiful Catastrophe" in his trilogy *Beautiful Catastrophes* (1935), Aleksandr Kazantsev's *The Burning Island* (1941), Sergei Beliaev's *The Destroyer Z-3* (1939), and Grigorii Grebnev's *Arktaniia* (1938). The compulsory immutability of the social background transforms

the future world into a quantitative expansion of the already existing "Soviet way of life." A. Beliaev depicts the exploration of the Arctic Sea shore line, Grebnev portrays the future Socialist scientific stations in the Arctic regions, etc. Other writers avoid even these prognoses: their fantastic hypotheses come down to the depiction of near-future improvements on already-existing technical innovations (television sets, destroyers or submarines, excavators, etc.) and the stories take place in the present. Often their hypotheses are frankly borrowed from somewhere else: Kazantsev's *Burning Island* is reminiscent of A. Beliaev's *Air Merchant*, Vladko's *Argonauts* borrows all its fantastic material from Tsiolkovsky, while Adamov's *Two Oceans* dips into Verne's *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* for inspiration.

Recycling of safe themes is more than just a symptom of the genre's stagnation. It also rescues the author from the dangerous necessity of tracing the socio-historical consequences of a hypothesis. The same motive accounts for a stress on technology, since its influence on society is not direct. And in those rare cases when, "by an oversight," the hypothesis threatens to defy control and leave its imprint on the future, its development is stopped by a forceful and arbitrary intervention on the part of the author. The burning island is destroyed, the supersonic destroyer captured.

Clearly, given homogeneous space-time, the task of sustaining the plot development becomes difficult. The mechanical piling up of adventures common in this SF of the '30s is explicable as a solution to this problem. At first, the chain of adventures includes natural and unexpected obstacles; gradually, however, a typically Soviet element is added: the obstacles are discovered to be the result of purposefully pernicious activity by various "enemies." Spies and secret agents fill the pages of Kazantsev, Adamov, S. Beliaev, and others; and the plot now moves from one enemy action to another, culminating in the final exposure of the whole web of the enemy conspiracy.

The connection between this collective plot and real events of the '30s (the time of the Stalinist purges and the Moscow show-trials) is evident enough. On the ideological level, however, this SF reveals fascinating aspects of the transformation of the official myth. Like a true myth, official ideology lay claim to offering a universal—and otherwise total—explanation of the creation of the world and the end of history. But since spatially its power was limited, official ideology introduced a clear separation of the world into "one's own" and "the alien." The confrontation of "good" and "evil" followed the same lines of separation. The world was now divided into the orderly ("one's own") versus chaotic ("alien") because everything that came out of the alien world brought chaotic interruptions into the "planned" movement of "one's own" world.

As the official ideology ossified and turned into a state religion with its own rituals (and "sacrifices"), the confrontation between "good" and "evil"

was increasingly transformed from a social into an irrational one. This situation was a mirror-image of the pre-revolutionary state of affairs. Again "one's own" Organization opposed the hostile "Lower Depths," the carrier of a grim threat and eternal danger, ready (if one were not "vigilant") to flood the world of Light with the powers of Darkness. "Alien" (as George Orwell noted later) was given irrational features, demonic destructiveness. In other words, there took place a mystical mutation of Marxism and of former notions of the "rebellion of the Lower Depths" expounded by fellow-travellers. This was not a victorious myth but a defensive one, frozen in fear and paranoia, not in triumph. The fear then experienced throughout the society had its source not so much in the arrests and executions as in the idea, proclaimed from above, of the omniscience and irrationality of everything "Alien." Accordingly, the line of division between "one's own" and what was "alien" gradually moved, from external to internal (or psychological) landscape. It became necessary to suspect and fear everybody, including oneself. The very notion of reality thus became fantastic: the "alien" ideology could possess a person in the same way an "alien" from another planet could in J.W. Campbell's *Who Goes There?* (1938). And, as was the case in Campbell's Antarctic station, this "alien" could be eradicated only by fire.

