

REVIEWS

Darko Suvin, *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities: An X-Ray of Socialist Yugoslavia*, foreword by Fredric Jameson
Haymarket Books: Chicago 2018, \$28, paperback
428 pp, 978 1 60846 801 0

CATHERINE SAMARY

A UTOPIAN IN THE BALKANS

How is it, asks Darko Suvin, with Brechtian directness, that socialist Yugoslavia started out so well, yet ended up so very badly? In answering that question he has produced an extraordinary work on the philosophy of emancipation, the lived possibilities of workers' self-management and the horizon—in Ernst Bloch's sense of the willed and worked-for future—of democratic communism. Studded with *aperçus* from Aristotle, Dante, Montesquieu, Hegel, Lenin, Gramsci and many more, Suvin's *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities* is also, as Fredric Jameson notes in his illuminating Foreword to the book, a critical-utopian intervention in present-day discussions, not least of the relations between economic and political democracy. Suvin himself is exceptionally qualified to undertake such a task. A direct witness of the early decades of the Yugoslav revolution, deeply committed to its emancipatory aims, he is also a theorist of science fiction and utopia, a heterodox thinker within what Bloch called Marxism's warm stream of future-oriented liberation, complementing its cool stream of analysis.

Born in Zagreb to a Croatian Jewish family, Suvin was ten years old when Hitler's tanks rolled into the city. He recalls here 'the war years of immediate fascist threat to my psychic and physical survival, as a small but conscious boy', and then 'the wondrous years after 1945' as a young Titoist militant. Members of his family—the Šlesingers: they changed their name to Suvin as skies darkened in 1939—were among the hundreds of thousands butchered by the Croatian Ustaše, whose savagery against Jewish and Serb

Croatians shocked even the Gestapo. In 1945 he joined the Communist Youth Organization (SKOJ), which had played a major role in the Resistance. As he writes in the introduction, 'Pro Domo Sua', to *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities*: 'I hope the horror, desire, wrath, loyalty and auroral astonishment of the young communist have been carried over into this reconsideration.'

Suvin was a product of—and participant in—the extraordinary ferment of post-war Yugoslavia, launched on its unprecedented experiment of workers' self-management and egalitarian planning, and open to the wider currents of the international left. This was the context for the cross-fertilization of genres, concepts and cultures that has been the hallmark of Suvin's work: from critical theory to drug-store novels, Soviet science fiction, Japanese theatre and radical political philosophy. Armed also with a chemical-engineering degree, he studied, then taught—modern drama, literary theory, science fiction—at the University of Zagreb. As he remarked in a *Science Fiction Studies* interview, the formative events of his youth—Yugoslav monarchy, fascist occupation, partisan struggle, revolutionary reconstruction—made it easy to conceive of alternative time-streams, possible worlds. 'A Nazi bomb hit 50 meters from me: in a very slightly alternative world, I'd have died then, before my teens.' Practice came first, and only later the discovery of 'other worlds' in print: Thomas More, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells.

In the mid-1960s Suvin won a grant to pursue his studies in the US, visiting and lecturing at theatre departments from coast to coast (and going on strike with his students in Massachusetts). While he was away—local jealousies, perhaps—he was bumped out of his post at Zagreb. Thereafter he taught in the literature department at McGill University in Montréal. A founding theorist of contemporary science-fiction studies, he famously characterized the genre in formalist or Brechtian terms as a 'literature of cognitive estrangement'. Its defining move was the fictional representation of a *novum*, a community in which institutions, norms and relationships are ordered according to alternative principles to those that structure the author's world. The term is Bloch's, from *The Principle of Hope*: here, reality might be said to include not only what is, but also what might be, for the material world is unfinished and its future direction is not predetermined. Alternative real possibilities lie on the horizon ahead which may be anticipated, represented, fought for as 'concrete utopias'—in contrast to the merely fantastical 'abstract utopias' of compensatory wishful thinking. For Bloch, the *novum* is that part of reality just coming into being on the horizon of the future; it is 'not yet'. For Suvin, this will be a key concept for the reconsideration of Yugoslav history in *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities*.

