# Fantastic Empires: Imaginary Travel in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Russia

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# Abstract


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This dissertation examines Russian fantastical travel narratives from 1784 to 1855, an era of substantial imperial conquest, in which authors of various backgrounds, both Russian and non-Russian, wrestled with questions of cultural identity and the prospects for Russia's development on the global scale, while in a profound but often contentious relationship with the countries of Western Europe. My chapters cover three different categories of fantastic travel. The first includes journeys to undiscovered space, including Antarctica and the Moon (in works by Shcherbatov, Lyovshin, Kiukhelbeker, and Senkovsky), which largely criticize Russian expansionism. The second is stories of travel to or in the distant future (Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker, Faddei Bulgarin, and Vladimir Odoevsky), which project a more positive view of Russian imperial destiny. The third category is metafictional travel, through maps and the written page (Veltman), which deconstructs the very notion of imperial reality. I argue that writers employed the genre of fantastic travel literature, as well as specific devices such as dreams and frame narratives, to critically interrogate and reshape the imperial and national ideologies of their time. These works anticipate modern science fiction by using a wide range of spatial and temporal settings to create new worlds that highlight the possibilities or faults of their own societies, for satirical or didactic purposes—and as such they benefit from the application of recent theories of science fiction. Given the diverse range of authors and time periods I investigate, my work also has a taxonomic purpose, delineating the thematic evolution of fantastic travel narratives in different categories and paving the way for more targeted analyses of these understudied works.

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# Note on Transliteration and Translation

In this dissertation, I examine the works of writers who possessed hybrid identities due to their Polish and German lineage, and I explore the ever-evolving nomenclature of places as empires crumbled and territorial lines shifted. No single transliteration approach can fully encapsulate these intricacies. I use the Library of Congress standard when transliterating Russian words or phrases, as well as in the footnotes and bibliography. However, when transliterating names, I have opted for more readable modifications, such as using *yo* instead of *ë*, and *-y* in lieu of *-ii* or *-yi*. I have transliterated the names of Russian-language authors from Cyrillic, even if their names are not of Russian origin. Thus, I use Kiukhelbeker instead of the German spelling Küchelbecker, and Senkovsky and Bulgarin instead of the Polish Sękowski and Bułharyn. In the case of monarchs, I employ the easily recognizable English versions of their names, such as Catherine, Alexander, and Nicholas. As for place names, my choice reflects the official language of the governing country at the respective time.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations presented in this dissertation are my own.

# Introduction

> I had never laid eyes on foreign soil before. The frontier held an air of mystery for me; travel had been my dearest dream since childhood. For a long time afterwards, I led a nomadic life, roaming now in the south, now in the north, but never once breaking free from the vast expanse of Russia. With high spirits, I rode into the longed-for river, and my good horse carried me to the Turkish shore. But that shore was already conquered: I was still in Russia.
> —Aleksandr Pushkin, *Journey to Arzrum*[1]

> Up to this point, my journey has been smooth; we zipped through the Himalayan tunnel like lightning, but in the Caspian tunnel, we were halted by an unexpected obstacle: surely you've heard of the massive meteor that recently streaked across the southern hemisphere; this meteorite fell not far from the Caspian tunnel and buried the road. [. . .] This time human ingenuity withstood the onslaught of the wild forces of nature; a few steps ahead in the tunnel, a new electric carriage awaited us, brilliantly illuminated by galvanic lanterns, and in the blink of an eye, the towers of Erzurum flashed by.
> —Vladimir Odoevsky, *The Year 4338*[2]

These epigraphs, taken from nonfictional and fictional Russian travel narratives published in the 1830s, share a common setting—the border between the Russian and Ottoman

[1] Никогда еще не видал я чужой земли. Граница имела для меня что-то таинственное; с детских лет путешествия были моею любимою мечтою. Долго вел я потом жизнь кочующую, скитаясь то по югу, то по северу, и никогда еще не вырывался из пределов необъятной России. Я весело въехал в заветную реку, и добрый конь вынес меня на турецкий берег. Но этот берег был уже завоеван: я все еще находился в России.
A. S. Pushkin, "Puteshestvie v Arzrum vo vremia pokhoda 1829 goda," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, ed. D. D. Blagoi et al. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel′stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959–62), 5:438.

[2] До сих пор поездка моя была благополучно; мы с быстротою молнии пролетели сквозь Гималайский туннель, но в Каспийском туннеле были остановлены неожиданным препятствием: ты, верно, слышал об огромном аеролите, недавно пролетевшем чрез южное полушарие; этот аеролит упал невдалеке от Каспийского туннеля и засыпал дорогу. Мы должны были выйти из электрохода и с смирением пробираться просто пешком между грудами метеорического железа; в это время на море была буря; седой Каспий ревел над нашими головами и каждую минуту, кажется, готов был на нас рухнуться; действительно, если бы аеролит упал несколькими саженями далее, то туннель бы непременно прорвался и сердитое море отомстило бы человеку его дерзкую смелость; но, однако ж, на этот раз человеческое искусство выдержало натиск дикой природы; за несколько шагов нас ожидал в туннеле новый электроход, великолепно освещенный гальваническими фонарями, и в одно мгновение ока Ерзерумские башни промелькнули мимо нас.
V. F. Odoevskii, "4338-i God," in *Povesti i rasskazy*, ed. E. Iu. Khin (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel′stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959), 419. Parenthetical page numbers will refer to this edition.

Empires south of the Caucasus, between the Black and Caspian Seas. Both passages convey the thrill of venturing into unfamiliar and untamed lands, from the perspective of the Russian center. Pushkin's nonfictional account depicts his attempt to briefly escape into Ottoman territory, only to be thwarted in tragicomic fashion as the imperial borders shift around him. In contrast, Odoevsky's fictional narrative follows a Chinese student's journey to Russia in the forty-fourth century, with awe-inspiring descriptions of future Russian technology. Both texts reimagine imperial space and time: while Pushkin observes the effect of real-time border changes on his own life, Odoevsky envisions a fully reconfigured imperial future in which Russia reigns as a superpower, exerting its cultural dominance over the second world power, China. Both authors reconstruct literary versions of the Russian Empire in innovative, insightful ways, but whereas Pushkin's contributions to Russian literature have long been intensively studied, Odoevsky and many of the other authors I analyze in this dissertation have been sidelined. While extensive research has examined nonfictional Russian travel writing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scant attention has been given to the analysis of fantastic travel fiction and its complex relations with the dominant cultural discourses of its time. Despite this dearth of research, comparative analytical models to help us understand these works can be found in studies of Western European fantastic travel literature of the same period as well as theoretical studies of fantasy and science fiction.

Pushkin's desire to escape the bounds of Russia, mentioned in the first epigraph, may bring to mind the notion of escapism in literature. The genres of science fiction and fantasy in the middle of the twentieth century, and sometimes still today, have been accused of being escapist to their detriment. As reported by C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien responded to that charge by asking: "What class of men would you expect to be most preoccupied with, and most hostile to,

the idea of escape?" and answering "jailers."[3] Lewis agreed, arguing that science fiction can provide a beneficial form of escape from contemporary political disputes—he gives the metaphor of a ship steward coming out on deck to breathe the night air and appreciate the vastness of the ocean and the smallness of mankind's everyday worries. The jailers here are not just literary opponents of non-realism, but active agents trying to suppress the higher spiritual inclinations of humanity. Lewis and Tolkien set one model of how serious topics could be conveyed through fantastic genres. Since the time of Lewis and Tolkien, a wealth of artistic, provocative works of science fiction and fantasy have proved the literary legitimacy of these genres to most critics, but escape continues to be a powerful metaphor for writers and readers alike.

In the context of Russian history, *escape* perhaps brings to mind the image of the defector braving personal hardship and danger to escape the oppression of the Soviet Union. Correspondingly, scholars of Russian literature have long been interested in the prominence of science fiction in the late Soviet Union, and some have linked it to ways in which authors have escaped the restrictions of censorship and readers have escaped to less confining, imaginary worlds. But the desire for escape has a long history. In the Russian Empire (1721–1917), writers and readers could have many reasons for wanting to escape, at least in the imagination, by writing and reading fantastic fiction. For some, the motivation was also censorship and restricted freedom of movement and expression; for others it may have been the tedium of societal conventions; still others may simply have wished to imagine spaces out of the realm of their experience, and pasts and futures outside of their own lifetime.

[3] C. S. Lewis, "On Science Fiction," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 67.

*Escapism* is a twentieth-century word, first used in English in the 1930s in sociological contexts. In Russian, the equivalent *eskapizm* entered the language in the 1950s and 60s, for example in a political article about Zionism, and later in Ivan Efremov's philosophical science fiction novel *Razor's Edge* (*Lezvie britvy*, 1963).[4] Although the concept of art as escape was not unknown in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, more common was the belief that reading had a direct impact on moral development, and there are instances of Russian intellectuals attempting to reshape their reality based on their early reading experiences. For example, the Muravyov brothers, future Decembrist revolutionaries, were already as children considering alternatives to their existing society on the model of *Robinson Crusoe*, as Yury Lotman explains:

> [They] dreamt of going to Sakhalin, which seemed to them an uninhabited island (Robinson's world!), and founding an ideal republic named Choka there. The brothers would recreate all of human history on the island, without masters, slaves, or money; they would live for the sake of equality, brotherhood, and freedom.[5]

Like the Muravyovs, some of the writers I discuss in this dissertation attempted to turn fictional fantasies into political realities through radical action. Most notably, Pushkin's friend Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker took part in the same Decembrist revolt, for which he was imprisoned and exiled. Other authors found greater success in their careers through accommodation with the regime, and restrictions, whether external or self-imposed, on the content of their works.

These writers were also limited in their own ability to leave the Russian Empire. Travel restrictions were especially strict during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55), in response to what the tsar saw as the pernicious influence of liberal Western European ideas, especially on young

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[4] These are the earliest recorded uses in the National Corpus of the Russian Language. "Eskapizm," Natsional′nyi korpus russkogo iazyka, accessed August 31, 2023, https://ruscorpora.ru/s/epQ9Q.

[5] Iu. M. Lotman, *Iz istorii russkoi kul′tury*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Shkola "Iazyki russkoi kul′tury," 2022), 230.

students.[6] As hinted at in the first epigraph to this introduction, more individual travel limits, under both Nicholas I and his predecessor Alexander I, meant that Pushkin, despite being deeply immersed in Western European culture, never left the confines of his country. Imaginary escape was more effective, or at least more easily accessible, and Russian literature from the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century abounded in works of fantastic travel that allowed an escape from societal restrictions through the domestic act of reading. Nevertheless, this escape was not absolute. Writers brought the concerns and ideas of their times into their work. Some intentionally constructed utopias and dystopias to argue political points; others turned to satire, criticizing, confirming, or reshaping the dominant ideologies of their own society; some reveal aspects of their worldview by what they exclude from their fantastic worlds.

In this dissertation, I explore the genre of fantastic travel narratives originating from the Russian Empire between 1784 and 1855, a period marked by significant geopolitical shifts. This era is bookended by two pivotal events that dramatically altered Russia's position within the European sphere: the annexation of Crimea in 1783 and the Crimean War from 1853 to 1856. Throughout the reigns of Catherine II, Paul I, Alexander I, and Nicholas II, the Russian Empire expanded its reach, subjugating a multitude of ethnically diverse territories, including parts of Poland, Ukraine, Crimea, the Caucasus, Alaska, and beyond. As the empire grew, writers grappled with the challenge of constructing their cultural identities and defining Russia's place within the context of the European sphere and in comparison to other burgeoning empires of the time. With a focus on the fantastic genre, in this study I examine how these narratives provided authors with a platform to engage in discourse surrounding cultural identity and imperial destiny.

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[6] W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 91.

By doing so, I aim to uncover the intricate and often contradictory visions of the Russian Empire that were imagined and articulated through these innovative and sometimes eccentric tales.

The works I examine in this study offer provocative perspectives on empire and nationality that diverge from the more familiar works of canonical writers such as Karamzin, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol. The lesser-known works I analyze here intertwine realistic travel narratives with fantastic or science fictional elements to reveal unique perspectives on imperial ideologies. They encompass three categories of travel—through space, time, and the written page—and while not all explicitly conform to the criteria of modern science fiction, they exhibit innovative modes of thinking that present surprising answers to contemporary imperial questions.

I claim that, rather than merely reflecting Russian imperial ambitions and national identity, Russian fantastic travel literature actively interrogated and reimagined these concepts by creating worlds which were free from the constraints of their own society but tied in intricate ways to state and societal discourses about empire and national identity. In the fantastic worlds they created, the Russian Empire was repeatedly transposed, inverted, deconstructed, and reconstructed. In doing so, the authors I study brought to light the imaginative and imaginary nature of Russian imperial reality as a whole. Their texts served to undermine, without fully demolishing, the ideological foundations of the society they lived in, in ways that have not yet been fully appreciated by the scholarship on the intellectual history of the period.

As a study of a genre within Russian literature, this dissertation also falls within a distinct genre. Despite the general thesis mentioned above, the diversity of the works I study—written over more than four decades by seven authors of different backgrounds—precludes the more conclusive type of analysis that would be more typical in a literary studies dissertation. Instead, I

provide a guidebook to the early development of a genre in Russia and trace the historical significance of specific themes within the categories I have determined. This dissertation thus lays the foundation for future analytical work on specific questions that I raise, such as the connection between authors' real state service records and their adherence or rejection of state ideologies in their works.

One obstacle to definitive analysis is the multitude of fantastic devices employed in these texts, such as dreams and nested frame stories—narrated by characters who are ethnically different from the authors—which complicate attempts to nail down the works' political or social messages. Nevertheless, we can discern commonalities in the imperial substance of these texts that differ depending on the categories of fantastic travel, which I have defined in my three chapters. Authors used the category of spatial fantasy to argue for isolationism and critique the excesses of Russian expansionism. In contrast, authors of temporal fantasies imagined the Russian Empire in the future as exerting a positive effect on the world. Finally, metafictional fantasy allowed one author—Alexander Veltman—to focus on how empires are constructed through language, maps, and historical artifacts.

These works were not seen as part of a unified genre in the past, and I do not claim that my list of works is comprehensive, or that comparisons could not be made to other works of the period. Although I use the terms science fiction and fantasy, I analyze works that depart in notable ways from the usual expectations for those genres, as does, for example, Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters*, which is set in the future but features no futuristic technology. Another bending of the rules is in my third chapter, on metafiction, a genre that is not normally linked to science fiction but which forms a productive third element in the series of travel through space, travel through time, and travel through the written page. Nevertheless, these works do share a

relatively rationalistic and humanistic worldview, as well as the key device of travel as a way to explore the world, categorize its inhabitants, and construct some form of knowledge. In the present study, therefore, I exclude works of fantasy that draw more on folklore, Gothic horror, and the supernatural, such as Gogol's collection of short stories *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (*Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki*, 1829–32) or Veltman's historical fantasy *Koshchei the Deathless* (*Koshchei bessmertnyi*, 1833).

## 0.1 European Literary Context

Though highly innovative, the authors discussed here were responding to an existing European tradition of fantastical travel literature. The titles of the works of fantastic fiction offer insights into the workings of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary marketplace. For instance, Odoevsky's *The Year 3448* and Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables, or Wandering around the World in the Twenty-Ninth Century*, employ future years or centuries, aligning them an eighteenth-century genre that recent scholars have termed "future fiction."[7] To this day, this device remains a useful way to immediately evoke futurity in twentieth-century science fiction; for example, in George Orwell's *1984* and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. But by attaching specific events to specific years or centuries, these titles also establish a temporal framework that resonates with the genre of historical fiction. Furthermore, different temporal terminology can imply other genres. Consider Odoevsky's brief piece, *Two Days in the Life of the Globe*, whose title initially suggests a journalistic or documentary-style work. However, it turns out to be a concise anecdote centered around a social gathering; the word *days* referring to two impromptu pieces about the end of the world penned by participants in a parlor game.

[7] I. F. Clarke, ed., *British Future Fiction*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge, 2016).

Many of the authors inscribed their works into two of the broadest genres of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction: the travelogue and the epistolary novel. Travel is implied by various words in the titles: *Journey* (Shcherbatov, Lyovshin, Senkovsky), *Wandering* (Bulgarin), and *Wanderer* (Veltman). The travelogue was often epistolary in form, as in Nikolai Karamzin's influential *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (*Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*, of which the first complete edition was published from 1797 to 1801). The subtitle of Odoevsky's *The Year 4338* is *Petersburg Letters*, which is somewhat misleading, as the letter-writer, a Chinese student, sends his first letter from Constantinople as he is on his way to St. Petersburg. Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters* contains no such contradiction: the writer is an American traveling through Europe. By using "letters" in their titles, the authors seem to be defaulting to a popular genre, but they make little use of the dialogical possibilities of the epistolary format, and for Kiukhelbeker, the laconic use of *European Letters* as his only title belies the more interesting future-fictional aspects of his work.

The travelogue emerged as a popular and versatile genre because it provided a structure that allowed authors to present a variety of content without necessarily needing to link the parts into a unified narrative. As Andreas Schönle has argued, the travelogue allowed Russian writers to develop stronger authorial personas and experiment with the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. By the nineteenth century, travel writers already had long tradition of literary travelogues to which they could refer ironically and intertextually, each text vying to be more authentic than its predecessors.[8] Thus, realistic travel stories (such as Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*) and non-fictional travelogues (such as Pushkin's *Journey to Arzrum*) provide a valuable

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[8] Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790–1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

point of comparison to their fantastic counterparts. Fantastic travelogues, despite their outlandish elements, feature the same episodic (or picaresque) structure, didactic bent, emphasis on the narrator's subjectivity, and use of allegory.[9]

The tradition of travel writing has long allowed for an unusual combination of dry realistic details with improbable, marvelous, and experimental elements. This is true of the examples of travel writing (*khozhdeniia*) that survive from medieval Rus′ and Muscovy, including pilgrimages and merchants' accounts. The earliest known travel account written in Old East Slavic (the ancestor language of Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian) is the twelfth-century *Journey of Abbot Daniil (Khozhdenie igumena Daniila)*, an account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with descriptions of miracles such as the Holy Fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The fifteenth-century merchant Afanasy Nikitin's *Journey beyond Three Seas* (*Khozhdenie za tri moria*), includes not only the extraordinary, though believable, details of his trip to India, but also the abrupt intrusion of Muslim prayers, left untranslated from Arabic. Scholars have variously seen in this journey either an "anti-pilgrimage" away from Christendom or the account of a pragmatic merchant who partially accepted Islam.[10] In the more fictional genres of popular literature, such as fairy tales and chivalric romances, we can also find examples of extraordinary journeys, sometimes made by magic means, such as the flying carpet.[11] Afanasy Nikitin's

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[9] Reuel K. Wilson, The Literary Travelogue: A Comparative Study with Special Relevance to Russian Literature from Fonvizin to Pushkin (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), x–xi.

[10] See the summary of previous scholarship in Mary Jane Maxwell, "Afanasii Nikitin: An Orthodox Russian's Spiritual Voyage in the Dar al-Islam, 1468-1475," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 3 (2006): 243–66.

[11] Literally "self-flying carpet" in Russian (kovër-samolët), found in six of the folktales collected by Afanas′ev. A. N. Afanas′ev, *Narodnye russkie skazi A. N. Afanas'eva*, 2nd ed., (Moscow: Akademicheskii proekt, 2018), 3:510.

*Journey* and other early travel accounts reveal the formation of a Russian national identity in the context of an ever-expanding global environment.

By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the travel genre was wildly popular across Europe. Nikolai Karamzin recorded that the royal library in Paris in 1790 contained seven thousand travel books, compared with six thousand novels.[12] The explosion of accounts of real travelers was accompanied by the use of the genre for literary experimentation and social criticism. Certain Western works of travel fiction, which explore issues of national identity and imperial conquest, served as key models for Russian writers of fantastic travelogues. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) was read and imitated throughout Europe, and first translated into Russian in 1762–64.[13] Improbable, though not fantastic, *Robinson Crusoe* presented a highly influential model of colonization, imperialism, social relations, and British national character, all tied up in an engaging story. Travelogues could also be more realistic, blurring the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. This was the case of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, the semi-fictional account of the narrator's journey through Western Europe, overlaid with discussions of politics and the sentimental reflections.

In addition to non-fictional and realistic fictional travelogues, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the popularity of fantastic voyages, a genre with roots dating back to Homer's *Odyssey*. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) was a landmark in innovative spatial travel, combining realistic and fantastic elements to support Swift's over-arching argument about the inhumanity of mankind. Mercier's novel *The Year 2440* (*L'An 2440*, 1771)

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[12] N. M. Karamzin, *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 270.

[13] Iakov Trusov, trans., *Zhizn' i prikliucheniia Robinzona Kruza prirodnago aglichanina*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: pri Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1762–64).

served as an influential model for fiction set in the distant future, sometimes—as in Mercier's work—accessed through the medium of time travel. These works, driven by political and philosophical motivations, drew on the tradition of utopian writing, tracing back to Plato's *Republic* and developed further by Thomas More in *Utopia*. However, in the late eighteenth century, authors sought to go beyond static utopias, infusing fictional elements and narrative framing to ground their utopias in the real world with real people. Their accounts responded to an increasingly globalized world and mirrored the ethnographic writings of actual explorers. Addressing political issues within their works, these authors sought to situate their utopias within a tangible realm of global empires that were competing for military, commercial, and moral supremacy. At the same time, some of these authors utilized fantastic settings like the Moon or the future to explore imaginative scenarios involving new technology and even climate change.

A final strain of highly self-referential or metafictional journeys was made famous by Laurence Sterne, in his *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), mostly translated into Russian by 1807, and *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), translated in 1793.[14] These provided not only a model of sentimentalist travel descriptions, but also a certain kind of "fantasy," consisting not in miraculous events but in metafictional play and digressions. A different experiment in the same vein was Xavier de Maistre's *Journey around my Room* (1794), in which the author makes use of his restricted circumstances (house arrest) to play with the reader's imagination.

[14] *Bol'shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Stern," https://bigenc.ru/literature/text/3541290. See also Neil Stewart, "From Imperial Court to Peasant's Cot: Sterne in Russia," in *The Reception of Laurence Sterne in Europe*, ed. Peter Voogd and John Neubauer (London: Continuum, 2004), 127–153.

## 0.2 Science Fiction and Fantasy

Modern science fiction depends on its readers' awareness of the convention. It is not unique in this respect. Every genre assumes that the reader has a certain body of knowledge and belongs to a specific community; in other words, each genre "constructs a world" in which the language it uses and the events and characters it presents follow a kind of logic.[15] However, science fiction demonstrates this more intensely than other genres. The reader enters a science fictional world with certain assumptions about what is possible in that world, ranging from extensions of existing technology, such as space travel or robots, to inventions that contemporary science views as impossible, such as time travel, which nonetheless are accepted because of the existing body of texts in which they are featured. These expectations lie at the root of Samuel Delany's definition of science fiction as characterized by a "vast play of codic conventions" which instruct the reader how to interpret texts. He gives two example sentences— "Her world exploded" and "He turned on his left side"—which take on different meanings depending on whether they are encountered in a work of science fiction or realist literature. On the basis of that definition, he dates the beginning of science fiction to the early twentieth century, arguing that earlier authors had no understanding of the codes of the modern genre.[16]

This is a useful way to think about modern science fiction—note, for example, that some originally science fictional concepts, such as robot and warp speed, have become so conventionalized as to enter everyday discourse. But I find Delany's historical bound too limiting. Instead, I side with Adam Roberts, who argues that the genre has its roots in the ancient

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[15] John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 7.