Such was the reigning ideological model until the Second World War —a model which Soviet SF, thanks to its distinctive generic characteristics, was able to reflect better than any other writing of the period. This SF embodied the irrational fears of the 1930s, fears which had become both the common destiny of the people and the common plot of literature. Again, although in a different fashion, individual fates disappeared, events in literature represented the collective fate, while the story-line recreated the single plot of the official myth, developing in the space-time of arrested history. Fantasy joined with myth in all trivial points: SF's fantastic hypotheses became variations on the themes of official technological projects; its protagonists, mirror images of great and small leaders; and its events, items in administrative production plans.

The interpenetration of ideology and fantasy turned SF into the means of affirming and legitimizing the official myth. The official myth, with the help of the fantastic devices of projecting reality, entrenched itself in the consciousness of the people, affirming its own eternal stability. But it was precisely because of the joining of SF with ideology that the former could —albeit unconsciously and involuntarily—reflect, better than any other genre, the inevitable degeneration of the ideology, first into a stagnating "Manichæan" myth and later into a decaying formal religion.

The degeneration becomes particularly noticeable towards the end of this period, when official assertions of uninterrupted progress towards the ideal increasingly clash with Soviet reality. The notorious theory of the "intensification of the struggle" on the way to the goal makes its appearance now. In the SF of the '30s, '40s, and early '50s, the contradiction between

stated progress and static reality finds its expression in an unheard of proliferation of pernicious efforts by various "enemies," whose unmasking displaces even the most insignificant remnants of SF from the plot. This is clearly apparent in Kazantsev's post-war novels *The Arctic Bridge* (1946) and *The Northern Pier* (1952). In minor works, the multiplying of obstacles takes the form of a mysteriously growing number of natural disasters (as in Feodor Kandyba's *The Hot Earth* [1950], for example) or even endless misunderstandings and mistakes on the part of the protagonists (e.g., in Vladimir Nemtsov's *The Last Flag-Station* [1959]). Young authors entering SF with new hypotheses (such as Georgii Martynov and Georgii Gurevich) also latch onto the device of artificial retardation of the plot, which gradually assumes nearly parodic proportions. Unwittingly, SF becomes a parody of the official myth of the purges and show-trials—a myth whose dissolution in SF (which is thereupon transformed into an almost fairy-tale narrative) anticipates the real dissolution and degeneration of ideology.

If the first stage of Soviet SF ends in a defeat of the ideology of fellow-travellers, its second stage concludes with the degeneration and dissolution of the official ideology. This is reflected in the extra-literary aspects of SF's evolution. Now it is the turn of professional writers to yield the field to the engineers, technicians, and journalists of popular science, "called into literature." The links to Western SF are practically severed at this time: there are virtually no new translations, and the old masters are submitted to severe criticism (particularly H.G. Wells, whose penchant for utopia and anti-utopia was officially seen as a dangerous temptation). Both theory and criticism of the genre were all but totally absent; and the few articles that did appear—devoted to individual works—imposed on SF the specific tasks of "prescience" and "popularization," thus precluding any attempt to return SF to the fold of mainstream literature. This artificially-imposed isolation forced the Soviet SF of the period to work out its own pseudo-artistic form, a mixture of essay on popular science and the adventure or spy novel. This SF completely rejects psychology (unsuitable for the mythological modelling of collective fate) and gradually becomes one of the most dreary and uninspired genres of Soviet literature.