Settling in Italy after his retirement from McGill in 1999, Suvin at first refused to set foot in the ex-Yugoslav lands, after their collapse into the

murderous secessions and civil wars of the 1990s, in which ‘a congeries of feuding dwarfish classes’ led ‘brainwashed mini-nationalisms into war’. From 2002, however, he was contacted by the new-generation left in Zagreb and Belgrade, who translated the political-epistemological essays he had begun writing in the late 1990s on turbo-charged capitalism. Deeming it important to reconstitute a ‘Yugoslav space’, at least at the level of ideas, they urged Suvin to set down his memories. These were published in instalments under the title *Memoari jednog skojevca* [Memoirs of a Young Communist] from 2009. The present book Suvin describes as ‘collateral damage’ from that revisiting of the war and post-war decades:

The aura of those days was in some ways harshly black-and-white but bracingly and overwhelmingly hopeful and bright. The dire discrepancy between that epoch and the same locus two generations later, with the ignominious and bloody demise of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in between, prompted rankling and cutting reflections: how was this devolution from rosy to black horizons possible?! Behind this, an even more disquieting reflection went on: was there any sense in the revolutionary horizons and therefore my youthful activism? I had no clue and said to myself (copying Brecht’s Galileo): *Ich muss es wissen*—I have to understand it!

This is Suvin’s most synthetic—and moving—presentation of what he calls the ‘what, why and how’ of *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities*, which was written under several pressures. Politically, Suvin felt himself to be working in and against ‘a dominant, leaden and smothering counter-revolutionary pall’ whose effect was an ideological demeaning of the whole history of Titoist Yugoslavia, not only extrapolating backward from its end, but writing it off as ‘a misconceived or indeed pernicious enterprise’ from the very start. Methodologically Suvin presents, as Jameson notes, a type of ‘reflexive history’, a consideration of events that reexamines the categories in which these have been—and ought to be—thought, in the course of unfolding them. For Suvin, this involves above all judging developments against a critical utopian horizon. He cites Rousseau’s dictum: we should know what there ought to be in order to judge well what is. The third pressure is both a moral and an epistemological one: Suvin sees his book as a step towards undoing ‘the odious obliteration of memory’ in the Yugoslav lands, exemplified by Tudjman’s dynamiting of hundreds of Partisan memorials in Croatia; a desecration Suvin compares to the Taliban blowing up the monumental Buddhas of Bamiyan, though incurring nothing like the same Western disapproval. The project, then, must encompass Yugoslavia’s ‘polar discrepancies’—‘the auroral beginning and the pitch-dark ending have both to be explained.’

Splendour, Misery and Possibilities deliberately omits what would be the starting point for any conventional account of socialist Yugoslavia: the

contrasting pre-histories of its component populations during their long periods under external rule, in a land not only characterized by wide geographical variations—Adriatic shore, northern plain and foothills, southern mountain redoubts—but historically bisected by powerful imperial-religious boundaries: to the east, Byzantium orthodoxy succeeded by the Ottoman Caliphate, which subordinated the medieval Kingdom of Serbia; to the west and north, the empires of Rome, Charlemagne, the Habsburgs, Napoleon and Austro-Hungary, which successively swallowed up the territories of Slovenia and Croatia. Correspondingly differentiated patterns of socio-economic development and historical struggles for independence marked the outlooks of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, Dalmatians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and others, in addition to their various alphabets and languages. Nor does Suvin describe the establishment in 1919 of the ‘first’ Yugoslavia, the royal kingdom that was in some respects a Greater Serbia; nor the insurgent traditions of Balkan socialism which preceded it and helped to shape the Yugoslav Communist Party. (A useful selection of pre-wwI documents on Balkan socialism and the concept of the Balkan Federation appeared in the journal *Revolutionary History* in 2003.)