[16] Samuel R. Delany, Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics: A Collection of Written Interviews (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 27.

Greek and Roman novel—specifically the fantastic voyage narrative—and was revived in the early modern period in the context of the Protestant Reformation and the Copernican Revolution.[17] Roberts's specific thesis—that science fiction represented a Protestant way of thinking and fantasy a Catholic one—is certainly debatable, as well as difficult to apply to the Russian context, which was predominantly Orthodox but which was also influenced by spiritual norms borrowed from various Western European countries. Nevertheless, his historical framework supports my conviction that certain late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fantastic stories can be considered science fiction in the broad sense, and that identifying their commonalties with the modern genre is a productive enterprise. As John Rieder argues, it is more useful to think of the genre as a web of "family resemblances" that changes over time.[18] The works I examine in this dissertation sometimes display the seeds of future science fiction conventions, and at any rate, they represent attempts to envisage the future of humanity, the possibilities of new technology, and ways of reorganizing society that lie at the heart of modern science fiction.

One of the preeminent science fiction theorists is Darko Suvin, who defined the essence of science fiction as the presence in the text of a *novum*: a new fictional machine or concept which causes the reader to experience "cognitive estrangement"—the vision of a strange new world that will cause readers to reexamine their own.[19] This definition is especially useful with regard to works which can be classified as utopian or dystopian. The works I analyze do feature

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[17] Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[18] John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 16.

[19] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 63.

*nova*, though in contrast with much modern science fiction, the works rarely depend on innovative or futuristic technology. Some of them in fact feature little modern technology; others indulge in a great deal of technological imagining, but new inventions usually appear as entertaining decoration rather than drivers of plot.

I use the *fantasy* and *fantastic* in a fairly broad sense, encompassing stories that include highly improbable, extravagant, or supernatural elements. In calling my texts *fantastic*, I have to confront Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as fulfilling three conditions:

> First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus, the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work—in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations.[20]

Todorov places the fantastic between the marvelous, in which strange events are given supernatural explanations, and the uncanny, in which these events could have rational explanations. Rosemary Jackson, drawing on Todorov, instead prefers to see the fantastic more broadly as a mode located between the marvelous and the mimetic.[21] Both the marvelous and the mimetic are confident in the "truth" of the reality they represent; the fantastic, however, centers on the doubt and hesitation of the narrator and the reader. Some of my chosen works fit Todorov's definition of the fantastic, by inducing hesitation and doubt on the part of the narrators, characters, and readers, often through the devices of dreams, visions, and other

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[20] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 33.

[21] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 2003), 32.

obfuscations. Others contain more "marvelous" descriptions, that seem to follow some internal logic. Many of the works, which are often experimental and unfinished, mix several modes, by combining rational and supernatural explanations for events, as well as leaving other occurrences unexplained.

Other scholars have defined fantasy by the relation between world, characters, and reader created by the author. Farah Mendelssohn uses this approach to identify four categories of fantasy, while at the same time acknowledging works that subvert her categorization.[22] In a portal or quest fantasy, the narrator or main character leaves a familiar world to enter a wondrous new one, and is often shown around by a local guide. In an immersive fantasy, the characters are already present in the fantastic world. In an intrusive fantasy, the supernatural enters the familiar world. Finally, in a liminal fantasy, similar to Todorov's fantastic, the characters and readers are never sure if the supernatural elements are real. The majority of the works examined here—in particular the utopias—fall into the portal fantasy category: the characters travel by various means to the future, the Moon, or the center of the Earth. Some works display features of the other categories. For example, Kiukhelbeker's narrator in *European Letters* is a resident of the future, and we are immersed in his world without any prelude. Veltman's novel *The Wanderer*, on the other hand, is often liminal: the mode of travel switches abruptly between the real and the fantastical, leaving the reader and sometimes the narrator himself in a confused state.

A final theoretical point to consider is the notion of "Aesopian language," containing a superficial meaning for the eyes of the censor as well as a hidden meaning to be deciphered by the intelligent reader. This concept has long been applied to Russian literature of both the tsarist

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[22] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

and Soviet periods, and is especially frequent in discussions of science fiction. The works under discussion in this dissertation do indeed express various forms of social criticism, obscured by creating parallels of the perceived defects in newly discovered lands or future times. Some of these works, such as Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, remained unpublished perhaps because they were overly unfavorable to the status quo. But the Aesopian language argument only partly explains why these authors chose to compose long-form narratives of strange new worlds, which feature not only hidden criticism of present society but also pride in Russian and European achievements and a wide range of alternative political and social possibilities.

### 0.3 Dreaming and knowledge

Among the most intriguing aspects of Russian fantastic travel literature is the frequent use of dreams and other framing narrative devices. As mentioned above, one function of dreams corresponds to Todorov's concept of the "fantastic": they inject doubt into the narrative about the reality of the events described. This function is fulfilled especially when a dream figures not as an explicit plot element but as one potential interpretation for the extraordinary events within the story. Such is the case of Lyovshin's and Kiukhelbeker's lunar voyages (in chapter 1), for example, in which the narrators' wakefulness is implicitly thrown into doubt. Some of these narratives draw on another concept of dreaming—their supposed ability to reveal hidden, otherwise inaccessible truths or prophecies. This is true of Odoevsky's *The Year 4338* (chapter 2), which depends on a somnambulist's access to the future through the medium of sleep. Other works, anticipating Dostoevsky and Freud, feature dreams that reveal subconscious anxieties, such as in a Gothic nightmare contained within Veltman's novel *The Wanderer* (chapter 3).

But dreams also have a broader purpose, by tapping into fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of reality. In this respect, Descartes's theorizing on the nature of

dreams forms a fundamental point of departure. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, 1641), the French philosopher postulated the impossibility of clearly distinguishing dreaming and waking experiences. In a famous passage, he noted how there are experiences that seem so incontrovertibly real that one must be awake—he was "now here, sitting by the fire, wrapped in a warm winter gown, handling this paper"—but that these same experiences would seem just as real within the context of a dream.[23] Building on this existential doubt present in one strain of Enlightenment philosophy, the authors examined in this dissertation frequently incorporate dreams and similar nested narrative elements that encourage readers to question not only the reality of the plot—which was always ultimately fictional—but also the very concept of an "imperial reality." These works thus compose a meta-commentary that casts empire in an imaginary and imaginative light, destabilizing the assumed solidity of imperial discourse and suggesting that empire itself is as fluid and uncertain as a dream.

### 0.4 Utopia

These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fantastic travel stories were also strongly influenced by the tradition of utopian fiction. Etymologically, utopia translates to a "not place" (Greek *outopia*), yet Thomas More, when coining the term, already recognized the wordplay potential of the similar-sounding "good place" (Greek *eutopia*).[24] As the early modern utopian tradition unfolded, it assembled additional common features, such as a predilection for static

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[23] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 13–14.

[24] "Utopia priscis dicta, ob infrequentiam, / Nunc civitatis aemula Platonicae [. . .] Eutopia merito sum vocanda nomine" (By the ancients I was Utopia, because of my isolated condition; now as an imitator of the Platonic state [. . .] I am rightly called by the name of Eutopia). Thomas More, *De Optimo Reip. Statu, deque Nova Insula Utopia* (Basel: apud Ioannem Frobenium, 1518), 11.

description over narrative: typically, an outsider discovers a perfect world and is given a tour and explanations by a local guide, which allows the narrator to detail the world's social organization and its differences from his own imperfect world. But even the early utopias feature rudimentary plots, especially surrounding the narrator or protagonist's journey to and from the "not place." In the works covered in this dissertation, these narrative elements—often deemed the mere trappings of the utopia—serve as revelatory and less didactic windows into the author's stance on pressing issues of the time, such as empire-building, colonial exploitation, and commercialism.

Of particular relevance to my project is the analysis of Nina Chordas, who argues that early modern utopia is "a conglomeration of genres, or forms," such as travel writing, ethnography, dialogue, pastoral, and the sermon, all intricately linked to "nascent imperialism."[25] A comprehensive study by Léonid Heller and Michel Niqueux of Russian utopian fiction examines its history and social dimensions, categorizing it into distinct periods and subgenres. The eighteenth century, for example, saw the development of the "caricatured utopia," the "counter-utopia," and the "Masonic utopia."[26] I continue the same kind of categorization in this dissertation, although I also examine ways in which authors combined utopian elements with more conventional literary plots.

### 0.4 Empire, Nation, and Ideology

The authors of the fantastic travel stories that I investigate here lived in a world of competing, large, multiethnic, monarchic empires. While the Russian Empire was conquering

[25] Nina Chordas, *Forms in Early Modern Utopia: The Ethnography of Perfection* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Routledge, 2010), 6.

[26] Léonid Heller and Michel Niqueux, *Histoire de l'utopie en Russie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995).

and assimilating new territories and ethnic groups, these writers participated in the imperial project not only through literary commentary but also through active participation in the form of civil and military service. At the same time, their reading of journalism and history—and in some cases their own travels—made them aware of neighboring empires of Europe and Asia, as well as colonizing projects around the globe. Within this imperial context, these writers adhered to specific notions of Russianness. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a growth of so-called "romantic nationalism," according to which each nation had its own primordial traditions, political community, and special character. Scholars in recent decades have highlighted some specific ways in which Russian nationalism distinguished itself from that of other European countries. Olga Maiorova argues that Russian nationalist discourse in the late nineteenth century was dominated by a "peculiar blend of national sentiment and imperial pride"; this imperialist nationalism (or nationalist imperialism) features prominently in several of the early nineteenth century works I analyze.[27] In *A Nation Astray: Nomadism and National Identity in Russian Literature*, Ingrid Kleespies suggests that the image of the nomad, wandering at the margins of Europe, was central to the Russian intelligentsia's self-perception.[28] Indeed, themes of rootlessness and wandering are omnipresent in the stories I examine, but they acquire altered meaning when paired with fantastic devices or settings. The narrator of Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters*, for example, records his introspective impressions of European civilization just like so many Russian wanderers before him, but in this case the narrator is American, and

[27] Olga Maiorova, From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855–1870 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 5.

[28] Kleespies, Ingrid. *A Nation Astray: Nomadism and National Identity in Russian Literature*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012.

the now-ruined Europe has lost whatever Enlightenment it claimed to possess. Although the tension between empire and nation often led to conflict, it also created an impetus for literary creation, as writers attempted to define their own relation (and that of their characters) to a complex web of identities.

The Russian imperial mentality encompassed varying attitudes towards different regions of the Russian Empire, shaped by factors such as ethnic composition, climate, resources, and the timing and method of conquest or assimilation. At the same time, perceptions of regions and ethnic groups coalesced in the Russian literary imagination. Realistic and fantastic travel works made use of the empire's diversity, but interestingly this genre difference corresponded to a different geographic emphasis. For example, the Caucasus, despite being the site of a prolonged 19th-century war and a rich source of inspiration for realist writers like Pushkin and Lermontov, was not a popular setting for fantastic travel. Instead, writers drew inspiration from other regions, such as the colder expanses of Siberia and the Arctic, which inspired both Bulgarin and Senkovsky, just as the Antarctic inspired Shcherbatov. In contrast to the Caucasus, which was embroiled in a lengthy and brutal war of conquest, Siberia and the Arctic offered tempting "blank slates" for these authors to set their fantastic worlds, just as Shcherbatov chose the Antarctic Ocean as a setting for his utopian land of Ophir. But these places were not devoid of human history, and the authors exploited the presence of real ethnic groups living there, such as the Tungus and the Yakuts, to reimagine colonial encounters in extraordinary settings. A final destination for some fantastic travels was Western Europe, a space that allowed writers to present their own perspective in the continual debate on Russia's linguistic and cultural dependence on Western Europe. For example, Senkovsky's Brambeus embarks on a journey to

Italy and subsequently discovers an underground kingdom, while Kiukhelbeker's narrator traverses through the ruined future countries of Spain and Italy.

By exploring and reimagining these zones of their empire, these authors entered into a complex relationship with imperial ideologies. The concept of empire has dominated Russian historiography since the 1990s, with the so-called "imperial turn."[29] The first wave of this influence in Russian literary studies consisted of studies of works of poetry and fiction that revealed Russian writers' relations to specific regions of their empire. Susan Layton, drawing on Said's *Orientalism*, has explored how Pushkin, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Lermontov, and Tolstoy constructed literary versions of the Caucasus as Russia's own Orient, supplying readers with "unverifiable affective meanings about their relation to untamed Asia."[30] Crimea, ruled by the Crimean Khanate until it was annexed by Russia in 1783, was another Oriental zone, complicated by its image as both Edenic paradise and a land with ancient Greek heritage—important for rulers such as Catherine II who wanted to establish their connections to the source of European civilization.[31] Kerstin Jobst has analyzed how writers developed the motifs of "beautiful Crimea," "ancient Crimea," and "Crimea as metaphorical Orient" to justify colonization.[32]

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[29] On the imperial turn in Russian studies, see Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin, "The Imperial Turn," *Kritika* 7, no. 4 (2006): 705–12.

[30] Susan Layton, Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12.

[31] See Andrei Zorin, *By Fables Alone*; and Kerstin S. Jobst, *Die Perle des Imperiums: Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007).

[32] Kerstin Jobst, Die Perle des Imperiums: Der russische Krim-Diskurs im Zarenreich (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007).

Other scholars, rather than focusing on specific regions, have probed the relationship between periphery and center. Katya Hokanson has taken the entire fringe of the Russian Empire in her study *Writing at Russia's Border*, in which she argues that the periphery was essential for the construction even of works such as *Eugene Onegin* that are mostly set in central Russia.[33] Alexander Etkind has analyzed internal colonization as a metaphor and mechanism by which the Russian Empire colonized ethnic Russians at the same time as it conquered other territories.[34] This dissertation is especially indebted to another line of scholarship that focuses on specific genres or literary modes within the imperial context. Harsha Ram's *The Imperial Sublime* (2003) argues that imperial ideology was implicated in the development of Russian poetry from the 1730s to 1840.[35] Valeria Sobol's *Haunted Empire: Gothic and the Russian Imperial Uncanny* (2020) explores how the ambiguities of imperial expansion into the north and south led to the proliferation of Gothic horror stories.[36]

Although Russian-language writers were heavily influenced by their Western European counterparts, their own empire was distinguished in significant ways from the British or French Empires, where travel fiction often revolved around perilous ocean voyages preceding encounters with indigenous peoples in far-flung colonies. The Russian Empire, by contrast, was predominantly a land empire, with a few northern islands and short-lived colonies in Alaska and California. Although the steppe was occasionally likened to a terrestrial sea, the Russian

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[33] Katya Hokanson, *Writing at Russia's Border* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

[34] Aleksandr Etkind, Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011).

[35] Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

[36] Valeria Sobol, *Haunted Empire: Gothic and the Russian Imperial Uncanny* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

experience of empire clearly stood apart from the British or French narratives. Consequently, much Russian travel fiction explored other themes, such as the experiences of travel due to military service or obligations, the logistics of post horses and inns, or the dangers of travel through potentially hostile mountainous regions. However, the aspirations of writers and the curiosity of readers within the Russian Empire were not limited to exploring this land empire alone. Authors such as Shcherbatov, Lyovshin, Kiukhelbeker, and Senkovsky described fantastic voyages to truly imaginary and uncharted territories: Antarctica before it was discovered, the Moon, and the center of the Earth. But while untethered from the real spaces of the Russian Empire, these works still are intricately connected to the discourses and ideologies of the society in which they were created.

Ideology has a complicated history, especially in Russia, where its pejorative Marxist definition—as an element of social control by the ruling—acquired a neutral meaning in the Soviet context—as a system of ideas or worldview—before becoming negative again in the post-Soviet context.[37] For the purposes of this dissertation, I see ideology as a powerful system of beliefs that are held both consciously and unconsciously and are partially determined by the social status, place of origin, and generation of the individual. Within this framework, it is essential to distinguish between different facets of ideology, such as state ideology, ideologies of the intelligentsia, and even variations within the intelligentsia itself. Official ideologies expressed by the state—such as "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality," formulated in 1833 by Sergei Uvarov, Nicholas I's minister of education—may not be dominant across all parts of

[37] For a history of the word and an application to the Russian context, see William Mills Todd III, introduction to *Fiction and Society in the Age of Pushkin: Ideology, Institutions, and Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

society, but more subtle, subconscious commitments may align individuals with state projects, even when they ostensibly oppose them.

My approach is influenced by Andrei Zorin's analysis of "the historically concrete dynamics of the working out, crystallization, and change of basic ideologems," in which ideology becomes a "reservoir of metaphors which people of various professions and types of activity both draw from and replenish."[38] But the genres of science fiction and fantasy deliberately imagine worlds that are at some remove from our own, so the relationship between literature and ideology becomes even more complex. One useful analytical model is found in John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, which focuses on Anglophone science fiction from the mid-nineteenth century on. According to Rieder, not only did science fiction authors transpose colonial ideologies to exotic settings; they also manifested a "satirical impulse to turn things upside down and inside out." This put them in a complex relationship with the dominant ideological background of the day, including scientific anthropology, social Darwinism, and a belief in progress. Science fiction authors played with the prevalent logic that indigenous peoples were "living in the past" and with the colonial gaze between the observer and observed. Rieder identifies several "ideological fantasies" expressed in science fiction: those of the discoverer, the missionary, and the anthropologist. He also explores the "lost-race motif," with the emphasis on mapping and imperialist knowledge-gathering. He notes how science fiction offered a powerful critical potential because of its "combination of realism and impossibility."[39]

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[38] Andrei Zorin, *By Fables Alone*, 22.

[39] Rieder, Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction, 14.

Just as in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century English-language science fiction analyzed by Rieder, the works explored in this dissertation reinforce or critique imperial ideologies, often by reimagining or inverting them. But these earlier Russian works were written in a different ideological background. By the late eighteenth century, the Russian elite to which these writers belonged had become thoroughly Europeanized, through the long process of westernization set in motion by Peter I. Thus, they were implicated in the broader European Enlightenment, with its attendant faith in progress, drive towards taxonomy and knowledge accumulation, and debates about human rights and equality. The Russian iteration of the Enlightenment was particularly focused on the Catherine II as a patroness of French philosophy and a locus of possibility (and disappointment) for liberal thought within the Russian Empire. At the same time, the Russian Empire was rapidly expanding in all directions, conquering territory as far away as Alaska, and coming into contact and conflict with a diverse range of ethnic groups, languages, and religions. Russians began to see their empire as assuming a place among the other empires of the globe.

The authors studied in this dissertation not only participated in the imperial discourses of their time but also used their works to construct political and social alternatives. At times, the imaginative worlds they built resembled the type of empire that would later lie at the heart of much of twentieth-century science fiction. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that science fiction arose from "the technological expansion that drove real imperialism, the need felt by national audiences for literary-cultural mediation as their societies were transformed from historical nations into hegemons, and the fantastic model of achieved technoscientific Empire."[40] Although the authors in this dissertation stopped short of imagining a united Earth battling aliens or

[40] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, "Science Fiction and Empire," *Science Fiction Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003): 231–45.

colonizing new planets, they still used their works to respond to the ever-increasing imperial momentum they saw around them. One work, Odoevsky's *The Year 4338*, does craft a vision of a technoscientific future Russian Empire in Csicsery-Ronay's sense, one that is seemingly enlightened and stable but which conceals apocalyptic anxieties underneath its surface.

### 0.5 Structure

I structure my dissertation in thematic chapters according to the type of fantastic travel each describes: travel through space, through time, and through the written page. In chapter 1, I analyze four works describing travel to uncharted lands. The first two are eighteenth-century Enlightenment utopias: Mikhail Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir* (*Puteshestvie v zemliu Ofirskuiu*, 1784), set in an imagined Antarctic continent, and Vasily Lyovshin's *Newest Journey* (*Noveishee puteshestvie*, 1784), an account of a voyage to the Moon. The second pair consists of Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker's unfinished lunar satire *Land of the Headless* (*Zemlia bezglavtsev*, 1824) and Osip Senkovsky's four-part *Fantastic Journeys of Baron Brambeus* (*Fantasticheskie puteshestviia Barona Brambeusa*, 1833), featuring the purported discovery of texts from a vanished Arctic civilization as well as a journey to the center of the Earth. These works drew on the European traditions of fantastic voyages and utopias to critique various aspects of the expansionism, westernization, and intellectual pretensions of Russia and of Europe as a whole, while also implicitly furthering the discourse of the inevitability of European dominance and scientific progress.

In chapter 2, I examine the genre of temporal fantastic travel, including works of both time travel and future fiction. Several of these works have clear science fictional components, including futuristic inventions, comet-caused apocalypses, and even notions of climate change. I focus on the three most notable works of the period: Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters* (1820), in

which an American travels through a ruined Europe in the twenty-sixth century; Faddei Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables* (1824), in which a Russian protagonist is shipwrecked, falls asleep for a thousand years, and awakens in a future world; and Vladimir Odoevsky's novel *The Year 4338* (1840), in which a somnambulist accesses a set of letters from the distant future authored by a Chinese student visiting Russia. These future settings allowed writers to contemplate Russia's destiny in comparison to other empires, leading to diverse conclusions regarding whether Russian nationality, culture, and state institutions would endure the passage of time. In contrast to the spatial travel works of the first chapter, these works champion imperial expansion, cultural evolution, and scientific progress.

In chapter 3, I turn to a narrative type that features travel through the written page, or through the map; in other words, metafictional travel, that plays with the reader, anticipating techniques of twentieth- century postmodernism. My key text is Aleksandr Veltman's novel *The Wanderer* (1831– 32), which begins as a journey through a map, before mixing in realistic travel descriptions, poetry, and a dialogue with the reader in the style of Laurence Sterne. This novel is based on Veltman's experiences as a military officer and topographic surveyor in the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29, as well as his wide-ranging interests in history and other subjects (the author also wrote a non-fiction history of Bessarabia and later directed the museum of the Moscow Kremlin.

In my conclusion, I take the opportunity to explore some of the legacy of these works up to the twentieth century, by sketching out how the key themes of the travelogues examined here were developed and transformed, both in works by literary giants such as Dostoevsky, as well as in works of science fiction works which, after being established as a distinct genre, achieved new ascendance and new social meaning.

# Chapter 1: Travel to Uncharted Territories

In December 2015, a collaboration between the Russian government and the Moscow Patriarchate produced a new addition to the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy (VDNKh), the vast, 1930s-era trade fair complex in northern Moscow. Nestled among pavilions dedicated to the former Soviet republics and themes ranging from space exploration to rabbit breeding, Pavilion 57, now houses a high-tech "historical park" entitled "Russia: My History" (*Rossiia — moia istoriia*). The Moscow version, since replicated in dozens of similar parks across Russia, showcases four exhibitions, as of May 2023: "the Rurikids," "the Romanovs," "Peter the First: Birth of an Empire," and "Russian Azov." An exhibition on twentieth-century history is currently under renovation.[41]

Each room in the Romanov exhibition features a unique map, highlighting the contributions of each tsar to Russia's territorial expansion. When I visited in 2017, the museum gift shop offered yet another map, published in 2016 by AGT Geotsentr, entitled "Russia from Rurik to Putin," displaying the Russian Federation (including the recently annexed Crimea) speckled with dates of battles and the founding of cities, and bordered by shields bearing the names of Russian rulers. No visual distinction is made between medieval princes, tsars, emperors, Soviet leaders, or recent presidents.

