

When and Where?

Time and Space

in

Boris Akunin's *Azazel* and *Turetskii gambit*

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Dennis Kilfoy

August, 2007

Abstract

Boris Akunin's historical detective novels have sold more than eight million copies in Russia, and have been translated into nearly a dozen languages. Boris Akunin is the pen name of literary critic and translator Grigory Chkhartishvili. Born in 1956 in the republic of Georgia, he published his first detective stories in 1998. His first series of novels, beginning with *Azazel'* and followed by *Turetskii gambit*, feature a dashing young police inspector, Erast Fandorin. Fandorin's adventures take place in the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth century, and he regularly finds himself at the center of key historic events. The first book takes place over one summer, May to September 1876, as the intrepid Fandorin, on his first case, unveils an international organization of conspirators—Azazel'—bent on changing the course of world events. The second takes place two years later from July 1877 to March 1878 during Russia's war with the Ottoman Empire. The young detective again clashes with Azazel', as he unravels a Turkish agent's intricate plan to weaken and destroy the Russian state. Both adventures have proven wildly popular and entertaining, while maintaining a certain literary value.

The exploration of time and space in Russian literature was once a popular subject of discourse, but since the 1970s it has been somewhat ignored, rarely applied to contemporary works, and even less to works of popular culture. Akunin's treatment of time and space, however, especially given the historical setting of his works, is unique. *Azazel'*, for example, maintains a lightning pace with a tight chronology and a rapidly changing series of locales. *Turetskii gambit* presents a more laconic pace, and, though set in the vast Caucasus region, seems more claustrophobic as it methodically works towards its conclusion. Both works employ a seemingly impersonal narrator, who, nonetheless, speaks in a distinctly 19th century

tone, and both works cast their adventures within the framework of actual historical events and locations.

This thesis analyzes core theories in literary time and space, applying them then to Akunin's historical detective literature.

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Nothing is particularly possible without good friends... or particularly worthwhile.

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To Mom, Dad,
and Every Teacher I ever had.

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Introduction

I. Purpose

In his conclusion to the anthology *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, Joseph Kockelmans explains that a defining characteristic of philosophy, including phenomenology, is “radical and presuppositionless” comprehension.¹ Time and space may not seem radical at first, but they permeate and form the basis of every single piece of literature, as they do existence in general. They are so basic, so fundamental that they often fall beneath the reader’s attention, and sometimes, perhaps, even the author’s. The distinction between a fictional representation of a place and the actual place itself, for example, might seem obvious, and some might argue that it goes without saying. The answer to this objection is yes, it is obvious, but to leave that distinction unsaid is to ignore a defining feature of art with particular relevance to authors of historical fiction. Thus, following Kockelmans’ thought, my proposed analysis of time and space will point out just how remarkable the things we already know are. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to reveal the complexities of a supposedly simple, mundane, and consequently neglected, topic. The thesis that follows will more specifically demonstrate its relevance in respect to Boris Akunin’s first two novels.

II. Boris Akunin

Boris Akunin is the pen name of literary critic and translator Grigory Chkhartishvili. Born in 1956 in the republic of Georgia, he published his first detective novels in 1998. His first series of novels begins with *Azazel’* (*Azazel’*, 1998), followed by *Turetskii gambit* (*The Turkish Gambit*, 2000), and features a dashing young police inspector, Erast Fandorin. Fandorin’s

¹ Joseph J. Kockelmans. “Summary and Conclusions: Toward a Descriptive Science of Man,” *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretations*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Garden City. New York: Doubleday, 1967) 540.

adventures take place in the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth century, and the protagonist regularly finds himself at the center of key historical events. *Azazel'*, the introductory work, takes place over one summer, May to September 1876, as the intrepid Fandorin, on his first case, unveils an international organization of conspirators—*Azazel'*—bent on changing the course of world events. *Turetskii gambit*, the second novel, takes place two years later from July 1877 to March 1878 during Russia's war with the Ottoman Empire. The young detective again finds himself pitted against *Azazel'*, as he unravels a Turkish agent's intricate plan to weaken and destroy the Russian state.

Akunin's historical detective novels have enjoyed a rare success, selling more than eight million copies in Russia, and having been translated into nearly a dozen languages, including English, French, Spanish, German and Japanese. His *Prikliucheniia Erasta Fandorina (The Adventures of Erast Fandorin, 1998-)*, to which *Azazel'* and *Turetskii gambit* both belong, includes nine novels and two novellas and is just one of three different series. The adventures of Erast Fandorin were shortly followed by *Prikliucheniia sestry Pelagei (The Adventures of Sister Pelagei, 1999-2003)*, a trilogy of detective novels whose sleuth happens to be a nineteenth-century nun. Later, Akunin moved further into postmodernism with *Prikliucheniia magistra (The Adventures of a Master's Graduate, 2000-)*. In this series Erast's grandson, Nicholas Fandorin, an English-born Russian and computer programmer, moves to Moscow, and with the aid of an elaborate computer game investigates the lives of his seventeenth and eighteenth-century ancestors. Despite the success of all three series, Erast and his adventures have still proven the most popular.

Akunin and his books have met with mixed reviews. As Elena Baraban notes in her article "A Country Resembling Russia: The Use of History in Boris Akunin's Novels" (2004),

his work corresponds with a growth in historicism in Russia, including a tendency to idealize its pre-Soviet past, particularly the so called Golden Age of Literature of the mid- to late-nineteenth century.² Some reviewers, she further explains, have delighted in his many references to the literature of that period, basking in a general feeling of nostalgia, while others wonder whether nostalgia was ever really his point. Many of these others see Akunin's stylization as a perversion—"a caricature of Russian imperial history."³ Indeed, *Koronatsiia* (*Coronation*, 2000), a later installment in the first Fandorin series, portrays Tsar Nicholas II as a weak, hopelessly ineffectual monarch, and his wife, the Tsaritsa, as inconceivably selfish and cruel, willing to sacrifice the life of a young boy, rather than part with a precious family stone. This debate, however, is rich in irony: Akunin's novels pay tribute to a literary era whose most famous ambassadors were largely critical of the world around them. If Akunin were to portray their time in an entirely positive, flattering light, his works would no longer resemble theirs and consequently his novels would cease to be a tribute to that era. In this case, nostalgia demands social criticism, and one need not preclude the other.

Despite their literary allusions, Akunin's books are, at their heart, pulp fiction. They are, in fact, part of a wave of popular entertainment that has swept Russia since that fall of the Soviet Union, separated from their contemporary counterparts by their intellectual appeal, but no less sensational or entertaining. In her article "Big-Buck Books: Pulp Fiction in Post-Soviet Russia" (1998), Helena Goscilo documents the Post-Soviet rise in Russian pulp fiction—that literature whose chief aim is entertainment and mass appeal rather than intellectual respectability. "Disposable, one-time narratives following established formulas for entertainment and steeped in

² Elena V. Baraban, "A Country Resembling Russia: The Use of History in Boris Akunin's Detective Novels," *Slavic and East European Journal* 48 (2004): 397.

³ Baraban 396-397.

values that subliminally appeal to the majority,” she argues, “have taken Russia by storm.”⁴ Subscriptions to Russia’s esteemed “thick journals,” she points out, plummeted during the 1990s “so drastically as to imperil their survival,” replaced by such glossy fare as *Kul’t lichnostei* (a Russian clone of *People Magazine*), *Cosmopolitan*, *Domovoi*, and *Playboy*.⁵ In fiction, she claims “murder mysteries are routinely reissued in paperback to the tunes of 100,000 copies, once hardcover editions have become bestsellers.”⁶ In 1996, Goscilo adds, *detektivy*, which she defines as genre including murder mysteries, thrillers, and tales of crime, accounted for thirty-eight percent of the market in Russian fiction.⁷ Most of these books take their lead from Rambo rather than Sherlock Holmes, emphasizing gratuitous sex and violence over intelligence and wit. One notable exception is the work of Aleksandra Marinina, a former lieutenant colonel of police at the Moscow Law Institute in the MVD (Russia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs) and with whom Boris Akunin is often compared. Marinina’s protagonist, Anastasia Kamenskaia, also a lieutenant colonel in the police, solves mysteries not with bullets, but with an expertly honed memory, a brilliant sense of logic, and her ever ready computer skills.⁸ Aleksandra Marinina’s works all take place in a contemporary Russia, in which the Soviet era, according to Anatoly Vishevsky in his literary survey “Answers to Eternal Questions in Soft Covers: Post-Soviet Detective Stories” (2001), seems completely removed—“if not in time, then surely in the minds of the people.”⁹ Akunin’s Russia is similarly remote from its communist history. But where

8. ⁴ Helena Goscilo, “Big-Buck Books: Pulp Fiction in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Harriman Review* 12 (1998):

⁵ Goscilo 7.

⁶ Goscilo 7.

⁷ Goscilo 9.

⁸ Goscilo 12-14.

Marinina portrays a world in which the Soviet Union lies in the past, Akunin has chosen to portray a world in which it lies ominously await in the future.

Georgii Tsiplakov credits Akunin's choice of historical setting for much of his success, writing in his article "Evil Arising on the Road and the Tao of Erast Fandorin" (2001): "After Akunin began to write novels, he made several smart public relations moves. One was to transfer the action to the second half of the nineteenth century, the temporal motherland of the adventure novel. As a result, his writings began to differ for the better from the sundry detective chaff, unobtrusively reminding people of better examples of the genre."¹⁰ In "Akunization" (2003), her review of *The Winter Queen*, the English translation of *Azazel*, Vanora Bennett agrees. "A nation whose thoughts had been molly-coddled for seven highly regulated decades," she explains, "reacted to real life's terrifying lurch into the unknown after 1991 by snapping up every grisly tale of chopping and mincing it could get its hands on."¹¹ By 1998, many readers were jaded by a constant stream of pornography and gore, and thirsted for something more thoughtful and certainly more civil. Akunin's Erast Fandorin novels filled that void with its very first installment inscribed "in memory of the 19th century, when literature was great, belief in progress was unlimited and crimes were committed and solved with elegance and taste."¹² Their success was also aided by a real life mystery: "Who exactly is Boris Akunin?" Igor Zakharov, Akunin's publisher, admitted that it was a pseudonym, but refused to reveal the author's true identity, claiming it would damage the writer's serious reputation in literary circles. A flurry of

⁹ Anatoly Vishevsky, "Answers to Eternal Questions in Soft Covers: Post-Soviet Detective Stories," *Slavic and East European Journal* 45 (2001): 735.

¹⁰ Georgii Tsiplakov, "Evil Arising on the Road and the Tao of Erast Fandorin," trans. Vladimir Talmy *Russian Studies in Literature* 38 (2002): 27.

¹¹ Vanora Bennett, "Akunization," rev. of *The Winter Queen* [English trans. of *Azazel*] by Boris Akunin, *Times Literary Supplement* 16 May 2003: 32.

¹² Bennett 32.

speculation followed with some insisting Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, an intellectual and scholar in Eastern culture, was the culprit; others, that the works were genuine nineteenth-century texts, merely passed off as contemporary novels in an elaborate scam. In her review, Bennett quotes the following anecdote related to her by Akunin himself: “Someone I knew who was trying to impress her gynaecologist told him she knew Akunin and could get his autograph. Pityingly, the doctor answered: ‘Nonsense, my dear: everyone knows Akunin lived in the nineteenth century.’”¹³ Curiosity fuelled even further interest until Akunin finally admitted that he was Grigory Chkhartishvili, a noted expert in Japanese culture and translator. With that confession, sales jumped from one million copies in 2000, to 3.5 million copies in 2001.¹⁴

Another question remained: What could draw a respected scholar to such a generally disrespected genre, particularly among the intellectuals and academics who had held him in such high regard? Indeed, there was little in his background to indicate that Akunin would choose to pursue a career in detective fiction. As mentioned, he was born in the Soviet republic of Georgia in 1956. His father was an artilleryman, while his mother was a teacher of Russian literature and language. Two years later, his family left Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, for yet another capital—Moscow, where Akunin has lived ever since. As a child, he fell in love with Japanese culture, having read numerous Japanese books, and, particularly, after witnessing Kabuki theater. He was later accepted by the History and Philology Department of the Institute of Asian and African Countries at Moscow State University, where he continued to study Japanese literature and culture. Later, he would translate works by authors including Ukiyo Misima, Kobo Abe, and, even, Peter Ustinov, while publishing essays in the *Foreign Literature Journal*, eventually

¹³ Bennett 32.

¹⁴ Bennett 32.

becoming its editor-and-chief.¹⁵ Tsiplakov accuses Akunin of being overly modest with his critics, playfully emphasizing the “the unserious nature of [his] genre.”¹⁶ Akunin’s rationale for becoming a detective writer is often in a similar vein. “I decided to write,” he once explained, “the kind of detective novels that respectable ladies wouldn’t be ashamed to read in the metro.” His wife had always covered hers in brown wrapping paper.¹⁷ In an interview with *The Times*, he elaborated: “In Russia nowadays the middle class is the revolutionary class. It did not exist before. It’s very energetic, very active and in need of everything a class needs, like ideology, ethics, aesthetics and, well, easy reading.”¹⁸ At first, he attempted to convince his author friends—intellectuals, writers of high literature—to fill the void, to create that kind “easy reading” that is both entertaining and smart. “But these Russian writers,” Akunin laments, “they are so lazy.”¹⁹ Eventually, he decided to set the example, originally planning to write just one novel in the style he was advocating. Success, though, demanded differently, and Akunin has gone on to become one of Russia’s most internationally successful writers. In 2005, he even received a complement from an unexpected, and, perhaps, unwelcome source—the Ukrainian mafia. In a popular scheme, the criminal organization published a novel he had not written, but, all the same, bore his name, putting him in the esteemed company of American writer Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code*.²⁰ Whatever his motives, and despite his success, Akunin

¹⁵ Vera Ivanova, and Mikhail Manykin, “Boris Akunin: The Evil Spirit or Good Luck of Modern Russian Fiction?,” *Russia-InfoCentre*, 24 August 2006, 15 June 2007

¹⁶ Tsiplakov 35.

¹⁷ Richard Lourie, “If Pushkin Wrote Thrillers...,” *The St. Petersburg Times* 8 August 2003, 15 June 2007 <http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=10638>.

¹⁸ “A Russian’s Revolution,” *TIMESONLINE* 6 August 2005, 15 June 2007 <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article551700.ece?token=null&offset=0>>.

¹⁹ “A Russian’s Revolution.”

²⁰ “A Russians Revolution.”

has continued to balance popularity and intellectuality, producing works that are both entertaining and intelligent.

Akunin's popularity has sparked a number of different critical interpretations. Natal'ia Ivanova has investigated Akunin and his relation to a perceived decline of postmodernism in Russia ("The Life and Death of the Simulacrum in Russia," 2002), while Brian James Baer has explored his portrayal of homosexuality and gender ("Engendering Suspicion: Homosexual Panic in the Post-Soviet *Detektiv*," 2005). Pavel Basinskii and Lev Pirogov have both pondered the nature of his success ("The Early Bird Gets the Worm!: On Success as a Literary Category," 2001), and Georgii Tsiplakov has noted his use of Eastern philosophy. Elena Baraban has even examined his portrayal of history ("A Country Resembling Russia: The Use of History in Boris Akunin's Detective Novels," 2004), but few scholars have written specifically on his use of time and space.

III. Theories of Literary Time and Space

This particular series of novels presents an interesting opportunity to explore the role of time and space in fiction. The exploration of this topic in Russian literature was once a popular subject of discourse, but since the 1970s it has been somewhat ignored, rarely applied to contemporary works, and even less to works of popular culture. Time and space, however, are a major theme in Akunin's writing, and his treatment of the topic, especially given the historical setting of his works, is unique. *Azazel'*, for example, maintains a lightning pace with a tight chronology and a rapidly changing series of locales. *Turetskii gambit*, however, presents a more laconic pace, and, though set in the vast Caucasus region, feels more confined, as it methodically works towards its conclusion. Both works employ a seemingly impersonal narrator, who,

nonetheless, speaks in a distinctly nineteenth-century tone, and both works cast their adventures within the framework of actual historical events and locations.

Time and space in literature are generally considered both phenomenological and structuralist topics. This thesis applies a combination of the phenomenological and structuralist approaches, while exploring narrator's, characters', and reader's, as well as, historical, time and space. First, though, it is necessary to define the preceding concepts. Although the term "phenomenology," had been coined as early as the eighteenth century by previous philosophers, Edmund Husserl, a philosopher of the early twentieth century, is credited with providing its most generally accepted current definition. He proposed it as a science, not based on experience or experimentation, but on intuition. Its ultimate goal is the essence of the thing under observation. What, for example, defines a novel? What characteristics separate it from anything else? What makes it what it is? Structuralism may seem obvious, its name suggesting merely a description of a work's structure. It does, indeed, emphasize the importance of structure, but the issue is more complex. One work of literature alone, for example, may contain a number of different structures, and those structures may transcend the work itself, belonging to a broader cultural tradition. That kind of universality, in fact, is one of the main focuses of structuralism, which also emphasizes the importance of function, or, in other words, the role structure or form plays in the work as a whole. The two philosophical disciplines complement each other, with the phenomenological approach identifying the immutable characteristics of literature and represented time and space, and the structuralist approach identifying the devices an author may employ to address those characteristics and their limitations. Phenomenology with its emphasis on the essence and the ideal, is particularly suited to examining concepts in their most general and abstract sense; structuralism, on the other hand, allows a greater deal of specificity, and, with

its emphasis on universality and function, is particularly suited to identifying genre and literary value (Have those functions been fulfilled?).

Roman Ingarden, while attempting to reach a phenomenological definition of fictional literature in *The Literary Work of Art* (1965), made several important conclusions about time and space. Not least of these is the importance of distinguishing between historical locations and represented ones. No matter how historically accurate an author's description of a certain place in time may be, it remains only a representation, or, in other words, a fiction which may, in turn, give rise to all sorts of fictional events.²¹ This point bears some comparison to the findings of Ingarden's mentor, Edmund Husserl, whose work formed the basis of this theory.

Husserl noted in the first pages of his *Ideas* (1913) that "every material thing has its own essential derivatives," which include, he adds, all of those derivatives that material things hold in general: "time-determination-in general, durations-[in general], figure-[in general], materiality-in-general."²² Fictional things, I would add, are a more complicated matter. Their materiality is in question, and they are not, at least, physical things that can be smelled, tasted, heard, seen, or felt. Instead they stand in for those things, or, in other words, represent them, with the closeness of that representation depending on the creative decisions of the writer. Indeed, the only physical thing about a work of literary fiction, including the novel, is the actual type that appears on each page. The author and his reader engage in a game of "make believe" as they allow that print to stand in for a larger sphere of reality, including all those qualities of time determination, duration, figure, and materiality. In Akunin's case the nineteenth century, of course, fell into the past long ago and he is representing something that no longer exists. The words Moscow and St.

²¹ Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 25-26; 170-173.

²² Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969) 53.

Petersburg are not simply words, but a cue to the reader to picture those cities as they once were; as something that can be physically perceived, despite the passage of more than a hundred years.

This, then, again raises the question of historical accuracy. On the one hand, historical fiction remains fiction and one should not expect a perfect representation, or even an attempt at a perfect representation, of history. If this were the case, then it could no longer be called fiction. On the other hand, the terms historical fiction, the historical novel, and even the historical *detective*²³ novel all seem to demand some degree of historical accuracy. It is comparable to the act of a great impressionist, who mimics some well-known celebrity. The audience realizes that what they are seeing is not the actual celebrity, and they not only expect but demand the performer to take liberties and make exaggerations. However, if the impression becomes too divorced from reality—if all the lisps are suddenly turned to stutters and bad posture into a limp—then the performance becomes less and less an impression. Historical fiction is similarly limited by the demands of its subject, history. If the outcomes of wars and revolutions are reversed, important dates arbitrarily changed, and great leaders prematurely assassinated, then the work, with each change, gradually loses its right to its defining epithet, “historical.” Although Akunin’s portrayal of nineteenth-century Russia should not be confused with actual nineteenth-century Russia, it should not be held completely removed from it either. While he weaves a fictional narrative around actual historical events, those events are inevitably skewed or modified, allowing the narrative a slightly greater degree of creative movement. Yet, despite having taken some artistic liberties, Akunin never abandons the attempt of historical accuracy. His use of names, places, and dates, are all, for the most part, historically correct, and he even adopts the literary style of the era he is representing. The origins of events may be changed and the events themselves slightly modified, but, even so, they remain largely intact. Yet these

²³ Emphases, unless otherwise indicated are my own.

demands should not be mistaken for requirements in a strict sense. This may seem like a contradiction, but Akunin himself has chosen to write historical fiction and has chosen to respect the expectations of that genre. At any moment though, he may choose differently, and completely stray from the requirements of historical accuracy. His work might then be unrecognizable as historical fiction and many readers and critics may refuse to recognize it as such, but those are consequences he invites onto himself, and by at least partially meeting the demands of his chosen genre, he is practicing a form of self-discipline.

History plays a major role in Mikhail Bakhtin's conclusions on the nature of time and space, or as he calls it "the chronotope," in the novel as well. In his collection *The Dialogic Imagination*, he describes a process he dubs the "historizing" of the personal.²⁴ Early fiction and literary works of art, he explains, emphasized the importance of the historic over the personal so much so that the personal sphere was almost completely subjugated to the process of history. Individual lives were merely pieces of a much larger collective whole, always reflecting the nature of that larger structure of which they were only a part. History, for example, was seen as a cyclical process of occurrences and reoccurrences, while, similarly, life was a process of birth, death, and re-birth. The development of the novel introduced a new element as it extracted "the separate life sequences" of "individual fates" from "common time of collective life."²⁵ Life was now seen as a linear narrative, beginning with birth and ending with death, and history, while lying parallel to that narrative, ultimately lay *outside* of it, serving now as a backdrop against which the action of work was played.²⁶ What Bakhtin describes is process of *de-historizing* the

²⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1998) 209.