Instead, Suvin concentrates on what he calls the three ‘singularities’, two of them emancipatory and the third lethal, which in his view define the *novum* of the SFRY and its trajectory. His account begins *in media res* with Tito’s appointment by Stalin as General Secretary of the Party in 1937, though he notes that inter-war Yugoslavia was at that stage an impoverished peasant economy, its per capita annual income (\$96) closer to Egypt (\$85) than to Germany (\$520)—‘not even halfway between the Asian colonies and the metropolitan countries of Europe’. The immense impact of the October Revolution in these conditions was reflected in the rapid growth of the young, Comintern-affiliated YCP, flanked by its trade-union wing and its women’s and youth organizations. The Communists were the third largest party in the 1920 National Assembly elections and won pluralities in major cities—Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje—before being driven underground by the royal dictatorship. Suvin stresses the importance of Tito’s personal authority, experience and independent-mindedness, but these were also products of the broader Balkan tradition, shared to some degree by many of the veteran comrades. Born into a mixed Croatian-Slovenian peasant family in 1892, Josip Broz worked as a journeyman locksmith in Germany, joined the SPD, was taken prisoner by the Tsarist Army as a wwI Austro-Hungarian enlistee, escaped to participate in the October Revolution in Omsk, returned to build the metal-workers’ union in Yugoslavia, traversed Europe as a Comintern agent for the Balkan Secretariat, and helped recruit and train a Yugoslav brigade to fight in the Spanish Civil War. The YCP’s battle-hardened ‘Spaniards’ would play a crucial role in the Partisan resistance.

Despite their loyalty to the Comintern, Tito and his comrades retained a crucial dimension of autonomous decision-making. The sectarianism of the Third Period line elaborated by the Stalinized Comintern had been disastrous for the YCP in the early 1930s. Tito took advantage of the 'popular front' turn to build mass actions, insisting the Party leadership must be based inside the country and always aiming—as his deputy Edvard Kardelj, a Slovenian economist and Partisan leader, would stress—at financial independence from the Kremlin. This was critical when the Axis powers invaded and dismembered Yugoslavia in 1941, while the royal government fled to London. Contrary to Moscow's orders—the Allies would back the King until 1944—the Partisans called not only for 'Death to Fascism' but 'Liberty to the People'. In the liberated zones, the resistance forces established elected people's committees who would run the villages and towns themselves—a moral and material assault on the old class system, as Suvin puts it. The character of the liberation struggle arose from this improvised practice, in regions that were often cut off from the ever-mobile Party leadership. For Suvin (insisting upon the Balkan 'z'), the 'strong partizan tradition of solve-it-yourself-on-the-spot' applied not only to the fighting units but also to the 'forms of mass direct democracy' that flowed from the struggle, infused with 'the internationalist and militant spirit of the workers' movement' provided by the YCP.

This was the first Yugoslav 'singularity', Suvin argues: the revolution of 1941–46 was fought as an anti-imperialist war for national liberation and social justice, rather than being restricted to an anti-fascist front—and thereby broke with the Yalta agreement on 'spheres of influence', a keystone of Stalin's diplomacy. The original, 'do-it-yourself fusion' of national liberation and social revolution, achieved by the activity of people freeing themselves by their own efforts, was then the matrix that underlay and worked within all the rest. As he points out, the self-confidence born of the resistance, and its combined fight for 'plebeian democracy', sovereignty and social freedom, was very different from the experience of the countries of Eastern Europe directly dependent on the Red Army for their liberation from Hitler. Closer to that of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions, it endowed the new state and the Tito government with an extraordinary legitimacy and popular élan, only strengthened by the terrible devastation the War had wreaked: over 10 per cent of the population killed, many by the home-grown fascists of the Ustaše; railways and other infrastructure destroyed by the retreating Axis forces. In the November 1945 elections, the YCP-led People's Front won a huge majority. Consonant with the international autonomy sought by the Titoist leadership, in Suvin's view, was the national-constitutional settlement that aimed at a new Yugoslav 'union' of free and equal peoples, replacing the Serbia-dominated kingdom with

a federation of socialist republics and autonomous provinces. The great historical project of a Balkan socialist confederation, directly negotiated between the states of the region, was scuttled by Stalin, with grim consequences for the Albanians in Kosova. But the conflict with Moscow opened a new phase of the Yugoslav socialist project.