This specific narrative of the inevitable territorial expansion, from Kievan Rus to the modern era, forms an essential part of the current state-driven Russian ideology, but it has precedents in the Russian Empire, in which the state and the church constructed and disseminated a narrative of an expanding empire that was linked to dynastic continuity and to a

[41] "Istoricheskii park «Rossiia — moia istoriia»," May 12, 2023, https://myhistorypark.ru/.

divine mandate. This narrative accompanied territorial conquests and annexations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which had a lasting and particularly contentious legacy. From 1783 to 1828, the Russian Empire conquered or annexed Crimea, most of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Finland, and Poland in the west; Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the south; and Alaska in the east.

These lands were conquered, explored, and assimilated not only through the movement of people across space, but also through the interpretative and imaginative work of the empire's writers. But the intelligentsia's involvement in the imperial project was never uniform. Ethnic Russian writers as well as Russian-language writers of other ethnicities sometimes resisted and sometimes reinforced this process of assimilation. Within their texts, writers frequently oscillated between glorifying imperial expansion and criticizing state oppression. Consider Gavrila Derzhavin and Aleksandr Pushkin, who, inspired by the odes of Horace, conceived their poetry as having an everlasting legacy, one that would transcend the normal bounds of space and time. In his 1795 poem "Monument" (Pamiatnik), Derzhavin boasted that he would be remembered "among countless peoples" across the lands of European Russia: "Word about me will pass from the White waters [Sea] to the Black, / Where the Volga, Don, Neva, and from the Ripaeus, the Ural flow."[42] Further expanding his imperial vision in another imitation of Horace, "The Swan" (1804), he imagined his fame stretching "From the Kuril Islands to the River Bug, / From the waters of the White Sea to the Caspian," asserting recognition among "The Slavs, the Huns, the Scythians, and the Chud"—a surprising mix of nations from different periods of history. He

[42] "Слух пройдет обо мне от Белых вод до Черных, / Где Волга, Дон, Нева, с Рифея льет Урал." G. R. Derzhavin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Pravda, 1985), 174–75.

presumed that in the future his poetry will be renowned for having spread peace and happiness throughout the world.[43]

By contrast, Pushkin, in his poem "I have raised myself a monument not made by hands. . ." (Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi. . .), professed a legacy that was closer to his imperial reality:

> Word of me will pass through all of great Russia,
> And every tongue in it will name me—
> The proud grandson of the Slavs, and the Finn, and the now-wild
> Tungus, and the Kalmyk, the friend of the steppes.[44]

Through these choices of specific ethnicities, the poet is imagining his reputation traveling across space to the four corners of the Russian Empire—west, north, east, and south. The peoples named also cover the full spectrum of what were then considered to be primitive and civilized peoples. In the next stanza, Pushkin claims he will be remembered as a defender of liberty and advocate of mercy for those who have fallen.

These two poets include a subtle critique of the state in their poems: as advocates of peace or liberty, they imagine that their poems will find everlasting fame across the empire, and, as Ram argues with reference to Derzhavin, "crown the poet in place of the tsar."[45] However, their aspirations were intrinsically tied to actual imperial conquest of lands and sometimes forced cultural assimilation of peoples. Pushkin did become a household name among ethnic groups across the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, but this was not solely due to his artistic

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[43] "С Курильских островов до Буга, / От Белых до Каспийских вод [. . .] / Славяне, гунны, скифы, чудь." Derzhavin, *Sochineniia*, 250–51.

[44] "Слух обо мне пройдет по всей Руси великой, / И назовет меня всяк сущий в ней язык, / И гордый внук славян, и финн, и ныне дикой / Тунгус, и друг степей калмык." Pushkin, "Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 2:460.

[45] Ram, The Imperial Sublime, 118.

greatness, it was also the product of decades of Russification and the poet's eventual canonization as national poet.

This particular alignment of Russian poets' literary ambitions and the success of Russian expansionism is but one example of a possible relation between writer and state. In this chapter, I bring to light an alternative, by showing how late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russian writers used the new European genre of the spatial fantastic travelogue to critique the excesses of Russian and European imperialism, often by satirizing elements of Russian society or government through various inversions or mystifications. At the same time, these writers still participated in discourse that presented European scientific progress and dominance of new lands and peoples as inevitable. The development of spatial fantastic travel can be seen in two pairs of texts that I analyze here: two eighteenth-century Enlightenment utopias: Mikhail Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir* and Vasily Lyovshin's Newest Journey; and two nineteenth-century satires: Kiukhelbeker's *Land of the Headless* and Senkovsky's *Fantastic Journeys of Baron Brambeus*.

### 1.1 European Spatial Fantasies

The genre of the fantastic voyage, with roots dating back to ancient works such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, and the *Odyssey*—experienced a resurgence in early modern Europe, fueled by the intellectual ferment caused by the Protestant Reformation, scientific advances, and the discovery of new continents. An early milestone in this trend was Thomas More's *Utopia*, a dialogue between a fictional version of More and Raphael Hythloday, a seafarer recently returned from the island of Utopia. In its function as a political treatise describing an ideal state, *Utopia* consciously draws upon a tradition of philosophical dialogue dating back to Plato but incorporates a narrative structure that gives his imaginary

island a seemingly real, material existence in the world of the Age of Discovery. Hythloday, who has recently returned from a voyage to the New World with Amerigo Vespucci, gives ethnographic details of the island of Utopia that are unrelated to its political system. The narrator of the fictional dedication states that the geographic coordinates of the island only remain a mystery because of a well-timed cough when Hythloday was relating its location. A similar narrative approach and setting can be observed in Francis Bacon's unfinished work *New Atlantis* (1626), which describes an imaginary utopian island, Bensalem, located in the Pacific Ocean west of Peru.

The Moon also became a popular destination for fantastic voyages. The second-century-BCE Greek author Lucian of Samosata had already laid the groundwork with two satirical travel stories. In the dialogue *Icaromenippus*, a philosopher travels first to the Moon and then to Olympus, where he engages in conversation with Zeus. Lucian's *True Story* (*Alethe diegemata*, second century BCE)—a parody of unbelievable travelers' tales—features travel to the Moon and the sun and numerous extraterrestrial creatures. But it was not until the seventeenth century that the idea of an actual voyage to the Moon began to gain scientific credibility. In Johannes Kepler's *Dream* (*Somnium,* 1634), the means used to get to the Moon are entirely fanciful—a daemon summoned by the narrator's witch mother—but the Moon is presented as a real material location, and the work was partly written to expound Kepler's theory regarding solar and planetary motion. Cyrano de Bergerac's dual "comic histories," one focusing on the Moon (*Histoire comique des États et Empires de la Lune,* 1657) and the other on the sun (*Histoire comique des États et Empires du Soleil*, 1662) meld a scientific curiosity about astronomy and space flight with biting religious and political satire.

Among eighteenth-century works, none had a wider and longer lasting influence than Jonathan Swift's *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (1726), better known as *Gulliver's Travels.* This fantastical travelogue, which is partly a parody of real travelogues and novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*—is a satirical critique of empire and humanity in general. Swift argues for the equality of colonizer and colonized not by dignifying the latter but by portraying what he saw as the inherent barbarity of all "human animals." As critic Claude Rawson notes, in *Gulliver's Travels* "Humanity's despised subgroups, Indians, Irish, women, beggars, are correctly seen for what they are by people who, when the truth is known, are precisely as despicable for the same reasons."[46] Gulliver's "truth," which he explains in a fictional prefatory letter to the novel, is that he and his fellow Europeans are in fact part of the race of Yahoos, the greedy and savage creatures he observed in one of the lands he visited.

*Gulliver's Travels* quickly inspired imitations, such as the pseudonymous Samuel Brunt's *Voyage to Cacklogallinia* (1727), in which the narrator travels to the Moon in a bird-drawn vehicle. Numerous fantastical travelogues in other countries and other languages followed, such as Ludvig Holberg's neo-Latin work *Niels Klim's Underground Travels* (*Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum*, 1741), a journey to several underground worlds, including a satirical utopia called Potu (Utop[ia] backwards). Voltaire contributed to this genre with *Micromegas* (*Micromégas,* 1752), a *conte philosophique* that reverses the usual direction of the outer-space travelogue by describing the visit to Earth of two giants, one from a planet of the star Sirius and one from Saturn. Restif de la Bretonne's *Southern Discovery* (*La découverte australe*, 1781) describes the finding of a utopia in the city of Sirap (Paris) in a southern continent called Megapatagonia. As

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[46] Claude Rawson, "Gulliver, Travel, and Empire," *CLCWeb* 14, no. 5 (2012): 5, https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2140.

we can see from these works, eighteenth-century writers of fantastic voyages were fascinated by opposites—giants and dwarfs, the Earth and the Moon, aboveground and underground, the northern hemisphere and the southern—and these binaries were often signaled by whimsical wordplay; both of these elements continued as the genre developed.

## 1.2 Russian Context

The list of potential destinations for fantastic voyages—the Moon, the center of the Earth, undiscovered islands, and so on—was thus already well developed by the time Russian writers turned their attention to the genre.[47] Literate Russians consumed these fantastic works in the original or in translations, sometimes through the medium of another language such as French. *Micromegas* was popular enough in Russia to prompt at least two translations in the eighteenth century: one published in *Monthly Compositions* (*Ezhemesiachnye sochineniia*) in 1756 and one by Aleksandr Sumarokov in *The Industrious Bee* (*Trudoliubivaia pchela*) in 1759.[48] *Niels Klim's Underground Travels* was translated into Russian in 1762.[49] The first appearance of a lunar travelogue in the Russian language was a 1770 translation from German of the Brunt's *Voyage to Cacklogallinia*.[50] A translation from the French of *Gulliver's Travels* by Erofei Korzhavin (also spelled Karzhavin) was published in 1772–73, in connection with the Assembly for the

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[47] Brian M. Stableford, "Fantastic Voyages," in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. John Clute et al. (Gollancz, September 13, 2021), http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/fantastic_voyages.

[48] Voltaire, "Mikromegas: Povest′ filosofskaia," *Ezhemesiachnye sochineniia, k pol'ze i uveseleniiu sluzhashchie*, January 1756, 31–61. Voltaire, "Prishestvie, na nashu zemliu, i prebyvanie na nei, Mikromegasa," trans. Aleksandr Sumarokov, *Trudoliubivaia pchela*, January 1759, 455–75.

[49] Ludvig Holberg, Podzemnoe puteshestvie predstavliaiushchee istoriiu raznorodnykh s udivitelnymi i neslykhanymi svoistvami zhivotnykh, takozh obraztsev zhitia i domostroitel′stva onykh, trans. Stefan Savitskii (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Sukhoputnago kadetskago korpusa, 1762).

[50] Kapitana Samuily Brunta puteshestvie v Kaklogaliniiu ili v Zemliu petukhov, a ot tuda v Mesiats (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Sukhoputnago shliakhetskago korpusa, 1770).

Translation of Foreign Books (Sobranie staraiushcheesia o perevode inostrannykh knig) led by Catherine II's secretary Grigory Kozitsky.[51] Thomas More's *Utopia* was translated from Thomas Rousseau's French version and published in 1789–90.[52] Translations continued into the nineteenth century, for example, with the translation from the French of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* that appeared in 1821.[53]

Translations of foreign literature played a crucial role in shaping original Russian works of fantastic travel. Writers within the Russian Empire often responded directly to specific peculiarities of their own state, such as its historical experience of internal colonization, the process of Europeanization initiated by Peter I and continued by his successors, and the autocratic nature of its government. At the same time, however, they actively participated in broader European intellectual discussions of British, French, and Spanish colonialism. They sometimes situated their narratives in distant locations unrelated to Russia—a device which allowed them simultaneously to subtly critique their own countries and participate in pan-European debates.

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[51] Erofei Korzhavin, trans., *Puteshestvii Gulliverovykh kniga pervaia[—chetvertaia]* (St. Petersburg: Pri Imp. akad. nauk, 1772). For the translation and reception of Swift in Russia, see Iu. D. Levin, *Vospriiatie angliiskoi literatury v Rossii: issledovaniia i materialy* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990), 103–33.; and Michael Düring, "From Russian 'sviftovedenie' to the Soviet School of Swift Criticism: The Dean's Fate in Russia," in *The Reception of Jonathan Swift in Europe*, ed. Hermann Josef Real (London: Continuum, 2005), 170–213.

[52] Kartina vsevozmozhno luchshago pravleniia ili Utopiia (St. Petersburg: I. K. Shnor, 1789); Filosofa Rafaila Gitlode stranstvovanie v Novom Svete: I opisanie liubopytstva dostoinykh primechanii i blagorazumnykh ustanovleniĭ zhizni miroliubivago naroda ostrova Utopii (St. Petersburg: I. K. Shnor, 1790).

[53] *Novaia Atlantida* (Moscow: V tipografii g-zhy Bozhukovoi, 1821).

## 1.3 Enlightened Russian Utopias

Confronted with the paradoxes of the Enlightenment and its contentious debates regarding human equality, the ideal state, and the merits of civilization, and responding more specifically to Russia's emerging status within the larger European political and intellectual sphere, two eighteenth-century Russian authors found an effective medium for their ideas in the utopian genre, framed as extraordinary travel narratives. In addition to participating in the broader context of the Enlightenment, both of these authors had ties to freemasonry, which is reflected in their political and religious ideological frameworks.[54]

The more notable author in the pair discussed here was writer and statesman Prince Mikhail Mikhailovich Shcherbatov (1733–1790), who served in a number of public offices under Catherine II, including as a member of the Legislative Commission of 1767 and as court historian. *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, composed between 1783 and 1784 but seemingly incomplete, was eventually published in 1896.[55] This work explores the discovery of an enigmatic civilization known as Ophir, located in the heart of the Antarctic Ocean. Shcherbatov is otherwise best known for a seven-volume *History of Russia from the Earliest Times* (*Istoriia rossiiskaia ot drevneishikh vremian*, 1770–91) and a treatise *On the Deterioration of Morals in Russia* (*O povrezhdenii nravov v Rossii*, written in 1786 but published only in 1858, abroad). Shcherbatov aligned himself with the conservative faction of the Enlightenment, in that he opposed both unrestrained autocracy and the abolition of serfdom. He regarded the hereditary

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[54] See G. M. Hamburg, *The Enigma of Mikhail Shcherbatov* (Yale University Press, 2016), and Alina Orłowska, "Masonskii diskurs o novoi Rossii: O svoeobrazii obraza mira v russkikh masonskikh utopiiakh XVIII veka," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis: Folia Litteraria Rossica* 12 (2019): 11–23.

[55] M. M. Shcherbatov, "Puteshestvie v zemliu Ofirskuiu gospodina S... shvedskago dvorianina," in *Sochineniia kniazia M. M. Shcherbatova*, ed. I. P. Khrushchov, vol. 1, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo "Pechatnia S. P. Iakovleva," 1896), 749–1060.

nobility as the cornerstone of Russian society and criticized numerous reforms instituted by Peter I, which had led, in his opinion, to the proliferation of corruption and immorality.

The second author, Vasily Alekseevich Lyovshin (1746–1826), fought in the Russo-Turkish war of 1768–74 and remained in government service until the reign of Alexander I. His list of works includes everything from a manual of horse medicine to a sentimental epistolary novel, *Mornings of a Lover* (*Utrenniki vliublennago*, 1779). He is especially known for his collection of Russian fairy tales (*Russkie skazki*, 1780–83), which influenced later folklore adapters such as Karamzin and Pushkin. His novella *Newest Journey* (*Noveishee puteshestvie*) was first published in Princess Dashkova's journal *Companion of Lovers of the Russian Word* (*Sobesednik liubitelei rossiiskago slova*) in 1784.[56] It tells the story of a scholar named Narsim who travels to the Moon on a flying machine.

Shcherbatov's and Lyovshin's works draw heavily on the utopian tradition: they are replete with intricate descriptions of the political and societal structures governing their envisioned realms. As in Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia*, the characteristics of their imaginary worlds are presented through dialogues that make their rationally achieved advantages seem incontrovertible, though attentive readers will note leaps in logic and recognize the unquestioned biases and assumptions of the authors. The utopian genre demands great descriptive detail, often in the form of lengthy conversations, but relatively little plot. The narrator or main character often encounters a guide—likened by Northrop Frye to an Intourist Soviet tour guide—who leads the traveler around the world and answers his questions, in a kind of Socratic dialogue that ultimately supports the superiority of the utopian solution of each

[56] "Noveishee puteshestvie: Sochineno v gorode Beleve," *Sobesednik liubitelei rossiiskago slova* (1784), published across four issues: 13:138–66, 14:5–33, 15:5–33; 16:38–53. Subsequent parenthetical references are to this edition.

societal problem. The traveler often encounters rituals that seem strange to him, until the guide reveals their rationalistic basis.[57] Nevertheless, these works do have elementary plots, and it is often in the narrative framing that telling details of their authors' imperial worldviews can be seen, as I analyze in the section on framing below.

In Shcherbatov's Ophir, the peasants, the nobility, and the wise monarch work together for the common good. Ophir is clearly an idealized antipodean version of Russia, signaled by the use of modified versions of Russian names—in the same tradition as the above-mentioned backwards names used by Shcherbatov's European predecessors. In Ophir's tumultuous past, the ruler Perega (Peter) decided to move the capital from Kvamo (Moscow) to his new city of Peregab (Petersburg), built on unsuitable marshland. This change caused the ruling elite to be alienated from their subjects, and after Perega's death, the new ruler decided to restore the original capital and the native traditions and virtues of his country. Nevertheless, the society has not reverted to an Ophirian equivalent of medieval Muscovy with its bearded boyars—it also has a strong dose of the Enlightenment and Masonic rational ordering of society. The Ophirian religious services, for example, consist of short prayers to a supreme being, and the priests are drawn from the police force, who thus serve as defenders of public morals in all aspects of Ophirian life. This rationalistic religion was the aspect of Ophir that attracted the most criticism in the decades after the work's publication in 1896, prompting the writer Vasily Fursenko, for example, to call the Ophirian religion "something so narrow, cold and petty, that our feelings decidedly cannot be reconciled with it."[58]

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[57] Northrop Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopias," *Daedalus* 94, no. 2 (1965): 324.

[58] V. Fursenko, "Shcherbatov, Mikhail Mikhailovich," in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, ed. A. A. Polovtsov, vol. 24 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Glavnogo upravleniia udelov, 1912), 122.

Lyovshin's *Newest Journey* similarly presents a vision of a stable and fairly conservative society, in this case located on the Moon. A recurring theme is how the narrator Narsim's perspective is different from that of the lunar inhabitants, who think of our earth as their Moon. Narsim has a mirror image in Kvalboko, a Lunarian who at the beginning of the story has left the Moon to explore the Earth and returns at the end to repent his folly and tell his own experiences. Unlike Shcherbatov's Ophirians, Lyovshin's Lunarians have little interest in history or science—they even lack a written tradition, although they are somehow aware that writing exists.

### 1.4 Shcherbatov and Lyovshin: Framing

While these stories unfold predominantly in fantastical, uncharted realms, they begin with real-world narrative frames, a device that allows the authors to incorporate discourses on global imperial politics and national difference. But it is noteworthy that both of these writers conspicuously excluded references to Russia even from the real-world parts of their stories.

Lyovshin's *Newest Journey* is told in the third person by an unspecified narrator. The story begins with the main character, Narsim, sitting at his window, looking out at the Moon and the stars, and contemplating the principles of flight. The name seems to have been borrowed from that of a fictional Crimean prince in Mikhail Lomonosov's 1750 play *Tamara and Selim* (*Tamara i Selim).* We can thus read as a natural philosopher from some Eastern country. On the whole, however, in his encounters with the Lunarians, Narsim serves to represent the humanity of Earth. It is his counterpart Kvalboko—a Lunarian who comes to Earth and is captured by the Turks before ending up in the realm of Catherine II, who represents the supposedly outside perspective on the Russian Empire.

The narrator in Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir* is more developed. He is a Swedish nobleman serving in the French navy in India, who is heading back to France when his

ship is blown off course into the Southern Sea. The narrator's Swedishness obscures the Ophir–Russia analogy, and the addition of India allows Shcherbatov to include a critique of French expansionism. When the narrator and his crewmates first encounter the Ophirians, they are surprised by their level of civilization: "we thought humanity and politeness were only present in Europe."[59] At face value, this seems to be a partial critique of Eurocentrism: although the French sailors may not have encountered these civilizational values in India, they are surprisingly present in a zone of colonial exploration that was thought to be empty or inhabited by "primitive" tribes. But the phrase develops an ironic significance in a subsequent incident, in which a group of drunk European sailors begin a brawl and end up killing one of the Ophirians. For this, they are rounded up and sentenced to hard labor according to Ophirian law. For Shcherbatov, this represents the victory of rationalistic order over barbarism—Enlightenment lies firmly on the side of the Ophirians. If we make a Swiftian parallel, the European sailors turn out to be nothing but wild Yahoos.

These complex national dynamics are also visible in the languages that figure in the plots. In both works, the narrators communicate with the inhabitants of the newly discovered lands using languages they have already learned. Shcherbatov's Ophirians speak Sanskrit, a language the Swedish narrator conveniently acquired during his time in India. This device places the work in the broader context of a growing interest in Sanskrit in late eighteenth-century Europe. Some writers believed that the language offered access to pure or primitive knowledge or even supported the truth of Christian scripture.[60] Though Shcherbatov does not make such claims, the

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[59] "Мы думали, что человечество и учтивость в одной Европе пребывают." Mikhail Mikhailovich Shcherbatov, *Izbrannye trudy*, ed. S. G. Kalinina (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2010), 186. Subsequent references to pages in this work will be made in parentheses in the body of the text.

[60] Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Yoda Press, 2005), 97.

presence of Sanskrit in his imagined Antarctic land implies the eternal quality attributed to the language.

Lyovshin's Lunarians, on the other hand, speak Syriac, a language understood by the narrator Narsim either because he is from the Middle East or because he has studied ancient texts. Syriac evokes notions of mystical wisdom and ancient history that were popular subjects of Orientalist study. However, Lyovshin introduces the "real" eighteenth-century Oriental world in a more threatening manner. Narsim's counterpart, Kvalboko, a Lunarian journeying to Earth, faces capture in Turkey and almost forced conversion to Islam before securing his release through bribery. Just as the Orientalist works famously analyzed by Edward Said, Lyovshin's work features a distinction between a scholarly, ancient Orient and a corrupted modern Turkey. The Ottoman Empire was among Russia's principal adversaries at the time, and the subject of Russian imperial ambition, most notably in Catherine II's "Greek project"—a contemplated reconquest of Constantinople and Greece for the European world, and specifically for Orthodox Christendom.[61]

### 1.5 Shcherbatov and Lyovshin: Technology

While these spatial fantastic narratives originated before the comprehensive industrialization and mechanization that sparked modern science fiction, they nevertheless exhibit an inherent faith in the advancement of human intellect and the potential of novel technologies. Despite Shcherbatov's and Lyovshin's hostility towards some of the social and cultural consequences of Peter I's reforms, they were far from being Luddites—they accepted and made use of the possibilities presented by new technology, particularly in the domains of

[61] For more on Catherine's Greek project, see the first three chapters of Zorin, *By Fables Alone*.

exploration and military application. Their works thus represent a blending of technological globalism and social isolationism that is perhaps only practicable in artificial utopian worlds.