²⁵ Bakhtin 214.

²⁶ Bakhtin 216-217.

personal, but it is possible to go still further and observe another extreme, which I call *the personalization of history*. Akunin, for instance, does not just set his novels against the backdrop of history; he suggests fictional reasons for actual historic events. In both *Azazel'* and *Turetskii gambit*, purely fictional characters claim responsibility for the major events of the nineteenth century. In this case the situation has been reversed: history has become an extension of the characters' personal lives and its course subjugated by their individual will.

Ingarden also notes the existence of indeterminacies as a defining characteristic that separates fiction from reality. Actual places and moments in time exist in of themselves in their entirety.²⁷ Fictional places and events, however, are distinguished by vagaries and undescribed missing pieces.²⁸ Even the fullest description of an event or place leaves something out, and these points of indeterminacy are often important artistic choices. Ingarden does further elaborate that when an author describes a room, there is an understanding that a world exists outside that room. This world is not infinite and eventually it does succumb to its own vagueness, but it does exist.²⁹ The same is applicable, I would argue, to the concept of time. There is an understanding that time will continue after the course of the novel, and that it has even continued before the course of the novel. In his mysteries, Akunin often hints at an approaching future, as well as a larger world existing outside of Imperial Russia. Akunin is deliberately playing with the points of indeterminacies—the limitations of represented time and space—in both his works. Realizing that he cannot and should not describe everything, he merely hints at the approach of an ominous future, and suggests the existence of a larger, often hostile, world. Doing this, he builds a powerful atmosphere of fear, suspense, and even impending doom.

²⁷ Ingarden 246.

²⁸ Ingarden 246-247.

²⁹ Ingarden 219.

These points of indeterminacy do have the potential to be filled in somewhat by what Ingarden calls “aspects held in readiness.”³⁰ The name “St. Petersburg,” for example, has more potential meaning for people who have actually visited the city than someone who has not, and those people have the ability fill in some of those indeterminacies themselves. Still, it should be said that the potential for meaning is gradually lost as the city is moved further and further into the distant past. A reader may have visited or be quite familiar with contemporary St. Petersburg, but what about nineteenth-century Petersburg, or the Finnish swamp that existed centuries before the city was even founded?

Returning to Ingarden; the phenomenologist also introduces the notion of the life of a literary work. He argues that works of literature can grow old and even die, often because of their use of language.³¹ A novel’s literary style or way of speaking can date the work and betray its age. Akunin makes constant use of this phenomenon. He deliberately writes in an outmoded style and, like soaking a newspaper in tea or wearing a grey wig, artificially ages his works. He playfully poses them as literary artifacts of an earlier time.

It is now possible to relate Ingarden’s conclusions to George Poulet’s *Theories in Human Time* (1949), which traces time theory as far back as the Middle Ages. Medieval Christians, for example, believed that the universe was in a constant state of change: creation, destruction, recreation, reconstruction, and so on.³² Time, they argued, is brought about as the physical reality of our universe brings friction and resistance to that constant state of destruction and renewal.³³ Fiction, on the other hand, though often representing actual reality, is independent of

³⁰ Ingarden 252.

³¹ Ingarden 354

³² Poulet specifies “Medieval Christians,” but this belief was by no means limited to Christians, widely shared by a number of different cultures and religious faiths.

it, and, with its points of indeterminacy is only limited by the turn of a page. Things may not happen instantaneously, but in the length of a sentence we may travel a thousand miles, and in the span of a second; a thousand years. Centuries later, Poulet recounts that the French philosopher Descartes often worried that our universe, existing in that permanent state of flux, might at any moment be reconstructed in some wildly new way.³⁴ However unlikely this may seem within our sphere of reality, within the unique world of fiction it is very much possible. Again, with that ability to leave certain pieces out, an author is able to destroy and recreate his universe in an instant and then, if he wishes, destroy and recreate it all over again, each time forming it completely anew. His only limits are his own, including his desire to mimic the nature of the actual and the real. That desire, though, is not a minor one.

Summarizing the beliefs of Molière, Poulet adds that *ridicule* is "the immediate perception of a sudden perturbation in the order of human duration."³⁵ In other words, for *ridicule* to work something out of order has to happen, something unexpected. The same thing might be said about most adventure literature, particularly detective fiction. For it to work, something contrary to normal human duration has to happen. A dead body, for instance, has to turn up at the most inappropriate time in the most inappropriate place. So, in Akunin's case there is even an expectation that his fictional world will be recreated in some unexpected and surprising way. But there are those self-imposed restrictions. Does the author, for example, want his novel to be remotely plausible or even remotely comprehensible? Akunin has chosen to write historical detective fiction. The importance of this distinction has already been discussed:

³³ George Poulet, *Studies in Human Time* trans. Elliot Coleman (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1956) 3-5.

³⁴ Poulet 58.

³⁵ Poulet 100.

if Moscow is suddenly transported to the planet Mars or the Bolshevik revolution takes place in 1870 instead of 1917, then the work is no longer "historical."

Bakhtin, too, notes the nature of *ridicule* and even suggests that the origin of the novel itself is parody. Epics, Bakhtin reasons, presented a world that was historically remote. They portrayed environments that were self-enclosed with no connections to our own. "[C]ompleted and locked in a circle," their characters were immutable, remaining unchanged over time.³⁶ Parody broke down these boundaries, portraying the epic landscape and its heroes as imperfect and incomplete. Now there was growth and change in narrative, and its presented reality seemed closer to actual reality. "Laughter," Bakhtin concludes, "has the remarkable power of making an object come up close."³⁷ Parody and satire have the ability to close the gaps of time and space, and to bring things historically and physically remote forward, with greater clarity.

While examining the philosophy of Pascal, Poulet explains: "Human time first appears, then basically to be preservation. Knowledge depends upon reason, and reason depends on the preservation faculty, on memory." Later he adds: "The rational present is a 'progress' of the prolonged past."³⁸ This is applicable, again, to detective literature. In his introduction to Dashiell Hammett's *The Continental Op*, Stephen Marcus explains that in detective fiction the hero "invariably walks into a situation that has already been elaborately fabricated or framed." The detective's job is then to dispel the fabrication and discover the actual sequence of events.³⁹ In a certain sense, the detective does not have memory because the past is a mystery. At first, there is no rational present because something has happened, a murder, a robbery, for which

³⁶ Bakhtin 19.

³⁷ Bakhtin 23.

³⁸ Poulet 76-77.

³⁹ Stephen Marcus, introduction, *The Continental Op*, by Dashiell Hammett (New York: Vintage 1992) xx.

there is no explanation, and the moments preceding the crime are unknown. The detective navigates the novel's world of time and space trying to find that past and return the world to the rational present on which reason is based. This lack of rationality *does* apply to the reader, but *more* specifically to the characters. It is *their* world—their sense of preservation and progress—after all, which has been disrupted, not ours. We are only reading about it; only vicariously sharing their alarm. There is, though, a disruption of time that applies more specifically to the reader.

Husserl defines the term “temporality,” explaining that it is “a necessary form binding experiences with experiences, and that “[e]very real experience is one that endures [...] that at once tells us that it belongs to one endless ‘*stream of experience*’.”^{40, 41} When we immerse ourselves in the fictional world of a novel, we temporarily lay that sense of duration aside. Experiences are not necessarily bound together; in fact, with its moments of indeterminacy, a novel may allow any amount of undescribed time to pass and with it a complete change of setting. Years, for example, can pass unaccounted for between just two chapters and the action completely relocated to another country. There is a connection here to more abstract forms of representative art. Derek Maus, examining the paintings of Pavel Filonov, notes “the fragmentation of bodies” in that artist’s works.⁴² Instead of a creating a single blended image, Filonov uses “a collection of smaller formal elements,” separated by broad outlines, to create a fractured but unified whole.⁴³ Novelists also have the of option of using fragmented and jarring, rather than smooth, transitions between each change of scene, thereby creating a sense of

⁴⁰ The emphases in this quotation are Husserl’s.

⁴¹ Husserl 236.

⁴² Derek Maus, “Space, Time and Things Made ‘Strange’: Anrei Belyi, Pavel Filonov, and Theory of Forms,” *Studies in Slavic Cultures* 1 (2000): 91.

⁴³ Maus 91.

disorientation, with experiences not so much bound, as thrown together. This technique is particularly effective in a work of detective fiction where the theme is often that same feeling of disorientation and confusion. Without the preservation faculty of memory, the reader is a kind of amnesiac, totally reliant on others—the narrator, the characters—to explain that unknown interval. Like the detective, whose adventures, we, as readers, are following, we might very well find those others uncooperative, or still worse, unreliable. And, again, like that detective, we lack a rational present, because we also lack a prolonged past, having surrendered our normal sense of orientation to a fictional world.

Throughout his study, Poulet also repeats the notion that human time is framed by two great voids: one which precedes our birth, and one which follows our death. Novels too are framed by voids; like life, one precedes the first page and another follows the last. In their attempts to mimic reality, however, authors often create the illusion that their fictional worlds extend into those voids, that somehow this world existed long before we first encountered it and will continue to exist even after we have left. This has odd significance for a recurring series where the author's represented universe *has* existed before, and, depending on the success of each new installment, will continue to exist in the future.

Horst Ruthrof's *The Reader's Construction of Narrative* (1981) also has implications for the study of time and space. In it, Ruthrof stresses the separation of presentational process and presentational world.⁴⁴ How the story is told and the story itself are two different, though interrelated, things, and one is not necessarily more important than the other. There have been some novels, for example, with very little presented world at all; the emphasis instead was placed on the peculiarities of the narrator rather than his actual narrative.⁴⁵ As noted by David

⁴⁴ Horst Ruthrof, *The Reader's Construction of Narrative* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 6.

McCullough in his introduction to the anthology *Great Detectives* (1984), in terms of content, most detective novels are very much the same.⁴⁶ Some authors may emphasize sex and violence a little more, others the power of analytical reasoning, but they still all share a similar story structure. There is some sort of mysterious event—a murder without any witnesses, or a person disappears without a trace. Often a conclusion is reached that is not only wrong, but maybe even fabricated—someone, for instance, is falsely accused. The detective starts his investigation. People are suspected, then not suspected, then suspected again. There are several false leads until finally there is one final denouement and everything is explained. What separates a good detective story from a bad one is the way it is told. The presentational process is equally if not more important than the presented world.

Akunin uses a narrator that speaks in a nineteenth-century tone (overwrought description, chapter headings etc.). His novels work as both parody of and homage to nineteenth-century literature and in that case the presentational process is as important as the presented world. This, in fact, leads to another important point raised by Ruthrof—the spatiotemporal location of the narrator. The narrator and the author are not always the same person, and they often occupy entirely different worlds.⁴⁷ This is, perhaps, most obvious in those first person works where the narrator identifies himself as the major participant in a story or at least a contemporary of his characters. In addition to this, however, one could argue that even without an explicit statement of spatiotemporal location, it is often possible to place the narrator in an entirely different sphere than his creator. In parody and homage again, for example, authors often adopt literary styles

⁴⁵ Ruthrof 16;21.

⁴⁶ David W. McCullough, foreward, *Great Detectives: A Century of the Best Mysteries from England and America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) ix.

⁴⁷ Ruthrof 24-25.

that are not their own, and, using outdated, even archaic language, place their works, including their narrators, in a different place and era.

Ruthrof also discusses the concept of noetic and noematic readings of texts. The term noetic, he explains, refers "to the act of experiencing," while noematic refers "to what has been experienced." Readers first encounter a novel noetically; not necessarily knowing what the future will bring, each page is a revelation. Then, having completed the text, the reader can look back at all of its events noematically and see a pattern or an overlying story arc.⁴⁸ This bears some comparison to F.K. Stanzel's work *A Theory of Narrative* (1979), which also explores the nature of narration. Stanzel discusses a phenomenon he calls the "reflectorization" of narrative at length. Narratives, he explains, are often hijacked by reflector characters.⁴⁹ Instead of a distinct authorial voice, the novel seems to unfold through the direct experiences of a character. There is a spatiotemporal shift from a narrator who sees the story noematically as a whole, to a character, who, like the reader, experiences it all as step-by-step revelation, noetically. The effect is a kind of immediacy, as if the story is unfolding here and now, and not in the past.⁵⁰ There is also the strange sense of temporarily occupying another person's space. In *Ideas*, Husserl explains that "we have primordial experience of ourselves and states of consciousness [...] but not of others and their vital experiences."⁵¹ Even if it were mentally possible to adopt another person's exact perceptions, it would remain physically impossible, because no two things can occupy the exact same space. Failing to share the exact same spatial location and orientation, the perception would inevitably be changed, however slightly. Reflectorization is

⁴⁸ Ruthrof vii; 75.

⁴⁹ F.K. Stanzel, *Theory of Narrative* trans. Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 48.

⁵⁰ Stanzel 5.

⁵¹ Husserl 51-52.

not a primordial experience, but it tries to come as close as possible by creating the *illusion* that the reader is experiencing the world directly as another person. This is all part of a larger concept that Stanzel labels “the mediacy of presentation.”⁵² Like Ruthrof, he too stresses the separation of presented world and presentational process. “Whenever a piece of news is conveyed, whenever something is reported,” he states, “there is a mediator—the voice of a narrator is audible.”⁵³ Stanzel labels this phenomenon “mediacy,” which he argues is the defining characteristic of narration. Reflectorization is a process where the narrator’s voice is suppressed in favour of the direct or immediate impressions of a character. Stanzel adds that there are also “zero grades of mediacy,” in which information is reported directly to the reader, and not passed through a mediator or teller.⁵⁴ The early use of synoptic chapter headings, he argues, is one example,⁵⁵ although it should, perhaps, be further added that irony is often used to infuse these cases of zero grade mediacy with a distinct narrative voice. The use of chapter headings in a contemporary work of literature, for example, can act as a kind of temporal marker that lend the work a distinctly nineteenth-century tone. Are we then receiving the information directly? Or is it being passed first through the prism of an earlier time?

Ruthrof and Stanzel’s observations on narrative invite further examination of those of Edmund Husserl. In *Ideas*, the phenomenologist states: “I am aware of a world, spread out in space endlessly, and in time becoming and become, without end. I am aware of it that means, first of all, I discover it immediately, intuitively.” He adds, “corporeal things somehow spatially

⁵² Stanzel 4.

⁵³ Stanzel 4.

⁵⁴ Stanzel 22.

⁵⁵ Stanzel 47.

distributed are *for me simply there*⁵⁶ [...] whether or not I pay them special attention by busying myself with them.”⁵⁷ We have already discussed the reader’s actualization of the author’s fictional world. It is the process by which the reader mentally envisions the material he or she is reading. As Roman Ingarden strenuously states in his definition of the literary art form, however, this process should not be confused with the fictional world or the novel itself. There is a concrete text, with certain specific words, saying certain specific things, all building up to a certain presented world. That text, including the world it contains, is a corporeal thing onto itself. It exists whether we as readers busy ourselves with it—in other words, read it—or not. A reader’s actualization of a work, after all, is open to misreading, misinterpretation, and even biases, which do not at all belong to the work itself.⁵⁸ Some readers, for example, may choose to skip a few lines, lightly skim over a few pages, or even omit an entire chapter or two. In this case their perception of the text is incomplete and possibly wrong, and what they have actualized in their mind is perhaps an entirely different thing than that with which they have been presented. It is exactly that word—“presented”—in which the distinction lies. The missing lines in the previous example continue to exist even if I fail to notice them, just as the entire novel continues to exist even if I fail to notice it. In fact, they continue to exist even if everyone fails to notice or read them. The novel is not defined by its actualization, but by its potential to be actualized; in order to exist, a novel must first be presented or, more specifically, narrated.

As stated before, the presented world extends beyond what has strictly been described. Nevertheless, it does not extend endlessly into time and space; it has limits, however vague, and those limitations are an important factor in any literary work, especially the novel. These limits

⁵⁶ Emphasis is Husserl’s.

⁵⁷ Husserl 102.

⁵⁸ Ingarden 12-16.

are particularly connected to this notion of narrative. In a narrative, for example, time and space are more than connected; they are interdependent. Only one thing can be presented or narrated at a time. A man, for example, may walk through a door and immediately perceive a room and its contents spread out before him. In the real world this happens, as Husserl describes it, immediately and intuitively. All the contents of the room exist simultaneously and at once, and the man senses them all in an instant. Also, the contents of the room continue to exist whether or not he notices or perceives them. This is true in literature as well: those reading a narrative may very well decide not to read a description of a room and its contents, but regardless of what they do, that description continues to exist. The difference lies in the nature of narration. The existence of the room and its contents rely not on my perception, but on the author's presentation, or that process of making perception possible. It needs, in other words, to be narrated, but narration takes time: first the narrator tells us that there is a table, then, next to it, a chair, and above the chair there follows a window. One thing follows another—*first* the table, *then* the chair—and no two things can be brought into existence at once. After all, the process of saying something only allows one word at a time, and the word remains the fundamental building block of literature. The existence of a fictional world, as well as our spatial orientation within it, is a function of time. The opposite might also be said to be true. If the fictional world remains unchanged; if there is not, at least, some change in spatial orientation, then how else is the passing of time to be felt? If there is no sense of movement or action in space, then the fictional world remains temporally frozen. The narrator needs to be able to tell something for his narration to exist, to document some progress from one state to another. Without it, his narration, with its fictional passing of time, is brought to a stand still: the man, for instance, from the previous example sits down and nothing else follows. He does not move and everything

about him—his presence in space—remains exactly the same, as do all the things that surround him. There is nothing here to mark the passage of time and nothing to distinguish it from a static vignette; a still portrait expressed in words rather than paint.

The finite quality of narration and its presented world places limitations on the reader's freedom of perception. Husserl's phenomenology, as described in *Ideas*, sees apprehension as "a singling out" —a conscious process by which we can choose what we draw our attention to and perceive more deeply.⁵⁹ Later, Husserl uses a metaphor to describe this process, comparing it to "a bright cone of light," which to some extent can be thrown consciously on those things with which we wish to busy ourselves. Some things fall into the light, and others fall out, depending on where we choose to cast it. In fiction, however, we lack that freedom. We cannot perceive a thing without first being shown it and that process of showing has been left entirely to the author and the narration he has created. The real universe is something we can explore endlessly and at will. In contrast, there is just so much of a fictional universe to see: in fact, only that which we are allowed to see. We explore this other world under the careful watch of a guide, a narrator, who, taking hold of our hand, leads us with a firm grip. We as readers are not at liberty, because, once again, we have temporarily surrendered that liberty. There are strong implications here for detective literature and adventure/suspense literature in general. In reality dark corners and long black alleys can be frightening, but we can always relieve ourselves of fear and suspense by simply investigating those dark spaces. While reading fiction we can only wait patiently in a state of suspense until we are told what lurks in that dark corner, or down that long black alley. We remain subject to the author, his or her narration and narrator, and to the step-by-step revelation of space through time.

⁵⁹ Husserl 117.

IV. Conclusion

Matters such as these are at the heart of this thesis, highlighting the peculiar relationship between fiction and reality, and, in turn, the distinction between time and space in both. Akunin as both literary critic and translator of literary works is undoubtedly familiar with many of the notions discussed here, but whether he considers them all consciously as he composes his own fiction is another question. What is, however, without question is that each of these phenomena can be observed in his work, and Akunin, whatever his conscious intent may be, is forced, as all authors are, to confront, adapt to, and manipulate them, often to great effect, as the chapters that follow will demonstrate.

Chapter 1: Time in *Azazel'*

I. Narration and Time

It is important to note that Boris Akunin and his narrator are not the same person. Instead it may be helpful to think of the narrator of this novel as a character that the author has temporarily assumed. Akunin is no more synonymous with his narrator than actors are with the roles they assume when they walk on stage. There is, for example, a key separation between the point of view of the writer and his narrator. Akunin, of course, writes from the twenty-first century, but his narrator speaks in a distinctly nineteenth century tone and seems to view the events as a contemporary rather than as a writer of historical fiction. Exploring the future of Russian postmodernism, Natal'ia Ivanova suggests that writers “absorb successful practices and methods, filtering out the superfluous and the unnecessary, discarding the flabby and tired, the pulpy and overwrought.”¹ Akunin, however, embraces the “pulpy and overwrought,” and using it places his detective novels stylistically in the nineteenth century. The opening paragraphs of *Azazel'*, for example, are characteristically florid:

По аллеям, среди цветущих кустов сирени и пылающих алыми тюльпанами клумб прогуливалась нарядная публика — дамы под кружевными (чтоб избежать веснушек) зонтиками, бонны с детьми в матросских костюмчиках, скучающего вида молодые люди в модных шевиотовых сюртуках либо в коротких на английский манер пиджаках.²

These lines would seem more at home in a Victorian newspaper than a piece of twenty-first-century literature, and, indeed, as we will see later in this thesis, Akunin actually uses nineteenth-

¹ Natal'ia Ivanova, “The Life and Death of the Simulacrum in Russia,” *Russian Studies in Literature* 38 (2002) 49.

² Boris Akunin, *Azazel'* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002) 3.

century newspaper excerpts to begin each chapter in *Turetskii gambit*. Akunin even uses the descriptive chapter titles of a Dickensian serial. Chapter twelve of *Azazel*, for example, is titled “в которой герой узнает, что у него вокруг головы нимб,”³ while chapter fifteen is “в которой убедительнейшим образом доказывается важность правильного дыхания.”⁴

F.K. Stanzel identified the early use of the synoptic chapter heading as a case of zero grade mediacy, an example of information being passed directly to the reader without the interference of a narrator.⁵ Even those headings that took a sardonic approach to the material, departing from a mere summary of the ensuing chapter, were meant to be seen as something separate from the narrative itself—a rare case, perhaps, of a writer sharing a brief moment of self-parody directly with his audience. For that brief moment, a writer might step back from his text, and laugh with his reader at its absurdities. They could also have an enigmatic quality, enticing the reader with mystery rather than humor. Something short and cryptic could leave an audience anxious about its potential significance and questioning possible implications for the protagonist, with whom they had invested so much time. Akunin’s chapter headings in *Azazel* employ both approaches, often simultaneously. Chapter fourteen, for example, reads simply: “в которой повествование поворачивает совсем в иную сторону.”⁶ This kind of extraneous commentary helped create a more intimate rapport between author and reader, slyly coaxing that reader to continue further into the text. Synoptic chapter headings, in any form, however, have largely fallen out of fashion in modern fiction. Novels of the nineteenth century were often published in serial format, but this is no longer the case. There is no longer any need to entice

³ Akunin, *Azazel* 208.