The second singularity was the introduction of the workers' self-management system, after Tito's 1948 break with Stalin. The first five-year plan of the immediate post-war period had foreseen collectivization, centralized planning and production quotas along Soviet lines, to accomplish the gigantic tasks of reconstruction and industrialization. This was thrown into crisis when the Yugoslavs refused to kowtow to Moscow's attempt to control the YCP's relations with other communist parties, and then to replace Tito with a 'Russian stooge'. The Kremlin duly imposed a damaging economic blockade and expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform. In this emergency, Yugoslavia's economic thinkers—Kardelj, Milovan Djilas and above all, Suvin argues, Boris Kidrič, a youthful Slovenian resistance leader and Tito's Minister of Industry—went back to Marx's idea of the 'free association of producers' and to Lenin's 'Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government': 'The socialist state can arise only as a network of producers' and consumers' communes'—'every factory, every village is a producers' and consumers' commune, whose right and duty is to apply the general soviet laws in their own way.' Social ownership was already in place in Yugoslavia; in this context, Kidrič proposed—with input from Kardelj and Djilas, and Tito's agreement—the introduction of plant-level workers' councils, backed by law and by the recognition of workers' self-management as a constitutional right.

Splendour, Misery and Possibilities devotes a whole chapter to the work of Kidrič, dubbed by Djilas 'the most daring mind of our revolution'. Kidrič's approach to workers' self-management foregrounded the socially owned enterprise, which was seen as the subject, creating income, rather than the object of state administration. Understood as an independent unit, the enterprise would nevertheless make its accounts fully public and draw up plans within nationally established parameters. It would be run by an elected workers' council, its members revocable and with limited mandates, and a director appointed by the local People's Committee who, up to the 1960s, was generally a former partisan. Kidrič, in Suvin's telling, emphasized the central question for an emancipatory transformation of the economy: 'who will appropriate the surplus?' After 1948 he rejected Stalinist central planning for its inefficiency and incapacity to transform workers' conditions—closer in that sense to Lenin's *State and Revolution* than to his praise of the 'scientific organization of labour' in big monopolies. At the same time, the notion of self-management raised theoretical and

practical questions about ‘the transition to communism’: what role for the market as ‘instrument of planning’ and of decentralized choices for consumers? How to combine planning and workers’ rights? What did ‘social ownership’ mean, not only as a juridical category but in real social relations of decision-making and control? Finally, what about ‘politics’? Taking the Paris Commune as a model, Kidrič proposed an elected hierarchy of workers’ councils, from local to national level. With a nod to the radical workers’ organizations of Marx’s time, the Party was renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY).

Suvin reads the workers’ council strategy as ‘a direct continuation of the creative imagination of the partizan war.’ Certainly, it was no mere paper policy. Factory self-management grew beyond the initial need to defend the autonomy of national decision-making from Moscow’s diktat, to become a central feature of the Yugoslav system. The elected workers’ councils met monthly, drew up ground rules for the enterprise, agreed its annual targets, set wages—redenominated as ‘personal income’, of which a portion could rise with increased productivity—and signed off on all major purchases or sales of fixed assets. Sub-committees were set up to report on specific aspects of factory life. Terms were fixed and positions rotated, to avoid the sedimentation of a bureaucratic layer. By 1964, Suvin reports, nearly a quarter of the population had participated, and workers’ councils were being extended to social services. At the larger enterprises, many published their own newspapers, carrying proposals, running surveys, reporting data. One immediate requirement of the new system was further education for the workers, to allow them to grapple with the complexities of factory management. Enterprises and trade unions helped fund over 200 Workers’ Universities, which by 1968 had held almost 10,000 courses, while lectures had 2 million listeners—in a country where two-thirds of youngsters had had barely four years’ schooling up to 1945.

The self-management system drew its legitimacy, Suvin argues, from ‘the revolutionary achievements of plebeian upward mobility, which changed the life of millions for the better’, while at the same time producing more egalitarian relations: by the early 1960s, Yugoslavia had a better Gini coefficient than the rich capitalist countries. Meanwhile, with Moscow refusing aid, funds for investment came from Western loans. As Suvin notes, the geopolitical situation—US interest in Yugoslavia’s strategic role as an ‘anti-Soviet’ state on Comecon’s western flank—meant the credit was not accompanied by the usual harsh conditions, allowing the Yugoslav social experiment ‘a quarter century (roughly 1949–73) of breathing space before the world market and the Western powers began to squeeze the windpipe.’ (Suvin’s explicit decision to focus on domestic politics means that he does not mention the initial concession of support for the US in the Korea War—

nor, later, for Soviet tanks in Hungary, once relations had been mended with Moscow; nor indeed the turn to founding the Non-Aligned Movement and to solidarity with anti-colonial revolutions in the late 1950s.)