Shcherbatov's work, while devoid of futuristic technology, draws heavily on the existing military and geographical science of his time, reflecting its origins at a pivotal juncture in the history of European exploration and colonization, and a corresponding evolution in fantastic travel narratives. Fantastic voyages such as *Gulliver's Travels* took place in an ostensibly "open" world, in which the conceit of large islands still undiscovered by Europeans was entirely plausible. By 1820, when the Russian expedition of Bellingshausen and Lazarev discovered Antarctica, these possibilities were increasingly closed off; undiscovered lands could only be believable as "lost worlds" in highly inaccessible regions.[62]

*Journey to the Land of Ophir* lies at the turning point between the open- and closed-world paradigms. Composed in an era when Europeans had started to colonize Australia but had not yet reached Antarctica, Shcherbatov elected to place his utopia within a region of ongoing European exploration—the Southern Ocean. As the narrator's frigate is on its way from Pondicherry back to Europe, it is blown off course to "58 ½ degrees south latitude, that is, in a place where, as far as we know, no European ship has penetrated, owing to the great ice surrounding the Antarctic pole."[63] But in an implicit acknowledgement of the flawed nature of European geographic knowledge, the sailors make a surprising discovery: "we began to see the land, and through the telescope we saw a well-built city—here, where we only thought to find ice, or at least an empty

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[62] David Pringle et al., "Lost Worlds," in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. John Clute et al. (London: Gollancz, 2021), accessed December 1, 2021, https://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/lost_worlds.

[63] "[M]ы были в 5872 градусах полуденной широты, то есть в таком месте, куда еще, колико известно, ни один европейский корабль не проникал, ради великих льдов, окружающих антарктический полюс" (183).

land, or one inhabited by barbarian peoples."[64] The reader is primed for a typical European exploration travelogue, complete with potential justifications for colonization predicated on the land's desolation or the primitiveness of its inhabitants. The ensuing discovery, however, upends this anticipation, while simultaneously echoing and challenging the colonial discourse.

What did remain an enticing "open land" for science fictional discovery, at least until the twentieth century, was the Moon, although the question of what kind of technology would allow human beings to reach it was still largely speculative. Lyovshin's *Newest Journey* represented the first original Russian story of a voyage to the Moon. Although his work was published a year after the Montgolfier brothers' flight, he chose to ignore the brand-new invention; instead, his narrator Narsim fabricates a flying machine out of beech boards and eagle feathers—reminiscent of the ill-fated contraption invented by Daedalus in ancient Greek mythology. Narsim's version works, however, and taking to the air, he is amazed at how he is overcoming the normal limitations of humanity: "He is encouraged, starts moving the handles, cuts through the transparent abyss, moves away, and forgets about himself."[65]

### 1.6 Shcherbatov and Lyovshin: Imperial Expansion

Although Shcherbatov's and Lyovshin's works are minimally reliant on science fictional technology, they depend on another type of science—the knowledge of space accumulated by explorers, scientists, and imperial officials. The spaces described in these works are fantastic but still connected to the very real spaces of empire, and both the description of the utopian realms

[64] "Уже мы с самого корабля начинали видеть землю и чрез трубу усматривали постренный хороший град, — тут, где мы только думали льды или по крайней мере пустую землю или населенную варварскими народами обрести" (184).

[65] "Он одобряется, начинает двигать рукояти, рассекает прозрачную бездну, удаляется и забывает о самом себе" (13:142).

and their connections to the outside world are inflected by imperial ideologies. For instance, Lyovshin's narrator is hopeful that the exploration of outer space will one day lead humanity to greater enlightenment by reminding humans of their own relative insignificance:

> Look at this distance, equal to eternity, and understand that millions of suns do not emit their rays for you; there are countless lands inhabited by creatures, against which you could be considered moles and midges. Is it not insane to think that an all-perfect mind would fill the sky with dots serving only for the amusement of your eyes?[66]

Even before he makes his own journey, he imagines a future in which humanity will have discovered the power of flight and this eternal truth of the smallness of man:

> With what longing we would see the air fleet departing from us! This fleet would not be driven by love of gold: only excellent minds would fly up on it for enlightenment. The shores of this new India would not be stained with the blood of thundering furies that come forth on them; there would be an army armed only with optical instruments, quill pens, and paper.[67]

Narsim thus delineates two contrasting forms of human expansion: one characterized by violence and avarice, and another driven by the quest for knowledge. This second future serves as a discursive space for the scholarly Narsim to critique the bloody realities of Russian colonial conquest from the outside. But he also participates in his own fantasy of conquest—an army of writers—advocating for the possibility of peaceful contact and expansion through science. The ultimately illusory contention that imperial knowledge gathering can be divorced from the brutality of military conquest is central to the very notion of enlightened imperialism.

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[66] "Взгляните на сие расстояние, равняющееся вечности, и поймите, что не для вас испускают лучи свои миллионы солнц; есть несчетно земель, населенных тварями, противу коих вы можете почесться кротами и мошками. Не безумно ли чаять, чтоб всесовершенный разум наполнял небо точками, служащими только к забаве очей ваших?" (140)

[67] "С каким бы вожделением увидели мы отходящий от нас воздушный флот! Сей флот не был бы водимый златолюбием: только отличные умы возлетели б на нем для просвещения. Брега новыя сей Индии не обагрились бы кровию от исходящих на оныя громоносных бурий: се было бы воинство, вооруженное едиными оптическими орудиями, перьями и бумагою" (140).

When Narsim arrives on the moon, he observes how the Lunarians are content with their simple, isolationist society. Occasionally troublemakers arise who want to colonize the dark side of the Moon, but these are strictly punished. Criticism of imperial conquest also appears in the narrator's thoughts as he arrives on the Moon and sees the gold-roofed houses of the inhabitants: "Thousands of Columbuses from all four parts of our world would come to try their swords on the necks of the Lunarians."[68] This continues Lyovshin's critique of the corrupting powers of European conquest and greed—often specifically invoked in reference to the Spanish Empire as part of the so-called Black Legend—though once again, it allows Narsim's own scientific expedition to remain pure and apolitical—Narsim presents himself as an objective observer, unlike the bloodthirsty "Columbuses."

Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir* takes a stronger stance against all forms of expansionism. The author directly contrasts Ophirian political structure and European colonialism, combining both critiques of the post-Petrine Russian Empire and of Western European imperialism. When the French sailors arrive in Ophir, they boast of their king's glorious military conquests and colonization of part of India. The Ophirians respond by asking why, if France is the happiest country, it needs to colonize other lands. A rejection of expansion, or even contact with the outside world, is inherent in the Ophirians' decision to move their capital back to the center—for Shcherbatov, a symbolic rejection of the whole idea of Saint Petersburg and with it, the idea of a modern European empire.

Shcherbatov's creation of a history for Ophir allows him to accomplish two political goals at once: to positively imagine a new state founded on rational principles (the usual function

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[68] "[Т]ысячи Колумбов со всех четырех наших частей пришли бы отведать мечей своих над шеями лунатистов" (158).

of utopia) but also to negatively assess his own state (Ophir has thrown off the negative aspects of the Russian modernization and westernization). Some of the strongest criticism of Ophir's past and Russia's present is in the story of the dignitary Bombei-Gora, as an ideal statesman opposed to expansionism. The character Agibe recalls Bombei-Gora's speech on the subject:

> It is not territorial expansion that constitutes the strength of kingdoms, but multitude of people and good internal government. There are still many places in our country that are not settled, and many places where the land still awaits human labor to bring forth fruit a hundredfold.[69] We still have peoples under our power who need to be brought into a better state, so is it not better to correct these internal conditions than to subject the people to death through needless war and desire to conquer either empty lands, which would be difficult to defend, or people who are different from us in every way, who even after several hundred years will not accept the national spirit of the Ophirian Empire, and who, while nominally our subjects, will be our secret enemies?[70]

As Aleksandr Kizevetter pointed out, this speech directly echoes a passage in Shcherbatov's treatise *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia* criticizing Catherine II's expansionist policies targeting the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire. Shcherbatov cites the same difficulties in conquering unfamiliar territories and foreign peoples and attributes these endeavors to Catherine's pursuit of glory.[71] In a way that should challenge any of our preconceptions about the unity of the Russian imperial project across Russian society and over

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[69] From the Parable of the Sower: "And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold" (Luke 8:8).

[70] "Не расширение областей составляют силу царств, но многонародие и доброе внутреннее управление. Еще много у нас мест не заселенных, еще во многих местах земля ожидает труда человеческого, чтобы сторичный плод принести. Еще у нас есть подвластные народы, требующие привести их в лучшее состояние, то не лучше ли исправить сии внутренности, нежели безнужной войной подвергать народ гибели и желать покорить или страны пустые, которые трудно будет и охранять, или народы, отличные во всем от нас, которые и чрез несколько сот лет не приимут духа отечественного Офирской империи и будут под именем подданных наших тайные нам враги" (316).

[71] A. Kizevetter, "Russkaia utopiia XVIII stoletiia," in *Pomoshch' evreiam, postradavshim ot neurozhaia: Literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik* (St. Petersburg: Isidor Gol′dberg, 1901), 233–34.

time, Shcherbatov specifically critiques the annexation of Crimea: “We have acquired, or rather stolen, Crimea, a country whose different climate makes it a tomb for Russians.”[72]

Shcherbatov's critique of expansionism—in both the real world and the land of Ophir—disrupts the monolithic notion of Russian imperialism, revealing it as an assortment of competing projects that were rife with social and geographical problems. His dissent invites us to reframe the Russian Empire not as a unified construct but as an evolving, aspirational web of competing ideologies and initiatives. In other words, Shcherbatov argues for historical contingency: Russia could have taken—and could still take—a path other than that of expansionist imperialism. Ophir represents his ideal vision for such an alternative future.

## 1.7 Dreaming and Imperial Knowledge

Shcherbatov’s *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, despite its complicated narrative frames, ultimately presents the discovery of the antipodean Ophir as a believable, rationalistic event. In contrast, certain elements in the Lyovshin’s *Newest Journey* voyage imply that Narsim’s adventure may be no more than a dream, setting the ground for narrative doubt and a broader epistemological inquiry into the nature of imperial reality, as I initially proposed in my introduction. The novel starts in a realistic, albeit philosophical vein, as the narrator recounts Narsim’s musings on the subject of flight, linking it to technological innovation and the powers of human imagination:

> Narsim, pondering the properties of air, did not doubt that it would be possible to invent a suitable machine for navigating through that fluid substance. He observed how a feather, even in the slightest wind, rises into this element. “Did not the same thing lead to the invention of water-going vessels?” he imagined. “Certainly, many centuries passed until a means was found to sail the seas, and undoubtedly, people have always noticed that a splinter of wood cannot sink in water. Is it not the same with a feather and the air? From

[72] M. M. Shcherbatov, “O povrezhdenii nravov v Rossii,” *Russkaia starina* 3 (1871): 685.

> the splinter came warships, and the feather will provide us with a means to craft a device capable of lifting us above our atmosphere.[73]

On the surface, Lyovshin presents Narsim as a scientific observer driven by the pure pursuit of knowledge, making a comparison between two modes of vehicular movement. But a deeper analysis reveals a message about the nature of imperial reality. As in the poetry examined by Harsha Ram in *The Imperial Sublime*, the concept of empire here plays out on the horizontal and vertical axes. On the horizontal axis is sea travel: Lyovshin, through Narsim's musings, traces the history of nautical innovation specifically from a crude splinter to a warship—the enabler of maritime expansionism. For Russian reader, mention of warships would also evoke Peter I's creation of a modern navy as part of his widespread military reforms. On the vertical axis is flight, represented by the *pero*, which through a convenient double meaning of this word in Russian ("feather" and "quill pen") also symbolizes both Narsim's scientific writing and Lyovshin's literary aspirations. The vertical axis is more powerful, allowing the wielder of the pen to escape the imperial reality on the surface of the earth.

However, as Narsim continues to reflect, he focuses on a literal escape into the atmosphere by using a feathered flying machine, but he must confront the practical barriers to such an invention—his "lack of resources" (*nedostatok sredtsv*). It is at this juncture in the plot that Lyovshin introduces the dream device, which allows Narsim to overcome these obstacles: in his sleep he sees materials hanging on his wall and constructs a complex vehicle from eagle

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[73] "Нарсим, размышляя о свойстве воздуха, никак не сомневался, чтоб нельзя было изобрести удобной машины к плаванию по оному жидкому веществу; он видал, как перо от малейшего ветра поднимается на сию стихию. «Разве не то ж самое служило к изобретению водоходных судов? — воображал он. — Конечно, много веков прошло, доколь найдено средство плавать по морям: и без сомнения, всегда видали, что щепка дерева не может погрязнуть в воду. Не то ли самое с пером и воздухом? От щепки произошли и военные корабли: а перо доставит нам способ сделать орудие, удобное взносить нас выше нашей атмосферы»" (138–39).

wings, beech boards, hinges, and springs. The narrator does not tell us when or if Narsim's dream ends. If we read the whole text as a dream, Narsim's vision of transcending the limitations of his reality—even the reality of his fictional world—remains aspirational. Nevertheless, the dream device allows Lyovshin—just as Shcherbatov's nested Ophirian story allowed him—to construct a separate reality and outside perspective from which to critique the society he lived in.

### 1.8 Kiukhelbeker and Senkovsky: Romantic Irony

Several decades later, Kiukhelbeker and Senkovsky manifested a greater experimentation with the genre of fantastic travel by adding an undercurrent of satire, sometimes verging on the absurd. Nevertheless, the framing of their fantastic works within the context of technological development, global exploration, and imperial ideologies suggests they all contain elements of what might be called early Russian science fiction.

Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker (Wilhelm Küchelbecker, 1797–1846) was a nobleman of Baltic German family who grew up in in Livonia (present-day Estonia), and is remembered today as one of the school friends of Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin. He served in the College of Foreign Affairs in Saint Petersburg, under Arch-Chamberlain Aleksandr Naryshkin in Paris, and under General Aleksei Ermolov in the Caucasus, but in 1825 he participated in the failed Decembrist Uprising, for which he spent the last two decades of his life in imprisonment and exile. Kiukhelbeker's political liberalism contrasted with his literary conservatism, particularly in poetry: he defended the use of archaic language, praised the ode, and decried the Romantic elegy made popular by Zhukovsky and Pushkin, among others. This criticism appears strongly in his unfinished fantastic story, *Land of the Headless* (*Zemlia bezglavtsev*), published in 1824 in an

almanac edited by Kiukhelbeker and Odoevsky: *Mnemosyne* (*Mnemozina*).[74] In this dystopian story, the narrator flies in a hot-air balloon to the Moon, where he finds a society of “headless” and “heartless” people. The land is Acephalia (from the Greek for “headless”), and their capital is Acardion (“heartless”). Kiukhelbeker may have known of the medieval myth of headless men with faces on their chests called Akephaloi or Blemmyes, often depicted on early world maps, and indeed, the use of these Greek names the tradition of European travel literature from ancient times to the Renaissance.[75]

Kiukhelbeker’s Moon is a much more allegorical space than Lyovshin’s and is used partly as a place for the author to satirize various aspects of Russian society that the author disliked, including problems that seem insignificant to the modern reader, such as the prevalence of the elegy in Russian poetry. The lunar society that he describes has several unusual characteristics. The people survive despite being “headless” and “heartless.” Their form of currency is violence—they ask the narrator to pay for his dinner by slapping them and beating them with sticks. Acephalia borders on “the Paper Tsardom” and “the realms of human knowledge, delusions, dreams, inventions” and is separated from them by “the Ink River and the Cardboard Wall.”[76] The story breaks off at the point when the narrator is about to explore the neighboring Paper Tsardom—which may have been a locus for the authors to develop his satire of the literary world.

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[74] Vilgel′m Karlovich Kiukhel′beker, “Zemlia bezglavtsev,” in *Mnemozina: Sobranie sochinenii v stikhakh i proze*, ed. V. Odoevskii and V. Kiukhel′beker (Moscow: Tipografiia Moskovskago teatra, 1824), 143–51.

[75] John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 12.

[76] “Акефалия граничит с Бумажным Царством, с областями человеческих познаний, заблуждений, мечтаний, изобретений! Мы отделены от них только Чернильною рекою и Стеною картонною!” (351).

Kiukhelbeker transposes the flaws and brutalities of Russian society and government to the Moon, where they acquire literal and extreme forms. For example, the violent education system among the Headless serves as a satirical allegory for the Russian education of the early nineteenth century. The well-to-do Headless hire mercenary teachers who "saw off the necks and try to corrode the hearts" of their charges.[77] This prompts the narrator to ironically praise the Russian system:

> I remembered my homeland and proudly stood on tiptoe, thinking of the superiority of our Russian upbringing over the Acephalian one: we entrust our children to pious, intelligent foreigners, who, although they have not the slightest understanding of our language, our holy faith, or the ancestral customs of our land, nevertheless strive in every way to instill in our youth an attachment to all things Russian.[78]

Kiukhelbeker is repeating a common nineteenth-century lament about the use of foreign tutors among the nobility, leading to the presumed alienation of the nobility from Russian national culture, including the Russian language. The same discourse reappears in other fantastic travel works of the period, such as Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables*, discussed in chapter 2, but Kiukhelbeker chose to present the problems of Russian education in a particularly extreme light, through a metaphor of violence, which also evokes the institutional corporal punishment of the society of his time. He takes his argument a step further than most critics of his time, arguing that the imitation of foreigners, and the resultant loss of cultural identity has seeped into the lower classes as well. Although the "rabble" in Acephalia are allowed to keep their hearts and heads

[77] "[П]одпиливают им шею и стараются вытравить сердце" (351).

[78] "Я вспомнил о своем отечестве и с гордостью поднялся на цыпочки, думая о преимуществе нашего русского воспитания перед акефалийским: мы вверяем своих детей благочестивым, умным иностранцам, которые, хотя ни малейшего не имеют понятия ни об нашем языке, ни об нашей святой вере, ни о прародительских обыкновениях земли нашей, но всячески силятся вселить в наших юношей привязанность ко всему русскому" (351).

but "even the commoners strive to get rid of them, and for the most part succeed in their attempts."[79]

The satirical fantastic travel narrative was developed to a greater degree by Józef Julian Sękowski, known in Russian as Osip Ivanovich Senkovsky (1800–58), who was born near Vilna to a noble Polish-Lithuanian family. He became an Orientalist scholar, traveling to Turkey, Syria, and Egypt, as well as earning a professorship at Saint Petersburg University. Like his compatriot Bulgarin, whom I analyze in my chapter on time travel, he first published in Polish before switching to Russian. He is especially remembered as the editor of *The Library for Reading* (*Biblioteka dlia chteniia*)—a monthly magazine containing everything from poems to articles on agriculture—and for his advocacy of journalism and popular literature.

The work by Senkovsky I analyze in this chapter is the *Fantastic Journeys of Baron Brambeus* (*Fantasticheskie puteshestviia barona Brambeusa*, 1833), an experimental work with four parts written in four different genres. The first, "Autumn Boredom," consists entirely of the ramblings of the narrator, Baron Brambeus, who after deliberating whether to drown himself in the Neva, get married, or get a menagerie of animals, finally decides it would be best to read his own writings. In the second part, "Poetic Journey around the World," the narrator, in search of strong sensations, travels to Constantinople by way of Moscow and Ukraine. He ends up finding various sources of "poetry" and feeling, often in the ugly and grotesque. In the third part, "Scholarly Journey to Bear Island," the narrator travels with a scientific expedition across Siberia to an island in the Arctic Ocean, where he supposedly finds a cave with Egyptian hieroglyphs, telling the story of a civilization that perished in a great flood. In the final part, "Sentimental

[79] "[И] самые простолюдины силятся сбыть их с рук и по большей части успевают в своих покушениях" (351).

Journey to Mount Etna," Baron Brambeus climbs Mount Etna, falls into the mouth of the volcano, and ends up on the inner surface of the Earth, where everything is the opposite of the normal world. These chapters are deeply intertextual, drawing on devices and themes ranging from Sternean digressions and metafiction, to Romantic ennui, to a satire of academic pretensions, to a parody of sentimental travelogues.

Senkovsky and Kiukhelbeker's ultimate exclusion from the narrow canon of Russian literature may have partly been due to their partially non-Russian identities. Senkovsky, like Bulgarin, suffered particularly from the disparagement of both Polish and Russian contemporaries as well as later generations, which seems in part due to what was seen as his ambiguous national identity. Senkovsky's biographer Louis Pedrotti has collected some of the criticism:

> To Herzen he was a "Polonais russifié . . . sans aucune opinion, à moins d'appeler opinion un profond mépris des hommes et des choses, des convictions et des théories; il n'avait de respect pour rien.'" Prince V. F. Odoevsky, writing in 1836, drew attention to Senkovsky's origin and lamented the "Polish monopoly" in Russian journalism. [. . .] From Władysław Mickiewicz, the son of the poet, Senkovsky earned the epithets "Russified Pole," "degenerate Pole," and "habitual accuser of his fellow countrymen."[80]

Kiukhelbeker fared better in this respect in the eyes of his contemporaries, perhaps because he could claim a more Russian upbringing. In fact, in a letter to his nephew, he explicitly placed his own Russianness above Senkovsky's:

> You will say: "He is Pole, but you yourself are German." No, my dear, there is a difference: I am German by my father and mother, but not by language—until the age of

[80] Louis Pedrotti, *Józef-Julian Sękowski: The Genesis of a Literary Alien* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 2–3.

> six I did not know a word of German. My natural language was Russian: my first mentors in Russian literature were my nurse Marina and my nannies Kornilovna and Tatiana.[81]

The appeal to the nanny as a source of Russian identity was not unique to Kiukhelbeker: even the firmly Russian Pushkin wrote poems in honor of his nanny Arina Rodionovna, through whom he felt connection to Russian folk culture. Kiukhelbeker thus saw himself as more authentically Russian than Senkovsky. Unlike Herzen, Odoevsky, and Mickiewicz, however, Kiukhelbeker did have some praise for the Polish writer's works:

> All the more honor to Senkovsky that he mastered our language, mastered it in his middle years. I do not compare the writer Senkovsky, the European writer and scholar with any of ours: he far outweighs all of us. . . (not excluding anyone) with his scholarship and thoroughness of knowledge. I put the Russian narrator Senkovsky directly after Pushkin, Kukolnik, and Marlinsky.[82]

Defensive about his own heritage, Kiukhelbeker does not assign Russian nationality to Senkovsky, but he does deny that nationality has a determinative role in literary greatness; instead, he creates another category, that of a Russian-language user (thus Senkovsky, though not Russian, is a "Russian narrator").

## 1.9 Kiukhelbeker and Senkovsky: Narrative Frames and Nationality

Kiukhelbeker's narrator in *The Land of the Headless* is Russian, but he starts his hot-air balloon ride in Paris and is accompanied in his trip to the Moon by a Frenchman. In contrast to

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[81] "Ты скажешь: «он поляк, но ты же сам немец»; нет, любезный, тут есть разнциа: я по отцу и матери точно немец, но не по языку; — до шести лет я не знал ни слова по-немецки, природный мой язык — русский: первыми моими наставниками в русской словесности были моя кормилица Марина, да няньки мои Корниловна и Татьяна." Quoted in V. K. Kiukhel′beker, *Lirika i poemy*, ed. IU. Tynianov (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel′, 1939), vii.

[82]" [Т]ем больше чести Сенковскому, что он овладел нашим языком, овладел им в летах немолодых. Я литератора Сенковского, литератора и ученого европейского ни с кем из наших не сравниваю: он всех нас... (не исключая никого) далеко перевешивает ученостью и основательностью познаний. Русского же повествователя Сенковского ставлю непосредственно после Пушкина, Кукольника и Марлинского." Quoted in V. Kaverin, *Baron Brambeus: istoriia Osipa Senkovskogo, zhurnalista, redaktora Biblioteki dlia chteniia* (Leningrad: Izdatel′stvo pisatelei, 1929). 137.

