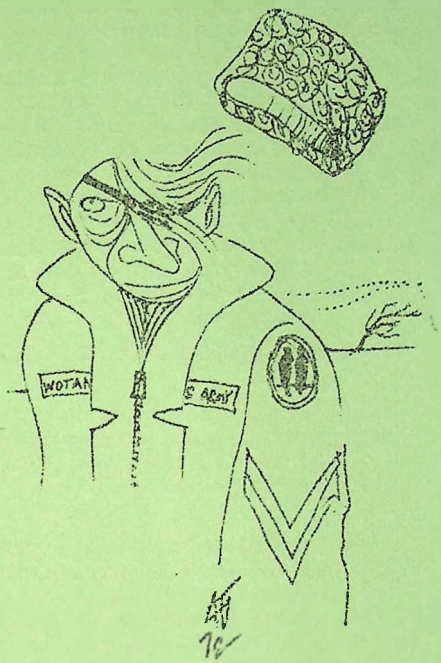

PARERGON PAPERS

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The cover illustration for this issue, if it turns out (the old Roneo has been playing up no end lately, not being so used to travelling as I am), I have used before — on the cover of Philosophical Gas 21, to be exact. It seems vaguely appropriate here. Alexis Gilliland was the artist, then and now.

Right now the Roneo seems disinclined to operate automatically, so this issue is printed by hand. Since the collating and stapling is also done by hand, this disinclination seems also vaguely appropriate — and (of course) utterly fannish.

I didn't think, in April 1976, that I was investing in a fannish duplicator, but that's the way it turned out.

I didn't think, in April 1978, that I would be in Melbourne a few months later, but that also is the way things turned out. This issue (cribbed, cabin'd & confined as it is) has to do with The Nature Of The Future, and how we poor souls, willy-nilly, are caught up in it — along with our Roneos and other prized possessions.

The issue is rated AO.

It was intended for General Exhibition, and it was planned to run at least 20 pages — but this is how it turned out.

PARERGON PAPERS are published at the drop of a hat, or a letter of comment, by John Bangsund, 7 Derby Street, Kew, Victoria 3101, Australia. If you can think of no more civilized way of getting these papers, they may be had for $1.00 each. Subscriptions of more than $5.00 are not encouraged. Eight issues were published in the fiscal year 1977-78 (and all but no.1 are still available 50 cents each), but five or six seem a reasonable expectation for 1978-79. This issue is commenced on 20 June, and is the ninth in the series.

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THE FUTURE, I have often thought, is all we have left. This is absurd, of course; mankind has gone to a great deal of trouble to acquire a past, and a lot of that is available to us if we care to seek it out and make use of it; but absurdity does not preclude truth.

The Adelaide *Advertiser* recently quoted a Mr Allan Bray as saying that reading science fiction prepares one for the future. Depending on how you look at it, this is absurd however true, or true however absurd. What sort of future does sf prepare one for? What sort of sf prepares one for anything but the dismal likelihood that Sturgeon's Law will remain in force indefinitely?

I have read more sf than a grown man should admit to, and I wonder whether it has prepared me for anything. I wonder whether it has diverted me, left me unprepared for some things. I have learnt from it that the more things change the more they stay the same — but I might have learnt that without ever reading sf.

It's an interesting subject, Allan, and one that I would like to see pursued seriously in these pages. Somewhere in my files I have an article by a Russian gentleman that claims that good sf prepares us for our communist future (or something to that effect). If I can find it I'll publish it, and we'll see what sort of discussion ensues.

Descending from the philosophical heights, we find myself wondering what happened to my future in the last few weeks (and perhaps yourself wondering about that unfamiliar address up there). Sally and I started thinking last year in a very general sort of way about moving from Adelaide to Melbourne. Now and then we even applied for jobs here. But during May we decided that our future was in Adelaide, and on Saturday the 13th we went looking for a more convenient house to live in than the Mile End slum. Our search took us (and Gary Mason,

who thought we were crazy, but was too polite to say so in as many words) to the remote southern suburb of Morphett Vale, where we were to look at an enormous, rambling old house on something like half a hectare of land. The lease was for five years, the rent almost double what we were paying at Mile End, but we were prepared for that. We arrived, the owner told us she had been trying to get us on the phone because she had let the house to someone else, we said it was a good day for a drive anyway, and we went home. 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends rough,' I remarked, not for the first time, 'hew them how we will.' Monday was a holiday. On Tuesday Sally rang a dozen or more estate agents, explaining our requirements. On Tuesday I returned a proofreading job to Rigby's, and I was told, more or less in passing ('I thought you would have known by now,' Bill Reed said), that there would be no more freelance work for the rest of the year.

So we stopped looking for houses and started, well, panicking a bit. The President of the National Trust had led me to believe that I could expect payment for the book I had written for the Trust, but we had no idea when that might come, and I wasn't anticipating any other income. Moving to Melbourne stopped being something we'd thought desirable but decided against, and became an urgent necessity. We started packing.