By the early 1960s, after a decade of breakneck growth and increasing disequilibrium between the different sectors, the Yugoslav economy was facing severe problems of over-capacity. As Suvin notes, the SFRY now possessed five oil refineries, six steel mills and five car-assembly plants, dependent on large subsidies to compensate for insufficient demand, with over-capacity particularly marked in textiles, metal, tobacco and food-processing. What was needed, he argues—and this, repeated in passionate terms, is the central thesis of the book—was a deepening of plebeian democracy: the centralized plan ‘in constant feedback with direct producers’ that Kidrič had proposed. Suvin’s Blochian standpoint permits him to ‘see’ three concrete future possibilities in the given international and domestic context of the Yugoslav revolution: radical socialist democracy, a Stalinist-style command economy, or capitalist restoration.

Kidrič, who died in 1953 at the tragically early age of 41, had been remarkably prescient about the tensions between the need for ‘centralization’ and the logic of the enterprise’s independence, based on market relations. ‘It is necessary to introduce as soon as possible workers’ councils in each economic branch for the whole of Yugoslavia’, he insisted in 1951:

Without introducing at the same time a centralized and a democratic association of working collectives, that is, of the direct producers, the decentralization of operative management away from the state does not lead forward but leads inexorably back, to state capitalism—in fact, to several state capitalisms (in the Republics) which would be particularistic in relation to the whole (of Yugoslavia) and bureaucratic-cum-centralist towards below, in the relation to the working collectives.

Yet this would have required the LCY to democratize itself and, by this stage, Suvin argues, the Party had already become a ‘politocracy’ with its own interests to defend. As his analysis of its membership shows, in 1948 workers made up 39 per cent of the top leadership. By the mid-70s their proportion of the Central Committee had shrunk to 19 per cent, with Partisan veterans making up another 11 per cent and ‘managerials’ most of the rest. In the urgent debates on economic policy that followed the 1961 recession, the ‘politocracy’ was resistant to further experimentation with direct democracy. As Suvin explains, this would have required changing its own role, ‘through intense requalification and regrouping’, from commander to educator for consent—‘not necessarily with much less power, but with a power that interacts with an encouraged political as well as economic democracy going from the ranks upwards.’ Yet the professional Party core had forgotten Marx and

Lenin's life-long pursuit of new knowledge and instead, from the 1960s on, 'fell prey to the worst intellectual sin possible: they did not want to know.' Instead of democracy from below, the Yugoslav government opted to foster consumerism, with the help of an IMF loan.

Suvin periodizes the history of the SFRY into 'twenty glorious years', from 1945 to 1965, followed by twenty 'miserable' ones, with the market reforms of 1965 as the turning point. They produced the third, self-destructive singularity: instead of aiming towards a horizon of 'socialist justice, communist emancipation and economic well-being', the country now steered away from it. This 'inversion' divided the *vingt glorieuses* from the *vingt minables*. In particular, the 1965 Banking Law concentrated investment capital in the remodeled banks of the constituent republics; by 1971, Suvin writes, the Federal authorities had lost all control over credit policy. The banks of the wealthier northern republics (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia) became the most profitable sector of the Yugoslav economy, while their top-tier managers emerged as new power-brokers, with close ties to the republic-level party leaderships in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade.

At the same time, the 1965 reforms cut subsidies and devalued the currency, leading to sharp price rises. Following Susan Woodward's path-breaking analysis in *Socialist Unemployment* (1995), Suvin shows how the self-managed enterprises, put under an investment squeeze, tried to avoid firing existing workers but stopped hiring new ones, leading to rising youth unemployment. Within five years there were a million Yugoslav *Gastarbeiter* in Germany, drawn mainly from the northern zones. Foreign remittances and growing debt, along with tourism on the Dalmatian coast, became major features of an increasingly regionalized economy. Initial hopes that the self-managed enterprises would retain a larger share of earnings under the 1965 reforms were quickly dashed, in the context of a 'burgeoning financial system' and the dispersion of central power into 'seven or eight semi-state *apparati*'. Behind the scenes, Suvin writes, the IMF and World Bank were consistently pushing decentralization as a 'Trojan Horse' for marketization. Yet his explanation for the 'third singularity' is essentially endogenous:

In the 1960s the Party 'reformers' reached a compromise with the middle-of-the-road against a return to Stalinism on a platform of politocracy rule, and became 'decentralizers', which means more power to the republican and local leaders, plus verbal and smaller material sops for the workers and much consumerism for the middle classes, on an only partly controlled market. The ruling monolith fragmented into a polyarchy of 'republican' power-centres.