3. The decline of Soviet SF was halted in the 1950s. Its renewal in the '60s can again be chiefly interpreted from the ideological perspective. Following Stalin's death, the ideological turnabout in Soviet society necessitated the "airing" of official ideology and the birth of new ideological models, the existence and alternative values of which were now almost openly acknowledged. These models appeared as hybrids of former ideologies. At one and the same time we find nationalism existing in combination with religious humanism, liberalism absorbing the elements of the technocratic utopia, the remnants of Socialist ideology in the shape of "Marxism with a human face," "Orthodox Marxism," "the third power," etc.[7]

The appearance of new ideological models was followed by another SF boom, both quantitative and qualitative. This late entry of the new SF serves as yet another proof of the dependence of Soviet SF on the existence of ready-made ideological models. Based on a plethora of such models, this SF exploded onto the scene, as even purely external features of the phenomenon testify. Almost all at once dozens of new authors and works appeared. Extensive criticism and—for the first time—theoretical consideration of the genre emerged. SF's popularity among readers (particularly among students and the intelligentsia) increased rapidly. First the "thin" and later the "thick" journals began to print it. Major publishing houses formed divisions devoted exclusively to SF, both original (in such publishing houses as "Molodaia gvardiia" and "Znanie") and translated (from "Progress" and—later—from "Mir").[8] SF titles were produced in print runs of more than 100,000 copies a year. Collections came out devoted mainly or exclusively to SF (e.g., *Science Fiction for the Year...*, *The Almanac of Science Fiction*, the Leningrad collections, *The World of Adventures*, *The Seeker*), along with multivolume SF series ("The Library of Contemporary Science Fiction" and "The Library of Soviet Science Fiction"). At the peak of this boom, various writers' organizations formed separate sections of SF authors; SF clubs, conducting conferences for readers and writers, appeared in many cities; Soviet SF writers established their first contacts with foreign authors; and leading newspapers and magazines (such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Izvestiia*, and *Innostrannaia literatura*) published serious discussions on the nature of the genre. With the possible exception of poetry, SF stories exceeded all other literature in popularity; and in the unfolding ideological struggle, the genre had an importance second only to Samizdat's (where the same struggle was conducted on the level of ideas rather than of literary artistry).

SF's growth in popularity stemmed from its place in the ideological struggle. In theoretical articles of the period, SF is perceived as a specific artistic "laboratory" where various societal and historical models are placed under scrutiny. The focus on such models finds its direct expression in the plot of *Hard to be a God* (1964), one of the Strugatskys' best and most popular novels. Here the protagonists are scholars at the Institute of Experimental History, whose task is a comparative study and "rectification" of various societies. When we remember that open analysis of the Soviet model or the venting of alternative historical and societal models was (at least up until very recently) censored, we can understand why SF undertaking such an analysis should have become both acutely problematic and widely popular. This is necessary to remember in sorting out the reasons for the boom in Soviet SF. As a rule, these reasons are equated, and they are both based in the unfolding scientific-technological revolution and the positive or negative prospects for the society born in this revolution. This, however, holds only in part for Soviet SF: most works have been directly generated by the scientific-technological revolution; the remainder have

some features stemming from that revolution (i.e., original hypotheses, the qualitatively new scientific-technological background). But the central explanation for SF's popularity at this time is, of course, the socio-ideological role it played. This SF offered easily decipherable interpretations of reality and its possible extensions, a masked criticism of the system and its myths, and alternative global ideologies. In short, it supplied readers with a method and a model for comprehending history.

It is hard to resist the temptation of comparing this process with the explosive appearance of numerous literary genres hard upon the disintegration of classical myth. In the case of Soviet SF in the post-Stalin era, however, the process of disintegration results not in realism but rather in a higher conventionality in truly fantastic artistic forms. This occurs because of the manner in which SF returns to the global representation of reality, making the world and history its objects. Whereas depictions of these in the first stages of SF's evolution were "almost real," now they are viewed as "probable." The space of the new SF becomes multi-dimensional, since its move from the initial reality is realized along various social axes and not just one (that of the Revolution). The "future" also becomes increasingly more conventional by the inclusion of a multitude of possible variants of historical development. The authenticity of each variant is therefore reduced to the status of probability. Thus, the view of SF as a scientific-technological forecaster ("literature of the winged dream," as one writer of the previous period called it) is supplanted by the notion of SF as a means of artistic cognition and analysis of reality by way of probable extensions.