I have been here now for twelve days; Sally will join me toward the end of the week. We have experienced all the normal hassles of moving — I needn't elaborate, except to say that the Trust decided not to pay me — and here we are, in a pleasant old semi-detached house in the genteel-decaying old suburb of Kew. We're on a hill (once called Prospect Hill, and not the only one of that name around Melbourne), and from the front veranda there's an almost uninterrupted view eastward to the Dandenong Ranges, about 40 kilometres away. There are a dozen restaurants within easy walking distance, a good pub and a Kentucky Fried chookateria. And three tram routes, including a very useful one that goes direct to St Kilda. All I need to make myself perfectly at home now (apart from wife, cats, car, furniture &c) is a job.

Thinking again about Allan Bray's statement, I realize that I should have been prepared for this quite unexpected future by a story I once read in *Vision of Tomorrow*. It was a story by Harold G. Nye about a chap who is forever moving from place to place and starting new jobs and never being quite satisfied...

Harold G. Nye? No, I suppose I shouldn't expect most of my readers to recall the author or the story, let alone the story behind the story. It began one Saturday morning at Ferntree Gully, about ten years ago. I was reading the jobs column in the paper when Lee Harding called in — and within a few days I had become a character in a Harding story, and he (leo HardyNG) gained a pseudonym. Yes, I should have been prepared.

9 July George Turner was here last night (oh yes, thank you, wife, car, cats, books &c are here, and we're quite comfortable)(no job yet, no) and I clean forgot to ask him whether reading science fiction prepares one for the future. He was going on about a couple of novels he'd been reading on the tram by that well-known two-headed Russian author Borisunarkady Strugatsky. I've forgotten the titles of the novels already, but whatever they were, I can say that I haven't heard George speak so glowingly of a work of science fiction since '75, when he was quite bowled over by Tom Disch's *334*. If we in Australia are thinking seriously of bidding for the 1983 World Convention, maybe we should be thinking of the Strugatsky brothers as possible guests of honour. I leave the thought with you and move right along to

ONE CRITIC'S VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF SCIENCE FICTION IN OUR DAY

Reprinted from *Soviet News*, 1 September 1970, published by the Press Department of the Soviet Embassy, London

TAKING part in a broad discussion that is going on in the Soviet press concerning the role and the achievements, or otherwise, of science fiction, Vladimir Dmitrevsky puts forward in the columns of *Pravda* the suggestion that writers of sf, while not turning their backs completely on outer space and the more remote galaxies, might perhaps pay just a little more attention to the planet Earth and its not too distant future.

He points out that both in the Soviet Union and the world at large science fiction underwent a renaissance in the 1950s, 'when we could already feel outer space breathing down our necks'.

He says that a feature of the best science fiction produced in this renaissance, both in the Soviet Union and in capitalist countries, has been its 'tangibility', the fact that it proceeds from the basic assumption that what is being described could actually happen.

'After all, human fantasy is always far ahead of what is actually being achieved,' he says. 'Otherwise the creative process would inevitably peter out.'

'There is no question but that scientific and technological progress, its further development and its effect on society and the individual, have become the pivotal theme of science fiction in both the bourgeois and the socialist worlds,' Dmitrevsky continues. 'However, for bourgeois sf, scientific and technological progress is something isolated and outside of society, an enormous malevolent flower that is unfolding its petals and that many western writers believe will bring untold misery to mankind.

'The depletion of natural resources, an endless population

explosion, a machine civilization oppressing and levelling the individual, monstrous wars of annihilation, barren continents, contaminated oceans, and pitiful mutants existing as the last relics of human civilization — these are just a few of the wild and terrifying pictures of the future that bourgeois writers of science fiction embroider in their imaginations on the fabric of scientific and technological progress.

'Against the background of these horrors, sometimes depicted with truly impressive mastery, capitalism remains unchanged, merely being transported into space.

'Through the centuries and the millennia the future is seen in terms of the infinite power of money, constant fear of unemployment and the conquest of a capitalistic universe by bosses, businessmen and gangsters.

'One cannot, of course, dismiss the really critical trend of the best of western science fiction. Dissatisfaction with reality, bitter disillusionment and doubts about the future colour the writings of such leading writers of science fiction as Bradbury, Sheckley, Vonnegut and Anderson. However, their critical fervour is confined within the stone walls of the capitalist *status quo*.'

Turning to the situation with regard to science fiction in the Soviet Union, Dmitrevsky says:

'Our sf differs fundamentally from western sf, firstly in not detaching the scientific and technological revolution from social progress but rather seeing it as being tied up with the living practice of communist construction.

'Consequently the superlative achievements of science and technology are viewed as a means employed by clever, careful and kindly hands to improve life for the working man.

'It was precisely the constructive message of *Nebula in Andromeda* that compelled even bourgeois reviewers to acknowledge the encouraging nature of the picture it presents of mankind in the future.

'Soviet science fiction, with its social and human trend, is locked in uncompromising ideological struggle for objectively correct and true conceptions of the Earth's future and for inevitable revolutionary changes in literally every field of social life.

'One would have thought that the young genre of science fiction would have flourished. However, it has not had any bed of roses. Free, creative quests are definitely and objectively a positive thing. However, it is one thing when they seek for the new by extending and deepening the best of what has been achieved, and quite another when the dominant note is a tendency towards unjustified formal complications, imitation of western styles, flirtations with sundry novelties.'