Growing tensions erupted in a range of protests in the late 1960s and 70s, to which Tito and Kardelj responded with a combination of concessions and repression (Suvin does not analyse these in any detail). After Tito's death in

1980 the system entered its final decade, characterized by internal political crisis and external economic pressure. In the mid-1970s, Suvin writes, epitaphs to Yugoslavia's earlier hopes could still mourn mere mediocrity: for Bogdan Denitch, the contrast between the 'mundane possibilities' of a small, relatively underdeveloped country and the 'heroic aspirations to solve the complex problems of multi-nationality, industrial democracy, egalitarianism and social mobility in a way that has not yet been attempted anywhere in the world.' For Dennison Rusinow, 'Yugoslavia would become another slovenly, moderately oppressive, semi-efficient, semi-authoritarian state . . . like most states.' How much sadder was any epitaph written after the 1990s, with their 'fratricidal wars, material and moral dispossessions' and the 'misery of the counter-revolutionary break-up'. In a wonderful passage, Suvin portrays the figure of Yugoslavia as the Heroine of the people's liberation, grappling with a hydra-headed Balkan legacy: patriarchal authoritarianism, kulak usury, kitsch petty-bourgeois escapism; the negligence inherited from Ottoman decadence, subaltern Croatian envy, Slovene narcissism. 'As long as the Heroine, the original Enlightenment Yugoslavia, was vigorous and clear-headed, heads were being lopped off and the defeated monsters returned to their lairs.' But when she floundered and finally lost heart, they re-emerged—'with the decisive help of the ruling oligarchy's obtuseness.'

But Suvin wants to insist upon the latent possibilities of socialist Yugoslavia, as well as the splendours and miseries evoked by his Balzacian title. His historical account of the rise and fall of SFRY is complemented by a set of re-forged conceptual tools with which to assess its meaning for any broader project of human liberation. In one striking chapter, which derives its theses through a process of 'tearing out and reassembling' the contrasts developed in Marx's essay, 'On the Jewish Question', Suvin proposes the term 'Communism 1' to describe the original Marxian project of complete human social emancipation, and 'Communism 2' to denote the official state communism of the twentieth century, in its various forms. The two were distinct, certainly, but in the Yugoslav experience not totally disassociated, for the Party, during the War and in its first decades in government, 'was not only a factor of alienation, but concurrently also the initiator and lever of a real liberation—up to a certain important limit.' Suvin underlines: 'the liberation is important and the limit is important.' For this period at least, 'the party/state government was a two-headed Janus'. That 'potential dialectic' was suffocated by 'a "bureaucratic" tradition (in Marx's sense) of monolithism and non-transparency, here of Stalinist origin.' Insofar as it provided an emancipatory backbone, the Party was a possible feedback instrument for plebeian class interests from below. But since there was no democracy inside it, 'such pressures were inchoate, leading in practice to an eager or unwilling execution of decisions from the leadership.'

Nevertheless, Suvin argues, 'parties degenerating as they become successful' is not an 'iron law', even if it does seem to be a permanent tendency after revolutions in class society. It depends on 'what countervailing forces are mobilized in concrete situations'. Therefore 'Communism 1'—as 'full feed-back democracy' related to the satisfaction of human needs—was not an abstract, unreachable horizon, but a concrete utopia towards which the 'impure but real' advances towards self-government under 'Communism 2' were aiming. The relation can then be conceived as that of 'real plebeian, directly democratic communism that liberates and empowers people' versus a Janus-faced 'official state and party communism' that was 'partly very real, but emancipatory only to a degree and beset by temptations to repression'.