⁴ Akunin, *Azazel* 278.

⁵ F.K. Stanzel, *Theory of Narrative* trans. Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 37.

⁶ Akunin, *Azazel* 258.

readers to purchase each ensuing chapter of a novel: if they are reading it, then they most likely already own it in its entirety. Therefore the use of these headings is no longer just a case of an author sharing a witty aside with his readers, or providing some enigmatically worded clue. Their use is so dated that they have become an obvious artifice—a narrative affectation. Akunin is not simply telling a detective story—he has adopted the role of a nineteenth-century writer telling a detective story. That writer uses the same devices and stylizations as so many of his nineteenth-century contemporaries, including synoptic chapter headings. Those headings, consequently, can not be called cases of zero-grade mediacy. There is nothing immediate about them at all. They are an outmoded literary device, belonging to another century; a characteristic affectation of our narrator, a nineteenth-century writer. With plain irony, Akunin casts his works as actual artifacts of the nineteenth century rather than just retrospective examinations of the period. They are clearly part of the artificial and highly stylized narrative the author has adopted in order to give his novel a more authentic nineteenth-century tone

The narrator shares other characteristics with his nineteenth-century contemporaries, and at least one specifically with his Russian peers: a tendency towards the same insignificant office workers and various *чиновники* so often found, for example, in the works of Gogol and Dostoevsky. In a work of detective fiction, a perspective tied closely to the protagonist or one of his allies is more or less necessary. An overly broad perspective allowing insights into the minds of the villains, as well as the heroes, would give away the mystery. Akunin's third person narrator follows Fandorin quite closely, but occasionally allows slight diversions, temporarily assuming the perspective of various small-fry—office clerks, low-ranking administrators, office assistants, etc—seeing Fandorin from the outside. After returning to Russia from London, for instance, Fandorin is seen from the perspective of a bewildered postal worker, who, mistaking

the detective for an Englishmen (Fandorin is still in foreign dress), wonders what the strange foreigner might be doing in his particular office.⁷ The narrator even supplies a surprising amount of superfluous detail concerning the postal worker's work and career in general, especially considering that he is never mentioned beyond this brief passage, and plays no larger role in the novel:

Служитель (впрочем, назовем его по имени — Кондратий Кондратьевич Штукин, семнадцать лет службы по почтовому ведомству, славный путь от простого почтальона к классному чину) выдал бандероль из Ревеля пожилой чухонке со смешной фамилией Пырву и посмотрел, сидит ли еще англичанин.⁸

Even Xavier Grushin, from whose perspective we first meet Fandorin, is revealed to be little more than a petty bureaucrat and a relatively unimportant government functionary. When the supposedly simple case of the nihilist suicide balloons into much larger conspiracy, he is carefully brushed aside to make way for a younger, much more competent inspector. His lack of real importance is only too clear, when, faced with questions of professional incompetence, he implores Erast, his underling, “не подведите старика. Кто же знал, что так дело повернется?”⁹ Erast Fandorin, himself, at least in the beginning, is also a low ranking cog in the giant machine of government bureaucracy. Before being assigned to his first investigation, he sits at a desk filling out weekly reports, occupying the lowest position in the civil service's table of ranks—collegiate registrar or civil servant fourteenth class. His modest apartment is described both as a narrow box and a kennel, not unlike the quarters of another nineteenth century protagonist, albeit on the opposite side of the law—Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov.

⁷ Akunin, *Azazel* 227-228

⁸ Akunin, *Azazel* 227

⁹ Akunin, *Azazel* 92

That concentration on lower-to-mid-level bureaucrats, office workers, and ineffectual superfluous men is another example of narrative content lending this text a nineteenth-century tone.

II. Reader and Time

Boris Akunin sets his novels in the nineteenth century, but he remains, of course, a contemporary writer, writing for a contemporary audience. This may, perhaps, seem overly obvious, but its implications are not. There is a constant exchange here between the actual twentieth-to-twenty-first-century world in which the novels have been written and are being read, and the fictional representation of the nineteenth century in which the narrative takes place. In addition, there was an actual, physical nineteenth century, with which the reader may be familiar, or choose to become familiar. Though only a fictional representation of that historical reality, Akunin's presented world cannot avoid comparisons with its factual inspiration, and, indeed, it invites them. *Azazel'*, for example, is littered with historical references and allusions, which, more than serving just as temporal markers—creating a convincing backdrop of the period—are often foreboding and ironic. That sense, though, of foreboding and irony is only appreciable from the contemporary perspective of the author and his readers. The narrator and the characters are all nineteenth-century personae or, at least, reasonable facsimiles of such, and are unable to perceive their world as something already lying in the past, with the specific defining characteristics of something that is complete and shut-off. Nor can they appreciate its peculiar relation to a future, which, from their perspective, has not yet happened.

In the first chapter of *Azazel'*, Xavier Grushin, Erast Fandorin's superior at the Criminal Investigation Division of the Moscow Police, having read the headline “Зверства турецких

башибузуков в Болгарии,” responds facetiously, “Ну, это не для предобеденного чтения.”¹⁰

As twenty-first-century readers, we, of course, know, or, at least, are able to know, that this headline is an omen of a fast approaching war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and that it, perhaps, deserves much more serious attention from Grushin. He, though, is incapable of appreciating that fact, and not knowing the future in foresight, as we do in hindsight, is unable to see anything inappropriate in his joke. We, nevertheless, can, and this ability lends his witticism a level of irony which he never intended.

Another example of this phenomenon is the repeated mention of great nineteenth-century writers as talented contemporaries or esteemed representatives of modern culture, rather than figures of immense historical significance. In chapter one, for example, Grushin, continues to read from a newspaper. One of the articles laments the recent rash of nihilist inspired suicides, and its fictional author exclaims:

Как кстати тут слова почтеннейшего Федора Михайловича Достоевского из только что вышедшей майской книжки «Дневника писателя»: «Милые, добрые, честные (все это есть у вас!), куда же это вы уходите, отчего вам так мила стала эта темная, глухая могила? Смотрите, на небе яркое весеннее солнце, распустились деревья, а вы устали не живши.»^{11, 12}

The author of this article certainly admires Dostoevsky, and, even reveres him, but there is a familiarity here not normally associated with a writer of Dostoevsky’s stature and especially with one who has been dead for over a hundred and twenty years. That familiarity is largely temporal. From our perspective—the perspective of a twenty-first-century audience—

¹⁰ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 13.

¹¹ The italics are Akunin’s separating the words of the article’s author from the rest of the narrative.

¹² Akunin, *Azazel*’ 16.

Dostoevsky is an almost iconic figure, whose reputation has been forged after decades of critical interpretation. To the author of this article, however, Dostoevsky is a contemporary writer, a representative of modern culture, whose last book was released only in May, and whose work is most appropriately applied to a very specific syndrome of nineteenth-century Russia. He can not see Dostoevsky or his *Notes of a Writer* as being far more historically significant, because he can not see the time in which he lives as history. He cannot, for instance, appreciate the prophetic quality of the writer's entreaties or their ultimate impotence, particularly when one considers the nihilist assassinations of the later nineteenth century, or the wars and revolutions of the early twenty-first. These things and the yet to be fulfilled future of which they are a part are only known by Akunin and his readers, who, consequently, are the only ones able to appreciate the sense of irony and foreboding they help create.

Later, in chapter seven, explaining her pedagogical method, Lady Astair tells Erast Fandorin: “Есть очень милый североамериканский писатель, которого зовут Марк Туэйн. Я подсказала ему идею рассказа, в котором людей оценивают не по их реальным достижениям, а по тому потенциалу, по тому таланту, который был в них заложен природой.”¹³ In this case there is an even greater sense of informality and familiarity. Mark Twain, from Lady Astair's perspective is merely a “very dear” American writer who can be readily approached with new story ideas. He has not yet achieved that austere quality that only time can give, and Lady Astair has no way of knowing how great a figure in American and world literature he will become. The off-hand way in which she shares this anecdote about Twain, and the fact that she has to first explain that there is a writer Mark Twain is only ironic from our perspective because we have the benefit of hindsight—the benefit of knowing the historical and cultural stature Mark Twain will assume.

¹³ Akunin, *Azazel* 111-112.

Though the future is unstated in this text, we are able to draw from our own store of information—to fill in that indeterminacy with those aspects held in readiness first noted by Roman Ingarden. We have information that the narrator and the characters do not and with that information we were able to detect the above instances of irony and foreboding. Other indeterminacies are not so readily filled in. Akunin, for example, sometimes allows undescribed amounts of time to pass between chapters. These gaps in the narrative are often quite large, and leave the reader temporarily disoriented, at least until an account of the missing interval is given later in the chapter. Between chapters nine and ten of *Azazel'*, for example, several weeks pass, as Fandorin takes his investigation to London. Chapter ten's opening words, "28 июня по западному стилю, а по-русскому 16-го," inform the reader that some time has passed since the last chapter, but that interval is not described.¹⁴ With its sudden shift in dates and location, Fandorin almost seems to have appeared in England instantaneously. Akunin further broadens the separation between the two chapters by pairing the shift forward in time with an abrupt change in point of view. *Azazel'*'s third person narrator usually follows Fandorin quite closely, viewing the world through the young detective's eyes, and documenting his inner impressions and feelings. With a shift in time and scene, however, the narrator often temporarily assumes the view of other characters seeing Fandorin from the outside. The beginning of chapter ten, for instance, refers to Fandorin namelessly as "the young man," and sees him from the point of view of a hotel porter. Fandorin's appearance has suddenly changed—dressed extravagantly and sporting an obviously fake mustache—and he is now traveling under an assumed name—*господин фон Дорн* from Helsinki, Finland.¹⁵ From the porter's point of view, the reader can only guess at the change and Fandorin's motives. We as readers lack the binding experience that

¹⁴ Akunin, *Azazel'* 154.

¹⁵ Akunin, *Azazel'* 154-156.

connects Fandorin in Moscow on the twenty-eighth of May to Fandorin in London on the sixteenth of June. The interval between the two chapters is only partially filled after approximately seven pages of text with the sentence: “Путешествие по Европе оказалось менее приятным, чем полагал вначале окрыленный Фандорин.”¹⁶ Only now is Fandorin’s journey from Moscow even vaguely described. Until this point, we can assume that such a journey existed, but have no way of knowing any of its details, including the obstacles and delays which Fandorin faced. Of course, the character, Erast Fandorin, undoubtedly remembers his journey and its complications, but all *we* know is what Akunin has chosen to tell us, and that is deliberately delayed in order to forge a sense of temporal disorientation and confusion. From our perspective, Fandorin is being breathlessly flung from one adventure to another.

Novels are also bound by two great indeterminacies—the voids that precede a narrative’s beginning and follow its end. The first void is bridged quite effectively in detective fiction, where an investigator often unveils a much deeper conspiracy and far more complex motive behind the seemingly straightforward crime with which the narrative often begins. *Azazel*’ is such a case. Fandorin is first presented with a public suicide. Further investigation, however, reveals another student, and a nihilistic pact between the two to play an inevitably fatal game of Russian, or as Akunin renames it, American roulette. Still further investigation reveals a love interest and the source of rivalry between the two young men. The love interest, of course, has a dubious past and turns out to be an orphan and student of Lady Astair. Coincidentally, the deceased admirer has left his entire estate to Astair’s orphanages. The investigation takes Fandorin further and further into the past until, in the novel’s climactic scenes, Lady Astair explains the origins of her secret society. At its conclusion the detective’s journey has led him

¹⁶ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 161.

back forty years before the novel's opening suicide, and twenty years before he was even born. The illusion is that this presented world has existed decades before we first encountered it.

Akunin creates the same illusion using other means as well. One such device is the periodic revelation of elements in Erast Fandorin's past. In the first chapter, as Xavier Grushin looks benevolently on his young assistant, the narrator notes a genuine sympathy, explaining:

Девятнадцати лет от роду остался круглым сиротой — матери сызмальства не знал, а отец, горячая голова, пустил состояние на пустые прожекты, да и приказал долго жить. [. . .] Мальчику бы гимназию закончить, да в университет, а вместо этого — изволь из родных стен на улицу, зарабатывай кусок хлеба.¹⁷

The events described in this passage lie outside the novel's strict chronology, and do little, if anything, to advance the plot, but they do bring an added level of temporal depth, as they give us the details of Fandorin's pedigree and the circumstances that led him to pursue a career in government service. In this same chapter, there is also the unique feeling of a world, or, at least, a particular office of the Moscow Police, that has been lived in. Grushin is obviously very comfortable here, and the atmosphere is almost stagnant, as he casually lays aside the day's reports, and lazily turns to the morning newspaper. He lectures Fandorin with the exaggerated pomposity of a bureaucrat who has held his position for countless years, and coolly decides, based on his questionable experience, that the boy will never make a real detective. The impression is of a dusty office, and a stale bureaucracy, that has existed, perhaps, for decades, and certainly for longer than the ten or twenty minutes it has taken us to read the novel's first fourteen pages.

The notion that this presented world will continue even after its last page is not quite as illusionary as the idea that it preceded the first. Akunin has written a dozen sequels to this book,

¹⁷ Akunin, *Azazel* 9.

all featuring Erast Fandorin in the lead, and so, in that case, it has continued. That knowledge, however, was not immediately available to the first readers of *Azazel'* in 1998, nor to its author, who could not have been certain that his novel's success would warrant a sequel. There are, though, other indicators that this world is meant to be seen as one that will continue to exist after the narrative's close. One such indicator is Akunin's choice of historical setting. This novel is very specifically set in late nineteenth-century Russia, and deals with the nihilistic and revolutionary sentiments that helped define that era. From the perspective of the reader in the twenty-first century, it is obvious that these conflicts were by no means resolved by Erast Fandorin's defeat of *Azazel'* in 1878. The novel may be fictional, but it is also historical, so the implication is that Erast Fandorin, as an officer of the secret police, will continue to be confronted with violent revolutionary groups: a conflict finally culminating with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Even without the hindsight of history, it is still possible to imagine some future existence for Erast Fandorin, his allies, and enemies. In the novel's final pages, the vengeful remnants of the now shattered *Azazel'* organization, send the detective a bomb disguised as a mock wedding gift. The ensuing explosion kills Fandorin's bride on the eve of their honeymoon, and the novel ends with Fandorin, staggering through the city streets in shock and disbelief. This ending shows a picture of potential domestic bliss, suddenly destroyed by an unexpected act of violence.¹⁸ The investigator will now have to devote his life to some other ideal than love, which has been so cruelly taken from him, but to what—possibly to revenge, his career, and a life long of struggle against crime—is left to the reader's imagination, at least until the series' next installment. There is no definitive conclusion and that fact creates the uncertainty that makes those musings possible. We as readers are led to believe that this narrative has a future beyond what has been strictly described.

¹⁸ Akunin, *Azazel'* 130-132.

III. The Characters and Their Presented World

Among other things, this narrative is a coming of age story—Erast Fandorin matures from a naïve young boy to a seasoned professional as he faces a seemingly endless series of obstacles. That process of maturation is largely a temporal one; it is not an exaggeration to say that with each passing moment, Fandorin collects more and more experiences, until, by the novel's conclusion, he appears to have aged physically, as well as mentally. Paradoxically, his investigation into the past is throwing him irretrievably into the future. In his book *Russian Literature, 1995-2002*, N.N. Shneidman complains that Erast Fandorin's character is "somewhat artificial" and overly "pragmatic" and "aloof."¹⁹ In later novels, Fandorin is certainly described in those terms, but *Azazel'* details a more complicated psychology. Instead, this novel traces the detective's maturation and development into a more experienced, and supposedly cold, emotionless figure.

When we first meet Fandorin he is still very much an adolescent indulging in petty adolescent vanities and entertaining childish fantasies. He is, for instance, overly concerned with his physical appearance, and is still very much prone to blushing when embarrassed. Both foibles are only too evident when Grushin laughingly reads him an advertisement for the latest innovation—the Lord Byron whalebone corset:

Он [Fandorin] отчего-то смешался, щеки залились краской, а длинные девичьи ресницы виновато дрогнули [. . .] Дело в том, что позавчера он потратил треть своего первого месячного жалования на столь завидно расписываемый корсет, ходил в «Лорде Байроне» второй день, терпя изрядные муки во имя красоты.²⁰

¹⁹ N.N. Shneidman, *Russian Literature, 1995-2002: On the Threshold of the New Millenium* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2004) 160.

²⁰ Akunin, *Azazel'* 12.

Ironically that corset later saves Fandorin's life, protecting him from a fatal stabbing. The novice sleuth is also convinced, like so many adolescents, that he is underappreciated and misunderstood, and, again, like so many adolescents, he fantasizes about his own death and how then, of course, *they'll all be sorry*. When Grushin mocks Fandorin's generation and its recent attraction to suicide, the budding detective, within the confines of his own youthful imagination, issues the following warning, "Раскаетесь, Ксаверий Феофилактович, да поздно будет," while morbidly pondering the image of his own lonely grave.²¹ That morbidity is little cause for concern, however, as the narrator notes that Fandorin's character is far too vivacious to ever really commit suicide. Instead it is merely the product of an immature mind. As the narrative progresses and he reaches further and further into the past, Fandorin becomes painfully more experienced and mature. Lady Astair, for example, turns out not to be the benign motherly figure that he had originally supposed. Instead she is a murderous fanatic, and Fandorin is taught to be more discerning and less trusting. In the novel's final chapter, aptly named "в которой герой прощается с юностью,"²² his wife is brutally murdered by vengeful Azazel' operatives on the eve of their honeymoon and his temples are left "stark white" as if "thickly coated with hoarfrost," an unfortunate physical sign of his growth and maturation.²³

Fandorin is led on that journey into experience by someone who perversely turns out to be his enemy—Ivan Brillig. Brillig is the secret police officer brought in to take over the investigation from Grushin after the son of an important diplomat is murdered. He is a noted man of the future, a harbinger of the twentieth century who approaches police work as science, embracing the latest innovations. His presence virtually transforms the staid offices of the

²¹ Akunin, *Azazel'* 31.

²² Akunin, *Azazel'* 319.

²³ Akunin, *Azazel'* 332.

Criminal Investigation Division of the Moscow Police. Much to Grushin's chagrin, for example, he replaces the division's coffee room with a communications centre, equipping it with an unheard of extravagance—its very own telegraph machine.²⁴ His St. Petersburg residence is even equipped with the latest technological marvel, *The Bell Apparatus*, more commonly known as the telephone.²⁵ He adopts Fandorin as his protégé and introduces the young novice to the techniques of modern investigation. It is from him that Fandorin picks up his trademark habit of ordering all of his arguments numerically, with the first point inevitably suffixed “это раз,” the second “это два,” and so forth. Unfortunately, Brillling also turns out to be an agent of Azazel', and all of his modern innovations are for naught, a means of stalling the investigation, ironically, rather than leading to any real progress. The future here is a clever ruse—a misdirection.

Even when Fandorin discovers that betrayal, neither he nor Brillling completely abandon the roles of pupil and mentor. In one of the novel's most unusual scenes, Brillling continues to lecture his young colleague even as he plans to kill him. Aiming a gun at his bewildered apprentice, he warns Fandorin with evident passion and sincerity: “Нельзя быть таким доверчивым, черт бы вас побрал! Верить можно только себе!”²⁶ This piece of advice is particularly interesting from a temporal perspective: Brillling is preparing Fandorin for a career, and, indeed, a future, he presumably will not have once his chief has pulled the trigger. In the struggle that ensues, the double agent is fortunately overpowered. Fandorin survives, and Brillling himself is killed. Despite being an imposter and a traitor, Brillling leaves an indelible mark on Fandorin. Fandorin retains the lessons imparted to him by the more experienced, albeit treasonous, detective, even adopting and continuing to display some of his ex-superior's

²⁴ Akunin, *Azazel'* 92.

²⁵ Akunin, *Azazel'* 235.

²⁶ Akunin, *Azazel'* 253.

mannerisms. He carries Brillings' experience and expert advice into the future, becoming his equal and replacement in almost every respect except one—his loyalty lies unquestionably with the Russian Empire—and following the more positive elements of Brillings' example, uses it, ironically, to destroy the organization with which Brillings' loyalties lay—Azazel'. Brillings has unwittingly prepared his own opponent for the obstacles that lie ahead, ensuring the inevitable defeat of the cause to which he devoted his life, and, in the end, for which he gave it.

Brillings is not the only man of the future who turns out to be a villain. Azazel' is, indeed, a very forward looking organization with its eyes always trained on those times yet to come. Lady Astair, its founder, for example, rejects antiquated notions of child rearing and adopts the latest innovations in child development and education. Her dedication to progress is clear as she proudly explains her pedagogical technique, adding, “Я очень хорошо плачу своим учителям, ибо педагогика — главнейшая из наук.”²⁷ She also explains that there are some children whose talents unfortunately are not required by nineteenth-century society, but that their abilities may have been more suited to the distant past or may yet be called upon in the future. Later, in her final confrontation with Fandorin, she elaborates, as she defends her most ruthless assassins:

Помните, мой друг, я говорила вам, что не каждому из моих детей удастся найти свой путь в современном мире, потому что их дарование осталось в далеком прошлом или же потребуется в далеком будущем? Так вот, из таких воспитанников получаются самые верные и преданные исполнители. Одни мои дети — мозг, другие — руки.²⁸

Lady Astair reduces pedagogy to a form of terrorism, using its latest findings to train an army of conspirators, and perhaps more chillingly, killers. Her insistence that particularly this last group

²⁷ Akunin, *Azazel'* 115.