Pointing out that some young writers and critics, basing themselves on experience abroad, have strongly objected to the very epithet 'science' in science fiction as allegedly limiting its many-sided character, Dmitrevsky writes:

'Actually the s in sf puts a definite barrier in the way of any infiltration by mysticism, god-seeking and echoes of fashionable western versions of idealism,' he writes.

'Attempts are made to proclaim science fiction as an independent method of artistic creativity, running parallel to that of socialist realism. It is true that these attempts have remained attempts, going no further than mere discussion...

'Stories have appeared that have, in effect, dropped out of the vast range of sf themes and have claimed to be allegories or parodies, sometimes with a double meaning, the sf genre being employed merely as a literary device.

'A purely abstract treatment of the concept of good and evil, a "universally human" approach, independent of class, to burning issues of today, pacifism and, lastly, a romantic aura imparted to the lone-ranging hero who engages in single combat, at the risk of his life, against universal evil — these comprise a set of ideas that inspire some writers. Reviewers have drawn attention to these serious ideological and literary faults in some works of science fiction.'

Listing some notable Soviet works of science fiction published in recent years, Dmitrevsky favourably mentions the sociological novel *The Hour of the Bull* by I. Yefremov, the author of *Nebula in Andromeda*. In this book, he says, Yefremov gives a comprehensive picture of global communism on the Earth and of global state capitalism on a hypothetical planet called Thormans. Dmitrevsky praises S. Snegov's *Men Like Gods* space saga, which in its way, he says, is an answer to the pessimistic view of man's future given in the novel by H. G. Wells.

He also draws attention to the recently published novel *Fragments of Darkness on the Needle of Time*, by M. Yemtsev and Y. Parnov, the authors of which have set out from the heights of the future to trace and reveal the causes of the emergence of phases of rabid reaction in various periods of history — from the stultifying rule of the priests of Babylon and from the Inquisition to Hitlerism and the neo-fascism of the present day. Books like this, says Dmitrevsky, are direct evidence of 'the great creative potential of Soviet science fiction'.

He adds that the discussion that has been going on recently in Soviet literary periodicals will have a beneficial effect on science fiction.

'The fact is', he says, 'that Soviet sf is by no means doted on by our leading scholars and critics. Evidently this is due to inertia, to an unwillingness to realize that modern science fiction sets itself tasks far wider in scope than that of simply forecasting and popularizing scientific and technical ideas that are about to be implemented.

'After all, science fiction is a type of fiction — not a genre, as it has many genres of its own — and it is important to enhance its role in the formation of social thought, its educational impact... Prompt, serious and well-intentioned intervention on the part of critics in these matters would be invaluable.'

Dmitrevsky goes on to say that in the case of millions of young readers, science fiction serves to stimulate their own as yet unexpended energy, their readiness to perform remarkable feats. The Kurchatovs, Gagarins and Ostrovskys of the future become their idols and ideals.

'A society that set out long ago on the road of socialism may rightly ask what communism, the trail towards which is being blazed with such selfless inspiration, will be like,' he says. 'It is for writers of science fiction to make it visible and well-nigh tangible, to fill it with the thoughts and deeds of the New Man.

'It is, of course, incredibly difficult to create, not a walking cliche, but a real flesh-and-blood man of the communist era. No prototype exists... However, it is surely possible to select, concentrate and transport into the communist future the features of the finest people of today, communists who have studied in the school of Lenin, of whom there are many among the Soviet people...

'Without placing any artificial barriers in the way of the further elaboration of the space theme and visions of a future hundreds of centuries ahead and hundreds of parsecs away from us, I would like to draw the attention of our writers of science fiction to that small and enchantingly beautiful blue world — which is what everybody who has seen it from outer space says about it — that is our native planet, the Earth and our home. It may be worth while looking into its immediate future, as already mapped out in our plans and programs.

'Contemporary science fiction has taken wing, imbibing all the elements of imaginative thought, and it is quite capable of presenting in a new light the impending stupendous transformations that will be made in the Arctic, the changing face of Siberia's endless expanses, and other milestones in our advance.

'Awareness of the great responsibility they bear not only towards their contemporaries but also towards the generations who will live in that wonderful world which writers of science fiction endeavour to imagine, create and populate, provides an incentive for further successful creative writing.'

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Was it something like that you had in mind, Allan Bray? Sort of fragments of light on a needle in the haystack of historical and dialectical materialism (he said).

WHAT with George going on about the Fabulous Flying Strugatskys and so on, we missed a fascinating play on ABC steam radio last night. I quote from *The Age* radio guide: '7.30 WORLD THEATRE — June and the Pastrycook, by Sean O'Casey: The Boyle family are living in a Dublin tenement in the summer of 1922...' Ah, them was days, Joxer, them was days. Next week, no doubt, we shall have Oscar Wilde's famous drama of the turf, Lady Fandemere's Win, and the week after, Goldsmith's amusing She Stops at Congress. Poorfreading ain't in it, Italia!