Shcherbatov and Lyovshin, Kiukhelbeker bypasses the problem of alien communication with a fantastic explanation. The narrator brings up the question in a conversation with the Headless inhabitants:

> My comrade swore that he heard the purest Parisian dialect; it seemed to me that the Headless man was speaking Russian. [. . .] "Tell me," I asked the innkeeper later, "how do you all know the languages of our countries in your city?" "It's no wonder, my dear sir," he answered me, "Acephalia borders on the Paper Kingdom, the areas of human knowledge, wanderings, dreams, and inventions!"[83]

This self-contradictory explanation—does the Headless man's form of communication transcend language, or have they learned all human languages?—is in keeping with the more metaphysical and dream-like nature of the world depicted by Kiukhelbeker. It also has religious resonances, specifically to the story of the Pentecost, in chapter 2 of the Book of Acts, in which the assembled disciples of Jesus all speak in their own languages but still understand each other. The Headless may also represent certain Christian sects such as the Russian *khlysty*, who engaged in both self-flagellation and speaking in tongues.

Senkovsky's narrator, Baron Brambeus, is also Russian, but the Latinate pseudonym, apparently borrowed from the name of a "Spanish king" (*shpanskii korol'*) in a popular chivalric romance, indicates a more cosmopolitan identity (139). Baron Brambeus, because of knowledge of Jean-Jacques Champollion's decipherment system and time spent in Egypt, is able to translate the "hieroglyphs" he finds in the cave on Bear Island, allowing him to present the first-person account of this lost world before and after the flood that devastated it. We thus get another nested

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[83] "К моему удивлению, Безглавец его очень хорошо понял и вступил с нами в разговор. Товарищ мой клялся, что слышит самое чистое парижское наречие; мне показалось, что Безглавец говорит по-русски. [. . .] «Скажи, — спросил я потом у содержателя гостиницы, — каким образом в вашем городе вы все знаете языки наших отечеств?» — «Не мудрено, милостивый государь, — отвечал он мне,— Акефалия граничит с Бумажным Царством, с областями человеческих познаний, заблуждений, мечтаний, изобретений!»" (350–51).

story and another narrator—this time with the Eastern-sounding name Shabakhubosaar—who describes the vicissitudes of his own life during this apocalypse in great detail. When at the end of the chapter the supposed hieroglyphs are in fact revealed to be mere natural formations in the rock, the entire imaginative edifice constructed by the narrator collapses.

These various versions of narratorial alterity serve several functions. They add an extra layer of distance or mediation between the author and the reader, as well as an increased fictionality, which allows for the presentation of political arguments that censorship would not have allowed in more direct works of social commentary. This strategy would then be connected to the technique of Aesopian language or concealed meaning often attributed to science fiction. Second, and more importantly in my view, the framing of the stories draws readers into the global context, allowing them to critique Russian society from different imperial or national perspectives. As in the satirical device of an imagined foreign perspective employed by Montesquieu in *Persian Letters* (*Lettres persanes*, 1721)—in essence, a form of estrangement—outsides observer highlights the absurdity of what is normally seen as commonplace.

## 1.10 Kiukhelbeker and Senkovsky: Technology and Knowledge

A key inspiration of many science fiction stories in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the hot-air balloon or *aerostat.* On November 21, 1783, a balloon designed by the Montgolfier brothers had achieved the first-ever untethered, manned flight, causing an immediate sensation across Europe. André-Jacques Garnerin, accompanied by his wife, conducted the first balloon flight in Russia on June 20, 1803, which took off from the

Cadet Corps garden in Saint Petersburg and was witnessed by Alexander I.[84] Fiction writers began to propose a slew of extravagant uses for this new vehicle, including military ones.

Kiukhelbeker took advantage of this new technology and its associations with France. The narrator in *Land of the Headless* is walking along the Champs-Élysées when he sees a balloonist, "a successor to Montgolfier," who is challenging bystanders to join him in his balloon. The narrator accepts the challenge and soon is flying high, filled with a rapture similar to that of Narsim. He quotes an unnamed Greek Pythagorean philosopher: "I will forever be a rising star: neither time nor space will hold me back; I will soar—and there will be no limits to my soaring!"[85] Modern scientific questions also appear when the narrator faints because of the low air density in the upper atmosphere, which serves as one justification to interpret the entire following story as a dream.

The narrator in Kiukhelbeker's story, despite its heavy satire, also maps onto the type of the colonial ethnographer attempting to understand the strange bodies and customs of the natives—who allegorically represent members of his own society. Such a reading is prepared by an unusual paragraph inserted at the beginning over the story before the lunar trip:

> But recently my friend Lieutenant M. . .[86] returned to Moscow. He told me so many wonderful things about Siberia, about mammoth horns and bones, about shamans and the northern lights, that he encouraged me somewhat concerning my own journey. In

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[84] El′mira Ashirova, "Polet nad Rossiei: 215 let nazad frantsuz Andre-Zhak Garneren vosparil nad Sankt-Peterburgom," *Rodina*, June 20, 2018, https://rg.ru/2018/06/20/20-iiunia-1803-goda-sostoialsia-pervyj-v-rossii-polet-na-vozdushnom-share.html.

[85] "По смерти буду бурею, с конца земли пронесусь в конец земли; душа моя обретет язык в завываниях, найдет тело в океанах воздуха! Или нет, буду звездою вовек восходящею: ни время, ни пространство не удержит меня; воспарю — и не будет пределов моему парению!" (144).

[86] V. D. Rak and N. M. Romanov identify this as the polar explorer Fyodor Matiushkin (1799–1872), who attended the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum along with Kiukhelbeker and Pushkin. V. K. Kiukhel′beker, *Sochineniia*, ed. V. D. Rak and N. M. Romanov (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989), 530n2.

> addition, the other day I reread the world-renowned, marvelous, but true adventures of the Englishman Gulliver. Will you really encounter more improbabilities in my story?[87]

Kiukhelbeker jocularly juxtaposes his and Jonathan Swift's fantastic works with the real experiences of an imperial explorer of Siberia, but the implication is that the real-life experiences of imperial encounter can seem strange and unrealistic as well.

In Senkovsky's novel, different types of knowledge are foregrounded in the four different journeys. Although in the first part, "Autumn Boredom," the narrator remains in St. Petersburg, he laments his former stupidity in leaving his fatherland to explore the world:

> I have visited the four parts of the world, traveled all around the Earth, been to Sweden and Golconda, to France and Kamchatka, to Constantinople and Washington; I have seen everything that is curious and worthy of attention in the world—in a word, Chinese people, pyramids, and monkeys; I have seen naked people and live herring, kangaroos and English missionaries; I have even seen how coffee, tea, sugar, and rum grow.[88]

Here the various objects of the global traveler's gaze are collapsed into one overwhelming, parodic list that includes human beings, animals, places, and goods. Note, however, that English missionaries, normally representatives of Europe and agents of colonialism, are thrown together with more typical objects of nineteenth-century science, such as "naked people" and kangaroos. Baron Brambeus is thus placed at a dominant position even above the normal agents of imperial power.

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[87] "Но недавно возвратился в Москву мой приятель лейтенант М. . . Он столько мне рассказывал чудесного об Сибири, об мамонтовых рогах и костях, об шаманах и северном сиянии, что несколько ободрил меня насчет моего собственного путешествия. К тому же на днях я перечел всему свету известные, дивные, но справедливые похождения англичанина Гулливера. Ужели в моем повествовании встретишь более невероятностей?" (349)

[88] "Я посетил четыре части света, объехал вокруг всю землю, был в Швеции и Голконде, во Франции и Камчатке, в Царьграде и Вашингтоне; видел все, что только есть любопытного и достойного внимания в мире,— словом, китайцев, пирамиды и обезьян; видел голых людей и живых сельдей, кенгуру и английских миссионеров; даже видел, как растет кофе, чай, сахар и ром" (35).

The second part, “Poetic Journey around the World,” in which the narrator travels from Ukraine to Constantinople, similarly focuses on the ethnic diversity of these spaces, and how the narrator assimilates that complexity into an overarching view of the world. For example, after spending time in Odessa, the narrator concludes: “Education is a French tailcoat, an English beefsteak, Cypriot wine, a Turkish pipe, Russian bankruptcy law, + (plus) Italian actresses, − (minus) a taste for reading, = (equals) great fun!”[89] Senkovsky humorously moves from the items more typically prized by the European gentleman before throwing in more outlandish ones—including an ironic rejection of the value of literature. This strange cornucopia, Senkovsky implicitly argues, is only possible in these Russo-Ottoman borderlands.

The political, cultural, and geographic aspects of these spaces combine to produce heterotopias, characterized by an intriguing otherness and liminality. For example, the narrator is trapped in the Odessa quarantine, which he describes as follows:

> This is an enchanted country, with an enchanted way of thinking and ephemeral, fantastic customs. This is one of the outskirts of Constantinople, torn off by a storm from the shores of the Bosphorus along with a huge piece of the Ottoman mind and the refuse of the dominant opinions of Pera, then thrown by the waves onto the “Flea Steppe” of the Russian Empire.[90]

This place transcends the conventional boundaries separating nations and cultures. It is a fragment of Constantinople—echoing the existing fusion of West and East prevalent in the cosmopolitan foreigners’ district of Pera (Beyoğlu) —mysteriously transplanted into another, equally hybrid landscape: the vast Ukrainian steppe. Yet, this geographical dislocation is

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[89] “Образованность — французский фрак, английский бифстек, кипрское вино, турецкая трубка, русский банкротский устав, + (плюс) итальянские актрисы, — (минус) вкус к чтению, = (итого) очень весело!” (44)

[90] “Это страна заколдованная, с заколдованным образом мыслей и временными, фантастическими правами. Это одно из предместий Константинополя, сорванное бурею с берегов Босфора вместе с огромною полосою ума оттоманского и дрязгами господствующих в Пере мнений и выброшенное волнами на «Блошиную степь» Российской Империи” (46).

paralleled by a spiritual shift—transplantation of the Ottoman mentality. The catalyst for this transfer is a storm, a versatile metaphor that interweaves the fantasy already suggested by the word "enchanted," the literal storminess of the Black Sea, and the allegorical turbulence of Russo-Ottoman conflict into a single potent image.

But of most relevance to the question of "uncharted territories" is the third part, "Scholarly Journey to Bear Island," which foregrounds and satirizes the concept of academic knowledge of the world and its history. It relies on the reader's knowledge of European exploration and discoveries, such as Jean-Jacques Champollion's decipherment of the Rosetta Stone. More specifically, the account mentions the real eighteenth-century German naturalists and explorers Pallas and Gmelin, but invents references to their works that supposedly describe the fictional Bear Island and its "Painted Chamber" (69–70). The fact that much of the real exploration of these territories was done by Germans and other western Europeans under the service of the Russian Empire such as the Danish navigator Vitus Bering serves as an impetus for the inclusion in this section of a German scientist, Dr. Spurtzmann, a parodic academic figure, obsessed with making paleontological discoveries. He is enthusiastically drawn into the narrator's supposed decipherment of the story written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, interrupting the narrative at various points with his own observations. In the end, it is the third member of the expedition, the rational Russian scientist Ivan Antonovich Strabinskikh, who throws cold water on the whole story by announcing that the hieroglyphs are nothing more than stalagmites.

### 1.11 Kiukhelbeker and Senkovsky: Imperial Expansion

The topic of imperial conquest occurs in an unusual form in Senkovsky's "Scientific Journey to Bear Island." In the hieroglyphic story that the narrator finds (or imagines) on the wall of the Painted Chamber, he learns that the people of that country were waging a war with

their neighbors, the land of Shakh-Shukh, inhabited by black people, which Dr. Spurtzmann identifies as the present-day island of Novaya Zemlya. The character Professor Shimshik declares that he has learned the true purpose of the war, which is "to restrict the excessive freedom of the female sex":

> We've embarked on this war for this sole purpose. Everything is thought out and provided for in the best possible way. We hope to enslave half a million Moors [*arapy*] and make them into a formidable army of eunuchs. They'll be brought here as prisoners of war and distributed among the houses, under the pretext of quartering them, but with one of them for each married couple. With their help, on the appointed day, we'll seize our wives, lock them in their bedrooms, and put trustworthy guards at the doors. Then the high priest and I, in spite of our old age, mean to marry young women and enjoy real conjugal felicity. But I implore you, don't tell anyone in the world about this, or you'll ruin the whole affair. If we don't do this, then—you'll see!—the greatest disaster may happen, not only with us, but also with the whole human race, and with our whole planet, all because of women!. . .[91]

In one brief monologue Shimshik presents a fantasy of imperialistic domination, enslavement, and patriarchal control, all connected to a pre-apocalyptic view of the world. This outrageous plan ultimately ends up failing when the people of Shakh-Shukh, enraged by the threat of castration, end up winning the war (113).

This episode connects to several layers in the deeply nested story. The fantasy of enslavement is put in the words of Shimshik—who is ridiculed throughout the story as a hunchbacked, conceited buffoon—so at first glance we may dismiss this as the mere ravings of a madman. But if we examine the frame one step up—the hieroglyphic story—we see how

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[91] Мы предприняли эту войну единственно для этой цели. Все обдумано, предусмотрено как нельзя лучше. Мы надеемся поработить полмиллиона арапов и составить из них грозную армию евнухов. Они будут приведены сюда в виде военнопленных и распределены по домам, под предлогом квартиры, по одному человеку на всякое супружество. При помощи их в назначенный день мы схватим наших жен, запрем их в спальнях и приставим к дверям надежных стражей. Тогда и я с великим жрецом, хоть старики, имеем в виду жениться на молодых девушках и будем вкушать настоящее супружеское счастие. Но заклинаю тебя, не говори о том никому в свете, ибо испортишь все дело. Ежели мы этого не сделаем, то — увидишь! — но только с нами, но и со всем родом человеческим, и с целою нашею планетою может случиться из-за женщин величайшее бедствие!.. (85)

Shimshik's misogyny is echoed by the narrator, Shabakhubosaar, who throughout the hieroglyphic story engages in a tumultuous, dysfunctional relationship with his capricious fiancée and eventually wife. Shabakhubosaar might thus be tempted to support the war program described by Shimshik.

At the level up in the framing, the "Scholarly Journey to Bear Island" narrated by Brambeus, Shimshik's, and Shabakhubosaar's misogyny seems to be explicitly rejected. In his interruptions of the story, Spurtzmann attempts to defend the honor of women by asking Brambeus, in his translation of the hieroglyphs, to add parenthetical qualifiers to any potentially offensive generalizations about the female sex, for example: "All our (antediluvian or fossil) women are terrible flirts."[92] But this distance created between the antediluvian narrator and Baron Brambeus falls apart when we learn that he imagined the hieroglyphic story, suggesting that the misogyny and Orientalist fantasy are actually the products of his own imagination. This maneuver then brings into question Senkovsky's own thoughts on these subjects. As mentioned above, Senkovsky used the pseudonym Brambeus in his non-fictional writings, encouraging an identification of the narrator with the author even in this text. In a more biographical reading, one could compare Brambeus's faulty science with Senkovsky's own Orientalist writings, and Brambeus's (and Shabakhubosaar's) marital problems to Senkovsky's own—according to his biographer Valentin Kaverin, Senkovsky entered into a marriage of convenience while in love with his wife's older, married sister.[93] By enabling these layers of interpretation, Senkovsky engages in a complex game with the reader, which is appropriate for someone who was

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[92] "Все наши (предпотопные или ископаемые) женщины ужасные кокетки" (84).

[93] V. Kaverin, *Baron Brambeus: Istoriia Osipa Senkovskogo, zhurnalista, redaktora Biblioteki dlia chteniia* (Leningrad: Izdatel′stvo pisatelei, 1929), 98.

convinced of the commercial potential of mass literature and thus especially oriented to the reader's response to the different genres he experimented with in his book.

## 1.12 Conclusion

Despite the fact that some of them were popular at the time, later Russian and Russianist critics excluded these works from the core canon of Russian literature, whether because of their fragmentariness, the authors' biographical status as outsiders, or simply the changing tastes of readers. Nevertheless, spatial fantasy continued to be developed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the middle of the century, the lunar journey was well established as science fictional plot, finding new life in the anonymous Stroll to the Moon (*Progulka v Lunu*, 1839) and Semyon Diachkov's *Journey to the Moon in a Wonderful Machine* (*Puteshestvie na Lunu v chudnoi mashine*, 1844).[94]

The four authors discussed in this chapter make use of the device of travel to uncharted territories to link the imaginative act of literary creation and the reality of an expanding world of competing empires. Whether in the form of programmatic utopias or more subtle satires, these works transpose Russian imperial ideologies of empire and state control to imaginary new realms through an intricate layering of narrative frames. Through this process writers provided their readers with increasingly sophisticated ways to understand the problems of their day, including the nature and importance of Russian and European identities and the ethics of imperial conflict and expansion.

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[94] "Progulka v Lunu," *Syn otechestva* 8 (1839): 127–64; Semen D′iachkov, *Puteshestvie na Lunu v chudnoi mashine, s opisaniem tamoshnikh stran, obychaev i raznykh redkostei* (Moscow: Tipografiia Lazarevskogo instituta vostochnykh iazykov, 1844).

# Chapter 2: The Expected and Unexpected in Future Fiction

As discussed in the introduction, contemporary science fiction relies heavily on readers' familiarity with established conventions. When engaging with earlier texts that exhibit elements reminiscent of the modern genre, it is productive to examine the ways in which our expectations as consumers of science fiction are fulfilled or not. This chapter examines the emergence of the future fiction in early nineteenth-century Russia. Out of the three types of fantastic travel I discuss, this one has the most claim to be true science fiction, for which a future setting is often considered essential. After reviewing the conventions of future fiction and how it filtered into Russia from Western Europe in the eighteenth century, I investigate three nineteenth-century novellas written by Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker, Faddei Bulgarin, and Vladimir Odoevsky. Although these works do not completely align with modern science fiction expectations and exhibit variations in terms of style and content, they share common thematic elements, most notably a profound preoccupation with the fate of nations and empires in distant futures.

Temporal and spatial fantasies are often intertwined, as we can see if we return look at Pushkin's "Monument" poem in more detail. Pushkin's engagement with the question of time is indicated first of all by his shifts in grammatical tense, here indicated in the rightmost column:

| Russian | Literal translation | Tense |
|---|---|---|
| Я памятник себе воздвиг нерукотворный, | I have raised myself a monument not built by human hands; | Past |
| К нему не зарастёт народная тропа, | The people's path to it will not be overgrown; | Future |
| Вознёсся выше он главою непокорной | With its unyielding head, it has risen higher | Past |
| Александрийского столпа. | Than the Alexandrian pillar. | |
| | | |
| Нет, весь я не умру — душа в заветной лире | No, I will not die entirely—my soul in the cherished lyre | Future |
| Мой прах переживёт и тленья убежит — | Will outlive my dust and escape decay— | |

| Russian | Literal translation | Tense |
| --- | --- | --- |
| И славен буду я, доколь в подлунном мире | And I shall be renowned, as long as in the sublunary world | |
| Жив будет хоть один пиит. | At least one poet remains alive. | |
| | | |
| Слух обо мне пройдёт по всей Руси великой, | Word of me will pass through all of great Russia, | Future |
| И назовёт меня всяк сущий в ней язык, | And every tongue in it will name me— | |
| И гордый внук славян, и финн, и ныне дикой | The proud grandson of the Slavs, and the Finn, and the now-wild Tungus, | |
| Тунгус, и друг степей калмык. | And the Kalmyk, the friend of the steppes. | |
| | | |
| И долго буду тем любезен я народу, | And long shall I be dear to the people, | Future |
| Что чувства добрые я лирой пробуждал, | Because I awakened kind feelings with my lyre, | Past |
| Что в мой жестокий век восславил я Свободу | Because in my cruel age, I praised Freedom | |
| И милость к падшим призывал. | And called for mercy for the fallen. | |
| | | |
| Веленью Божию, о муза, будь послушна, | O muse, be obedient to God's will; | Present |
| Обиды не страшась, не требуя венца, | Fearing no offense, demanding no wreath, | |
| Хвалу и клевету приемли равнодушно | Accept praise and slander indifferently | |
| И не оспоривай глупца.[95] | And do not argue with a fool. | |

In the first four stanzas Pushkin thus alternates between past-tense constructions describing the erection of his verse monument and future ones describing its future legacy, before ending with a present-tense invocation of the muse. The past in the poem is the realm of engagement with the political or the moral, depending on our interpretation of some key lines. The "Alexandrian pillar" based on the structure of the word logically refers to a monument in ancient Alexandria, such the long-destroyed lighthouse or the still-standing Pompey's Column,

[95] Pushkin, "Puteshestvie v Arzrum vo vremia pokhoda 1829 goda," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 2:460.

but it has also been interpreted as a reference to the Alexander Column erected in 1834 on Palace Square in Saint Petersburg.[96] Also disputed is the phrase "mercy for the fallen," which could refer specifically to the quality of mercy in general or specifically to the Decembrists.[97] The future, by contrast, is a newly imagined world—a future fiction. As discussed in chapter 1, in creating his future, Pushkin brushes over the actual process of colonization but arrives at its result: a multiethnic empire that is united at least by language and poetry. One verse explicitly plays into the imperialist discourse of progress from primitiveness to civilization: the "now-wild" Tungus will join in the sophisticated crowd of peoples remembering Pushkin's name.

## 2.1 Conventions of Modern Time Travel and Future Fiction

Just as in Pushkin's poem, fiction with a future setting often also includes references to the author's present, and sometimes to the past. In modern science fiction, this is sometimes accomplished through explicit time travel within the narrative. A character from our present can travel to the past or the future, but it is also common to have characters travel from the past or the future to our present. There are even more complicated temporal possibilities, in which someone from the past travels to the future, someone from the future travels to the even more distant future, and so on. Science fiction television series have included many of these combinations. For example, the characters in the original series of *Star Trek*, who live in the

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[96] For one recent entry into the debate, see V. M. Esipov, "Aleksandrovskaia kolonna ili Aleksandriiskii maiak," *Moskovskii pushkinist*, no. 12 (2009): 260–69.

[97] V. M. Esipov, "Dva etiuda: 'Milost′ k padshim. . .'; Pochemu Italiia?," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 3 (1999): 60–73.

twenty-third century, travel back not only to the 1960s—the original viewers' present—but also, in one episode, to 1930.[98]

Before the late nineteenth century, literature presented a far narrower scope of possibilities for time travel narratives. According to Bud Foote, fictions concerning travel into the past did not emerge before the nineteenth century. This could be attributed to the premodern concept of time, bound to causality and linear history, did not accommodate such a notion, even as a fantasy. As Foote writes, "all experience, all common sense, all morality, all religion would have made the whole idea unthinkable."[99] There were occasional devices that created fantastical connections to the past, such as the concept of talking to the souls of the dead, as Odysseus does in book 11 of the *Odyssey*.

Foote identifies two distinct evolutionary stages in the development of narratives concerning actual journeys into the past. In the initial phase, characters voyaged to the past without intending to alter it, a famous example being Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843). As the first example of such travel Foote names an anonymous story from 1838: "An Anachronism, or Missing One's Coach," in which the narrator travels from the nineteenth century to the eighth and has a conversation with the Venerable Bede, the Anglo-Saxon theologian and historian.[100] The second phase introduces a narrative shift, featuring time

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[98] Memory Alpha, s.v. "Time Travel," accessed August 6, 2023, https://memory-alpha.fandom.com/wiki/Time_travel.

[99] Bud Foote, The Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century: Travel to the Past in Science Fiction (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 13.