²⁸ Akunin, *Azazel'* 316.

will be called upon in the future, is perhaps another ominous allusion to the turmoil that awaits Russia, as well as the wider world, in the twentieth century.

Villains, in fact, seem to have an insight into the future that the rest of their peers, including the narrator, lack. One of Lady Astair's henchmen, for instance, Professor Blank—a mad scientist and expert in electricity, with an avid interest in lobotomy—rightly predicts that electricity will revolutionize the world. “я считаю, что покорение электрической стихии — ключ к грядущему столетию,” he argues, adding, “мир преобразится до неузнаваемости, и свершится эта великая перемена благодаря электричеству.”²⁹ Blank, himself, is a walking allusion: his predictions are curiously similar to those made by Lenin to H.G. Wells in 1920, concerning the “electrification of Russia.”³⁰ Lady Astair, herself, notes that a “настоящая мирная революция” is taking place, arguing that her plans will thwart a much bloodier revolution. Additionally, she quite correctly anticipates unprecedented changes following her death. The future here is rather ambiguous, but if its representatives, with their complete willingness to abandon morality for a cause, are any indicator, then it is clearly something to be feared. Again, I suggest that Akunin is evoking the mayhem of the early twentieth-century, particularly the Russian revolutions of 1917.

Returning to Fandorin; one reason it is possible to track his struggle with inexperience and uncertainty is that Akunin makes liberal use of reflectorization, often preferring to give us direct access to the thoughts and feelings of his protagonist. One such example occurs as Fandorin, under cover, joins an illicit game of cards, a task for which he is woefully unprepared as a young innocent. He struggles even with the rules of the game, made evident by the frantic internal dialogue with which Akunin peppers the text, for example: “Как карта налево-то

²⁹ Akunin, *Azazel'* 301.

³⁰ Blank, in fact, is also the sir name of Lenin's maternal grandfather.

называлась? — не мог вспомнить Эраст Петрович. Вот эта «лоб», а вторая... черт. Неудобно. А ну как спросит? Подглядывать в шпаргалку было несолидно.”³¹ In this passage, the first and last sentences are clearly being delivered by the narrator, with Fandorin referred to in the third person, but what lies between—“Вот эта «лоб», а вторая... черт. Неудобно. А ну как спросит?”—are Fandorin’s direct thoughts, not marked by any identifying punctuation or italics and appearing in the present tense. As a reflector character, Fandorin is temporarily fulfilling the functions of the narrator, albeit from a completely different perspective, and his immediate impressions, the only means by which we can now perceive the novel, are equal to the previous description from that narrator. In fact, nothing is being described here, we as readers are *experiencing* the text just as Fandorin is. His thoughts are, in these instances, the only means by which the presented world is revealed—the narrator has stepped or has been momentarily pushed aside—and therefore it would be wrong to separate them from the rest of the narrative. For the time being, they *are* the narrative.

As the card game continues, Fandorin’s uncertainties continue to betray him to the reader, especially as he desperately tries to keep track of each hand: “Направо туз, налево тоже туз. У Зурова король. Направо дама, налево десятка. Направо валет, налево дама (что все-таки старше — валет или дама?). Направо семерка, налево шестерка.”³² At no point are these interjections introduced by the words “he thought” or any of their potential variations. This is not being reported to us in the traditional sense of the narrator telling us a narrative. Instead the narrative has reached such a point of intensity that the distance between us and the narrative is lost: again, we are witnessing it now just as Fandorin is, as something that is unfolding in the present tense or in “the here and now.”

³¹ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 129.

³² Akunin, *Azazel*’ 131.

These are true cases of immediacy, passed to the reader “wholesale,” without the apparent involvement of the narrator as intermediate. This, perhaps, goes a long way in restoring some of the suspense that is inevitably lost when an adventure is cast within the demanding framework of actual history. During these moments, we share Fandorin’s unease and the future no longer seems so certain. Fandorin’s future is our past, but in these moments that fact is easily forgotten or, at least, temporarily laid aside. The one hundred and twenty nine year gap that separates Fandorin’s nineteenth century and our twenty-first, as this thesis has already argued, is being collapsed and these events are occurring in “the here and now”; they are no longer part of a closed off past or part of a narrative already constructed, waiting to be told. Instead, they feel as if they belong to the living present, ready at any moment to take their own unforeseen direction, despite even the expectations and demands of the narrator and author, let alone those of the reader. Of course, this is an illusion—the author, at least, never relinquishes control of the narrative—but it is a convincing illusion, as that narrative rushes madly forward and we as readers share the bewilderment of its hero. And we cannot help but share this bewilderment, because for that moment Fandorin’s thoughts are our only means of experiencing the text. It is a curious form of time travel: as the temporal gap between reader and protagonist is closed, we assume the same position in time as a fictional character witnessing everything as a contemporary, never aware that this has all been settled long ago, because to him it has not been.

The use of reflectorization could be disastrous to other detective writers and their works. Delving so closely into the mind of the hero risks spoiling the mystery. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, could never reveal the intimate thoughts of his protagonist, Sherlock Holmes, at least not as the story is still unfolding or as Holmes is making his deliberations. Doyle’s investigator is so perspicacious that he may have solved the mystery long before it finally comes

to a close, or entertained strong suspicions at any rate, waiting only for the right, or perhaps the most dramatic, moment to expose the perpetrator. Fandorin, however, not possessing anywhere near as much experience, is, of course, not as astute. Therefore, in the novel's climactic scenes, when Fandorin arrives finally at Lady Astair's office, Akunin can safely include the following train of Fandorin's thoughts, without prematurely divulging the surprise yet to come:

Все сходилось! [. . .] Нелюди? Марсиане? Пришельцы из потустороннего мира?
Как бы не так! Они все — питомцы эстернатов, вот они кто! [. . .] Ну и семейка
из почти четырех тысяч гениев, разбросанных по всему миру! Ай да Каннингем, ай
да «лидерский талант»! Хотя стоп...³³

Fandorin is, and we through him are, just one step away from putting together the last piece of the puzzle. However, he is still so sufficiently naïve that he cannot bring himself to suspect someone so maternal and so apparently innocent as Lady Astair. Instead, he falsely concludes that Cunningham, her subordinate, was the mastermind of the Azazel' conspiracy, only realizing the truth, just after this train of thought, in a sudden, almost instantaneous, moment of serendipity. The drama of that revelation and its resulting confrontation is preserved by Fandorin's ignorance only seconds before. Fandorin's suspicions can be safely revealed because he is so consistently behind the course of events, or as Brillling tells him in their final confrontation, he is behind the times.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter, along with the chapters that follow it, has been divided into three sections—narrator and narration, reader and author, characters and their presented world—but these divisions, I admit, are somewhat arbitrary. As we have seen in this chapter there is, at least, a

³³ Akunin, *Azazel'* 287-288.

constant dialogue between these three perspectives, all within a temporal context. An exchange, for example, exists between the narrator and his characters, and all appear to belong somewhat to the same presented world. Likewise, there is an odd relationship between these nineteenth-century constructs and the author and his readers. We entertain a noematic appreciation of the general fate of these characters—the outcomes of history—even while noetically discovering their individual fates—the outcome of the mystery itself. The author and his readers, the characters, and the narrator all have information at some point that the others do not. The result is a persistent irony, with at least one group always in the dark, whether that be the reader, the narrator, or the characters, and the remaining two appreciating that fact at the other's expense.

Chapter 2: Space in *Azazel*'

I. Narration and Space

In the previous chapter, I noted that Akunin adopts the literary style of the era he is representing, even embracing many of its conventions and motifs, including repeated reference to *чиновники*. His portrayal of space, too, is often a continuation of this trend; corresponding with this repeated, even superfluous, mention of office workers and petty bureaucrats is a tendency towards offices, in general. Xavier Grushin's office at the Criminal Investigation Division of the Moscow Police, with its overwhelmingly stale atmosphere, is just one example, but the truth is that much of the action in *Azazel*' takes place in offices, including many of the novel's key, most climactic scenes. Lady Astair's co-conspirator and second-in-command, Cunningham, is mercilessly executed in his own office by Ivan Brillling, who then turns his gun on Fandorin in their final confrontation.¹ The scene that immediately follows that confrontation again takes place in an office—that of Adjutant General Lavrentii Arkadievich Mizonov, head of the Third Section, Imperial Russia's secret police, and Fandorin's newest mentor. Erast, in a moment of serendipity, realizes the truth about Lady Astair, sitting directly in front of her, across her desk.² Later, when Fandorin escapes mad scientist Dr. Blank, he finds Astair seated in yet another office, situated in a kind of underground bunker, equipped with the requisite two chairs and a desk.³ Lady Astair even dies in it. Having let Fandorin go, in a rare moment of mercy, she detonates an explosive device, destroying the room, the secret documents it housed, and, presumably, herself.^{4, 5} Again, like his predecessors Gogol and Dostoevsky, Akunin chooses to

¹ Akunin, *Azazel*' 251-252.

² Akunin, *Azazel*' 288-289.

³ Akunin, *Azazel*' 316-318.

place much of his drama in the least glamorous of settings—a dry room with chairs and a desk. And, again, he is deliberately aging his works by manipulating the content of his narration, posing it as a literary artifact of the nineteenth century.

Akunin’s depiction of Victorian London is still another example of how he manipulates the content of his narration in order to give his work a sense of nineteenth-century authenticity. Akunin’s London is a gothic wasteland. A ghetto, blackened with soot and fog, with danger lurking around every corner, it pays tribute to those dark, menacing depictions of the city that dominate, for example, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories, Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stoker’s *Dracula*, and, of course, the novels of Charles Dickens (including, especially, *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*). It appears almost supernaturally ominous, particularly as Fandorin first notes the polluted Thames:

А затем показалась и серая, неуютная в вечерних сумерках Темза. Глядя на ее грязные воды, Эраст Петрович поежился, и его почему-то охватило мрачное предчувствие. В этом чужом городе он вообще чувствовал себя неуютно. Встречные смотрели мимо, ни один не взглянул в лицо, что, согласитесь, в Москве было бы абсолютно невообразимо.⁶

The narrator calls London a “чужой, угрожающе безмолвный город.”⁷ It appears still more foreboding, when, after a stakeout takes a disastrous turn, Fandorin wisely decides to switch

⁴ The novel leaves Lady Astair’s supposed demise an open question. While there is no apparent means of escape, no remains are discovered—perhaps to be expected in an explosion of this magnitude—and the curiously worded note that accompanies that bomb that kills Fandorin’s bride is written in her hand.

⁵ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 316-318.

⁶ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 160.

⁷ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 160.

residences, and moves into the Ferry Road guesthouse. The novice sleuth has chosen an overwhelmingly dismal neighbourhood, and the city is presented here at its most sinister:

На Собачьем острове, в узких улочках за Миллуолскими доками, ночь наступает быстро. Не успеешь оглянуться, а сумерки из серых уже стали коричневыми, и редкие фонари горят через один. Грязно, уныло, от Темзы потягивает сыростью, от помоек гнилью. И пусто на улицах, только у подозрительных пабов и дешевых мебелишек копошится какая-то нехорошая, опасная жизнь.^{8,9}

This is more than an attempt to recreate London as it existed in the nineteenth century; this is a distinctly literary London—the kind of London one can find in so many Victorian novels. That the English capital struggled with poverty and slum housing, and that the Thames was polluted are matters of historical fact, but Akunin’s narrator is doing much more than just repeating that fact. He is reveling in it, suffusing it with his own narrative voice—perhaps even embracing, using Ivanova’s words, “the pulpy and overwrought”—bringing to the narrative a kind of gothic romanticism that would, again, belong more to the nineteenth century, rather than the twenty-first.

Akunin’s treatment of St. Petersburg is also intentionally dated. In this case, he utilizes the great nineteenth-century divide between slavophiles and westernizers, employing the

⁸ The passage is relentlessly dark, continuing in this vein:

В номерах «Ферри-роуд» живут списанные на берег матросы, мелкие аферисты и стареющие портовые шлюхи. Плати шесть пенсов в день и живи себе в отдельной комнате с кроватью — никто не сунет нос в твои дела. Но уговор: за порчу мебели, драку и крики по ночам хозяин, Жирный Хью, оштрафует на шиллинг, а кто откажется платить — выгонит взашей. Жирный Хью с утра до вечера за конторкой, у входа. Стратегическое место — видно, кто пришел, кто ушел, кто что принес или, наоборот, хочет вынести. Публика пестрая, от такой жди всякого. (175)

⁹ Akunin, *Azazel* 175.

slavophile notion of St. Petersburg as a European, hence artificial and corrupt city. It is in St. Petersburg, after all, that Fandorin discovers that Brillling is not the dedicated police detective he has been pretending to be, but a murderous Azazel' agent. Moments before that discovery, still under Brillling's deceptive spell, Fandorin admires the capital's distinctly modern appearance: "Катенинская улица Эрасту Петровичу очень понравилась. Она выглядела точь-в-точь так же, как самые уважаемые улицы Берлина или Вены: асфальт, новенькие электрические фонари, солидные дома в несколько этажей. Одним словом, Европа."¹⁰ In fact, the novel's descriptions of space seem to share that same distrust of the future and so-called men of the future, as it does the larger world outside of Russia, and, more specifically, Europe. The two concepts—the future, and Europe—are evidently connected. As Fandorin approaches Brillling's residence, the narrative continues:

Дом Сиверса с каменными рыцарями на фронтоне и с ярко освещенным, несмотря на светлый еще вечер, подъездом был особенно хорош. Да где еще жить такому человеку, как Иван Францевич Бриллинг? Совершенно невозможно было представить его обитателем какого-нибудь ветхого особняка с пыльным двором и яблоневым садом.¹¹

Brilling would never live in some dilapidated mansion—some dusty relic from the past. He is a model of modernity: he, the Future, and Europe are all grouped together and are all equally suspect. The larger world outside Russia is never vividly described, except for those passages on London, and then in its most negative terms. Instead it is chiefly conveyed through its representatives, the novel's villains, all agents of Azazel'. Lady Astair, her second-in-command Cunningham, and their aptly named henchman John Morbid are, for instance, all English. Dr.

¹⁰ Akunin, *Azazel'* 232.

¹¹ Akunin, *Azazel'* 232-233.

Blank, perhaps taking after the prototypical mad scientist, Dr. Frankenstein, is German. Brillig is Russian but he has a German-sounding name. Fandorin eventually discovers a catalogue of Azazel' members, all from countries outside of Russia, including Brazil, Denmark, France, England, Portugal, and Turkey¹², except for one full state counselor, who turns out to be Ivan Brillig.¹³ I have used the phrase "a larger world outside of Russia," but it might be more accurate to say, "a larger world surrounding Russia." There is a sense of claustrophobia here, a notion that Russia is surrounded by outside, malevolent forces, and, conversely, that it must defend the world from those forces. I propose that this mixture of xenophobia and nationalism is not Akunin's, but his nineteenth-century narrator's. After all, Akunin himself is not Russian, but a Georgian, who works as a translator of Japanese, and, even keeps an apartment in London, England. Again, this is an example of narrative style and content artificially aging a work, with Akunin's narrator embracing the slavophile, pro-Russian sentiment that emerged in so many of the works of Russian writers of the nineteenth century. Nationalism and xenophobia, of course, exist in contemporary Russia as it did in the past, but here we must take these attitudes in their proper context. This is a novel not only about the nineteenth century, but of the nineteenth century, or, at least, seeking to be. Xenophobia and nationalism here are part of a larger string of narrative content and stylistics, lending the novel that sense that it is an actual artifact of the nineteenth century. Akunin is not advocating these attitudes himself, but, instead, is channeling an era in which they were prevalent.

Within this historical framework lies the step-by-step revelation of space over time. Akunin's novels are filled with historical locations, or, rather, representations of historical

¹² The Turkish agent is Anwar Effendi the main villain and Fandorin's chief rival in *Turetskii Gambit*, the sequel immediately following *Azazel*'.

¹³ Akunin, *Azazel*' 264.

locations, but there are those that are completely fabricated, completely fictional. These later examples of space rely almost totally on the process of narration, where a thing must first be *said* before it can be *said* to exist. There is little possibility of the reader filling in any of their indeterminacies themselves because they have no counterparts in the real world. Of course, we can conclude, for example, that a chair in the fictional world will, at least, roughly resemble a chair in ours, as would a door or window, but beyond the most general characteristics we have no basis for comparison. The narrator exercises almost total control over their actualization, and we, as readers, have no means, other than cheating and skipping ahead in the narrative, of investigating on our own what lies ahead. Dark corners remain dark until illuminated by the narrator, and the effect is a persistent tension or perpetual wariness that we have no way of alleviating. There is always the potential to be shocked or surprised, and no way to avoid it. The author of a mystery novel has the perfect tool to create shock and suspense—the narrative—with its effectiveness relying entirely on how well the author uses it.

Boris Akunin is certainly a detective writer, but his narrator, at least, shows a talent for gothic horror, particularly in this next passage, in which Fandorin is led to believe he is being haunted by the ghost of a woman he mistakenly thinks he has killed:

Желтая щель меж занавесок погасла, посерела — видно, луна ушла за тучи,
а в следующий миг там колыхнулось что-то темное, жуткое, неведомое.

Что угодно, только не лежать так, чувствуя, как шевелятся корни волос.
Только не сойти с ума.

Эраст Петрович встал и на непослушных ногах двинулся к окну, не отводя
глаз от страшного темного пятна.^{14, 15}

¹⁴ The passage continues, revealing what lies in the impenetrable patch of darkness:

This is an example of entirely fictional space: space with no parallel in the real world. What lies in this terrible patch of darkness? That is a question that can only be answered when the narrative tells us what lies within it. Until then it remains impenetrable and we, the readers, remain in a state of suspense.

Another virtue of this quality of narration, beyond suspense, is that a previously defined area or length of space can be added to and manipulated. In other words, a familiar thing can suddenly become radically unfamiliar. Of course, things existing in the real world have the ability to change, becoming radically unfamiliar, as well, but only after a period of physical exertion, either exerted by the thing itself, or exerted upon it by an outside source. If a man, for instance, decides to paint his house, he must first make that decision, purchase the needed supplies, and then put in the needed hours of labour. In the ephemeral world of narration that entire process can be reduced to an instant, with just a few words: the house was white; then it was blue. Whether the narrative includes a process in between—how and why the house changed colour—is the creative decision of the writer, but it is by no means necessary. It simply depends on what he wishes to achieve: a smooth, blended transition from one state to another, or something jagged and disorienting—a world which seems to shift, transforming beneath the feet of its protagonists. Space is rewritten and changed with a word. The Moscow branch of Lady Astair's orphanages or *эстернаты* (Astair Houses) is the perfect example. In the early stages of

В то мгновение, когда он отдернул шторы, небо озарила вспышка молнии, и Фандорин увидел за стеклом, прямо перед собой, мертвенно-белое лицо с черными ямами глаз. Мерцающая нездешним светом рука с растопыренными лучеобразными пальцами медленно провела по стеклу, и Эраст Петрович повел себя глупо, по-детски: судорожно всхлипнул, отшатнулся и, бросившись назад, к кровати, рухнул на нее ничком, закрыл голову ладонями. (192)

Note that the indeterminable figure lying in the darkness is only visible through sudden exposures of light: first, by the light of moon; then, by a stroke of lightening. In this case, the notion of a narrator illuminating those untold extents of represented space is something more than a metaphor.

¹⁵ Akunin, *Azazel*' 191-192.

his investigation, when Fandorin first visits it, it seems to be exactly what it appears to be: an orphanage occupying a converted mansion. When Fandorin finally discovers the truth about Lady Astair and her chain of Astair houses, however, it becomes something quite different: a kind of labyrinth funhouse or house of horrors, complete with hidden doors, mad scientist laboratories, and, of course, Lady Astair's secret underground bunker with a mechanized door that closes and locks at the press of a button. Nothing is what it seems. Even the rather uncomfortable chair, in which Fandorin has been sitting, for instance, turns into a mechanical restraining device with just flick of a switch. The building's two purposes— orphanage and den of conspirators—clash when Lady Astair orders an incapacitated Fandorin be carried to Dr. Blank's operating room. She adds, “но нужно торопиться. Через двенадцать минут начнется перемена. Дети не должны этого видеть.”¹⁶ When Fandorin escapes the lab, leading one of Astair's thugs at gun point through the school's corridors, he is forced to issue the following warning to the students and teachers peeking curiously behind each classroom door: “Это полиция! [. . .] Господа учителя, детей из классов не выпускать! Самим тоже не выходить!”¹⁷ The mansion becomes an embodiment of incongruence. The unassuming orphanage and school is suddenly transformed into the headquarters of a secret revolutionary movement, without ever completely giving up the characteristics of the former. Two conflicting worlds are colliding here, and the result is a shifting reality, constantly changing, throwing Fandorin and the readers following him into a state of disorientation. This mansion, which at first seemed so ordinary and familiar, has suddenly become alien and unknown.

The perturbation of order, noted by Moliere in his comments on ridicule, is chiefly a temporal concept, but in the case of *Azazel*' its possible, and perhaps preferable, to examine it

¹⁶ Akunin, *Azazel*' 298.

¹⁷ Akunin, *Azazel*' 310.

from a spatial perspective. In the last example, for instance, there was an obvious juxtaposition between space—an orphanage and school—and the events occurring within it—murder and conspiracy. Both reader and protagonist held relatively benign expectations about a charitable institution devoted to the education of orphaned children. That sense of order, however, was disrupted when it was revealed that the unassuming orphanage housed something much more sinister. Suddenly we, and Fandorin, whose adventures we have been following, found ourselves on unfamiliar ground, outside our normal realm of experience.