Compared to the first stage of its development, the time and space of the new SF is removed even farther from reality. The subsequent "cracks" allow for numerous purely playful possibilities and point the way to various psychological, scientific, and structural variations. This heightens the potential variety of forms that SF can take; but by the same token, it requires the assimilation of traditional literary forms. Hence we again find a confluence of SF and mainstream literature, with mainstream writers (such as Vladimir Tendriakov, Daniil Granin, Vasily Shukshin, and others) joining ranks with professional SF authors. Meanwhile, the notorious "specific nature of the genre," justifying the artistic inferiority of SF works by assigning special tasks to them, is increasingly condemned in theoretical criticism. The search for new artistic forms is directed towards mainstream and, to a large degree, new Western SF.

The hidden influence of Western SF can be seen in what, for Soviet conditions, is an extraordinarily bold expansion of structural devices and ways of energizing the narrative. We even come upon the first Soviet "space-operas" (e.g., Sergei Snegov's *People like Gods* [1966]) and mystical "fantasies" (e.g., Oleksandr Berdnyk's *Vaiasvati's Feat* [1965]). The influence of Campbellian SF (in the broad sense and as opposed to Gernsbackian SF)—of writers like Lem, Simak, Asimov, Bradbury, Sheckley,

Vonnegut, and Kuttner—is particularly pronounced at this time. SF writers (e.g., Arkady Strugatsky, Ariadna Gromova, and Sever Gansovsky) were also among the first readers (and translators) of foreign SF (which is not easily obtainable in the USSR).

The storehouse of artistic devices offered by these hybridizations is put in the service of what is perceived to be the major task of SF: overcoming the old and assimilating the new ideologies. A certain contradiction emerges at this juncture—one between ideological and artistic, rational and playful elements, each of which has its own immanent laws of development. SF of that time appears not only against a backdrop of the heightened interest in the formulation of ideology; its own primary concern is generally believed to lie with ideology. This role, however, is not one which the SF of the time is comfortable with; it strives, instead, to become "Literature" —something we should keep in mind to avoid the temptation of interpreting each detail of a given work from a one-dimensional, ideological point of view. (The very yearning of SF to be "great literature" is all the easier to understand when we consider the disparity between the high social status which the latter generally enjoys in Russia and the long isolation of SF in a literary "ghetto.")

The contradiction between the demands of "literature" and "ideology" is at once subjective and objective; it existed not in a social vacuum but under pressure from the reading public ("the market"), on the one hand, and official censorship and criticism on the other. The latter openly supported and encouraged only that kind of SF which, avoiding risky pursuits, borrowed remnants of the official utopianism as the basis for its "forecasts" or, simply, for adventures in space or history. (It was precisely because of this pressure of official prescription that some SF writers from the "dissident" camp—Eremei Parnov and Sevez Gansovsky, for instance—later capitulated, choosing to follow a safe, albeit creatively impotent, path, or even act as guardians of the official order. For this zeal they were amply rewarded by mass editions of their works, sinecures, and trips abroad as "representatives of Soviet SF.") Against the pull of officialdom, the readers' "market," consisting mainly of young people and the liberal intelligentsia, supported the challenging, social and ideologically-pointed SF of the Strugatsky brothers, Ivan Efremov, and their ilk. This support prompted straightforward expressions of envy and malicious "disclosures" by the disgruntled writers of the previous period (notably, Kazantsev and Nemtsov) as well as by "official" writers. For a time, this struggle around and within SF proceeded without a clear winner. Then two events occurred which changed the balance of forces.

The successive defeat of the dissident and liberal Socialist circles in the USSR and Eastern Europe (particularly in Czechoslovakia in 1968) produced disillusionment, loss of faith in the prospects for liberalization of the system, and, consequently, a search for a new ideological orientation.