[100] "An Anachronism; or, Missing One's Coach," *The Dublin University Magazine: A Literary and Political Journal* 11, no. 66 (June 1838): 701–12.

travel characters actively seeking to modify the past. Foote argues that the progenitor of this genre was Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889).[101]

There is in fact a slightly earlier example in Russian literature: Aleksandr Veltman's *The Forebears of Kalimeros: Alexander, son of Philip of Macedon (Predki Kalimerosa: Aleksandr Filippovich Makedonskii*, 1836), in which the narrator travels to ancient Greece and neighboring areas on a hippogriff. This work contains not only visions of the past but also some episodes in which the narrator influences past events, for example by kidnapping the Pythia—the high priestess of Delphi—and claiming that "the historians who attribute the kidnapping of the young Pythia to the Thessalian Ithicrates [Echecrates] are mistaken."[102] This past alteration, however, is subsumed by the overall highly digressive and disjointed context, which is very distant from the realistic structure of Twain's novel or most modern time travel stories and films. Foote's general point about the late arrival of past-oriented time travel fiction remains convincing.

To be considered science fiction in the modern sense, a time travel story needs to explain how the travel happens. Many recent stories refer to a physical time machine, often relying on recent technological developments to give an air of credibility. In H. G. Wells's seminal novel *The Time Machine* (1895), the machine is metallic and mechanical, with levers to move forward and backward in time. More recent works often draw on the strange world of quantum mechanics or other theories that are obscure to the general public, but they remain a classic *novum* as defined by Darko Suvin—a new invention that allows for a change in the way the world

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[101] Foote, The Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century, 13.

[102] A. F. Vel′tman, Predki Kalimerosa: Aleksandr Filipovich Makedonskii (N. Stepanov, 1836), 13.

works.[103] Another option is the "timeslip," a movement in time caused by some apparent accident, such as a blow on the head in Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*. Modern science fiction merely set in this future, however, does not have this requirement: readers accept the future setting just as they would a realistic novel set in a fictional town. As I explore below, earlier stories tend to blend these two subgenres: they are future fiction with some elements of time travel, and the devices employed for the time travel are quite diverse.

Apart from the technology of the time machine, the reader of a modern story set in the future expects to see detailed descriptions of future technology and a focus on how new inventions change society. Some of the early Russian writers I analyze do describe future technology, sometimes making surprisingly accurate predictions, but others make little or no reference to technology, focusing instead on societal changes that occurred in ways unrelated to scientific progress.

One of the most notable elements of contemporary time travel stories is a focus on the question of contingency. The characters in these stories become aware that even the smallest actions can change future events; actions taken to prevent one catastrophe may produce another. Authors of time travel fiction also have to confront certain paradoxes, such as the grandfather paradox, which poses the question of what happens is someone travels back in time and kills his own grandfather, or the bootstrap paradox, in which certain events seem to be taking place in a causal loop that has no discernible origin. These considerations are completely ignored in the early Russian time travel stories, partly because they do not involve time travel to the past, in which these paradoxes are more apparent.

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[103] Darko Suvin, *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), 37.

The absence of a notion of contingency connects to perhaps the most significant difference between modern time travel stories and early Russian examples: plot movement and character development. In modern time travel stories, characters often execute this travel in order to solve a problem or to gain information. They interact with other characters and usually actively influence the past or future in certain ways, sometimes creating paradoxes. In contrast to this, the stories I analyze here are relatively static visions of the future. They are expositions of future worlds, and the characters that figure in the stories do not undergo any real development or change the world in any significant way.

## 2.2 History of Future Fiction in Europe and Russia

Although examples of stories set in the future started to appear sporadically as early as the seventeenth century, they only became popular in the late eighteenth century. Many of these works were utopias, drawing on a long tradition of geographic utopias going back to Thomas More's *Utopia.* As I. F. Clarke notes, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "time replaced space and [. . .] in consequence, the geographies of utopian fiction evolved into the historiographies of a new literature.[104] We could link this more generally to broader historical developments: the spatial utopia was connected with the Age of Discovery and the possibility of strange new worlds, whereas the temporal utopia was connected with the industrial revolution and the accelerating pace of technological change.

The genre of future fiction attained a peak in popularity through Louis-Sébastien Mercier's 1771 novel *The Year 2440, a Dream if There Ever Was One* (*L'An 2440, rêve s'il en*

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[104] I. F. Clarke, ed., *British Future Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1:ix.

*fut jamais*), which went through at least twenty-five editions.[105] In this prerevolutionary bestseller, the narrator travels five centuries into the future, discovering a utopian society embodying the principles of Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers. Later editions incorporated historical and technological developments. As the Montgolfier brothers' hot-air balloon was hard to ignore for someone intent on accurately predicting future life, Mercier's revised 1786 edition included an additional chapter focusing on this aerial apparatus, presenting it as a tool for rapid travel and potential climate regulation. This increased focus on technology in future fiction was followed by other authors, most notably the German writer Julius von Voss, whose novel *Ini: A Novel from the Twenty-First Century* (1810) included a whole range of fantastic technology: "balloons towed by eagles, mail containers shot from city to city, submarine troops and diving machines, underground cities with artificial lighting."[106]

The genre of future fiction quickly spread to Russia. Mercier's novel, in particular, received several mentions in the Russian press, and in 1788, two excerpts translated into Russian were published in the journal *Morning Hours* (*Utrennie chasy*) by Ivan Rakhmaninov, who had also translated and popularized the works of Voltaire.[107] The genre had already become popular enough by the 1820s that Bulgarin, in a note at the beginning of his *Plausible Fables*, felt the need to include a note acknowledging that many before him had "traveled forth on the wings of

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[105] Robert Darnton, The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France (W. W. Norton, 1996), 115.

[106] Clarke, British Future Fiction, xxviii.

[107] P. R. Zaborov, "Utopicheskii roman Mers′e," in *God dve tysiachi chetyresta sorokovoi: Son, kotorogo, vozmoshno, i ne bylo*, by Louis-Sébastien Mercier, ed. A. L. Andres and P. R. Zaborov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977), 189–208.

imagination to future centuries," and he mentions Mercier and Voss as writers who "particularly distinguished" themselves.[108]

But Russian writers had also already begun to compose utopian or future visions. The first fictional utopia of the Russian Enlightenment appears to be Aleksandr Sumarokov's brief sketch *Dream: A Happy Society* (*Son, shchastlivoe obshchestvo*), published in 1759 in the first private Russian journal, *The Industrious Bee*.[109] The dream has only a perfunctory real-world framing, beginning with "once, while falling asleep" and ending with the narrator being awoken by the sound of church bells. The bulk of the text consists of a static description of a prosperous, utopian future society, with strict moral conventions and a system of merit, which does not, however, seem to have eliminated class entirely. The text also satirizes specific legal problems and, similarly to Shcherbatov's and Lyovshin's works, includes Masonic allusions.[110] The text is narrated in the present tense and, though clearly directed at Catherine II and her advisers, is not explicitly tied to any particular time or place. Nevertheless, the text represents an early use of the dream device, which would become a common way to introduce future utopias.

The first utopia written in Russian and explicitly set in the future appears in Radishchev's *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* (Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu, 1790), which despite its reputation as a political treatise concerned with showing Russia's problems as they are, is in

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[108] "Не хочу присваивать себе чужого и признаюсь перед читателями, что уже многие прежде меня пускались странствовать на крыльях воображения в будущие века. Известный французский писатель Мерсье и немецкий Юлий фон Фосс особенно отличились в сём роде." Faddei Bulgarin, "Pravdopodobnye nebylitsy, ili stranstvovanie po svetu v dvatsat′ deviatom veke," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. M. D. Ol′khin, vol. 6 (St. Petersburg: K. Zhernakov, 1843), 85n. Future parenthetical references to *Plausible Fables* refer to this edition.

[109] Aleksandr Sumarokov, "Son shchastlivoe obshchestvo," *Trudoliubivaia pchela*, no. 12 (December 1759).

[110] Iu. V. Slozhenikina, "'Son, shchastlivoe obshchestvo' A. P. Sumarokova: K probleme verbal′nogo koda russkogo masonskogo teksta," *Vestnik Volgogradskogo universiteta: seriia 2, iazykoznanie* 14, no. 2 (2011): 35–39.

fact a work of fiction that contains many detours into the realm of fantasy, including time travel.[111] As Kahn and Reyfman argue, the focus on the Journey as a political treatise—and particularly Radishchev's recruitment by Soviet critics as a proto-revolutionary—has obscured its unique literary features, including a Bakhtinian polyphony of discourses, which allows it to present several competing perspectives on Russian society and its place within the sphere of the European Enlightenment.[112]

In the chapter "Bronnitsy," the narrator comes across the former site of a pagan Slavic temple. He mentally travels into the past and hears the voice of God who warns him against wanting to know his own future and to focus on his own conscience. The narrator is inspired by the sight of the temple to assert the unity of God under different names in human religions across time and space.[113] A more sustained experiment with the notion of time occurs in the chapters "Khotilov" and "Vydropusk."[114] The narrator finds a document on the ground outside the post station entitled "Project for the Future" (*proekt v budushchem*, literally "project in the future"), which describes an unusual future utopia: it presents a version of Russia that is more developed but still not perfect, from the reformist perspective: serfdom has not yet been abolished. And yet, even disregarding the title, clear evidence indicates that this is not the Russia of Radishchev's time: the clergy supports abolition, natural law is being taught in schools, and the hot-air balloon

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[111] Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu* (St. Petersburg: [Tipografiia Radishcheva], 1790).

[112] Andrew Kahn and Irina Reyfman, introduction to *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, by Alexander Radishchev (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), xx–xxii.

[113] Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev, *Puteshestvie iz Peterburga v Moskvu; Vol'nost'* (Sankt-Peterburg: Nauka, 1992), 35–36.

[114] Radishchev, *Puteshestvie*, 66–74, 76–79.

is mentioned as an "eighteenth-century invention." In contrast to the common twentieth-century view of Radishchev as a radical revolutionary, the "Project for the Future" in fact proposes a gradual, peaceful reform. Unlike Sumarokov's abstract utopia, Radishchev's text contains more references to real world history and geopolitics. Radishchev's "citizen of the future" decries expansionism and colonialism, arguing that a country's blessedness should be judged not by military glory, order, or wealth, but by the happiness of its own citizens. As examples of immoral conquest, the citizen brings up the European conquest of America (and use of slaves) and Alexander the Great's conquests (it appears that Catherine II, probably justly, read this as an attack on her own expansionism).

The tradition of the progressive future utopia was continued by the future Decembrist revolutionary Aleksandr Ulybyshev, who read his French story *A Dream* (*Un rêve*) at a meeting of the Green Lamp society in 1819. The narrator, in a dream, arrives in St. Petersburg some three hundred years in the future. The text has more explicit radical politics than Radishchevs'. For example, the symbol on the future Russian flag has changed from an eagle to a phoenix: "The two heads of the eagle that signified despotism and superstition were slaughtered, and from the blood that gushed out of them emerged the phoenix of freedom and true belief."[115] Nevertheless, Ulybyshev's utopian society has also returned to its roots, in the realm of art and literature, where it no longer relies on imitation of Europe. Ulybyshev's dream is interrupted by an event that emphasizes the social problems of his day: a drunk peasant being dragged off by the police.

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[115] Michel Niqueux, "L'utopie décembriste de A. Ulybyšev « Un rêve » (1819). Publication de l'original en français," *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie - Empire russe - Union soviétique et États indépendants* 50, no. 50/4 (December 15, 2009): 737–55, https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.9916.

Other than the three authors I examine in detail below, the final notable creator of time travel fiction from the early nineteenth century is Aleksandr Veltman, an author popular in his day for his experimental works with copious amounts of metafictional play, use of foreign languages, and obscure historical references. Several of his works have elements of fantastic travel, such as *The Wanderer* (*Strannik*, 1831–32), which is framed as a journey through a map. He produced one future fiction novel, *The Year MMMCDXLVIII: The Manuscript of Martin Zadek* (*MMMCDXLVIII god: Rukopis' Martyna-Zadeka*).[116] Martin Zadek was the supposed Nostradamus-like author of mystical book published in Basel in 1770, in which he predicted the fall of the Ottoman Empire. This made him popular in Russia; he is mentioned, for example, in Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin* (*Evgenii Onegin*, published 1825–1832).[117] Veltman's novel is set in 3448, "about half a century after the resettlement of the Ottomans to the shores of Libya, and soon after the transfer of the capital of the *Great People* from the shores of Pontus [the Black Sea] to the site of Bosporan Rome [Constantinople]."[118] According to Boris Bukhshtab, the novel was apparently written in haste, following the template of a historical romance.[119] Indeed, the work contains no future technology, and most of the book is taken up by the timeless plot of an evil imposter trying to overthrow the rightful ruler. Nevertheless, the novel does represent an interesting attempt to apply Veltman's academic interest in ancient

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[116] The use of Roman numerals in the title is typical of Veltman's eccentric style (compare Odoevsky's use of Arabic numerals in *The Year 4338*).

[117] V. D. Rak, "ZADEK (Zadeck) Martin, Zadeka Martyn," in *Pushkin i mirovaia literatura: Materialy k "Pushkinskoi entsiklopedii,"* ed. V. D. Rak (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2004), http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=303.

[118] Aleksandr Fomich Vel′tman, *MMMCDXLVIII god: Rukopis' Martyna-Zadeka*, (Avgust Semën, 1833), 1:5.

[119] B. Bukhshtab, "Pervye romany Vel′tmana," in *Russkaia proza*, ed. B. Eikhenbaum and Iu. Tynianov (Leningrad: Academia, 1926), 220.

history and archeology to a future setting. In particular, Veltman's future contains a number of references suggesting a realignment of nations and empires in the future. Bosphorania is seemingly Slavic with some Eastern influences; he also mentions a friendly "Western tsardom" as well as a country called "Columbia" (presumably America as a whole).

## 2.4 Three Key Works

The foregoing list contains many works that might be considered future fiction. They depart, however, from the conventions of modern science fiction in significant ways. Some of them lack narrative; for example, Sumarokov's and Radishchev's utopias are mere descriptions of future societies. Others, such as Veltman's *Year MMMCDXLVIII*, have narrative but do not consider the implications of a future setting in ways we would expect. I have identified three novellas that do fulfill these two criteria: they feature at least an elementary narrative structure and they describe in detail the state of the future world and its connections to our own. These are Vilgelm Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters*, Faddei Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables*, and Vladimir Odoevsky's *The Year 4338*.

These three authors and their works represent an interesting set in a number of ways. The authors epitomize the homogeneous and heterogeneous aspects of the Russian nobility. They come from three different ethnic backgrounds. Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoevsky (1804–69) belonged to an old Russian princely family that traced itself back to the Rurikid rulers of Kievan Rus. As noted in chapter 1, Vilgelm Karlovich Kiukhelbeker was born into the Baltic German nobility but saw himself as Russian. The nationality of Faddei Venediktovich Bulgarin (Jan Tadeusz Krzysztof Bułharyn, 1789–1859) was more complex. Born to a noble family in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, he identified himself in letters as a "Lithuanian" (*litvin*) and a "native Pole" (*prirodnyi poliak*); he also, in accordance with his surname, claimed Bulgarian

ancestry.[120] The Polish scholar Piotr Głuszkowski observes that Russian scholars tended to label Bulgarin as Polish, while Polish scholars referred to him as Russian—both groups likely influenced by the author's negative reputation—but also that some Belarusian scholars claim him as one of their own. Głuszkowski summarizes Bulgarin's nationality as follows: "he felt he was a Pole from historic Lithuania, a subject of the Russian Empire, and therefore also a Russian."[121]

All three writers whose work I examine in this chapter are remembered today partly because of their associations with Aleksandr Pushkin, who befriended Kiukhelbeker in his school days, waged a journalistic battle against Bulgarin, and collaborated with Odoevsky on the journal *The Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*, 1836). Odoevsky also edited a publication with Kiukhelbeker: the almanac *Mnemosyne*, in which some of Pushkin's poems were published as well.

Like more notable figures such as Pushkin, these authors had both supportive and oppositional interactions with the Russian state. As discussed in chapter 1, Kiukhelbeker served in the College of Foreign Affairs before being imprisoned and exiled for his role in the Decembrist Uprising. Bulgarin has a somewhat deserved reputation of a political opportunist. In the Napoleonic Wars, he first served in the Russian army against the French and Swedes before joining the Polish legion of the French army, fighting in Spain, then coming back to Russia as part of the invading forces. After his return to Russia, he collaborated to some extent with the

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[120] "I am Bulgarin, the *Litvin* who became a Russian-language writer." Bulgarin to Teodor Narbut, Derpt, January 9, 1836, in Fadzei Bulharyn, *Vybranae/Ukladanne*, ed. Aliaksanr Fiaduta (Minsk: Belaruski knihazbor, 2003), 435–36. "He charges the publishers of the *Northern Bee*, and above all me, a native Pole, with trying to justify the Warsaw mutineers." Bulgarin to A. Kh. Benkendorf, St. Petersburg, December 16, 1830, in *Vidok Figliarin: pis'ma i agenturnye zapiski F. V. Bulgarina v III otdelenie*, ed. A. I. Reitblat (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), 401. "My ancestors were chiefs [. . .] of the Slavic tribe of Bulgars." Bulharyn, *Vybranae/Ukladanne*, 160.

[121] Piotr Głuszkowski, *Barwy polskości: czyli życie burzliwe Tadeusza Bułharyna* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych "Universitas," 2018), 395.

Russian political police, although the details of this collaboration are murkier than it would appear from the Soviet historiography that accused him of informing on the future Decembrists.[122] Odoevsky has a more favorable reputation, but he also contributed to the police state apparatus through his work on the Foreign Censorship Committee, where, however, he argued for a more lenient approach to censorship.[123] *The Year 4338* first appeared in 1840 in Vladimir Vladislavlev's almanac *Daybreak* (*Utrenniaia zaria*); Odoevsky had been urged to support this state-friendly publication by Count Benckendorff, the head of the Third Section.[124]

The authors had different attitudes towards an expanding literary culture and the rapid growth of commercial journalism in the early nineteenth century. We saw in chapter 1 how Kiukhelbeker's political liberalism was offset by his literary conservatism, as seen in his support for archaic language in poetry and his critique of the Romantic elegy. Bulgarin stands out in this group by his advocacy for a commercial literature that would respond to the demands of the public. In contrast, Odoevsky was stridently opposed to commercialization, which he saw as the degradation of art. This debate finds echoes in their fictional works, and also foreshadows the twentieth-century debate about whether the popularity of science fiction detracts from its literariness.[125]

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[122] For a source analysis and partial rehabilitation, see Piotr Głuszkowski, *Barwy polskości: czyli życie burzliwe Tadeusza Bułharyna* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych "Universitas," 2018).

[123] Andrew Kahn et al., *A History of Russian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 371, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199663941.003.0026.

[124] V. F. Odoevskii, *Povesti i rasskazy*, ed. E. Iu. Khin (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel′stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959), 491.

[125] For a recent article that examines the growth of commercial journalism in Petersburg as an information-regulating network, see Yelizaveta Raykhlina, "Developing a Commercial Press in Petersburg and Moscow: Institutions and Networks of Journalism under Alexander I and the Early Reign of Nicholas I," *Russian History* 48, nos. 3–4 (2022): 327–48.

All three works remained unfinished, perhaps in part because the plots were not enough to carry the story once the novelty of the future setting was exhausted. Kiukhelbeker's novella *European Letters* was published in two different journals—*The Neva Spectator* (*Nevskii Zritel′*) and *The Emulator of Enlightenment and Charity* (*Sorevnovatel′ prosveshcheniia i blagotvoreniia*)—in 1820.[126] The author's plans for a continuation were interrupted by his journey to Europe. Thus, as Viktor Guminsky notes, "the 'fantastic' journey of an American in the twenty-sixth century (or the twenty-fifth, in some publications) directly preceded the real trip of its creator to Europe."[127] In fact, he later recorded the impressions of his real journey in book of *Travels* (*Puteshestvie*), excerpts of which were published in 1824 and 1825.

Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables, or Wandering around the World in the Twenty-Ninth Century* (*Pravdopodobnye nebylitsy, ili stranstvovanie po svetu v XXIX veke*) was published in 1824 across six issues of the author's journal *Literary Leaflets*.[128] Only a year later he published another science fiction work with a similar title: *Improbable Fables, or A Journey to the Center of the Earth* (*Neveroiatnye nebylitsy, ili Puteshestvie k sredotochiiu zemli*), also an allegorical story, in which the narrator tells of falling into a huge cave and discovering three countries: Ignorantsia, Skotinia ("land of brutes"), and Svetonia ("land of light"); the work also contains a

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[126] V. K. Kiukhel'beker, "Evropeiskie pis′ma," *Nevskii zritel′* 20 (April 1820); *Sorevnovatel′ prosveshcheniia i blagotvoreniia* 9 and 11 (1820). Page numbers refer to this edition: V. K. Kiukhel′beker, "Evropeiskie pis′ma," in *Sochineniia*, ed. V. D. Rak and N. M. Romanov (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989).

[127] V. Guminskii, ed., Vzgliad skvoz′ stoletiia: Russkaia fantastika XVIII i pervoi poloviny XIX veka (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1977), 302.

[128] *Literaturnye listki,* nos. 17–20, 23, 24 (1824). For a translation, see Faddei Bulgarin, "Plausible Fantasies or A Journey in the 29th Century," in *Pre-Revolutionary Russian Science Fiction: An Anthology (Seven Utopias and a Dream)*, trans. Leland Fetzer (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982), 5–34.

parody of Odoevsky, described as the "first philosopher" of Skotinia.[129] In 1828 he returned to future fiction with *A Scene from Private Life in AD 2028* (*Ststena iz chastnoi zhizni v 2028 godu ot Rozhdestva Khristova*). In this short dramatic piece, a group assembled at the house of a Petersburg nobleman discusses a set of Bulgarin's works that has survived for two centuries. They read Bulgarin's criticism of his own society—the use of French among Russian ladies, the hiring of foreign tutors, the dependence on foreign products—and rejoice in the fact that the Russia of their time has resolved these problems and become a self-sufficient and nationally confident country.

Out of the three main works I discuss here, Vladimir Odoevsky's *The Year 4338* (*4338-i god*) has the most complicated textual history. Odoevsky envisaged *The Year 4338* as the third part of a proposed trilogy. The first work would be set in the time of Peter I, the second in the present, and the third in the future.[130] According to Guminsky, the ternary conception was connected with Odoevsky's fascination with German philosophy, in which the three phases of human history corresponded to the Hegelian thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.[131] I would add that this conception blends genres generally thought of as separate, in Odoevsky's time and our own: historical, realist, and future fiction. The first part of the trilogy was probably never written, but excerpts of the second and third parts were published in 1835 and 1840 respectively under the

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[129] Léonid Heller and Michel Niqueux, *Histoire de l'utopie en Russie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), 117.

[130] Orest Tsekhnovitser, "Ot redaktora," in *4338-i god: Fantasticheskii roman*, by V. F. Odoevskii (Moscow: Ogonek, 1926), 4.

[131] Guminskii, *Vzgliad skvoz' stoletiia*, 315.

title *Petersburg Letters*.[132] Later it seems that Odoevsky came to think of the third part—the future utopia—as a separate work, but he never finished it. In 1926 the Soviet literary scholar Orest Tsekhnovitser finally published a full edition, including a preface, ten letters, and various fragments, some of which appear to represent different stages or conceptions of the work.[133]

With this background in mind, let us now delve deeper into these texts to explore how they do and do not correspond to the expectations of the modern science-fiction reader. I will start by looking at time travel devices and how they fit into the overall narrative structure of these works, and the related question of the presence or absence of future technology. Then I will examine some themes that may be more developed in these works than in the average modern science-fiction novel: the themes of geopolitics and empires, ruins, and the preservation or loss of history.