The novels opening paragraphs are still another example of this kind of disruption. I have already noted, in chapter one, the exaggerated, characteristically florid tone of the novel's opening paragraphs. What Akunin has created here is a pastoral vignette; a notably calm, idyllic, and, above all, civil description of Moscow's Alexander Gardens. It is a carefully constructed landscape whose disruption cannot be described as temporal in a strict sense, because nothing is actually happening; there is no progression of time, no chain of events to disrupt. The narrator, himself, even notes: "Ничто не предвещало неприятностей, в воздухе, наполненном ароматами зрелой, уверенной весны, разливались ленивое довольство и отрадная скука."¹⁸ It is a static, even flaccid, description of space waiting for a perturbation of order to set the narrative into motion. Akunin's narrator obliges by throwing in a discordant element in the form of an apparently drunk young man dressed extravagantly in "узких клетчатых панталонах, сюртуке, небрежно расстегнутом над белым жилетом, и круглой швейцарской шляпе."¹⁹ He and his odd behavior—periodically stopping and attempting to pick someone out of the crowd—immediately become the locus of attention. He is completely out of place in a scene

¹⁸ Akunin, *Azazel*' 3.

¹⁹ Akunin, *Azazel*' 4.

filled with flowers, ladies holding parasols, and nannies minding children in sailor suits, and his eventual suicide throws it all into chaos:

Началось нечто неопишное. Немка возмущенно поозиралась, словно призывая всех в свидетели такого неслыханного безобразия, а потом истошно заверещала, присоединив свой голос к визгу институток и полной дамы, которые издавали пронзительные крики уже в течение нескольких секунд. Барышня лежала без чувств — на мгновение приоткрыла-таки глаза и немедленно обмякла. Отовсюду сбегались люди, а студент, стоявший у решетки, чувствительная натура, наоборот бросился прочь, через мостовую, в сторону Моховой.²⁰

This suicide is the catalyst from which the rest of the narrative follows. It makes the narrative possible, and we can finally see a clear progression of time through the transformation of space from one state to another. The previously static portrait of a public park in springtime is thrown into disarray. The suicide has transformed it from an idyllic, albeit lifeless, landscape into a garish, albeit living, nightmare.

II. Reader and Space

The represented world of Boris Akunin's historical detective novels is an interesting phenomenon, particularly from the perspective of the twenty-first-century author and reader. It is a fictional representation of an environment that was actual and real, but now lies in the past, safely out of our reach. That distance allows Akunin a greater deal of creative freedom—denying those overly discerning readers the chance of checking every single point of historical detail, particularly the physical minutiae of represented space. There are three major cities in *Azazel'*, Moscow, London, and St. Petersburg, and a twenty-first-century audience has only two

²⁰ Akunin, *Azazel'* 7.

avenues of comparison: first, with the actual cities as they exist today, which, of course, have changed drastically since the nineteenth century; second, with historical accounts of the cities as they existed in the nineteenth century, which, no longer being physically verifiable, are subject to the often unreliable process of actualization. On the one hand, we know these places existed, and that adds a feeling of concreteness and reality to the text. When Fandorin patrols the streets of Moscow in search of witnesses, for instance, the names of those streets—Gusyantikov Lane, Chistoprudny Boulevard, Pokrovsky Street—are historically accurate. On the other, outside of a history textbook, there are few opportunities to experience these locations physically, and that lends the text a sense of the fantastic and the unreal. Also, when the opportunity to compare does present itself, we have to remember that Akunin's portrayals of physical space *are* unreal, and the author is at liberty to make exaggerations. His version of London, for example, is a gothic nightmare, particularly when seen through the eyes of the inexperienced sleuth, owing more, perhaps, to Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, than to historical reality. Akunin's representation of physical space becomes somewhat ephemeral, with an undoubtedly existent, but uncertain attachment to reality. There is a temptation here, perhaps, to compare this process to a funhouse mirror, with the mirror reflecting a distorted image of its object, but this metaphor is not altogether correct. First, the mirror is reflecting something that is concrete and whole. That is not the case here. Boris Akunin's descriptions of physical space are not based on first-hand physical experience, but on second-hand historical accounts, which, themselves, may not always be complete or even accurate. Second, however distorted the image may be, the mirror does reflect the object in its entirety. Again, this, here, is not the case. As we have seen before, the properties of fiction demand that some things be left out, and that choosing what to

leave out is often an important artistic decision. The effect on the reader is that we are often carried from one location to another without traversing the physical space in between.

I have already addressed this point in the first part of my thesis from the perspective of time: Akunin often allows undescribed amounts of time to pass between his chapters. Yet, it is also important to address it more specifically from the perspective of space. These untold intervals are often accompanied by undescribed lengths of physical distance, creating a sense of spatial disorientation, as well as temporal disorientation. In the previous chapter, I gave the example of chapters nine and ten, between which a period of weeks passes and Fandorin travels all the way from Moscow to London, England. The interval between is left undescribed until well into chapter ten and, without it, we, as readers, lack the binding experiences which Husserl argued are necessary to form a sense of duration. This is as much a spatial phenomenon as a temporal one. We have moved from one city to another, indeed, one country to another, without having first experienced any of the places in between. That Fandorin has passed through Berlin, Vienna, and Paris is only explained much later in the tenth chapter, and even then details are scant. Nothing is said, for instance, about what lay between the three capitals. It is like a peculiar practical joke: having fallen into a deep, impenetrable sleep, a man is moved to some radically new locale. Once he awakes, the victim asks the most pertinent questions: “Where am I?” and “How did I get here?” These are the questions which Akunin constantly provokes in his reader.

There are further examples of the same technique. In the novel’s first chapter, immediately after its opening account of the nihilist suicide, the narrative jumps abruptly from Alexander Gardens, in which the unfortunate event takes place, to a completely new location: Xavier Grushin’s office at the Criminal Investigation Division of the Moscow Police. The last

sentence of the novel's opening scene reads: "Отовсюду сбегались люди, а студент, стоявший у решетки, чувствительная натура, наоборот бросился прочь, через мостовую, в сторону Моховой."²¹ Then, suddenly, the first sentence of the next paragraph begins, "Ксаверий Феофилактович Грушин, следственный пристав Сыскного управления при московском обер-полицеймейстере, облегченно вздохнул."²² The shift in space here, with its accompanying sense of disorientation, is even more severe. It is, for example, not connected to any character who has traveled the intervening distance to report the incident. Whereas, in each subsequent scene of the novel, we can always be sure, at least eventually, to find Fandorin, he is not present at the suicide from which the rest of the novel unfolds. He and Grushin are only introduced as characters in the following scene, in the superior's office, where they learn of the incident from a second-hand newspaper report. No formal introduction is given of the characters until later in the text, and it is as if we, the readers, have accidentally walked into a room of strangers. The room and the people in it are entirely new to us, and with the confusion that that entails we spend the next few moments trying to familiarize ourselves with our new surroundings. As strangers, we have no one to latch on to, no guide or host to introduce us; relying totally on the narrative to tell us who is who, and what their relation to each other is. Perhaps, it is still worse: without a formal introduction to both men at the beginning of this scene, we have no way of even knowing what they look like. We have been shoved violently into this room blindfolded, and our knowledge of who and what surrounds us relies totally on the whim of the author and what he tells us, working through his narrator, who is, in fact, the one who pushed into the room in the first place.

²¹ Akunin, *Azazel*' 7.

²² Akunin, *Azazel*' 7.

Another byproduct of this scene is a certain irony. Without a description of the distance and interval separating these two episodes, they, if only for an instant, appear to lie beside each other in both time and space. The space between Alexander Gardens and the Criminal Investigation Division of the Moscow Police is temporarily collapsed, and Grushin almost appears to be sighing in relief over the suicide that just took place, rather than the papers he has just pushed aside.

A more subtle shift in space occurs between chapters four and five. In chapter four, Erast has followed a potential suspect, Nikolai Akhtyrsev, to a gathering arranged by *femme fatale*, Amelia Bezhetskaya. The chapter ends as Akhtyrsev is ejected from Bezhetskaya's home and Fandorin decides to follow: "Эраст Петрович понял, что надо уходить."²³ Chapter five then begins, immediately, with: "На улице, вдохнув свежего воздуха, Ахтырцев несколько ожил."²⁴ Unlike the previous examples, very little time passes between these two chapters; the shift is, instead, almost entirely spatial. It is as if chapter four embodies the interior of Bezhetskaya's home, and chapter five the city lying just outside it: the two young men not only walk out of the house into the streets, but also out of one chapter and into another. Akunin employs a rather cinematic approach, showing us the basics and allowing us to fill in the blanks in ourselves—first, we have the intention to go outside, and then, immediately, we are outside. If he had adopted a smoother transition, describing the process of the two men approaching the door, passing underneath the sill, and then descending down the front-doorstep into the street, then the pace of the novel would be much less kinetic, and, consequently, less dynamic. It would instead become languid, even, peaceful, a tone entirely inappropriate for a work of adventure and suspense. It would be unwise, let alone impossible for Akunin to attempt to fully describe each

²³ Akunin, *Azazel*' 73.

²⁴ Akunin, *Azazel*' 74.

and every movement of his characters, and the details of every transition in scene. Such an attempt would see his book balloon from a tense two-hundred and fifty page detective novel to an unending monstrosity. Akunin, like any writer, has to make choices; what to put in and what to leave out. He uses that necessity, however, to add to that constant feeling of uncertainty and unease on which any good mystery thrives.

III. The Characters and Their Presented World.

In the first section of this chapter, we saw how changes in literary space are necessary to perceive the progression of literary time. We are fortunate in this respect to have Erast Fandorin, whose frantic movement through space contributes to the frenetic progress of time, as our protagonist. In one particularly suspenseful episode, for example, Fandorin even races a letter, a dispatch sent by Azazel's headquarters in London to Russia by expedited post, across continental Europe in order, finally, to intercept it at the post office in St. Petersburg. Whether by foot, carriage, or train, he is a character who is constantly in motion, so much so, in fact, that the narrative often seems to lose him. With sudden changes in scene, I have noted, the narrative's point of view is often surrendered to some secondary or tertiary character, and we, as readers, are forced to find Fandorin through the eyes of an outsider. In these moments, Fandorin seems to be moving faster than the narrative, with the narrative striving to keep pace. When Fandorin suddenly changes locations the narrator even appears to lose him, if only for a moment, and is forced to take up the inner impressions of some other character in the same general proximity as Fandorin, but not the detective himself. While in London, for example, when the novice investigator suddenly changes hotels, moving into the Ferry Road guesthouse, the narrator temporarily takes up the point of view of Fat Hugh, the guesthouse's intimidating manager.

Seeing Fandorin in yet another disguise, he mistakes him for some eccentric French artist, and some of his impressions are notably delivered in the present tense, as he apparently takes up the role of reflector character, a role generally reserved for the novel's main protagonist, Fandorin:

Вот, например, рыжий патлатый художник-француз, только что прошмыгнувший мимо хозяина в угловой номер. Деньги у лягушатника водятся — без споров заплатил за неделю вперед, не пьет, сидит взаперти, первый раз за все время отлучился. Хью, конечно, воспользовался случаем, заглянул к нему, и что вы думаете? Художник, а в номере ни красок, ни холстов. Может, убийца какой, кто его знает — иначе зачем глаза за темными очками прятать? Констеблю, что ли, сказать? Деньги-то все равно вперед уплачены...²⁵

There is in this passage a spatial irony lying between Fandorin and Hugh. Fandorin is, of course, a separate entity from Hugh, a completely independent spatial object, and he has no way of knowing the direction the hotel worker's thoughts are taking. We as readers, however, are invited to merge ourselves temporarily with the identity of the guesthouse's unscrupulous host, to occupy his point of view, his position in both in space and time, as he considers turning the imposter over to the police. The Russian investigator has no way of knowing this, and is ironically unaware of the danger that exists just beside him.

The ill-prepared detective lacks investigative experience in this novel, but he has an abundant supply of energy. That energy though is then tempered by that very same lack of experience. Fandorin regularly finds himself lost in space. When his first case leads him to an illicit gambling parlor, for example, he is completely out of place—overwhelmed and surrounded by a darker world, filled with reprobates and degenerate gamblers, which he, as a young innocent, can hardly comprehend. In fact, he is so entirely disoriented that the narrative itself

²⁵ Akunin, *Azazel* 176.

reflects this. Fandorin again seems to disappear, completely inundated by his surroundings. He does not turn up until well into the course of this particular episode, his presence perhaps buried by the hurly-burly of the gambling hall. When the narrator finally locates Fandorin, an observer lost in the bustle of the crowd, he, all the same, fails even to identify him by name: “Среди зрителей, скромно держась чуть сзади, находился черноволосый молодой человек с румяной, совсем не игроцкой физиономией.”²⁶ Fandorin has escaped the notice of the narrator, but ironically, and even comically, he has not escaped that of the people surrounding him, the gambling hall sharps, who all see him as a potential mark: “Опытному человеку сразу было видно, что юноша из хорошей семьи, на банк забрел впервые и всего здесь дичится [. . .] Фандорин (ибо это, разумеется, был он) считал, что скользит по залу невидимой тенью, не обращая на себя ничего внимания. Наскользил он пока, правда, немного.”²⁷

Setting here has a way of revealing Fandorin’s character, particularly his inexperience—his early inability to adapt to space. This, though, is not the only example. Earlier in the text, for instance, Fandorin is led by potential witness/suspect Nikolai Akhtyrtsev to an especially sordid pub. The narrator explains that this is Fandorin’s first time in a genuine den of debauchery, and, though he is not lost by the narrative in this case, as in the previous example, he is clearly out of his element. His attention is particularly aroused by those scandalously dressed women, who so readily approach the bar’s patrons at their slightest beck and call: “Декольте у них были такие, что Эраст Петрович покраснел.”²⁸ The women are clearly prostitutes, but Fandorin seems unaware of this, and when Akhtyrtsev warns him, “[н]е пяльтесь вы на продажных, не стоят

²⁶ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 125.

²⁷ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 125.

²⁸ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 76-77.

они ни денег, ни времени. Да и противно потом,” he notably makes no response.²⁹ His virginity is almost without question, virtually a given fact, and he is so fresh-faced and naïve that the possibility is hardly likely to have even occurred to him.

Fandorin’s inexperience is most evident when he visits London. In an attempt to blend in, for instance, he unwisely adopts what he believes is the national dress of the Englishman—a black suit and matching bowler hat, an outfit garishly inappropriate for the city’s summer months.³⁰ Walking the streets, he feels a strange sense of melancholy and an almost supernatural paranoia—imagining some phantom stranger pursuing him, while glumly pining for the familiar landscape of his home country.³¹ Still worse when he stumbles on Waterloo Station, he immediately realizes that he has been cruelly taken advantage of by his cab driver, who had taken forty minutes to take Fandorin to his hotel, a distance which the young man has now discovered is only a few minutes by foot.³² Indeed, the detective’s footing here in this strange land is unsure, and he is saddled with the inconveniences of an alien unable to adapt to his surroundings.

London becomes a very dangerous place for the young Russian, and it is here where he faces one of his more grisly brushes with death. In the first section of this chapter, I used the metaphor of we as readers being blindfolded, relying completely on the words of the narrative to familiarize ourselves with our surroundings. In the eleventh chapter of *Azazel*, this metaphor becomes an almost literal truth. In it Fandorin is plucked from his room at the Ferry Road guesthouse, a sack thrown over his head, his arms and legs bound, and summarily dropped into

²⁹ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 77.

³⁰ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 160.

³¹ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 160-162.

³² Akunin, *Azazel*’ 162.

Thames to drown. From the moment the sack is thrown over his head until his able to free his limbs and reach the surface of the river relatively unscathed, Fandorin is blind, and, strangely enough, so are we. Between these two moments there is no visual description of space. Instead, we rely almost entirely on what Fandorin is hearing to orient ourselves, the narrative drawing us into his internal experience, and limiting us to his remaining senses. Akunin even injects a touch of dark humour with the following passage:

Последнее, что видел Эраст Петрович перед тем, как ему на плечи, до самых колен, натянули грубую мешковину, — была бесстрастная, абсолютно каменная физиономия Джона Морбида. Жаль, конечно, что белый свет показал Эрасту Петровичу на прощанье именно этот, не самый чарующий свой лик, однако в пыльной темноте мешка оказалось еще хуже.³³

The movement of the other characters—the villains who have kidnapped him—are all ascertainable by sound, and Akunin makes special note of the tone of each voice, explaining how Fandorin is able to distinguish between each person³⁴. We realize that Fandorin has been forced outside to an awaiting carriage only when the text explains, “[п]ахло дождем, пофыркивали лошади,”³⁵ and that he has reached his unfortunate destination when it adds, “Эраст Петрович слышал скрип досок под ногами, плеск реки.”³⁶ Akunin here is exercising a deliberate

³³ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 196.

³⁴ Examples include the following:

— Порядок, — с легким немецким акцентом объявил Франц. (196)

— Да куда ему деться? — басом ответил Морбид. (196)

— Не беспокойтесь, мэм, — пророкотал дворецкий. (197)

— Душенька Амалия Казимировна, — сказал по-русски знакомый уютный тенорок. (197)

³⁵ Akunin, *Azazel*’ 197.

indeterminacy, eliminating an entire sense from his description of space, so that we, as readers, can share the disorientation of his protagonist.

The author implements the same strategy again towards the novel's conclusion. When Fandorin is captured and prescribed a lobotomy by the villainous Dr. Blank, he feigns unconsciousness in order to aid his escape. With his eyes mostly closed, the narrative is again limited to what Fandorin can detect with his remaining four senses, particularly his sense of hearing. He and we only learn his intended fate when the budding policeman "pricks up his ears," following closely the mad doctor's lengthy exposition on the benefits of the medical application of electricity.³⁷ That exposition explains the quick glance Fandorin is able to take of the room, with its disturbing presence of surgical instruments, while nobody else is looking: "Даже сквозь закрытые веки было видно, как ярко вспыхнул электрический свет. Фандорин одним прищуренным глазом быстро обозрел обстановку. Успел разглядеть какие-то фарфоровые приборы, провода, металлические катушки. Все это ему крайне не понравилось."³⁸ Given the ghoulish fate supposedly waiting the detective, the lack of sight here is particularly unsettling, as if the reader was a child locked in a dark room with some unimaginable monster or boogeyman.

IV. Conclusion

In my conclusion to the last chapter, I admitted that the divisions I have placed between narrator and narration, author and reader, characters and their presented world, are somewhat arbitrary. The same might be said about time and space in general. They are not two mutually

³⁶ Akunin, *Azazel*' 200.

³⁷ Akunin, *Azazel*' 301-305.

³⁸ Akunin, *Azazel*' 300.

exclusive concepts, at least not in the context of literature. I have argued in the introduction to this thesis that one is always necessary for the perception of the other. In *Azazel*, from each perspective, a landscape is formed, which is constantly shifting, always ready to surprise. Despite a concrete framework of historical facts and locations, space here is an ephemeral thing, changing virtually beneath our feet. The result is a persistent sense of spatial disorientation, which is, perhaps, might also be described as temporal. Not always knowing where we are or how we came to be there, we lack the sense of duration on which reason is based. Not always knowing where we will be—the world transforming at any given moment—time seems to be moving too fast, treacherously flinging us into the future.

Chapter 3: Time in *Turetskii gambit*

I. Narration and Time

Akunin's second novel in the Erast Fandorin series, *Turetskii gambit*, is written in the same nineteenth-century tone—so crucial to the series' success—as the first, employing many of the same techniques as its predecessor, while supplementing them with a few of its own. It, for example, continues the antiquated tradition of synoptic chapter headings. They remain equally enigmatic, often funny—brief ironic asides on the content of the text—and sometimes even vaguely ominous—ambiguous warnings of things yet to come. The first, for instance, reads simply, “в которой передовая женщина попадает в безвыходную ситуацию,”¹ and without introducing any of the characters, including this so-called “передовая женщина,” leaves us to guess at its potential significance. The heading that accompanies chapter thirteen archly anticipates Fandorin's dramatic final denouement with “в которой Фандорин произносит длинную речь.”² The narration even recycles the prophetic “в которой события принимают неожиданный оборот”³ from *Azazel'* to begin the twelfth chapter of its sequel. At this point, it has taken on a satiric note, parodying the wild twists and turns that dominate so many works of detective fiction. The darkest is perhaps “в которой Варя видит ангела смерти,”⁴ predicting the presence of imminent death in chapter eight. In each case, as they do in *Azazel'*, they represent a deliberate stylization, tying the narrative nostalgically to the nineteenth century.

Turetskii gambit, though, relies on yet another technique to strengthen its defining atmosphere of the past. In the first chapter of this thesis, I argued that the opening paragraphs of

¹ Boris Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005) 5.

² Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 174.

³ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 157.

⁴ Akunin *Turetskii gambit* 104.