Simultaneously, by intensifying repression, the stagnating Brezhnev regime managed, for a time, to consolidate its powers and establish a certain permissible level of dissidence, provided it did not generalize about ideology or attack the system as such. These developments were felt throughout Soviet society, but their impact on the fate of Soviet SF was particularly marked. As noted above, even in the '60s most SF works ignored the central ideological conflict, limiting themselves instead to the potential results of the scientific-technological revolution presented against the background of a utopian future. This future was constructed out of the remains of the official myth superficially adjusted to fit the spirit of the time. Essentially, this SF agreed to the "rules of the game," to the norms of the ideological ritual imposed from the outside—thereby freeing itself, like "commercialized" Western SF, for experiments in genre and form. SF's relative freedom from censorship is another proof of the regime's tolerance when assured of at least purely ritual recognition of its ideology. In the next decade, the '70s, this literary strand was responsible for the emergence of an SF which, responsive to a hardening of regime demands, has actively, even belligerently, affirmed official utopianism.

Thus, in the '70s there begins a period of long stagnation in SF reminiscent of the second stage of its history. Evidence of this stagnation can be observed everywhere. "Molodaia gvardiia" halted the publication of its major collection of SF works and the same thing happened with that publisher's series "Library of Contemporary Science Fiction." The "Leningrad Collection" of SF has also been discontinued. SF practically disappeared from the pages of the annual *World of Adventure* and from the popular magazine *The Seeker*, while the only remaining SF annual (published by "Znanie") lost its status as a periodical. SF, which used to be printed regularly in such magazines as *Molodaia gvardiia*, *Neva*, *Nauka i zhizn'*, *Vokrug sveta*, and at times even in *Novyi mir* and *Iunost'*, now only appears intermittently in *Znanie-sila*, where it is allotted about two or three pages in some issues (though, exceptionally, more, as in the case of the serialization of the Strugatskys' *The Beetle in an Ant-hill* [1979-80]).

According to official Soviet data (in the standard bibliography of periodicals, *Knizhnoe obozrenie*), the number of original SF titles published in the USSR in the 1970s ranged from eight to ten per year (not counting new editions of previously published works, which are also decreasing in number). Furthermore, there is no central publishing house devoted to new SF: "Molodaia gvardiia" issues two or three titles annually (mainly collections of stories in their series "The Library of Soviet Science Fiction"), and the same number of works appear yearly in the Ural, Irkutsk, and other provincial publishing houses. Other Soviet publishing houses limit themselves to new editions of previously approved SF works.

The list of authors has undergone a considerable transformation. Such mature—and promising—SF writers as Mikhail Emtsev, Aleksandr Mirer,

Zinovii Iur'ev, Olga Larionova, Genrikh Al'tov, Vladimir Savchenko, Sergei Snegov, Oleksandr Berdnyk, and others, belonging in various degrees to the "opposition," have left the scene after encountering a persistent refusal by publishing houses to issue their works. Ariadna Gromova had the same experience. Great difficulties accompanied the "passage" of Ivan Efremov's and the Strugatskys' last works through publishing houses. Some works could be published only in journals.[9] On the other hand, those writers earlier relegated to obscurity and standing for the worst features of SF from the '30s to the '50s now returned to the field. Nemtsov's and Kazantsev's collected works, including their short stories, have been published; and these authors themselves have increasingly acted as editors and compilers of SF anthologies, for which they provide introductions reviving their old criteria for SF. People with no connection to literature (as, for example, the astronaut Savost'ianov) appear in the same role: as the heralds of official "guidelines." Soviet SF abroad is represented by the same people, led by Parnov, who is in charge of the Moscow section on SF and adventure fiction in the Writers' Union. The meetings of this union have become purely bureaucratic affairs, reflecting the general character of all the other Soviet creative unions and clubs.