Crucial here is Suvin's concept of plebeian democracy in-the-making as a form of resistance to capitalist or bureaucratic relations of domination. Why 'plebeian'? The term, he explains, comes from 'Brecht, with a pinch of Bakhtin and Babeuf', and denotes 'all social classes who live by means of their physical and/or mental work'. He minimally preferred it to Marx's 'proletarians', not just because it had been 'less abused in enthusiastic propaganda and less tied to the industrial workers of the 19th century', but also perhaps because its Roman origins stressed 'the element of civic opposition to the pernicious state power of a ruling class', while its Brechtian connotations raised the 'equally important' question of a position within the capitalist production process. The same concern might be extended to other formulations, which all have their strengths and weaknesses: dominated or subaltern classes, wage-workers and so forth. Suvin here raises fundamental issues about re-thinking emancipatory and Marxist debates, not least what he calls (following Gramsci) a bloc of alliances, including peasants as well as non-waged, precarious workers and intellectuals. His remarks on civic opposition can also be related to his approach to politics: against 'classical' views, he insists that 'communism cannot abolish politics', as the expression of conflicting interests and choices—not to be reduced to class ones, as demonstrated by gender, cultural, national and environmental issues.

As for the relation between the concepts of communism and socialism themselves, Suvin worries at the question all through the book. He explains he has strong reservations about the latter term, both because of the confusion between the ideal and its practice, and—'more neuralgically'—about its use to describe a historical epoch, especially when socialism is thought of as 'a rounded-off, monadic social formation, on a par with feudalism and capitalism'. But rather than using scare quotes when attributing 'socialism' to the Yugoslav experience, he offers his own definition, of which a crucial term is 'dis-alienation', in the sense of re-humanization as well as self-government. Thus, socialism is 'a transitional period (which may last for generations)'

between exploitative capitalism and fully democratic communism: 'the term "socialism" is useful only if understood as a field of forces polarized between a congeries of class society alienations and communist dis-alienation.' Socialism, then, 'can never be finally "built" as a house, especially not "in one country": if it ever were finalized, it would no longer be socialism but democratic communism.'

Between socialism and communism, though—or between 'Communism 2' and 'Communism 1'—stands the problem of bureaucracy; another key concept, to which Suvin devotes two final studies. The first explores discussions of bureaucracy and the state within classical Marxism; the second deals with the much less well-known debates on these subjects in post-revolutionary Yugoslavia, among the leadership (Kidrič, Djilas, Kardelj, Tito and Vladimir Bakarić) and within what Suvin calls the socialist 'loyal opposition', in which he includes the critical economist Branko Horvat and key members of the *Praxis* group: Mihailo Marković, Dragoljub Mićunović, Gajo Petrović and others. Like Petrović, Suvin sharply differentiates between officialdom in general—the 'bureau' element: white-collar pen-pushers—and the 'cracy' element, those who rule. His final view retains an element of paradox: the term bureaucracy had at first been helpful in facilitating critical discussion about Stalin's USSR, but its usage had degenerated into 'sterile prevarications about "strata" entailing the absence of deeper societal antagonism'. Nevertheless, however problematic the term, a mental grasp of the reality at which this 'crooked arrow' aimed was crucial.

The conceptual problems involved in determining whether a 'new ruling class' had emerged from the Titoist leadership haunt the book. As Suvin explains in the introduction, he had not fully made up his mind about this until the end of his investigation of Yugoslav social stratification. Indeed, slightly different formulations are advanced in different chapters of the book, which were written and partly published as separate essays—'in Brecht's sense of *Versuche*, attempts assaying at cognitive exploration'—although intended from the start to be cumulative. The grounds for what Suvin calls his 'hesitations' over this—which are of real intellectual interest—lie in a fundamental methodological choice: *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities* aims explicitly to examine intertwined social and political issues, not only in-the-being, but also as shaped by and expressive of conflicting trends, with national and international dimensions, yet open to choices and transformations with radically different outcomes.

In what might be called the 'softer' versions of his new ruling-class thesis, Suvin describes a 'potential bourgeoisie of a comprador variety', comprising bankers, export managers and representatives of foreign firms, emerging at some point in the 1970s or 80s; he quotes, without refuting, the view of 'well-informed insider' Bakarić in 1971 that these were 'not quite

yet capitalists but they represented capital'. The 'harder' version argues the 'ruling politocracy' of 1950–61 was a 'proto-class', *in statu nascendi*, but that 'a self-conscious ruling class' had already emerged by 1965–66. This class then more or less immediately fragmented, as 'its fractions decided that their interests were better served by fracturing the state, too, and constituting themselves into legally independent neo-comprador classes (in the case of Slovenia and Croatia) or gambling for a greater Serbia.' As Suvin explains, his starting point was, in formal terms, idealist: the search for a 'general hypothesis to explain the development and eventual collapse of SFRY' led to the conclusion that a new ruling class could 'most economically explain the break-up of Yugoslavia'.