Azazel’ had more in common with a Victorian newspaper than a representative piece of contemporary literature. In *Turetskii gambit*, Akunin goes still further, and actually replicates nineteenth-century-newspapers, using fictional newspaper clippings as a kind of epigraph to each chapter. Chapter one, for example, begins with the following excerpt:

**«Ревю Паризьен» (Париж),
14 (2) июля 1877 г.**

«Наш корреспондент, вот уже вторую неделю находящийся при русской Дунайской армии, сообщает, что вчерашним приказом от 1 июля (13 июля по европейскому стилю) император Александр благодарит свои победоносные войска, успешно форсировавшие Дунай и вторгшиеся в пределы Османского государства. В высочайшем приказе сказано, что враг полностью сломлен и не далее как через две недели над Святой Софией в Константинополе будет установлен православный крест. Наступающая армия почти не встречает сопротивления, если не считать комариных укусов, которые наносят по русским коммуникациям летучие отряды так называемых башибузуков («бешеных голов») — полуразбойников-полупартизан, известных своим диким нравом и кровожадной свирепостью»^{5,6}

The articles usually appear in a rational, sequential order, with the events that follow often stemming directly or indirectly from the events described in the articles themselves. Sometime, however, their order is not quite as chronological. Sometimes they anticipate the action of the chapter somewhat—artifacts, apparently, of the narrative future. The excerpt that begins chapter twelve describes a Turkish delegation to Russian headquarters suing for peace. The significance of this passage only becomes apparent later in the chapter. The delegation’s train is unwisely commandeered by General Sobolev, a heroic Russian military leader and admirer of Varya Suvorova, Erast Fandorin’s unlikely assistant, promising the young lady a pleasant excursion to San Stefano. The historical arrival of the delegation is described in the chapter’s epigraph, but

⁵ This passage is reprinted roughly as it appears in the novel. The boldface and spacing between lines are Akunin’s.

⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 5.

its arrival in the narrative comes later, the article describing a moment, which from the perspective of this narrative has not yet happened.

Each passage is fully indented, appearing in a lined box, separated from the rest of the text, and, in appearance, the narrative itself. Their style is generally ornate, sometimes even vitriolic, ignoring the kind objectivity that a twenty-first-century audience might associate with journalistic integrity. Quotes from Russian newspapers tend to be overwhelmingly patriotic, often to the point of absurdity. A passage from a St. Petersburg newspaper, *Правительственный вестник*, begins chapter eight, reading somewhat ridiculously, and with a definite touch of the grotesque, if not the perverse:

Невзирая на мучительные приступы эпидемического катара и кровавого поноса, Государь провел последние дни, посещая госпитали, переполненные тифозными больными и ранеными. Его императорское величество относится с такою искреннею сердечностью к страдальцам, что невольно становится тепло при этих сценах. Солдатики, как дети, бросаются на подарки и радуются чрезвычайно наивно. Автору сих строк не раз приходилось видеть, как прекрасные синие глаза Государя увлажнились слезою. Невозможно наблюдать эти сцены без особого чувства благоговейного умиления.⁷

Akunin's representations of foreign newspapers are generally scornful, suspicious of the Russian cause in Bulgaria, and taking a delight in every Russian failure that too borders on the perverse. After Russia's first disastrously unsuccessful attempt on the Turkish stronghold in Plevna, a German newspaper remarks with evident glee, "После конфуза под Плевной русские оказались в преглупом положении," adding, "Османа-паши позволил туркам выиграть время для перегруппировки, а маленький болгарский город стал для русского медведя

⁷ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 104.

славной занозой в мохнатом боку.”⁸ That kind of unabashed partiality, along with their often inane attempts to wax poetic, again, dates these passages, making them temporally foreign to a modern audience. Indeed, they infectiously date the novel as a whole, creating a distinctly nineteenth-century environment in which its readers can immerse themselves.

These passages work quite effectively as temporal markers, but they fulfill added roles as well. They are, for example, a convenient source of historical information, providing broader accounts of the historical events that dominate the book, including, as we have seen, the international reaction to those events. In this respect some might claim them as those cases of zero grade mediacy noted by Stanzel. They, however, would be mistaken. We cannot forget that these passages have been fabricated by a writer deliberately attempting to imitate a certain narrative style—one that fell out of fashion over a century ago. Like Akunin’s use of synoptic chapter headings, they are part of broader strategy to recreate the general feeling of literature’s golden age. They are therefore not at all separate from the narrative. They only appear so. Their placement in this text is actually suffused with a nineteenth-century narrative voice. In fact, they often appear to be in so intimate a dialogue with the narrative, that they feel inseparable from the narrative itself.

Each excerpt gives the date according to the Russian and European calendars,⁹ and with few exceptions explains the overall progress of the war—allowing the reader then to concentrate on the individual fates of the characters. But their role is greater than simply the expository. Again like the synoptic chapter headings, they often seem to be commenting on the direction of the narrative itself, entering into a dialogue with that narrative. The novel’s epilogue, for

⁸ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 77.

⁹ This itself is an interesting temporal phenomenon. There is a constant confusion—a disagreement—about even the date.

instance, is a particularly interesting example. It is the only chapter to both begin and end with a newspaper clipping. It begins with an excerpt from a Russian publication, celebrating the generous terms of Turkey's surrender to Russia. Then Akunin begins the chapter in earnest—to borrow a term from television—“already in progress” in mid-conversation. Varya Suvorova, the novel's heroine, chides the cynical detective: “Ну вот, мир и подписан, причем очень хороший. А вы каркали, господин пессимист.”¹⁰ Her words appear to be a direct response to the newspaper the text has just cited, the implication being that Varya and Fandorin have just been reading the very same article. The investigator objects, explaining that the terms of surrender are, indeed, overly generous, and then, as if to confirm this prediction, the epilogue ends with yet another article, whose headline reads brazenly, “Правительство ее величества говорит «нет».”¹¹ England, feeling threatened by a newly empowered Russia, has threatened war unless the terms of the agreement are radically modified. Russia, whose treasury has been depleted by an unnecessary conflict, is in no condition to insist and will be forced to capitulate. Just as Fandorin predicted Russia has been decimated by the Bulgarian campaign, left on the brink of collapse.

II. Reader and Time

My analysis of time in *Azazel'* showed, among other things, that the main advantage readers of historical fiction enjoy is that knowledge they have that the characters, and in this case, the narrator as well, do not—an appreciation of the larger direction of history. When Fandorin predicts that the terms of Turkey's surrender are far too generous—that Europe will never allow it to stand—we have the advantage of knowing that he is right, as opposed to his

¹⁰ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 198.

¹¹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 200.

fellow characters who dismiss him as a pessimist. We can to a certain extent see into the future of these characters and appreciate their relation to a history that they can not yet perceive. In a series with a reoccurring protagonist, though, we have an added advantage—we have access to a timeline, pieces of the hero’s past, that again the remaining characters may not. Varya Suvorova, for example, sees Erast Fandorin as a man of mystery and is startled by each subsequent revelation of his past. When Suvorova looks searchingly at him for the first time, noting “[в]ыглядит странно, странно говорит, странно поступает,”¹² she wonders if she can really trust him. We, of course, know where these peculiar characteristics come from, and could easily tell her yes, she can trust this man. That perception is in large part due to Fandorin’s attempts to shut down any mention of his past, particularly the murder of his wife. In a meeting with Mizonov, the head of Imperial Russia’s Third Section, he is even quite rude, impudently warning his superior not to address the subject. Earlier, in that same meeting, when Mizonov fails even to recognize Fandorin, exclaiming, “Боже, Фандорин, вы ли это? [. . .] да вас просто не узнать. Постарели лет на десять,”¹³ the significance is again completely lost on Varya, but not on us. When Varya, angered at Fandorin’s conservative ideology, exclaims in a moment of pique, “Я еще давеча заметила, что вы, как учитель танцев: раз-два-три, раз-два-три. Кто вас научил этой глупой манере?,” the investigator answers cryptically, “Были учителя.”¹⁴ That answer though is much less cryptic to the novel’s readers who know who Fandorin’s teacher was—Ivan Brillling, the man from whom he acquired this unusual habit, and the man would ultimately betray him. Parts of Fandorin’s past, though, remain a mystery even to us, the readers. Two years have passed since we saw him and since then he has grown into a much more

¹² Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 17.

¹³ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 35.

¹⁴ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 53.

competent investigator. He explains that he has played an active role in the war with Bulgaria, has fought in battle and has even been taken prisoner: he dismisses all notions of heroic romanticism, explaining that he was treated very well, and enjoyed the hospitality of gracious Turkish host. But what happened immediately after the death of his wife?—nothing; other criminal investigations?—again, a mystery. In this respect he remains a man of a mystery even to us who have followed his adventures from installment to installment.

Starting a narrative, as I put it earlier, “already in progress,” is an effective way of filling in one of those two great voids that border a novel. Akunin uses such a strategy in *Turetskii gambit*. When we first meet Varya, she has already made her way to Bulgaria and is already in the midst of a dangerous predicament—trapped in a Bulgarian tavern with no means of paying her bill or pressing forward, surrounded by potentially hostile natives (who are not at all convinced by her disguise as a young peasant boy). Obviously there was a series of events that led to this situation, but we do not yet know them. The result is a vagary—an uncertainty about where this narrative actually begins. Strictly speaking, it begins with the novel’s first sentence—“Женщина есть тварь хилая и ненадежная, сказал Блаженный Августин”¹⁵—but that sentence itself is a reference to the past, and there is a suggestion here of something more, almost as if some vandal had torn out the first chapters of the novel, detailing Varya’s life up to this moment. This is perhaps even more effective than if Akunin had detailed Varya’s life in full. Then there would be a definite beginning, a definite start to the narrative making it harder to imagine anything preceding it or a narrative that extends infinitely in both directions—the future or the past. Akunin instead switches back and forth from Varya’s current predicament and a *brief* sketch of how she arrived at this point. These descriptions are apparently her own

¹⁵ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 5.

reflections as she struggles to think a way out of the difficult situation, remembering her progression as a young radical, and the path that has left her alone and helpless in a shady bar.

Likewise, an ambiguous, inconclusive ending, as we have already seen in *Azazel*', can also suggest a future extending beyond the last pages of the novel. At the close of *Turetskii gambit*, Anwar Effendi has been decisively defeated, but what is not decisive is what will become of our young heroes, Varya and Fandorin. They have become quite close, despite their ideological differences, and have apparently fallen in love, and Varya clearly does not love her fiancé Petya, who she will soon marry. Will that marriage actually take place? Will she and Fandorin meet again? Will they become lovers? Plus the spectre of the approaching century with its disastrous upheaval, wars, and revolutions, remains. What affect will it have on the couple? That again is left an open question, and, at least until the next installment, the future remains uncertain. But an uncertain future remains a future all the same and the reader can again imagine a life for these characters existing outside the boundaries of its official chronology. A definite conclusion explaining exactly what happens to each character ending presumably with their deaths would allow no such speculation.

Unlike *Azazel*', the gaps between chapters in *Turetskii gambit* tend not to be as disorienting as those found in its predecessor. First, as we will see in the fourth chapter of this thesis, there is little change in setting, or space, in this piece even after great lengths of time. Second, the narrative, although delivered in the third person, is tied to the point of view of just one character, Varya Suvorova, with no exceptions. At no time is she "lost" to us, and the point of view passed on to some secondary or tertiary character. Instead, these instances of indeterminacy serve a much more pragmatic purpose. This narrative has been woven tightly around the events of the Turko-Russian war of the late nineteenth century, specifically around

Russia's attempts to take Plevna, a crucial strategic point, whose eventual capture broke the back of the Turkish defense. The major events of the novel, the betrayals, sabotage, and espionage that Fandorin is investigating all correspond to Russia's three assaults on that city. The challenge for Akunin is that between each assault there is a period of relatively uneventful time, and sometimes those intervals are even quite long. After each defeat, the Russians were forced to regroup, re-plan, and retrain before making another attempt. As an author of historical fiction, Akunin has chosen to respect the demands of at least historical dates, and therefore cannot simply dispose of the intervals, presenting the war as something that happened in a few short days or even weeks. Time here is strictly regimented with the end of the novel roughly corresponding with the end of the war, and it is clear that we are working methodically to that end, particularly with the newspaper excerpts telling us with increasing urgency the outcome of events and the conclusions they demand. The perception of time as we have seen, at least in the context of literature, is dependant on the perception of change—the transformation from one state to another. Military life, however, is also strictly regimented, following set routines and largely based on repetition. Things in the camp in which the bulk of the novel takes place remain largely the same. Akunin therefore wisely allows time to pass between each attempt on Plevna largely unaccounted for, with only the briefest of explanations, opting instead to give us a brief sketch of the major events that have occurred in the meantime. The novel carries a strong feeling of fatalism with the war drawing ever nearer to its inevitable conclusion, but if Akunin were to describe the moments between chapters in full, it would be something more than methodical—it would be boring, a capital offense in the genre of mystery and adventure. The same day repeated over and over again is a fate he rightly leaves to his characters, sparing us, his readers, the details.

Turetskii gambit lacks the jarring transitions so common in *Azazel*.¹⁶ Instead, its newspaper excerpts to some extent play the role of creating a certain sense of disorientation. They interrupt the narrative, while simultaneously remaining a part of it. Chapters often end on a point of suspense and anticipation, waiting to be relieved by the chapter that follows. Before the conflict is resolved, though, we must first pass through what often appears to be a superfluous newspaper article. It is a case of deliberate frustration, a case of time suspended, just for a moment—the time it takes us to read the excerpt—and only to suspend the tension for just a moment more. Only then does the text return to the main course of action or the narrative proper. Akunin even plays this device for laughs. In the novel’s climactic scenes, having been exposed by Fandorin, Anwar Effendi takes Varya at gunpoint, locking both himself and his prisoner in a virtually impenetrable bank vault. That chapter ends with the lines, “Д’Эвре захлопнул стальную дверь и задвинул засов. Они остались вдвоем.”¹⁶ They are immediately followed by chapter fourteen, but before being allowed to return to the action of the story—what will become of Varya and d’Hevrais—we first have to read a newspaper article from *Правительственный вестник* about the depleted finances of Russia’s treasury, an ironic comment on Varya’s current predicament, locked in a bank vault surrounded by money. The newspaper articles are a disruption of our perception of literary time—a deliberate frustration, an attempt to heighten that sense of suspense and anticipation which keeps us turning the page.

As the novel works gradually towards its inevitable finish, the cast of characters is gradually thinned. That, perhaps, is to be expected in a piece of detective fiction, relying so heavily on murder, but Akunin’s choice of characters to execute is unsettling. Four people are murdered in total in *Turetskii gambit*, and two of them appear to be little more than clowns, comic foils there only to add a touch of humour to the narrative. Ippolit Zurov, a character

¹⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 186.

returning from the first novel, is a notorious gambler and magnificent blowhard. His comic misadventures constantly get him into trouble. McLaughlin too, an Irish correspondent covering the war for an English newspaper, is likewise a comic figure or fool. His massive ego and pedantic manners inspire little more than laughter. He is also murdered mercilessly by Anwar Effendi. Fandorin provokes sympathy for the slain Irishman, when he asks Anwar, “Не жалко вам было бедного Маклафлина?”¹⁷ But little provocation is necessary. McLaughlin and Ippolit are both fools—figures of comic relief—they are supposed to be immune from this kind of violence, or at least as our experience as readers of fiction would have us believe. Their deaths are a deliberate assault on our sense of order—a perturbation, in fact, of that order. Two unserious characters have met a very serious end, and something has happened that our experience has not led us to expect. Varya is stricken by the expression on Ippolit’s face when he is found lying in a field, dead: “Спешившись, увидела профиль: удивленно открытый глаз отливала красивым стеклянным блеском, развороченный выстрелом висок чернел окаемом порохового ожога.”¹⁸ Zurov’s look of disbelief and surprise reflects our own: How could this man die? He hardly seemed significant enough, serious enough, to die.

Another of the character’s deaths affects a slightly different response. Kazanzaki begins, at least, as the novel’s least sympathetic character. He, like Fandorin, is an officer of the Third Section, but unlike our protagonist, is totally repellent. He is, for example, a blatant career opportunist, as well as a sniveling coward. Having accused Fandorin of marrying for social advantages, he spinelessly refuses to answer the insult: “Приказом его императорского величества дуэли на период войны строжайше запрещены. И вы, Фандорин, отлично это

¹⁷ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 182.

¹⁸ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 125.

знаете.”¹⁹ He too is later found dead along with Ippolit. The hussar had been dispatched to headquarters by General Sobolev, during Russia’s second unsuccessful attempt on Plevna, to summon more troops, and Kanzazaki, hoping to share in the glory, had rode after him. Sobolev having miraculously broke through the enemy’s lines, needed reinforcements to hold that position, but neither Ippolit or Kazanzaki are seen alive again, both murdered by Anwar Effendi before they could deliver the good news.

As I have said, Kazanzaki is an entirely unsympathetic character—at least until the point he is murdered. After his death it is revealed that the lieutenant was a homosexual, and the Turkish saboteur takes advantage of that fact. Disguising Kazanzaki’s death as a suicide, he places a forged love letter on the corpse, suggesting that the dead man had been blackmailed over his sexuality into betraying his country, murdering Zurov, and then himself in wave of guilt and shame. To Mizonov, who falls for the elaborate scheme, the deceased lieutenant’s sexuality makes him even more repulsive. “Тьфу, пакость!” he spurts, “Добро б еще из-за денег!”²⁰ Notably, however, Varya, who liked Kazanzaki the least, is oddly sympathetic: “Варя открыла было рот, чтобы заступиться за приверженцев однополой любви, которые, в конце концов, не виноваты, что природа сотворила их не такими, как все.”²¹ Her opinion is remarkably advanced—she is, after all, a young radical—and perhaps represents the view of many of Akunin’s twenty-first-century readers. Homosexuals, although still the unfortunate victims of hate and bigotry are at least more tolerated and accepted today than they were in the nineteenth century. Although Varya’s feelings carry the weight of a certain condescension, especially with the words “которые, в конце концов, не виноваты, что природа сотворила их не такими,”

¹⁹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 59.

²⁰ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 129.

²¹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 129.

still emphasizing something inherently wrong with homosexuality, they are much more representative of the twenty-first century than Mizonov's overt revulsion. There is a temporal disconnect here between us and Mizonov. Suddenly Kazanzaki becomes much more sympathetic. He is a victim of intolerance whose sexuality, his very nature, has been taken advantage of. He is, at least, a more complex figure than the conniving weasel he first appeared to be. Akunin has endowed him with a more complex psychology, making him deeper than we originally thought, and from a twenty-first century perspective his homosexuality is, at least in part, retroactively redeeming. Noetically, with each turn of the page and each new revelation, he demands no respect, but his death casts his entire life noematically in a more positive light. Although, we still do not like him, he, at least, becomes an object of pity, an unfortunate victim of his times.

III. Characters and Their Presented World

Varya Suvorova is in many respects a parallel to Fandorin as he appeared in the first novel—young, energetic, but also terribly naïve and inexperienced. So it is appropriate that the third person narrator relies on her perceptions to tell the story. After all, Fandorin has become such an accomplished investigator that it is no longer safe for the narrator to dwell on the Third section officer's thoughts, feelings, and inner impressions. He has become too perspicacious and a focus on his internal world would risk giving away the mystery. So it is necessary to pass the torch to someone else, who, like the detective in the first novel and maybe us the readers as well, is always one step behind, always "behind the times." Fandorin admits, for instance, that he suspected d'Hevrais of being Anwar Effendi after the first failed assault on Plevna. He was only waiting for more definitive proof. Varya Suvorova, however, had no such inkling and is

extremely startled by the revelation. D’Hevrais was indeed suspected as a potential spy when an inaccurate report of his on the defensive capabilities of the Turks at Plevna led to a humiliating Russian defeat, but subsequent events seemed to clear him of those charges. Now he is again the most likely suspect and is in fact the unquestionable culprit. His exposure has an interesting noematic effect—all the novel’s ill events can be tied together as an extension of his will, seen as an elaborate whole, and, upon a second reading, knowing that d’Hevrais is actually Anwar Effendi, many of the things that the *faux* Frenchman has said and done take on an ironic double meaning. His reputation, for example, among his unenlightened “friends” as an expert on Turkish culture is indeed deserved, but for an entirely unexpected reason—he is, in fact, Turkish. That irony is initially lost on Varya, and the reader, but perhaps not on Fandorin, who at least suspects the true identity of his unscrupulous quarry.

The narrative embraces Varya much as it did Fandorin in *Azazel*, even surrendering the narrative to her in moments of reflectorization. Varya loses consciousness several times in the course of the narrative, and every time she does, the narrative seems to as well—it stops, waiting for her to regain consciousness. Chapter two ends just as Varya passes out, terrified by the sight of a decapitated human head: “Но Варя не слышала — земля и небо совершили кульбит, поменявшись местами, и д’Эвре с Фандориным едва успели подхватить обмякшую барышню.”²² Then immediately the chapter ends. In the chapter that follows she has regained consciousness. While Varya admires the new handsome men in her life the lines appear, “Нет, определенно, все трое были замечательно хороши, каждый по-своему: и Фандорин, и Соболев, и д’Эвре.”²³ This is hardly the narrators thought, but it is not separated by any

²² Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 31.

²³ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 29.

identifying punctuation to identify it as Varya's. But that is exactly what it is—Varya's immediate impression of these three handsome figures.

In *Azazel*' a process of maturation, propelling the protagonist irretrievably into future, is paired contrastingly paired with an investigation of the past. A similar structure is employed in *Turetskii Gambit*. Investigating the alleged betrayal of Suvorova's fiancé, Fandorin again discovers a much larger conspiracy that reaches further into the past. In his final declamation, the detective reveals the true identity of French journalist, Charles d'Hevrais and *re*-recounts the last ten years of that man's life. The movements and colorful adventures of d'Hevrais, Fandorin explains, parallel those of Anwar Effendi, and the two men are clearly one in the same. The Turkish spy, himself, also admits that his actions are part of a larger strategy of global manipulation, and its origins, given Anwar's connection to *Azazel*, again lie twenty years in the past with Lady Astair and her first orphanages. The detective once again traces a crime back to its distant roots decades ago.