The links between Soviet and Western SF have been artificially severed. The publishing house "Mir" used to issue from six to eight translations a year, with over a half of those Western SF; now this figure is down to one or two a year. From 1979 to 1982, only three books of Western SF have appeared: Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*, Asimov's *The Gods Themselves*, and Christopher Priest's *The Inverted World*. Given that Western literature in the original is not readily available in the USSR, the result has been the complete isolation of the Soviet SF reader from Western literary developments.

Another important detail is the near-total turnover in personnel on all editorial boards and branches of publishing firms still involved with SF ("Molodaia gvardiia," "Mir," and "Znanie"). Those who join now as staff or volunteer workers are known to be of the so-called "Party ideological front" or self-appointed "censors."

At the same time, Soviet SF shows less interest than heretofore in the scientific-technological revolution. The "cybernetic" or "cosmic" future, which seemed so close for a time, has turned out to be far away, and not so readily attainable. New achievements in contemporary biology or physics can no longer be so smoothly assimilated in a work of art, nor can they be easily presented (or sometimes even understood) as new social and technological possibilities. The surviving scientific-technological branch of Soviet SF has experienced a comparable transformation. It now displays a tendency to focus on psychological problems, on the "inner space" of the human psyche. However, the general state of Soviet SF today makes it hard even to talk about tendencies, since, for all practical purposes, we are dealing

here with only a handful of works and authors. The successful official "young" authors such as Bilenkin, Shcherbakov, De-Spiller, Kolupaev, Bulychev, and Pavlov, whose stories and short novels are all that has recently been published in "Library of Soviet Science Fiction" (one collection per author), are in fact in their 40s. Significantly, in their works they turn almost exclusively to the inferior forms of SF—psychological novellas, empty adventure games, and open imitations of the fairy tale.[10]

4. The brief blossoming of Soviet SF has been effectively cut short and is now a thing of the past. In the short run, its revival is questionable. However, in its peak decade, from 1957-68, Soviet SF created a number of original works of literature worthy of careful attention.

We have already noted the resurrection of the global theme and the ideological orientation of this literature, reminiscent of analogous features of Soviet SF in its early stages. But whereas most SF works from the earlier period reduced conflict to a confrontation between antagonistic *social* forces, in the new SF it appears as a clash between *ideological* forces. Likewise, the heroes of the new literature come to symbolize various ideological models: in contrast to their appearance previously as social symbols, these heroes now embody the opposition between the older ideology and its rivals. Moribund official myth is debated by the Strugatskys, mocked by Varshavsky, rejected emotionally by Parnov, Shefner, and Emtsev, and questioned on philosophical grounds by Efremov, Gromova, Gor, and others. Above all, however, in these SF works the official myth is presented as refuting itself by being overly complex, ossified in bureaucratic forms, and painfully complicated. Not coincidentally, we find in many works a motif of the hero wandering through the labyrinth of social (or physical-cum-social) structures. The most vivid expression of this haunting motif can be found in the Strugatskys' *The Snail on the Slope* (1966-68) and in those chapters of Efremov's *The Hour of the Bull* (1970) devoted to a description of civilization on the planet Tormans. Western SF of the period offers a similar picture of an overcomplicated old structure (civilization), but there the result is a cathartic global catastrophe and subsequent return to barbarism (reminiscent of early Soviet SF, but with a different socio-historical emphasis). By contrast, in Soviet SF of the same period the old organization, having degenerated into complexity, is opposed not to a new chaos but to a new, more rational and humane organization of society and history.

This is the message of the Strugatskys and Efremov, the most striking, talented, and typical practitioners of this SF. At the heart of the new organization stands the human being, as the measure of all things and the most important part of the universe. The Strugatskys' protagonist, according to their generally liberal-humanistic position, is an individual, while Efremov's philosophy of history dictates that the hero be humanity in the aggregate. Their humanistic tendency, however, is the same.