## 2.5 Devices and Framing

All three authors incorporated some form of time travel in the framing of their descriptions of future worlds. In doing so, they responded to a general taste in the nineteenth century for framing and stories within stories, in works both fantastic and realistic. Pushkin, for example, created an imaginary narrator to convey the stories contained in *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* (*Povesti pokoinogo Ivana Petrovicha Belkina*)—as well as separate narrators for each story—emphasizing this pretense with a fictional publisher's foreword.

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[132] The excerpt from the second part of the trilogy was published under the pseudonym "V. Bezglasny" (the surname means "mute, voiceless"): V. Bezglasnyi, "Peterburgskie pis′ma," *Moskovskii nabliudatel′*, no. 1 (1835): 55–69. The excerpt from the third part (*The Year 4338*) was published under the author's real name: Kn. V. Odoesvskii, "4338 God: Peterburgskie Pis′ma" in *Utrenniaia zaria: Al′manakh na 1840 god*, ed. I. Vladislavlev (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia III otdeleniia sobstevennoi E. I. V. kantseliarii, 1840).

[133] Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevskii, *4338-i god: Fantasticheskii roman*, ed. Orest Tsekhnovitser (Moscow: Ogonek, 1926).

Framing was perhaps especially important in tales of a fantastic nature. In the eighteenth century, as we have seen, the time travel device *par excellence* was the dream, a natural way to introduce strange and fantastic things, and which could be interpreted either as nonsense or as prophecy.

Kiukhelbeker's work has the most perfunctory time travel framing: a short preface that proposes a mental journey into the future. The reason for this travel is the perspective it gives on the present. The author gives a version Archimedes's famous saying: "give me a point outside the Earth and I will move the Earth off its axis." In a science-fictional gesture, he imagines this as a literal and frightening possibility: "God preserve us from such a thought!" But the outside perspective, he argues, is needed for understanding the present; therefore, we must "be transported in our imagination" (*myslenno perenestis'*, 302) into the future. This Russian idiom most often signifies a momentary envisaging of the past, as in the lexicographer Ushakov's example: "*myslenno perenestis' v detskie gody*," "to travel in one's thoughts back to childhood."[134] A more idiomatic English translation might be "to revisit one's childhood," using another verb relating to travel. What is unusual here is not only the change to future time but also the extended narrative that results from this mental act.

Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables* contains a similar invocation of the imagination in the author's note on the first page of his work: "traveling on the wings of imagination." He continues by claiming an author's right to imagine what he wishes: "But as the realm of fantasy is exceedingly vast and everyone is allowed to wander in it without paying tribute or duties, I too resolved to step across (in my imagination, of course) a thousand years ahead and see what our

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[134] D. N. Ushakov, "Perenestis'," in *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi institut "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1939), 166.

descendants will be doing."[135] Note how fantastic travel is contrasted here with real-world travel with its annoyances such as customs duties (*poshlina*). The huge jump here described with the verb *pereshagnut'*, "to step across," is reminiscent of the fairy-tale seven-league boots or their equivalent in Slavic folklore, "fast-pace boots" (*sapogi-skorokhody*).

Unlike Kiukhelbeker, however, Bulgarin is not content to jump immediately to the future time; rather, he includes an opening dialogue set in the present, between characters labeled simply as "I" and "Friend," who are sailing on a skiff from Petersburg to Kronstadt. These characters debate whether the human race is improving morally and technologically. The narrator says "it would be interesting to know what will happen to the human race in a thousand years," when a strong wind overturns the boat, and the narrator falls in and loses consciousness. He wakes up in a comfortable bed; his host explains that he was found in a chalk cave wrapped in an herb called *radix vitalis*; it turns out that he slept there for a thousand years. The time travel device thus combines several elements: magic words (his final sentence), a dream state (the loss of consciousness), a Rip Van Winkle story, and a magic plant.

As if this were not enough framing, Bulgarin adds an additional element in another voice at the end of the story, which without any warning casts the text as a "found manuscript":

> Here the manuscript written in the Novaya Zemlya language ends and the second section begins in a language that we have not yet been able to make out. Following the example of Champollion, who unraveled the meaning of Egyptian hieroglyphs, we shall try to find out the content of this manuscript and shall then inform our readers about it. (109)[136]

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[135] "Но как область вымысла чрезвычайно обширна и всякому позволено странствовать в ней безданно и беспошлинно, то я вознамерился также перешагнуть (разумеется, в воображении) за 1000 лет вперед и посмотреть, что делают наши потомки" (85n).

[136] Здесь рукопись, писанная на новоземлянском языке, кончается и начинается второе отделение на языке, которого доселе мы разобрать не успели. По примеру Шамполиона, разгадавшего смысл египетских иероглифов, мы постараемся узнать содержание сей рукописи и тогда сообщим оное нашим читателям.

The reference to the arctic island of Novaya Zemlya and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs adds an air of academic mystery, but the author does not resolve the question of why a text composed and narrated in the first-person by a present-day Russian would be written in these two strange languages. It is possible that this paragraph represents a different conception of the work that somehow made its way into the publication.

The framing of Odoevsky's *The Year 4338* comes closer to modern science fiction in drawing on elements of nineteenth-century science and pseudoscience. The story starts with an allusion to a real-life comet, which was first recorded in 1772 and determined to be periodic in 1826 by Wilhelm von Biela (spelled *V'ela* by Odoevsky). The possibility of a collision with earth had caused popular panic in 1832.[137] Odoevsky uses this occurrence to assign a date to his story: 4338, a year before the expected catastrophic return of the comet in 4339. The frame narrator happens to have an acquaintance who is a master of mesmerism, who can enter into a somnambulist state and mentally travel to any time or place and report on what he sees there.

The concept of somnambulism or sleepwalking relates directly to the earlier tradition of dream time travel. By Odoevsky's time, mesmerism, or animal magnetism, once practiced by Franz Anton Mesmer in the late eighteenth century, had fallen into disrepute after a French royal commission condemned the practice. Nevertheless, questions about the influence of magnetism on the human mind remained, which provided some pseudoscientific trappings for Odoevsky's story. Like dreams, this device also involves some ambiguity. The somnambulist himself admits

[137] Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Halley's Comet* (New York: Walker, 1985), 46.

that his vision is sometimes deceptive, since "it is always more or less under the influence of our present understandings."[138] The narrator nevertheless argues for the essential truth of the vision.

Both Kiukhelbeker's and Odoevsky's works are epistolary: in Kiukhelbeker, the brief preface precedes the letters of an American traveler in Europe; in Odoevsky, the mesmerist's vision consists of the letters of a Chinese student traveling to Russia. Nothing in the larger framing of either story requires this, and the recipients of the letters are not named. Indeed, it seems strange that the frame narrator in Kiukhelbeker or the mesmerist in Odoevsky would send their minds into the future only to read letters, rather than to view and report on the world directly. One reason is the traditional use of the epistolary form in the travelogue genre, the most prominent example of which in the Russian tradition was Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, discussed in the introduction. The epistolary form allows a writer to present vignettes describing places or events of interest without necessarily folding them into an overarching plot. Another justification is the added layer of mediation that the epistolary form adds between the author and the reader: the reader is not given direct access to the whole fantastic world, but only through the sporadic form of letters.

In fact, I argue that layers of mediation and otherness were a key feature of Russian fantastic travel stories in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One way in which this was accomplished was through the use of foreign narrators, as discussed in chapter 1. As for the works examined in this chapter, Odoevsky's narrator is Chinese and Kiukhelbeker's is American. In the novellas of these two authors, this layered alterity serves as a useful narrative device, motivating detailed descriptions of the lands their narrators are exploring, and forming a

[138] "[О]на всегда более или менее находится под влиянием настоящих наших понятий" (417).

particular kind of Bakhtinian chronotope. *The Year 4338* is set in a time that is familiar to the narrator Ippolit Tsungiev but a place—Russia—that he is newly discovering, whereas the opposite would have been true of Odoevsky's Russian readers. Similarly, in Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters* the narrator is exploring Spain and Italy—lands he has only read about—although in this case the spatial setting is also relatively foreign to the Russian reader. Bulgarin's narrator, in contrast, is Russian, but the "found manuscript" story tacked on to the end, with its mention of strange languages, suggests the same impulse to impart the narrator with alterity. Practically, this also allows the author to engage in polemic on Russian political issues from a seemingly more objective standpoint; it can thus be considered an "Aesopian" device of concealment.

A final aspect of framing is the concept of stories within stories, which appears most prominently in Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters*, which contains a number of micro time-travel scenes embedded within the broader narrative. Out of the three narrators, Kiukhelbeker's is the most interested in history, and so it is natural that he will describe scenes from his past in detail. But at several times he abandons the posture of the distant historian and instead invokes the same notion of mental time travel that is described in the preface to the novella. In a scene set in a ruined monastery, which I discuss in greater detail below, the narrator mentally travels back in time and sees the shades of Spain's past. Another example of "micro time travel" appears when the narrator perceives the relevance of Ludovico Ariosto's sixteenth-century epic *Orlando furioso* to his own time:

> I love to read Ariosto: his paladins in the wilderness of the ancient world, it seems, would find Italy in the same, or perhaps an even wilder state, in which they left it. Having risen from the dead, they would think that they had just woken up from a *bogatyr's* sleep.[139]

The bogatyrs were heroes of the bylinas, or Russian folk epics. "Bogatyr's sleep" is an idiomatic expression for "profound sleep," but here Kiukhelbeker seems to be drawing an explicit parallel between Ariosto's Frankish paladins and the Russian bogatyrs. The fantastical element here is justified by the fantastic nature of *Orlando furioso*, which contains various fabulous beasts and a voyage to the Moon. If we step back a few frames, this insertion of a "Rip Van Winkle" micro-plot emerges as remarkably complex: the author of the preface mentally travels to the future, conjuring up letters sent by a real traveler to Europe, who himself imagines fictional characters traveling from the past to his present.

Later on, when recounting the vicissitudes of Roman history, Kiukhelbeker's narrator draws on the medieval myth of the Wandering Jew (commonly called the Eternal Jew in Russian), supposedly cursed to walk the Earth until the Second Coming. The legend was revived by Romantic and Gothic authors such as Jan Potocki, in his early versions of the *Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (1794, 1804).[140] For the narrator of *European Letters*, Rome is "like an old man who outlived all his contemporaries and descendants, like that Eternal Jew, who according to legend is destined to be a witness to all ages and a contemporary of all generations."[141] The theme of the Wandering Jew is significant here not only for its application to the quintessentially

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[139] "Люблю читать Ариоста: его паладины в диких пустынях древнего мира, кажется, наш ли бы Италию в таком же, а может быть, в еще более диком состоянии, в каком ее оставили. Воскреснув, они подумали бы, что только проснулись от богатырского сна" (308).

[140] Jan Potocki, *Œuvres*, ed. François Rosset and Dominique Triaire, vol. IV, part 2: *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (version de 1804) (Louvain: Peeters, 2006).

[141] "Как старец, переживший всех своих современников и потомков, как тот Вечный Иудей, которому, по преданию, определено быть свидетелем всех веков и современником всех поколений" (311).

Catholic city, but also for its invocation of a figure who is “out-of-time”—connecting to the broader theme of time travel and the importance of history.

In describing the ruins of St. Peter’s Basilica at night, the narrator adds another timeframe: his own, presumably distant future, extending the image of day and night: “Thus [. . .] will the human race seem transformed on the night that comes after its day; all its misfortunes, all seeming destruction will drown in the harmony of the whole.”[142] Analogously to the role he himself plays, he imagines an outside observer in this distant future: “A thinking sage, an immigrant from another world, will gaze with awe at this great creation of the supreme builder.” It is not clear what version of the world of humanity this extraterrestrial being will see, but it seems he will be blessed with a remarkable understanding of human history, according with the narrator’s belief that even the bad sides of humanity will ultimately contribute to its progress towards reason and virtue.

### 2.6 Future Technology

All three works take place in the distant future, which according to the conventions of modern science fiction would entail significant technological differences. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, authors took a variety of approaches. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Julius von Voss included a range of new technology in his future visions, but Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), set in the late twenty-first century, only mentions hot-air balloons.

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[142] “Так, думал я, и род человеческий в ту ночь, которая настанет после его дня, явится преображенным; все его несчастия, все мнимые разрушения утонут в гармонии целого” (312).

The technology in my three key works also varies greatly. On the one hand, the only modern technology mentioned in Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters* is the steamship (*parokhod*) on which the American narrator arrives in Europe—a conservative prediction, as several models of steamships had already been invented by 1820. On the other hand, Bulgarin's and Odoevsky's works are rife with newfangled devices. In their prefaces, they each make claims that their predictions are believable, as they are in line with the "laws of nature" and new discoveries in the sciences.

It would take too long to describe all the gadgets that appear in these future stories and the functions they serve in the future societies, but a brief description will give a sense of the familiar science-fictional nature of some of these descriptions. Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables* features self-propelled horseless carriages as well as steam-powered "air stagecoaches" (*vozdushnye dilizhansy*). In a partially accurate prediction of our present-day problems, the climate and agriculture of Bulgarin's world has also drastically changed, meaning that tea, coffee, and chocolate are cheap, whereas cabbage soup, buckwheat porridge, and cucumber pickles—quintessential peasant foods in Bulgarin's day—are considered luxuries. Odoevsky is equally inventive in his novella. Tsungiev mentions traveling on electrical vehicles (*elektrokhody*) through tunnels in the Himalayan and Caspian regions, and in Russia he finally has the opportunity to fly on a galvanic airship (*gal'vanostat*). He also mentions galvanic lighting, cameras, telegraphs, and climate control.

Both Bulgarin and Odoevsky make references to astronomy, anticipating other themes of modern science fiction. Bulgarin's narrator gains access to a powerful telescope:

> I looked at the Moon through a telescope and saw cities, fortresses, mountains, and forests on it—exactly in the same form as the surroundings of Strasbourg appear from the Minster tower. Animals were moving on the Moon like ants, but it was impossible to distinguish between their shapes and types. The distant fixed stars seemed like suns in all

> their brilliance, similar to ours; an amazing multitude of planets of extraordinary magnitude appeared to my eyes and filled the airy space.[143]

The telescope thus grants a change of perspective and suggests the existence of other worlds besides our own. Odoevsky's technology is more advanced, but unlike in the imagination of Bulgarin and other nineteenth-century thinkers, his Moon is uninhabited. This description appears only in one of the fragments that was not worked into the letters in *The Year 4338*:

> A way has been found to communicate with the Moon: it is uninhabited and serves only as a source of supplying the Earth with various everyday needs, by which the destruction that threatens the Earth owing to its huge population is averted. [. . .] Travelers take various gases with them to produce air, which is not present on the Moon.[144]

Here the Moon represents a chance to solve some of the Earth's problems that Odoevsky must have read about in nineteenth-century publications: the threat of overpopulation and the search for natural resources.

Odoevsky, not only a musician but also a perceptive musical critic, exhibited a deep-seated fascination with the field of acoustics. He may have been the first to adopt the word *telephone* into Russian, referring to a mechanical string device of his own invention, as noted in his diary entries. Seemingly unhappy with the Greek word, he contemplated a variety of names,

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[143] "Я посмотрел в телескоп на Луну и увидел на ней города, крепости, горы, леса -- точно в таком виде, как представляются окрестности Страсбурга с башни Минстера. Животные двигались на Луне, как муравьи, но невозможно было различить их формы и вида. Отдалённые неподвижные звёзды казались солнцами во всём блеске, похожими на наше; удивительное множество планет в необыкновенной величине представлялось взорам и наполняло воздушное пространство" (103).

[144] "Нашли способ сообщения с Луною: она необитаема и служит только источником снабжения Земли разными житейскими потребностями, чем отвращается гибель, грозящая земле по причине ее огромного народонаселения. Эти экспедиции чрезвычайно опасны, опаснее, нежели прежние экспедиции вокруг света; на эти экспедиции единственно употребляется войско. Путешественники берут с собой разные газы для составления воздуха, которого нет на Луне" (444).

including *sound collector* (zvukosobiratel′), *far-sound* (dalekozvuk), *sounder* (zvuchnik), and *co-sounder* (sozvuchnik), the last being suggested by the lexicographer Vladimir Dal.[145]

In *The Year 4338* Odoevsky introduces the hydrophone, an innovative musical instrument characterized by a keyboard controlling the flow of water onto carefully tuned crystal bells. This amalgamation of music and technology in Odoevsky's envisaged utopian future gains further dimension in an erotically-charged passage in which a beautiful lady delivers a captivating hydrophone performance that sends Tsungiev, the protagonist, into a state of ecstatic rapture. Tsungiev mentions that the music produced "almost the same effect" on his fellow audience members, but his own reactions to it reflect his positionality as a less-sophisticated traveler who has ended up in this earthly paradise. Additionally, the dreamlike nature of the description in this passage calls back the original framing of the story as the recorded visions of a somnambulist.

Future technology serves a variety of functions in these works: as a sincere prediction of future advances or a way to satirize or highlight social problems of their present. For the most part, technology appears in these works as a positive force and helps to create livelier utopian visions than some of their drier eighteenth-century predecessors.

## 2.7 Nations and Empires in the Future

Many historians of science fiction have explored the way in which authors have participated in and reimagined colonial discourses. John Rieder, for example, accepts as self-evident the omnipresence of colonial and imperial themes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century science fiction, and argues more specifically that the genre "addresses itself to the ideological

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[145] Vladimir Odoevskii, *Kniaz′ Vladimir Odoevskii: dnevnik, perepiska, materialy*, ed. M. P. Rakhmanova (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi tsentral′nyi muzei muzykal′noi kul′tury imeni M. I. Glinki, 2005), 218.

basis of colonial practice itself, by engaging various aspects of the ideology of progress."[146] The results of this engagement, according to Rieder, ranged from "fantasies of appropriation" to "visions of catastrophe."[147]

Most of these stories transpose colonial and imperial discourses to an interplanetary setting: encounters with colonial Others are reenacted as encounters with alien lifeforms. A similar process occurs in the Russian descriptions of travel to the Moon and other uncharted territories that I analyze in chapter 1. This chapter, however, deals with works of future fiction in which the extraterrestrial component is absent, but the theme of imperialism remains a central concern, combined with an equal preoccupation with national identity. The central questions these works pose are: what nations or empires remain in the distant future, how are they structured, and what is their connection to their past?

These themes set these works apart from most modern imaginings of distant future worlds, in which national distinctions among humans are largely erased or radically altered. The writers of early Russian future fiction, in contrast, agree that many if not all national identities will persist, with some recognizable features, in the distant future. They do posit that the geopolitics of the future world will be quite different, although they disagree on what territories future empires will control, which nations will be civilized, and which nations will have fallen into ruin.

The central argument of Kiukhelbeker's *European Letters* is that though empires rise and fall, humanity in general is progressing and improving. The American narrator is traveling

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[146] John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 30.

[147] Rieder, Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction, chapters 2 and 5.

around a twenty-ninth century Europe that has “gone wild again” (302), whereas America and other countries seem to have attained a high degree of civilization. The narrator, in typical nineteenth-century fashion, divides the world into enlightened and unenlightened nations, but the membership in each category is strikingly different. Besides his own country, the narrator explicitly mentions the enlightenment of Indians (303) and Russians (317). He also mentions a melting pot of presumably civilized foreigners in the city of Rome:

> Here is a strange mixture of people of all nations and lands: a Quebec native rents a house near a rich mandarin from Canton. A Russian merchant lives near a Japanese scholar, a Black man from Haiti breathes the same air as his African fellow tribesman. All languages are spoken here except Italian, but they read almost exclusively Italian and Latin books.[148]

That the narrator views the mixture as strange and worthy of comment indicates that other places in his world do not show this ethnic diversity. But the overall argument remains that the enlightenment once claimed by Europeans has now passed on to the other continents.

The narrator refers to this transfer in a brief overview of the “various theaters” of enlightenment in the history of mankind. The Greeks were followed by the Romans, who were followed by “the fresh, virginal sons of the North.”[149] Finally, the Europeans themselves were replaced: “Providence took away their light, but only in order to command the sun of truth in its best splendor to shine over Asia, over Africa, over Europe’s natural successor—America.”[150] The specifics of this future constellation of enlightened countries are complex. America appears

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[148] “Здесь странное смешение людей всех народов и всех земель: уроженец квебекский нанимает дом возле богатого мандарина из Кантона. Русский торговец живет возле японского ученого, негр из Гаити дышит одним воздухом с своим африканским единомышленником. Здесь говорят всеми языками, кроме италиянского, но читают почти исключительно италиянские и латинские книги” (311).

[149] “[С]вежих, девственных сынов Севера” (313).

[150] “Провидение отняло у них свет, но единственно для того, чтобы повелеть солнцу истины в лучшем блеске воссиять над Азиею, над Африкою, над естественною преемницею Европы — Америкою” (313).

preeminent, although Africa and Asia are also mentioned as benefiting from Enlightenment in the future.

One specific way in which Spain is described is quite telling. The only native inhabitants of the country are "wild guerrillas" who "move with their herds from valley to valley and, under the leadership of brave atamans, plunder peaceful African merchants and travelers."[151] Later on, the narrator describes the forests around Cordova that "separate the lands of our settlers from the vast steppes that stretch northward throughout the former Granada."[152] In these two quotations two words stand out. An *ataman* is a Cossack chieftain but is also sometimes used to describe the leader of a gang of robbers. Similarly, *steppe* in Russian usually refers to the grasslands of Russia and Ukraine but can also refer to grassland more broadly. Here Kiukhelbeker takes advantage of these transferred uses, but the words still resonate with the Russian imperial context. The Americans have a colony in wild Spain and must deal with the depredations of the local people just as the Russian state came into conflict with Cossacks and other groups on the fringes of their empire—in Kiukhelbeker's day including most notably the peoples of the Caucasus.

The persistence of the Russian nation in the future is represented by a Russian colony the narrator comes across in Calabria. This settlement—an example of the formerly peripheral Russian Empire colonizing the European center—is led by a man named Dobrov, whose name in

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[151] "Дикие гверилассы, единственные обитатели сей страны, переходят с своими стадами из долины в долину и под предводительством отважных атаманов грабят мирных африканских купцов и путешественников" (303).

[152] "[О]тделяют владения наш их поселенцев от необозримых степей, простираю - щ ихся к северу по всей бывшей Гренаде" (306).

Russian emphasizes his virtuousness. The narrator explicitly asks the reader to execute a time travel into the past (Kiukhelbeker's present):

> Take your mind back to the nineteenth century, and read to an educated European the image of my Dobrov. Despite the fact that Dobrov is no more and no less than only a true man, he will call him an ideal, impossible being. Judge how distant they were from true enlightenment, from true education—from nature.[153]

The enlightenment represented by Dobrov is truer than the supposed enlightenment of Kiukhelbeker's time because in Dobrov's world, people of different occupations and classes are not isolated in their fields, but instead recognize their common humanity. But like other utopias we have seen, Dobrov's Russian colony is not a communist or egalitarian one: there are still servants, to whom Dobrov evinces a paternalistic attitude. Dobrov is an Epicurean, who views the pursuit of pleasure as a fundamental human duty. His interests are diverse and extensive, ranging from hunting to taking luxurious Asiatic baths. He relishes in Socratic and Lucullan feasts, listens to music—which as in Odoevsky's future world is a source of spiritual, ethereal ecstasy—and engages in intellectual discussions. Above all, Dobrov cherishes the tranquility and sweetness of family life, largely attributed to his ideal wife, Eliza. Dobrov's world is thus a private utopia, much more restricted in space than the others we have seen. In stark contrast to Odoevsky's and Bulgarin's future worlds, we do not even know what the political status of Russia is in the future. Dobrov exemplifies how Russians could become examples of enlightenment not through state policies, but through their individual actions.