This movement towards the past, however, is again matched with a coming of age story with its focus on the future. In this case, Varya Suvorova is forced by experience to grow and mature. She begins the narrative as a naïve young idealist who foolishly sets out alone to Bulgaria to find her future husband. Her impetuosity eventually sees her surrounded by hostile natives, and she is only saved by the timely arrival of Erast Fandorin. She is less than grateful. As a radical, she dismisses the police detective as a government lackey, and is disgusted by his cold demeanor. As the novel progresses, she gains a new appreciation and deeper understanding of her protector. Having made many mistakes and experienced war, death, and betrayal, Suvorova is left less head strong and certain of her ideas. Even her attachment to her fiancé is thrown into question and as she moves uncertainly into her future she can not help but

look at Fandorin, who only recently had been an object of derision, wistfully with tears in her eyes: “Все хотела насмотреться на черную фигуру, что осталась на платформе, но фигура вела себя странно, расплывалась. Или с глазами что-то было не так?”²⁴ However sadly, at this point Varya has lost all her prejudices, fallen truly in love, and moved forward as a human being. She too has been paradoxically propelled forward in time by an investigation of the past.

Varya and Fandorin are not the perfect heroes, who, as Bakhtin explained, dominated the ancient epic. Those heroes were perfect not in the sense that they were always right—they so rarely were—but in the sense they were unchanging and immutable; closed off and distant. In Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses,” its eponymous hero boasts that he has not been changed by his experiences, by the things he has seen, or the places he has been, but that they have been changed by him. “I am a part,” he argues, “of all that I met.”²⁵ Varya and Fandorin too have certainly left their mark on things, with Akunin’s personalization of history suggesting that they are responsible for some of history’s key events, but, unlike Ulysses, they have also been marked by them—changed by them. Akunin’s two heroes are not perfect in any sense. In *Azazel*’ we saw Fandorin make all kinds of mistakes, and in this novel we see Varya make those same mistakes all over again. They are parodies of the stalwart heroes who normally dominate detective and adventure fiction, often only bumbling their ways to victory. Their lives are a process of growth, a progression, and in that progression we can observe the course of time, the transformation from one state to another—they make mistakes and learn from them. Likewise, it is easier to imagine these characters and their adventures existing in the present tense, as something continuous and unfolding rather than closed off and absolute, lying definitively in the past, over a hundred years ago.

²⁴ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 200.

²⁵ Alfred Tennyson, “Ulysses,” *Poems* (London: The Scholar Press, 1976) 265.

In the first chapter of this thesis I noted the amazing foresightedness of the novel's villains. Lady Astair, for example, predicts great changes in the coming century. One of her agents, the abominable Dr. Blank, goes still further and predicts the incomparable importance that electricity will play in that century. In *Turetskii gambit*, Anwar Effendi is still more specific, telling Varya Suvorova, "Я смотрю, у вас в России революционеры уже начали постреливать. А скоро начнется настоящая тайная война [. . .] Идеалистически настроенные юноши и девушки станут взрывать дворцы, поезда и кареты."²⁶ Russia's Bolshevik revolution is clearly invoked as an approaching bookend to the series, binding Erast's adventures between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Lady Astair, though, does more than just predict the inevitability of great change; she takes responsibility for that change, asking Fandorin, her captive:

Разве вы не видите, как стремительно в последние десятилетия развиваются наука, техника, искусство, законотворчество, промышленность? Разве вы не видите, что в нашем девятнадцатом столетии, начиная с его середины, мир вдруг стал добрее, разумнее, красивее?²⁷

She adds, "Мои дети каждодневно спасают мир. И погодите, то ли еще будет в грядущие годы."²⁸ But, again, Anwar Effendi can point to much more specific results. *Turetskii gambit*, is bound more tightly than *Azazel'*, taking place during the course of a well documented war. Akunin is faced with a barrage of key events and dates, to which his story must agree in order to be historically believable. Between those events and dates, however, there are gaps, not part of the historical record through which the writer weaves his fictional narrative. The novel's

²⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 191.

²⁷ Boris Akunin, *Azazel'* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002) 291.

²⁸ Akunin, *Azazel'* 291.

backbone is Russia's attempt to seize Plevna. The story is divided by a series of major battles: July 16th - the capture of Nikopol; July 18th and 30th - two disastrous assaults on Plevna; and finally, July 10th - the capture of Plevna and the eventual defeat of the Turkish army. The dates and their battles are real, but Akunin is not limited by them, instead using them around which to forge his narrative. In Akunin's fictional account, Russia mistakenly takes Nikopol instead of Plevna because Anwar Effendi has sabotaged an encoded message from staff headquarters. The two early assaults on Plevna end in disaster because Anwar has been feeding Russian command misinformation, while receiving their strategic secrets from a paid traitor. Likewise, Russia's eventual victory is entirely thanks to Erast Fandorin and his powers of deduction. It was he, after all, who realized that the news of a Turkish surrender was only a clever trick. Indeed the war itself is traced to the machinations of the novel's fictional villain. He tells Varya, "Я сам разработал рисунок этой шахматной партии и в самом ее начале подставил России соблазнительную фигуру — жирную, аппетитную, слабую Турцию. Османская империя погибнет, но царь Александр игры не выиграет."²⁹ He elaborates that Russia was a threat to the progress of civilization, and the only way to neutralize that threat was to sacrifice his own nation by drawing Russia into a protracted war. He can even claim the rise of Turkish reformer, Midhat Pasha, a controversial political figure of the late nineteenth century, who advocated progress in his home country. As the fictional protégé of an existing historical figure, he engineered Midhat's rise to power, and even his eventual exile, planning a heroic return after Turkey's loss to the Russian Empire. Midhat's return then is only thwarted by Anwar's defeat at the hands of the young Russian detective. History is personalized as each event is subscribed to the individual effort of the novel's villain, and between each of these *real* events there is a

²⁹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 193.

fictional sequence of events to explain them, as they are repositioned into the text of a detective story.

VI. Conclusion

In many respects *Turetskii gambit* is a more sophisticated book than its predecessor, *Azazel*'. It, for example, adopts an entirely new device, newspaper excerpts as ironic epigraphs to each chapter, without then abandoning, as one might expect, the use of synoptic chapter headings. Instead, Akunin uses the two in tandem to further strengthen the illusion of a nineteenth-century temporal tone. The author takes on more challenges here—at least in respect to time. He is, for instance, faced with a more daunting framework of dates, locations, and events, all demanding to be honored to earn that allusive epithet—historical. This is after all a war that has been recorded in a daunting amount of detail and a description of military life must acknowledge that time can be regimented to the point of tedium. The secret to Akunin's success may be that to a good writer these things are challenges; not disadvantages or limitations, but a call to action, challenging the author to address these complexities with the skilled use of the tools of his trade, including the recognition and manipulation of indeterminacies, the personalization of history, and the multiple perspectives of narrator, reader, and character.

Chapter 4: Space in *Turetskii gambit*

I. Narration and Space

With his obvious affectations of style, Akunin is clearly trying to evoke the era of Russia's Golden Age, but there is evidence that he is tapping into the mythical past of another nation, as well—The United States of America. In *Azazel'*, Akunin cleverly refers to American roulette—a game enjoyed by “American cowboys,” and which one of the characters predicts will be renamed Russian roulette after they dabble in the American pastime. *Turetskii gambit*, particularly in its first two chapters, borrows much more heavily from American western lore. The allusions begin subtly but soon develop into an overt example of postmodernism. The narrative begins in a tired saloon that would be quite at home in the Mexican border towns so often frequented by Clint Eastwood and his peers. Varya Suvorova, from whose perspective the narrative unfolds, finds herself there after being abandoned by her treacherous cab driver. She is only saved from the lecherous intentions of the Bulgarian town's natives by the timely presence of Erast Fandorin. Fandorin, it should be added, of course, carries an American colt—a popular six-gun of the Old West. The natives themselves, especially the nomadic and barbarous Bashi-Bazouks—seem to parallel the unfortunate stereotypes of American Indians, found so often in the literary and cinematic west. The Bashi-Bazouks, devoted to the Islamic cause and therefore regarded as heathens, carry human heads as trophies hanging from their saddles, perhaps mirroring the largely fictional collection of scalps practiced so widely by American Indians in film and literature.¹ On their way to Russian headquarters, Varya and Fandorin are attacked by these nomads, but then are miraculously rescued by the Russian army, its riders seemingly, like the American cavalry, appearing out of nowhere, despite the wide open fields of the Bulgarian countryside. These observations, I admit, are only conjecture and certainly debatable. What is

¹ The Scythians of the Eurasian steppes also used scalps as trophies (800-200 BC).

not debatable, however, is that French journalist Charles d'Hevrais²—the novel's most dashing character, supplanting even Fandorin himself, and actually Anwar Effendi in disguise—dresses in a distinctly American style, wearing a large cowboy hat, leather boots, and sporting a beard and mustache not unlike that of General Armstrong Custer³ or Buffalo Bill Cody⁴. He makes his entrance riding to the rescue of Varya and Fandorin alongside the Russian military, striking a distinctly Western pose, drawing his long-barreled six-shooter against the Bashi-Bazouks with superhuman speed:

Всадник в американской шляпе (он теперь был совсем близко, и Варя разглядела загорелое лицо, бородку и подкрученные пшеничные усы) натянул поводья, замер на месте, и в руке у него откуда ни возьмись появился длинноствольный пистолет. Пистолет — дах! дах! — выплюнул два сердитых облачка, и бек в драном бешмете закачался в седле, словно пьяный, и стал валиться на сторону.⁵

As if to remove all doubt about his inspirations, d'Hevrais is introduced by a fellow journalist as “[э]тот несравненный ковбой.”⁶ Akunin is channeling the mythical history of two nations bearing more similarity, perhaps, than generally recognized.

I choose to treat this as a spatial phenomenon and not a temporal one because, strictly speaking, this is not a temporal concept. Akunin's narrative is inspired by historical reality but, I reiterate, it is not synonymous with it. In the introduction to this thesis I cited the inscription to

² Interestingly enough, in his English translation of *Turetskii gambit*, Anthony Broomfield renames Charles D'Hevrais Charles Paladin. Paladin is also the pseudonym of the hero of *Have Gun—Will Travel*, a popular American television Western airing on CBS (The Columbia Broadcasting System) from 1957 to 1963.

³ Famous American general killed, along with all his men, at the Battle of Little Big Horn with the Sioux, June 25, 1876.

⁴ Legendary figure of the American West and frontiersman, who, having created his *Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show* in 1883, was himself an early propagator of the legend of the “Ol' West.”

⁵ Boris Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005) 24.

⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 26.

the first publication of Akunin's first novel: "in memory of the 19th century, when literature was great, belief in progress was unlimited and crimes were committed and solved with elegance and taste." Crime, however—especially murder—has never been elegant. It has always been a gruesome affair and its investigation—correspondingly gruesome. I believe that Akunin himself is aware of this and that these lines are an obvious piece of romanticism, indicative of the overall nostalgia with which each of his works is suffused. I mention the legends of America's Wild West by way of analogy. Americans have taken the existing past of their nation, particularly the late nineteenth century, and re-imagined it, creating an entirely new world that is probably quite different than the history on which it is based. Russians, for decades having their interpretations of history dictated to them, were not free to engage in these same flights of fancy. Now, though, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, history is an open topic, and Russians, like Americans before them, are romanticizing the late nineteenth century. Both countries, for example, imagine the era as a time of high adventure and rugged individuality, emphasizing exaggerated notions of bravery, chivalry, and masculinity. It is an attractive notion. The nineteenth century lies sufficiently in the past that it maintains an exotic appeal, but not so distantly that we can not imagine ourselves in this environment: the people dress and speak, for example, more or less as we do—at least, more so than in any other century in history—and, with the advent of photography, a precise visual record of the era does exist.⁷ These representations with their exaggerated notions remind us of what we want to be, and we imagine the nineteenth century as being, in Akunin's words, more "elegant." But was this ever really the case? No—this is nostalgia, an idealization of the past, but not actually the past itself. Russia and America have both created fictional landscapes whose bases alone are in history.

⁷ Precise in the respect that it does not rely on the subjectivity of a painter or sculptor.

Returning to my initial point; this is not then a temporal phenomenon. Akunin's presented world is a reflection of our historical past, but it is not synonymous with it. Instead, it lies outside historical reality, parallel to it, sharing many of the same dates and locations but, still, something different. Akunin's interpretation, for instance, is different. Indeed, that it has any interpretation at all—true history existing independent of its interpretations—that, in other words, Akunin has suffused it with the romanticism of high adventure separates it from the thing it reflects. Tracing history back would lead us to the actual past, not Akunin's variation of it. In fact, this is no one's past. It is not ours—it is a fictional take on it. Nor is it even the characters'—for them, after all, this is the present. Instead, I recommend looking at this as another world, borrowing a term from science fiction, a “parallel universe”, where, for example, the events of actual history are given alternate explanations.⁸ It even has its own physics—as we have seen people can appear instantly, out of nowhere—increasing at all steps the opportunities for drama, adventure, and surprise. Indeed, maybe historical fiction might even be seen as a branch of science fiction.⁹ Where science fiction dreams of possible futures on endless planets, historical fiction limits itself to multiple visions of just this one planet, dreaming instead of possible alternate pasts. Akunin has created his own pseudo-physical space, a sort of fictional playground or theme park, its design based on history, but, by no means, history itself.

⁸ Maybe we could also look at this in musical terms as a “variation on a theme.” The two compositions are connected in that one inspired the other, and they may share many points of similarity, but they remain two separate individual pieces of music.

⁹ There are, in fact, two genres of science fiction that deal specifically with history. One, called “alternate history,” imagines the impact of radically different outcomes of historic events. What, for example, would have happened if the Germans had won World War II? The other, called “steam punk,” may be a sub-genre of the former. It is generally set in the Victorian era, and often casts historic figures like Albert Einstein or Thomas Edison in comic-book-like adventures against aliens, robots etc. They are armed with futuristic technology, which, none-the-less, is often powered by distinctly nineteenth-century innovations, including the steam engine. These two genres radically rewrite history, overturning historical events entirely, and departing entirely from the demands of historical accuracy. I would not label them, therefore, as historic fiction.

Paraphrasing Herman Melville, David Milch, the creator of the HBO television series *Deadwood*, itself a piece of historical fiction, argues, “Any good poem, any good human being, and any good story ‘spins against the way it drives’.”¹⁰ Akunin is an example of this observation. He subverts his romantic vision of a time long gone, simultaneously, while propagating it. In the third chapter of this thesis, for example, I noted the deaths of Ippolit Zurov and Shamus McLaughlin, and how, being clowns, their murders upset our normal expectations of literature. Likewise the rugged distinctly masculine heroes that dominate the novel are all to an extent frauds. Ippolit, the dashing hussar, is actually a reckless buffoon. General Sobolev, the dauntless war hero, is hopelessly vain, his massive ego bordering on megalomania. D’Hevrais the French “cowboy,” is, in actuality, a Turkish agent in disguise, and Fandorin’s uncertainties and self-doubt, despite the detective’s pose as an icy professional, are only too familiar to us from the first novel. The narrative, though, possesses still more absurdities and contradictions dealing more specifically with space, particularly within the spatial confines of war. These sections profit from a juxtaposition between the events and atmosphere of a scene, and the battle, with its ensuing carnage, that surrounds it. The clearest example is the observation post, set up by the journalists to watch Russia’s third, ultimately unsuccessful attempt on Plevna. Its location is chosen as a point, which, although safely removed from the battle itself, still allows a clear view of the conflict. When Varya decides to join the journalists at the post, Fandorin asks her, “смотреть с безопасного расстояния, как люди убивают друг д-друга, нравственно?” adding, “Варвара Андреевна, ну что вы там потеряли? Сначала будут долго стрелять из пушек, потом побегут вперед и п-поднимутся клубы дыма, вы ничего не увидите,

¹⁰ David Milch, interview, *The Education of Swearengen and Bullock*, dir. Michael Schwarz, HBO Video, 2007.

только услышите, как одни кричат «ура», а другие кричат от боли.”¹¹ The notion of sitting peacefully, and calmly looking on as other men suffer—“кричат от боли”—disgusts Fandorin. The narrative soon confirms that disgust. While arriving at the observation post, Varya first passes a detachment of infantry waiting to be deployed:

Офицеры, собравшись группками по несколько человек, дымили папиросами. На Варю, ехавшую амазонкой, смотрели удивленно и недоверчиво, словно на существо из иного, ненастоящего мира. От вида этой шевелящейся, жужжащей долины стало не по себе. Варя отчетливо увидела, как над пыльной травой кружит ангел смерти, вглядываясь и помечая лица своей незримой печатью.¹²

At the observation post itself, she notes an entirely different atmosphere: “Зато на наблюдательном пункте все были оживлены и полны радостного предвкушения. Тут царил атмосфера пикника, а кое-кто прямо расположился у разложенных на земле белых скатертей и с аппетитом закусывал.”^{13, 14} The difference between the two locations is almost surreal. A more subtle example of spatial absurdity is the murder of Ippolit Zurov and Lieutenant Kazanzaki. Both men are killed in this same assault, and the confusion that surrounds them almost allows Anwar Effendi to get away with the crime. Again, there is here a disarming juxtaposition: these men have each died very individual, personal deaths in an arena of mass death—they have been murdered in the midst of a war zone. As usual, the narrator does not offer any direct comment on these two incidents, restricting himself instead to the observations of his characters. He is, after all, a contemporary of those journalists, and like them perhaps sees

¹¹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 114.

¹² Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 115.

¹³ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 115.

¹⁴ This is comparable to the festive atmosphere of the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas, 1861) during the American Civil War. The gentry of Washington were also picnicking spectators.

nothing particularly unsettling about the spectacle of war—Varya and Fandorin being ahead of their time in this respect. His silence, in its way, is as much a temporal marker as the synoptic chapter headings and newspaper articles I noted in the previous chapter. Both these examples subvert the very same romanticism that Akunin is trying to create—they and the bizarre contrast they represent are both exercises in the grotesque.

II. Reader and Space

The majority of this novel takes place within in the limited confines of the military camp stationed at Russian headquarters, and we, like the characters are forced to share that same claustrophobic environment. On the one hand, that tedium is relieved by those indeterminacies between chapters that allow time to pass more quickly. On the other, those same indeterminacies add to that general feeling of claustrophobia. When there are changes in space, when the characters move from one place to another, for example, we do not get to enjoy that same sense of movement—the actual journey is often completely stricken from the narrative, or at least severely abbreviated. When Plevna is finally taken, and the Russian army pushes forward into Turkish territory, we got only the following quick paragraph:

Как снялись с плевненского лагеря, жизнь стала увлекательной. Что ни день переезды, новые города, умопомрачительные горные пейзажи и бесконечные торжества по поводу чуть ли не ежедневных викторий. Штаб верховного переехал сначала в Казанлык, за Балканский хребет, потом еще южнее, в Германлы. Тут и зимы-то никакой не было. Деревья стояли зеленые, снег виднелся только на вершинах дальних гор.¹⁵

¹⁵ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 158.

Varya gets to travel—to move about—but we as readers are transported almost instantaneously from one static position to another. Moving chronologically, this passage is followed by a scene in a tavern in Adrianople; then, a scene enclosed in a train car; then another in a bank office; followed by a bank vault; then, a train station; and, finally, again the inside of a train. We, as readers, are being transported from one enclosed space to another. The effect is almost theatrical, as if the same space—a single stage—is being redecorated over and over again, with the changes being made between acts, behind the curtains where we cannot see them. Even when Varya is stricken with typhus, the author does not allow us to accompany her to the field hospital. Instead, at the end of chapter nine the text reads:

На лоб ей легло что-то приятное, ледяное, и Варя даже замычала от удовольствия.

— Хорошие дела, — раздался гулкий голос Фандорина. — да ведь это тиф.¹⁶

At the beginning of chapter eleven, three months have already passed, and Varya is returning, again, to Russian headquarters: “Холодным, противным днем (серое небо, ледяная морось, чавкающая грязь) Варя возвращалась на специально нанятом извозчике в распоряжение армии.”¹⁷ When she returns, she is surprised to see the camp transformed: “Лагерь за три месяца изменился до неузнаваемости. Палаток не осталось — ровными шеренгами выстроились дощатые бараки. Повсюду мощные дороги, телеграфные столбы, аккуратные указатели.” We, however, are denied the hustle and bustle of its transformation. It has all occurred in an undescribed interval. Likewise, when Fandorin’s investigation takes him to England and then France, we are instead left with only Varya’s point of view, limited to those same confined spaces listed above. Fandorin, the narrative explains is gone for over a month,

¹⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 131.

¹⁷ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 132.

but when the government inspector explains his business abroad, his description is characteristically scant:

П-побывал в редакции «Дейли пост», убедился в полной невинности Маклафлина. Это второе. Д-друзья и коллеги отзываются о Шеймасе как о человеке прямом и бесхитростном, отрицательно настроенном по отношению к британской политике и, более того, чуть ли не связанном с ирландским национальным движением. [. . .] На обратном пути — все равно уж по д-дороге — я заехал в Париж, где на некоторое время задержался. Заглянул в редакцию «Ревю паризьен» [. . .] Тут-то и выяснилось, [. . .] что прославленного Шарля д’Эвре в родной редакции никогда не видели.¹⁸

Fandorin confines himself to specifics and again the reader is not invited to share in any of superfluous details of his journey. Instead, he reduces his trip to just two very specific locations: the offices of the *Revue Parisienne* and *The Daily Post*. Akunin is antagonizing his audience, forcing us to share the spatial frustrations as his characters, only more so, pinning us down to set locations, and corralling us towards the inevitable finish of a well documented war.

The narrative, being tied so closely to the viewpoint of Varya Suvorova, allows one of the novel’s grander set pieces—the climactic scenes between Varya and Anwar Effendi locked away in the vault in the bank of San Stefano. In this case, we are fortunate to share the limited point of view of Erast’s female assistant, being privy to information that the other characters are not, including the great detective himself. Anwar, like some James Bond villain, goes to great lengths to explain himself, highlighting his motives, past successes and failures, and plans for the future. “Ваша огромная держава сегодня представляет главную опасность для цивилизации,” he tells his abductee, “[с]воими просторами, своим многочисленным,

¹⁸ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 175.