Some doubts should be registered here. Suvin's insistence on a 'new class' that had emerged in the mid-60s as the cause of the break-up of Yugoslavia involves downplaying other factors. As he acknowledges, his analysis sets aside the national question, the period from the 1970s to the 1990s and later processes of capitalist restoration—crucially important for understanding the final outcome. Despite his warm interest in Kidrič's work, it does not provide any final answers to the Marxist discussions—from the Soviet Union in the 1920s to the 'Great Debate' of Che Guevara, Charles Bettelheim and Ernest Mandel in Cuba in the 1960s and in Czechoslovakia, with Ota Sik—about the 'law of value' and the ratios of plan to market, stimulus to efficiency, in societies in transition to socialism. In Yugoslavia, this discussion was also specifically informed by the character of the partisan revolution and the 'social contract' of national rights and self-management.

Here, the combined effect of three factors added to the pressures for 'market socialism'. The richer republics wanted to increase their production freely—to be 'more efficient' and therefore of more help to the poorer ones, as they put it. Secondly, workers' and anarcho-syndicalist approaches defended their self-management rights against state and Party control over the larger part of the surplus, and thus against centralized planning. Third, some Marxist as well as non-Marxist economists favoured allowing the law of value and market pressures to 'play their role', not least through greater opening to the world market—a position supported by Suvin, and which had a great deal of influence at the time in the discourse around the New International Economic Order. Whatever the rights and wrongs of these approaches, they cannot simply be identified with the expression or defence of new (bourgeois) class interests.

Suvin is right to emphasize the importance of internal factors in resisting or enabling pressures for capitalist restoration in Yugoslavia—not least political choices in favour of the mobilization or repression of the people. The period of 1968–71, from the student revolts to the first flaring of the

Croatian national movement, was indeed a turning point. Nevertheless, Tito and Kardelj were still playing leading roles at the time. Concrete analysis of the new turn they presented at the Congress of Self-Management in Sarajevo in 1971 would have illustrated what Suvin calls the Janus-faced character of the regime—playing a dual role in increasing workers' and national rights, while repressing all autonomous movements. It could have offered further evidence for his point about the self-management system's organic requirement of a form of radical socialist democracy to render it coherent. But this was not yet the rule of a new bourgeoisie, nor even of 'representatives' of capitalist or IMF interests.

The Constitution of 1974–76 increased workers' rights and social ownership, dismantling the banking system and technocratic power in the big factories as well as extending national rights. But it did so under pressure from the richer republics, which wanted to control their own foreign trade without meddling by Federal bodies—or the mobilization of self-managing workers. The upshot of that balance of forces meant rising inflation and growing debts, both internal and external. In turn, this brought IMF pressure, operating not in conjuncture with a fully fledged and unified 'Yugoslav bourgeoisie', but with emerging ones in the constituent republics. The death of the historic leaders opened the final phase of 1980–89. In a changing international context, caught between the pressure of external debt and social resistance to market reforms, capitalist dynamics within the confederalized system produced the resurgence of pre-Yugoslav nationalisms—and some new ones.

These dissenting notes do not detract from the overall achievement of *Splendour, Misery and Possibilities*, which extends far beyond the 'new class' thesis. Suvin has performed an invaluable task in drawing out the golden threads of economic and political democracy for contemporary radical thought. In conclusion he returns to Bloch's reworking of Hegel's thought-object relation, asking not only whether thought corresponds to the object, but also, more mysteriously, whether the object manages to correspond to what it potentially might be—a correspondence most valuable and most neuralgic when it is lacking, and yet remains the measure for any realization, 'which is not yet'. Suvin asks: 'Did the SFRY have a potential tendency of corresponding to its farthest emancipatory horizon?' If so, the plebeian democracy he postulates may contribute towards a useful, concrete utopianism. 'But I can neither prove nor be sure of it: it is not yet.' Rather than foster an abstract one, he ends with a paradox retranslated from Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*: 'What is loved turns bitter, and bitterness becomes beloved.' Highly original, conceptually fecund, this is a rich and necessary book.