невежественным населением, своей неповоротливой и агрессивной государственной машиной.”¹⁹ He has sacrificed his own nation in order to draw Russia into a hopeless war with Europe, arguing “России же отныне уготована роль второстепенной державы. Ее разъест язва коррупции и нигилизма, она перестанет представлять угрозу для прогресса.”²⁰ Meanwhile, locked in the same prison as our heroine, we can hear the muffled sounds of activity outside the vault door, including, at one point, a terrific gun battle between the Russian and Turkish forces. The exact outcomes of those events, however, are unseen, and, therefore, unknown to us. What, for example, is Fandorin doing? Are Anwar Effendi’s plans succeeding? Is Varya’s rescue being prepared? All of these things, from the point of view of Suvorova, a point of view we share, are a source of anticipation and suspense.

The structure of this scene corresponds roughly with the transition I described in chapter two of this thesis, in which Fandorin and Nikolai Akhtyrtsev walk out of the home of Amelia Bezhetskaia into the Moscow streets. A similar, albeit much less subtle, transition occurs in this case as well. As I pointed out in chapter three, the thirteenth chapter of *Turetskii gambit* ends with the lines: “Д’Эвре захлопнул стальную дверь и задвинул засов. Они остались вдвоем.”²¹ Chapter fourteen begins (after the requisite newspaper report) with: “Д’Эвре отпустил Варю, и она в ужасе шарахнулась в сторону. Из-за мощной двери донесся приглушенный шум голосов.”²² Much like the previous example from *Azazel*, the earlier chapter embodies the exterior of a bank vault, and the chapter that follows, the interior. With the clang of those doors, we pass from the office into the vault, from one chapter into another.

¹⁹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 192.

²⁰ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 194.

²¹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 186.

²² Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 187.

Chapter division here is not defined necessarily by a change in subject matter, but by a change in location.

III. Characters and Their Presented World

The characters suffer their own frustrations of space. Varya's situation, for example, is not unlike Dr. Watson's in the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's mystery *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). In that novel, Sherlock Holmes simply disappears into the English mires on his investigation, leaving Watson alone with the principal suspects for much of the text. Likewise, Varya is left behind when Fandorin leaves for England and France, awaiting his return and his eventual explanation with no word from the allusive investigator in the mean time. There are other examples.

Almost all the characters in *Turetskii gambit* suffer from a general feeling of claustrophobia and ennui, eagerly anticipating the movement and excitement of battle. They spend the time between those battles almost entirely in the press club tent, drinking, playing chess, debating the major issues of the day, and, finally, thanks to the arrival of Ippolit Zurov, gambling at cards. This last addition causes McLaughlin to grumble: "Был пресс-клуб, а стал какой-то прытон."²³ The press club becomes a kind of second home to the novel's characters, a cozy meeting place where almost the entire cast regularly gathers. Seeing it for the first time, Suvorova is immediately impressed:

В клубе было неряшливо, но по-своему уютно: деревянные столы, холщовые стулья, стойка с шеренгами бутылок. Пахло табачным дымом, свечным воском и мужским одеколоном. На отдельном длинном столе лежали стопки русских и иностранных газет. Газеты были необычные, сплошь склеенные из телеграфных

²³ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 74.

ленточек. Варя присмотрелась к лондонской «Дейли пост» и удивилась —
сегодняшний утренний выпуск. Видимо, присылают из редакции по телеграфу.²⁴
Здорово!²⁵

Indeed, the press club seems more a social haven than an actual press club. Only two of the novel's main characters, and regular occupants of the club, are journalists—McLaughlin and d'Hevrais (and d'Hevrais, of course, is an imposter)—and Akunin is forced to remind us that this place is, in fact, occupied by other members of the press, involving those other members in the general banter of the club. In the midst of lengthy discussion on the historic advantages and disadvantages of the harem, Akunin finally allows a nameless journalist to interject, “Однако, должно быть, чертовски утомительно, когда у тебя на шее висит такой обоз [. . .] Пожалуй, это уж чересчур.”²⁶ reminding us that there are other people in this room besides his main cast, the majority of whom are not journalists. When d'Hevrais asks rhetorically, “Но как быть, если у тебя целый гарем?” yet another nameless figure answers, “Да, в самом деле,”²⁷ again reminding us that there are still more people in this tent. Perhaps Akunin is trying to correct a mistake here? Having previously defined this space as a press club, he forgot to populate it with an actual press.

Meanwhile, the Russian army and its commanders as a whole suffer the maddening fate of being so close to their main objective—Plevna—yet, at the same time, “so very far away.” The town is only a short distance away from the Russian camp with foreign correspondents even traveling freely between the two camps, maintaining their sources on both sides of the conflict.

²⁴ These telegraphed newspapers and Varya's admiration of them hold a quaint charm, particularly from the perspective of our internet age.

²⁵ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 53.

²⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 71.

²⁷ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 72.

The Turkish stronghold, though, is just out of the Russians' reach, and each failed attempt is another thorn, paraphrasing the newspaper excerpt opening chapter six, in the side of the Russian bear. Yet, their frustrations do not end with the taking of that small city. Russia manages to decimate the Turkish defense, taking much of the Ottoman Empire's territory. So much so, in fact, that the lights of Constantinople—or as the Russians call it, Tsargrad—are visible from San Stefano, the last position taken by Sobolev at the behest of d'Hevrais. Its proximity is actually the latest part of the Turkish saboteur's cunning plan, tempting the egotistical Sobolev with dreams of regaining the former capital of Orthodox Christianity, knowing that its capture will draw Russia into a larger war with Europe—a war it cannot win. Later the Effendi explains that Russia is a threat to all of civilization, and he is willing to sacrifice his own nation just to destroy it. The scene plays out with a certain touch of humour, as d'Hevrais presses the White General forward, and Perepelkin, the general's personal assistant, desperately urges restraint, the two acting as the pair of cartoon devil and angel, respectively, sitting on Sobolev's broad shoulders. Fortunately, just as Sobolev has decided on the disastrous course of pushing forward, Fandorin arrives, just in time, to thwart the imposter's scheme to create an international incident.

Varya Suvorova suffers her own frustrations of space. In a world dominated by men, particularly within the context of war, she often finds herself pushed to the sidelines, and sometimes even appears to disappear in space, at least in the consciousness of the novel's male characters. When Fandorin and she, for example, are first called to the presence of Mizonov, the head of Russia's Third Department simply forgets that she is in the same room, while he shares highly classified information with his trusted detective. Finally, after a long exposition of the history of Anwar Effendi, she sneezes, making her presence only too clear: “Однако генерал испугался еще больше. Вздвогнув, он обернулся и ошеломленно уставился на невольную

свидетельницу конфиденциальной беседы.” He is infuriated, perhaps as much at his own lack of observation, as at the unexpected young lady, demanding, “Сударыня, вы почему здесь? Разве вы не вышли с подполковником? Да как вы посмели!” This, in turn, sets up the unlikely pairing of government agent and young radical. When Mizonov demands that Varya be kept under guard for the duration of the war, Fandorin generously recommends that, instead, she be employed. His superior agrees, demanding, however, that Fandorin take responsibility for the girl, taking her on as his assistant. Neither finding the prospect particularly promising, both exclaim simultaneously: “Ну уж нет!”²⁸

Varya finds herself similarly forgotten in a situation which presumably has everything to do with her. When her honor is assaulted by Prince Karl Lukan of Romania, a man both she and Fandorin suspect of treason, the offender is challenged by both Ippolit Zurov and Charles d’Hevrais to a duel—the latter, it turns out, seeing an opportunity to rid himself of an unreliable ally. All three men are admirers of Varya, and all three, thrilled by the prospect of violence, simply forget her presence: “Варю больше всего поразило то, что о ее существовании все трое, казалось, совершенно забыли.”²⁹ Sensing the absurdity of her position, and the possibility of even greater shame and embarrassment, not to mention the possibility of needless bloodshed, she frantically tries to defuse the situation, only to find the three men remarkably unresponsive: “Даже не взглянув на даму, из-за чести которой, собственно, произошла вся история, свора мужчин, оживленно переговариваясь, двинулась по коридору в сторону внутреннего дворика. С Варей остался один Маклафлин.”³⁰ For the three combatants, Varya hardly seems to exist, existing outside their masculine sphere, not belonging to the same space.

²⁸ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 48.

²⁹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 100.

³⁰ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 101.

She is in the unique position of being everything to this duel, and, at the same time, nothing. She is its reason, its cause, but once it has been started it is self-sustaining, needing neither her nor her honor to persist.

Varya does not even get to personally witness the duel of which she is supposedly the cause. Instead, she and McLaughlin remain in the restaurant foyer, where the incident began, while the action is played out in a back alley. They—Varya and McLaughlin—and likewise we—the readers—are limited to Ippolit’s florid account of what happened, the hussar returning in an excited state, forgetting even to tell his listeners who was killed, leaving them in a state of extreme anxiety and suspense. This is surprisingly effective. With his tendency towards romanticism and over exaggeration, Zurov engages in the kind of hyperbole that even a nineteenth-century writer might avoid, making it something more spectacular than it could have ever been in real life, perhaps, again, even comically so. “Как могли мы, русские, утратить традицию сабельной дуэли,” he begins, “красиво, зрелищно, эффектно! Не то что пиф-паф, и готово! А тут балет, поэма, бахчисарайский фонтан!”³¹ He continues in the same exaggerated vein:

— О, это надо было видеть. — Ротмистр возбужденно посмотрел на нее и на Маклафлина. — Все свершилось в десять секунд. Значит, так. Маленький, тенистый двор. Каменные плиты, свет фонарей. Мы, зрители, на галерее, внизу только двое — Эвре и Лука. Союзник вольтижирует — помахивает шашкой, чертит в воздухе восьмерки, подбросил и разрубил пополам дубовый листок. Публика в восторге, хлопает в ладоши. Француз просто стоит, ждет, пока наш павлин кончит красоваться. Потом Лука скок вперед и делает клинком этакий скрипичный

³¹ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 102

ключ на фоне атмосферы, а Эвре, не трогаясь с места, только подался туловищем назад, ушел от удара и молниеносно, я и не заметил как, чиркнул сабелькой — прямо румыну по горлу, самым острием. Тот забулькал, повалился ничком, ногами подергал и всё, в отставку без пенсионера. Конец дуэли.³²

Although, strictly speaking, the text remains from the point of Varya—she is listening to Ippolit’s story—Akunin has allowed Ippolit to tell his story in its entirety and uninterrupted, momentarily surrendering the narrative to the view point of another character. This is, in turn, completely in line with the narrative itself. As a nineteenth-century woman, Varya would never be allowed to witness the bloody spectacle personally, and even if she had, given that she nearly faints at even this second-hand account of the swordfight, her perspective could never have supplied an account so dynamic or complete.

Although Varya’s position as a nineteenth-century woman is certainly a disadvantage to her, there are certain advantages to experiencing the world through her eyes. Returning to the incident with Mizonov, for instance, it means that we get a fairly objective, unobtrusive portrayal of the proceedings. The two men continue as if she was not there, not altering the content or the tone of their conversation. They are unaffected by her presence, and the words spoken between them would continue in the same direction even if she were not there. We, though, need that presence—the narrative has been tied to her point of view and without it we would not know exactly what was said between Fandorin and Mizonov and would lack an important piece of exposition on which the narrative itself is based. Instead, we would have to rely on what Erast Fandorin chose to convey to Varya about the meeting, and, given his new position as a recluse, cold and aloof, we could not trust his information to be complete or even entirely accurate. Varya has the advantage of physically being there—physically occupying the same space as the

³² Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 102.

two men—and yet, remaining unnoticed by one or both of the room’s occupants—from their perspective she is not consciously there, making her the ideal eavesdropper.

Varya suffers the added frustration of being paired with a partner who is largely immobile. Fandorin has gained a lot of experience since his first adventure, and considerably more professional skill, but he lacks the same enthusiasm, as if his energies have been sapped by his experience. Shortly after they are assigned to investigate the mysterious Anwar Effendi, she is shocked by his investigative technique:

Потом от нечего делать зашла проведать Фандорина, которому выделили отдельную палатку в штабном секторе. Эраст Петрович тоже бездельничал: валялся в походной койке с турецкой книжкой, выписывал оттуда какие-то слова. — Охраняете государственные интересы, господин полицейский? — спросила Варя, решив, что уместнее всего будет разговаривать с агентом в тоне насмешливо-небрежном.³³

When her fiancé, Petya, is falsely accused of treason, Fandorin remains equally lethargic, despite his promises to prove the young cryptologist’s innocence:

Истинного виновника Фандорин искал как-то странно. По утрам, вырядившись в дурацкое полосатое трико, подолгу делал английскую гимнастику. Целыми днями лежал на походной кровати, изредка навещался в оперативный отдел штаба, а вечером непременно сидел в клубе у журналистов. Курил сигары, читал книгу, не пьянея пил вино, в разговоры вступал неохотно. Никаких поручений не давал. Перед тем, как пожелать спокойной ночи, говорил только: «З-завтра вечером увидимся в клубе».³⁴

³³ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 51-52.

His greatest spurt of movement comes towards the novel's end when he travels to England and France to investigate suspicions of McLaughlin and d'Hevrais. That movement, though, remains unseen by us, left behind in Bulgaria, at the front, with Varya. Instead he remains largely dependent on the observations of his female assistant to form his conclusions. Earlier, I compared Suvorova's situation to Dr. Watson's in Conan Doyle's *The Hound of The Baskervilles*, the Sherlock Holmes mystery in which the famous protagonist remains largely unseen. A comparison might also be made to American author Rex Stout's popular Nero Wolfe series of detective stories, novellas, and novels. Stout's protagonist, the 5'11", 286 pound agoraphobic and *gourmand* Nero Wolfe, rarely leaves the comfort of his brownstone mansion, preferring instead the leisure of sitting in his office drinking beer and reading books, enjoying fine foods, or tending to his beloved orchids. Instead, Wolfe employs Archie Goodwin to do his legwork for him, constantly asking the more energetic investigator to report to him "*verbatim*," finally weaving all the facts he has received second hand into one great denouement. I note this similarity not to suggest that Akunin was inspired by the American writer. I have no evidence to even suggest that Akunin has read the works of Stout. Instead, I wish to underline a tradition in detective fiction, where the detective's powers of observation and deduction are so immense that he needs not move from one spot, remaining stationary in a central location carefully collating all his facts. This may, in part, explain the popularity of Akunin's works, particularly among intellectuals. There is a certain wish-fulfillment here—a hero whose intelligence is so great he can set his own terms with the world, even in an autocratic society. Just as Wolfe leisurely enjoys a glass of beer or tends to his orchids, Fandorin remains in his tent occupying himself with a glass of wine and a book.

³⁴ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 62.

I have argued that Varya's inexperience parallels Fandorin's in *Azazel*'. As an inexperienced young woman she is prone to the same disorientation, that same confusion in space, which plagued our hero in his first novel. Space here has the same ability to reveal character, particularly inexperience. When Varya, for example, first arrives in Bulgaria, abandoned by her coach driver in disreputable tavern, she is unable to distinguish whether the village she has been left in is Muslim or Christian, belonging to the enemy or allies:

Варя увидела такое, на что раньше не обратила внимание. Над домами торчал невысокий облупленный минарет. Ой! Неужто деревня мусульманская? Но ведь болгаре — христиане, православные, все это знают. Опять же вино пьют, а мусульманам Коран запрещает. Но если деревня христианская, тогда в каком смысле минарет? А если мусульманская, то за кого они, за наших или за турок? Вряд ли за наших. Выходило, что «армията»³⁵ не поможет.³⁶

She is reduced to a state of childlike helplessness and fear: “Такой тоскливый, безнадежный ужас она испытала только однажды, в шестилетнем возрасте, когда расколотила любимую бабушкину чашку и спряталась под диван, ожидая неминуемой кары.”³⁷ Suvorova, with no money to pay her bill, no means to move forward towards the front, and completely baffled by the unintelligible language of the suspicious natives that surround her, is indeed helpless, saved only by the fortunate presence of Erast Fandorin, who himself knows what its like to be lost in a foreign environment.

³⁵ Varya believes, naively, that she can form Bulgarian words simply by adding the suffix “-ra” to their Russian equivalents.

³⁶ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 9.

³⁷ Akunin, *Turetskii gambit* 6.

IV. Conclusion

Space plays a major role in *Turetskii gambit*. Almost the entire narrative essentially stems from mistake in space—based on an improperly decoded telegram, the Russians mistakenly invade Nikopol instead of Plevna³⁸ and spend the rest of novel paying the price of that mistake. War, itself, is largely a matter of space: frontlines, flanks, maneuvers, positions, etc. Fandorin is able to expose Charles d’Hevrais as Anwar Effendi largely by showing that wherever one man was there was always the other. Anwar even foolishly takes his pseudonym—d’Hevrais—from the place of his birth—Hef-Rais, a small town in Bosnia³⁹. But Akunin’s treatment of this topic is more complicated than the simple summation of these facts, especially with his emphasis on contradiction and frustration. Having created an idyllic landscape of adventure, he then subverts it all with grotesque absurdities. Having forced his characters into narrow, confined spaces, he pushes his readers still further into more narrow, even more confined spaces.

³⁸ An early example of Anwar Effendi’s tampering, and the crime for which Petya is falsely accused of treason.

³⁹ This village is most likely fictional. I have been unable to find a contemporary or historic counterpart in Bosnia.

Conclusion

It might seem that Akunin's novels straddle the divide between reality and fiction, between what actually happened and what is purely fabricated, and some might argue that I straddle that divide myself—never quite sure if my subject is history or fiction. Neither argument is the case. Historical fiction is still fiction, inspired by history, but not actual history itself. It is no more synonymous with history than a portrait is with its subject. A man sitting down to have his picture painted is not one and the same as the picture itself once it is complete. Yes, they are related in the sense that one inspired the other, but they are still distinct—two separate entities—one the man, and the other the artistic representation of the man. One, in short, real, and the other unreal; the later defined by the existence of artistic liberties and limitations, with its limitations often as important, if not more important, than its liberties. Limitations have a way of enforcing a certain discipline—forcing the writer to work within certain parameters. The great writer, and even the very good writer, rises to the challenge, exhilarated by its difficulties, not discouraged by them. Accepting history as one's subject is then a welcoming of still more limitations, still more challenges.

Remembering the divide between historical fiction and actual history, an author of historical detective novels should by no means be expected to recreate history in its entirety. To respect every single detail of historical locations and events is to expect the impossible—only history itself can exist in its entirety, not its representations, and with the inevitable gaps in the historical record, the failure of historians to capture every instant of every day, that is, in fact, a history which is completely lost to us. Instead, we occupy ourselves with either the incomplete or the fictional, hopefully recognizing the difference between the two. Still, an author of historical fiction is expected to respect the demands of his audience that his portrayal of history

at least resemble the real thing. Without respecting, for example, the most basic conventions of locations and dates, the work would then be unrecognizable as a piece of historical fiction. But do those restrictions limit the author creatively? Perhaps, but not necessarily: as I have said, a good writer rises to the challenge. The rigid metal framework of dates and locations might be better thought of as a jungle gym in a children's playground. The dates and locations form the bars and crossbeams of that jungle gym, and the artist's ability to weave through the gaps that fall between them, to contort and loop himself around those facts and figures, depends on his creative agility.

It is a challenge that comic book artist and illustrator Don Rosa mentions repeatedly in the "Making of" sections of his own epic piece of historical fiction, *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck* (2005), as well as its companion piece named appropriately enough *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck Companion* (2006). But why at this stage make reference to a comic book? Because what Akunin has created here is a kind of comic book version of history, whose villains seek no less than to tilt the world on its axis, and whose hero adopts the role of a detective like Superman dons a cape. His latest installment in the *Nicholas Fandorin* series, *F.M.* (2006), a novel in two volumes, goes still further, its cover pages featuring Spiderman and a Japanese cartoon character looking impishly over the dour shoulders of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky. The first two installments of the *Erast Fandorin* series are much less overtly post-modern, but they are in their own way—in that act of turning history into an entertainment—no less provocative.

Akunin's career as a novelist began with a challenge: first, as a challenge to his writer friends to create a work of quality in a genre that had long ago fell into disrepute; and, then, when they failed to take up the gauntlet, a challenge to himself to prove that good entertainment

could also be good literature. Much of his success is due to his skilled use of time and space—a recognition, whether conscious or subconscious, that their attributes in fiction are unique; that, for example, a second in a written narrative can take many seconds to describe, but, paradoxically, a year, two years, or even a hundred years can be passed over in an instant; or that space needs to be said to exist before it has any substance, and therefore becomes a function of time, but also that time needs space—specifically changes, transformations, and progressions in the spatial world—in order to be perceived. Without it the narrative would be stuck in an instant, an endless second, ceasing then to even be a narrative.

Other questions, though, arise: Has Akunin consciously considered all the spatial and temporal phenomena I have described in this thesis? He is a literary critic and should therefore be familiar with at least the basic theories of literary time and space, but whether at all turns he considered them consciously—it is doubtful. For that reason, I have avoided speaking directly of Akunin’s intentions—except in those incidents where I felt strongly a particular affect was deliberate—focusing instead on the finished product: his results. Good writers, I would argue, ought to be judged not on their intentions, but on their achievements. After all, no writer intends to write a bad novel, but it happens all the time. Akunin *is* a good writer and what he has achieved is equal parts good entertainment and good literature. But then is he something more than just a good writer? maybe a “great” writer? I do not know. I do not think so, and, to be honest, I am not entirely sure what exactly a “great” writer even is. I leave that question to more qualified scholars—maybe those literary critics and theorists who will unearth his books after another hundred years or so of history. My admiration of Boris Akunin is not based on his being a great novelist, the next Fyodor Dostoevsky or Charles Dickens, but on the fact that in a sea of schlock and mediocrity, and in large part due to his accomplished use of time and space, he has

created something finely crafted and masterful, something that delights the imagination but does not pander to it, and something which I think is worthy of admiration and invites academic study.

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