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[153] "Перенесися же мысленно в XIX столетие, прочти образованнейшему европейцу изображение моего Доброва. Несмотря на то, что Добров не более и не менее как только истинный человек, он назовет его существом идеальным, невозможным. Суди же, как они были удалены от истинного просвещения, от истинной образованности — от природы." (319).

Kiukhelbeker's narrator complicates his characterization of enlightenment by arguing that conventional views about the enlightenment of peoples and historical periods were inaccurate. He criticizes historians and politicians for believing in the "imaginary Enlightenment" of the time of Voltaire and Frederick II of Prussia and ignoring the negative aspects of the period:

> Without even mentioning the Inquisition, torture, and the persecution of thinking people, let us merely glance at the mercantilist system, the delusion of the physiocrats, the resistance that met Adam Smith's simple and wise instructions even in the nineteenth century, let us glance at the treacherous policies of Napoleon, the incessant disturbances of the balance and the most sacred rights of mankind.[154]

In this description the narrator lumps together a fairly long period—Voltaire died decades before Napoleon came to power—reflecting perhaps the distant perspective of the future historian. But this criticism is also clearly aimed at Kiukhelbeker's contemporaries.

The narrator argues that the conventional European view of India is wrong for the opposite reason: it was and is civilized. India appears not as a stop on the narrator's journey, but in his appraisal of the Portuguese poet Camões, whom he is reading for pleasure. The narrator has a special connection to India; it turns out that he spent his youth there and "was enriched with vast knowledge and pure, charming philosophy."[155] Although he appreciates Camões's style, he takes umbrage at his depiction of the Indians:

> The proud contempt with which the poet speaks of the Hindustanis shows that he could not foresee their future greatness, that he had no idea of their ancient enlightenment at all. I confess, dear friend, that the superstition and cruelty that marked all the enterprises of

[154] "Не говоря уже об инквизиции и пытке, о гонениях на людей мыслящих, взглянем только на систему меркантилистов, на заблуждение физиократов, на то сопротивление, которое встречал Адам Смит даже и в XIX столетии своим простым и мудрым наставлениям, взглянем на коварную политику Наполеона, на беспрестанные нарушения равновесия и священнейших прав человечества" (307).

[155] "[О]богатился обширными познаниями и чистою, прелестною философиею" (303).

> the Spanish and Portuguese in India and America contradict the notion that we, in our happy age, have about true erudition.[156]

In effect, in the narrator's perspective, Camões, despite his poetic talent, was a product of his brutal colonialist society and was unable to appreciate a truly great civilization.

But the narrator's view of Enlightenment does not amount to a complete reversal of the usual European division of the world into enlightened and primitive; indeed, at times he echoes the nineteenth-century European sense of superiority over other parts of the world. For example, in his view, Spaniards were uniquely un-European; they were held back on the road to enlightenment not only by the decadence of their empire, but also by "the laziness characteristic of African and Asian tribes" that was introduced by the Moors.[157] Here, however, we could also read Spain as an Aesopian substitute for Russia. The characterization of the Spaniards as backwards and "un-European" also resembles similar arguments used in the discussion of Russian history in Kiukhelbeker's time, for example in Pyotr Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters* (1829–1830). At any rate, the essence of Kiukhelbeker's argument, conveyed through the medium of his future American narrator, is that the nineteenth-century European pride in its own civilization was highly mistaken.

Bulgarin is less concerned than Kiukhelbeker with evaluating the enlightenment of nations over the course of history, but he portrays differences in language use and changes in the supposed level of civilization of different nations and races that would seem dramatic to the

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[156] "Гордое презрение, с которым поэт говорит об индостанцах, показывает, что он не мог предчувствовать будущего величия их, что он вовсе не имел понятия о древнем их просвещении. Признаюсь, любезный друг, что суеверие и жестокость, ознаменовавшие все предприятия испанцев и португальцев в Индии и Америке, противоречат понятию, которое мы, в счастливый век наш, имеем об истинной образованности" (303).

[157] [Л]еность, свойственная племенам африканским и азиатским, удержала их на пути гражданского усовершенствования и умственного образования не менее роскоши и нерадивости, порожденных сокровищами обеих Индий" (305).

nineteenth-century reader. The "fashionable and diplomatic" language of the future is Arabic. The women of the house in which the narrator wakes up are astounded to learn that in his day, that function was filled by the "monotonous" French language. The narrator explains the situation in his own society, reflecting the ongoing debate over language use in Russia:

> "In our time," I replied, "ladies spoke Russian only with footmen, coachmen and maids, and they exhausted all their wisdom in imitating the French pronunciation. In our country," I continued, "those who did not speak French were considered ignorant in high society, although it sometimes happened that the Russians who always spoke French to each other were the greatest ignoramuses.[158]

His host the professor says that the twenty-ninth century has the same problem, just with different languages: "French in our time is the same as your *chukhonskii*, and rich, sonorous, and flexible Arabic has taken the place of French."[159] From the nineteenth century perspective, this is a striking inversion: sophisticated French has been demoted to the uncivilized level of *chukhonskii*, a now dated term referring to Finnish and the Finnic languages of northwest Russia.

A reception held by his host allows the narrator to meet some "distinguished foreigners," several of whom stand out to him as racially different: "several black people and olive-colored people."[160] Among them is an unnamed "Eskimo prince," who prompts the narrator to make the following reflection, referring to the travel journals of the British Arctic explorer William Edward Parry, which were published in the 1820s:

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[158] "В наше время, -- отвечал я, — дамы говорили по-русски только с лакеями, кучерами и служанками, а всю свою премудрость истощали в подражании французскому произношению. У нас кто не говорил по-французски, — продолжал я, — тот почитался невежею в большом свете, хотя иногда так случалось, что те из русских, которые между собой говорили всегда по-французски, бывали величайшими невежами" (90). For more on the debate about the French language, see Derek Offord, Vladislav Rjéoutski, and Gesine Argent, *French Language in Russia: A Social, Political, Cultural, and Literary History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

[159] "[Ф]ранцузский язык в наше время есть то же, что у вас был чухонский, а богатый, звучный и гибкий арабский язык заступил место французского." (90).

[160] "[Н]есколько негров и людей оливкового цвета" (96).

> I had recently read Parry's *Travels* and was surprised at the similarity of this prince's face to the pictures included in this traveler's book, depicting the inhabitants of the polar countries, the poor Eskimos, who in our time wandered like bears along the uninhabited shores and ice of the polar seas. The politeness and education of this prince and the two adjutants who were with him led me to presume a high degree of enlightenment in the polar countries.[161]

The narrator displays a specific liberal concept of racial progress that was typical of his time: the Arctic inhabitants are primitive and animal-like, but may proceed to enlightenment in the future. The polar regions, of course, were of special interest to the Russians, who had established permanent fur-trading settlements in Alaska by the 1790s. Note, however, that the narrator's knowledge of the Eskimos of his day comes from a British source. The narrator then meets another figure at the reception from the opposite corner of the globe: "a young black man, the son of the famous Barabanoi, the commander of the Ashanti Empire, the strongest in Africa."[162] In Bulgarin's time this area was of colonial interest not to the Russians, but to the British, who in 1823—a year before the publication of *Plausible Fables*—had entered into the first of several Anglo-Ashanti wars to gain control of what is now Ghana.

Fewer nationalities are mentioned in Odoevsky's *The Year 4338*, which imagines a fairly simple future geopolitics: Russia and China are the two great powers, but China is culturally inferior; America, meanwhile, has gone wild. One might see that as simply a result of a perception of the growing power of China combined with a sense of Russian national superiority,

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[161] "Я недавно читал "Путешествие" Парри и удивился сходству лицеочертания сего принца с картинками, приложенными к книге сего путешественника, изображающими жителей полярных стран, бедных эскимосов, которые в наше время, подобно медведям, блуждали по необитаемым берегам и льдам полярных морей. Вежливость и образованность сего принца и находившихся с ним двух адъютантов заставили меня догадываться о высокой степени просвещения полярных стран" (97).

[162] "Засим профессор познакомил меня с молодым негром и назвал его сыном знаменитого Барабаноя, полководца сильнейшей в Африке империи Ашантской. Этот юноша путешествовал для приобретения опытности, сопутствуемый своим наставником" (97).

but certain clues point to an additional symbolic meaning. The Chinese student Tsungiev describes his country's winding road to development in detail. He praises the great reformer Khun-Gin, five hundred years ago:

> I find myself pondering what our fate would have been, had our great Khun-Gin, who roused China from its age-long slumber, or rather, dead stagnation, not been born 500 years ago. What if he had not eradicated the traces of our ancient, naive sciences, had not replaced our fetishism with the true faith, had not ushered us into the family of educated nations? With no exaggeration, we might have become like these savage Americans, who, for lack of other speculations, auction off their cities at public auctions, then come to plunder us.[163]

The negative portrayal of Americans here is perhaps related to Odoevsky's distaste for commercialism. But Khun-Gin's reforms—destroying his country's old traditions and aligning it with cosmopolitan culture—recall those of Peter I, suggesting that China in this future world represents Russia of the author's day.

This impression is confirmed as Tsungiev continues his narrative. The Chinese only adopted the technology of aeronautics after losing battles to the Russians—this corresponds to Peter's focus on acquiring Western European military technology. After westernizing, the Chinese have completely lost their former xenophobia and have now fallen into the opposite extreme, the "unaccountable imitation of foreigners": "everything we have is in the Russian manner: dress, customs, and literature; the one thing we do not have is Russian keen-wittedness, but we will acquire it over time."[164] This criticism of cultural imitation fits clearly into the

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[163] [Я] часто, любезный товарищ, спрашиваю самого себя, что было бы с нами, если б за 500 лет перед сим не родился наш великий Хун-Гин, который пробудил наконец Китай от его векового усыпления или, лучше сказать, мертвого застоя; если б он не уничтожил следов наших древних, ребяческих наук, не заменил наш фетишизм истинною верою, не ввел нас в общее семейство образованных народов? Мы, без шуток, сделались бы теперь похожими на этих одичавших американцев, которые, за недостатком других спекуляций, продают свои города с публичного торгу, потом приходят к нам грабить" (422).

[164] "[Б]езотчетное подражание иноземцам; все у нас на русский манер: и платье, и обычаи, и литература; одного у нас нет -- русской сметливости, но и ее приобретем со временем" (422).

contemporary debate in Odoevsky's time over Russia's imitation of France and a desire for a more strongly defined Russian character. Here, just as in the appearance of the Arabic language in Bulgarin's novella, the believed deficiencies of elite Russian cultural life in the future context have undergone a process of defamiliarization, or "cognitive estrangement" in the Suvinian sense.

## 2.9 History and Ruins

More than modern science fiction with future settings, early future fiction often exhibited a fascination with the notion of past time—both the author's present, which has become a past in the future, and the author's past, which has faded into antiquity. A central question of these works is what aspects of human civilization will remain in the distant future. The authors' answers to these questions were tied up with their conceptions of national identity and their interest in or anxieties about the preservation of book learning and the ephemerality of material and artistic monuments—topics, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, that concerned Pushkin as well. It is no accident that these works appeared during the phase of Romantic nationalism, the rediscovery and invention of national traditions, and the birth of historical fiction as a genre with its own codic conventions.[165] The past was of interest to writers of spatial fantasies discussed in chapter 1, but it acquired new significance in these works of future fiction or time travel, which allowed writers to focus on specific predictions about their own country's future, in part based on an understanding of its past.

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[165] For the seminal works on these subjects see Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965).

The works of Kiukhelbeker, Bulgarin, and Odoevsky present different perspectives on the question of whether knowledge of the past will be preserved in the future. Kiukhelbeker's narrator has a detailed knowledge of political and cultural history and has access to books from the past in his imperial metropolis, though that knowledge has been lost to Europeans themselves. Bulgarin also meets scholars in the future who have some knowledge of his time, such as the fact that French was a prestige language among the Russian nobility. In Odoevsky's world, however, despite advancements in technology, knowledge of the past has been lost because of the fragility of the print form.

The preservation or loss of historical knowledge directly relates to the question of the preservation of national identity. In Odoevsky, the German nation seems to have disintegrated, if we judge from a scholarly debate about the meaning of the word *nemtsy* (Germans). In a conversation with a Russian scholar, the Chinese student Tsungiev flaunts his supposed knowledge of the subject:

> "The Nemtsy were a people who lived to the south of ancient Russia;" I said, "this, it seems, is proven; the Nemtsy were conquered by the Allemands, then in place of the Allemands appeared the Tedeschi, the Tedeschi were conquered by the Germans or, more correctly, the Germanians, and the Germanians by the Deutschers—a famous people, from whom even the language has been preserved in a few fragments left by their poet Goethe. . ."[166]

The joke here lies in the fact that all of these words—in Russian, French, Italian, and German—actually refer to the same people. Tsungiev has been misled by the different names to posit a complex history of conquest and replacement of one tribe by another. This is evidently a parody

[166] "— Немцы были народ, обитавший на юг от древней России, — сказал я, — это, кажется, доказано; немцев покорили Аллеманны, потом на месте Аллеманнов являются Тедески, Тедесков покорили Германцы или, правильнее, Жерманийцы, а Жерманийцов Дейчеры — народ знаменитый, от которого даже язык сохранился в нескольких отрывках, оставшихся от их поэта, Гете. . ." (426)

of the academic pretensions and debates on ancient and medieval history in Odoevsky's time. But it also depends on the world the author has built, which, despite its technological innovations, has not been able to adequately preserve the knowledge of the past in book form.

In contrast, in Odoevsky's world Russian nationality has survived, perhaps because of the persistence and expansion of the Russian Empire, but Russian written monuments have suffered the same sporadic preservation. One work that has survived is the Code of Laws of the Russian Empire, which was first published in 1832, and which the Minister of Reconciliation shows to Tsungiev:

> "This is one of the first monuments of Russian legislation," my host informed me. "Owing to the changes in the language over such a long period of time, much in this monument has now become completely inexplicable, but from what we have managed to decipher so far, it's apparent how ancient our enlightenment is! Such monuments should be preserved by grateful posterity."[167]

The minister's praise of the Code of Laws may reflect Odoevsky's own opinion—possibly that the Code of Laws was a step towards more liberal reforms. But this passage does have the same forced quality as the conclusion of Isaac Asimov's 1954 novel *The Stars, Like Dust*—which Asimov later regretted—in which the future inhabitants of Earth discover an ancient manuscript of the United States Constitution and adopt it as a guide for a new empire.[168] But in Odoevsky's novel it is important that though the Code of Laws has been preserved, it is still largely undeciphered—the Russians of the future thus have only a tenuous connection to their centuries-old history. This is confirmed by two haphazard facts that have survived about Saint Petersburg

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[167] «Это один из первых памятников, — сказал мне хозяин, — Русского законодательства; от изменения языка, в течение столь долгого времени, многое в сем памятнике сделалось ныне совершенно необъяснимым, но из того, что мы до сих пор могли разобрать, видно, как древне наше просвещение! такие памятники должно сохранять благодарное потомство» (435).

[168] For Asimov's regrets, see Isaac Asimov, *In Memory Yet Green* (New York: Avon, 1979), 600.

in Odoevsky's future world. One is a verse of Derzhavin's—"Petropolis and its towers slumbered" (Petropol′ s bashniami . . .)—which gives rise to arguments about whether the ancient name of the city was Petropolis, Petrograd, Petersburg, or Piter (436). The other is a snippet of a mundane letter from a lowly Petersburg civil servant, which is taken as a precious document written by an important dignitary (436–37).

The past and the question of preservation is represented by the concept of ruins. Since the sixteenth century Europeans had been fascinated with ruins, whether the real ruins of ancient civilizations, the mock ruins that decorated gentry estates, or the imagined ruins of art and literature. Ruins served as evidence that the mightiest empires have fallen and that the works of mankind would ultimately fall to the powers of nature. This reminder became especially pressing as modern Europeans proclaimed their own urban and architectural superiority in relation to the rest of the world. This complex engagement with ruins was later summarized by the early twentieth-century sociologist Georg Simmel, who maintained that the ruin is a unified aesthetic object, tragic yet peaceful, resulting from a tension between "purpose and accident, nature and spirit, past and present."[169]

Future fiction offered a new way for Europeans to examine their own developed cities and societies and the prospect that they too will fall into ruin. John Clute has identified some of the early hints at this theme: brief musings about the future of European cities.[170] In 1749 James Caulfeild, first Earl of Charlemont, was visiting Athens when he remarked in his travel journal

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[169] Georg Simmel, "Two Essays," trans. David Kettler, *The Hudson Review* 11, no. 3 (1958): 371–85, https://doi.org/10.2307/3848614.

[170] John Clute and David Langford, "Ruins and Futurity," in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. John Clute et al. (London: Gollancz, 2021), http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/ruins_and_futurity.

on the “melancholy” possibility that one day travelers would come, “perhaps from America,” to see the ruins of London. In 1774, Horace Walpole imagined “some curious traveller from Lima” coming to a future London to tour the ruins of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Eventually these meditations found narrative form. Mercier created an early model in 1771 in *The Year 2440*, in which the narrator dream-travels to the future and explores the ruins of the Palace of Versailles. But the first story, according to John Clute, that provides the outside perspective of an inhabitant of the future (rather than a time traveler) is Thomas Lyttelton’s narrative poem *The State of England, in the Year 2199*.[171] Here an American traveler comes to the same point of British pride mentioned by Walpole: the ruined St. Paul’s Cathedral. This sight fills the traveler with nostalgia for Britain’s imperial might, described in graphic terms: the time is gone when Britain beheld “The Spaniard crouch beneath her spear, and all / The Gallic lilies crimson’d o’er with blood.”[172]

The European fascination with ruins naturally spread to Russia. In 1771, for instance, Catherine II commissioned a “Ruin Tower” to grace the grounds of her palace in Tsarskoe Selo and commemorate her victories over the Ottomans. An important literary model figured in Nikolai Karamzin’s novella *Poor Liza* (1792): the narrator visits a ruined monastery near Moscow that fills him with sentimental contemplations about the past: “There, leaning on the ruins of the gravestones, I listen to the dull groan of the times swallowed up by the abyss of the past—a groan that makes my heart shudder and tremble.”[173] Ruins also appear in works of

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[171] John Clute, “New Zealander,” in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. John Clute et al., last updated January 11, 2018, http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/new_zealander.

[172] Thomas Lyttelton, Poems, by a Young Nobleman, of Distinguished Abilities, Lately Deceased; Particularly, The State of England, and The Once Flourishing City of London [. . .]. (London: G. Kearsly, 1780), 7.

[173] Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, *Izbrannye sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 2:606. For an exploration on the changing attitudes of Russians towards ruins over time, see Andreas

spatial fantasy, such as Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, in which the antipodean Peregab (Petersburg) and its palaces have partly fallen into ruins after the decision of the Ophirian ruler to move the capital back to Kvamo (Moscow).

How do ruins figure in the three works of temporal fantasy focused on in this chapter? In Bulgarin's *Plausible Fables*, they do not appear. The narrator mostly travels around lands that were undeveloped in his own time. At the end, he finally returns to St. Petersburg on an airship, where he sees some familiar buildings: "My heart trembled with joy at the sight of the golden roofs, buildings and lofty spires of the churches and towers of my native city. Its space amazed me: there were wide streets and huge buildings all the way to Pulkovo Mountain, along the sea coast, and far inland" (109). This is a fairly accurate prediction of the expanded Petersburg of our time, though he does not mention the present-day Pulkovo airport which has made that name recognizable to tourists in our own universe. Instead, the mountain is topped with a strange structure: "an obelisk in the form of an Egyptian pyramid," which serves as a "monument to the great memories of the nineteenth century," perhaps suggesting that the accomplishments of Bulgarin's time will be seen with the same reverence—but also distance—as Egyptian antiquity.

Ruins make a fleeting appearance in one of the manuscript fragments contained in Tsekhnovitser's edition of Odoevsky's *The Year 4338*. In what seems to be an earlier plan for a future novella with a quite different plot, we find the title "19th century—2000 years later," hinting at a setting in the 3830s.[174] The fragment discusses a manuscript discovered in unspecified ruins, detailing the history of ancient Russia. An unnamed son of a poet attempts to

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Schönle, *Architecture of Oblivion: Ruins and Historical Consciousness in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011).

[174] "XIX век. Через двести лет" (445).

use this manuscript to showcase his scholarly prowess, aiming to win over his beloved. He is shocked by his discoveries, including the fact that Russia once occupied only a portion of the globe instead of spanning both hemispheres as in his era. Yet the scholarly community remains skeptical of his incredible findings, which plunges him into despair. Despite the different plot, this fragment shares several themes with the more developed novella about Tsungiev—the expansion of Russian territory and the loss of historical knowledge. In contrast to Tsungiev's confidently wrong notions about the word *nemtsy*, or Brambeus's accidental fabrication of a manuscript in Senkovsky's novel, the poet's son in this fragment in fact discovers the truth, only to be disappointed by academia. All of these texts serve to satirize scholarly pretensions, but from different angles.

In Kiukhelbeker's work, ruined Europe forms the basic premise of the plot. Kiukhelbeker clearly seems to be drawing on the tradition of ruins in future fiction, although his focus is somewhat different. The American traveler notes that "Rome exists, meanwhile cities as rich and powerful as Paris and London have disappeared from the earth," but unlike the future travelers of other authors, he does not visit them or contemplate the ruins of Versailles or St. Pauls'.[175] Instead, he visits Spain and Italy, two countries that from the early nineteenth-century perspective had already experienced long declines. The ruins of the Escorial, the former residence of the kings of Spain, serves as a site for a Gothic dream sequence. In the "obscure heights" he sees a succession of shades, beginning with "crafty Ferdinand and ambitious Isabella" and proceeding to what was for the author the most recent great event in Spanish history—Napoleon's invasion of the country during the Peninsular War: "Spain flooded with the

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[175] "Рим существует, между тем как города столь же богатые и могущественные, между тем как Париж, как Лондон исчезли с земли" (311).

unbridled hordes of Murat; the brief reign of King Joseph; Spain in the struggle for freedom and independence, for the sacred rights of peoples—a great and edifying example for posterity!"[176] Identification with the liberal faction in the Spanish war of independence was natural for Kiukhelbeker the future Decembrist.[177] Following this, "a cold wind rising from the north" (perhaps symbolizing anti-liberal Russian policy) interrupts his dream, and he ends his contemplations with a broader musing on "[his] own insignificance and the insignificance of everything on earth."[178]

Note that the narrator does not dream of any events after the war that ended in 1814. This is true of the work as a whole, in which he shows a detailed knowledge of European history, but only into the first decades of the nineteenth century. From the perspective of modern science fiction, this could be seen as a symptom of insufficient world-building—or history-building—on the part of the author. But this historical limitation allows the author to concentrate his political message. That the wise American traveler from the future, whose distant perspective lends him an air of impartiality, was so focused on nineteenth-century liberal revolutions, means that they were a turning point in world history. The implication is that the great European powers, by suppressing these movements, were sowing the seeds of their own demise.

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[176] " Казалось, я видел пред собою в смутной высоте тени коварного Фердинанда и честолюбивой Изабеллы [. . .]. Испания, наводненная необузданными полчищами Мюрата, минутное царствование короля Иосифа, Испания в борьбе за свободу и независимость, за священнейшие права народов — великий и назидательный пример для потомства!" (304)

[177] For an account of the connections between these revolutionary movements, see Richard Stites, *The Four Horsemen: Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[178] "Холодный ветер, поднявшийся с севера, прервал мои мечтания, но я еще долго бродил, задумчивый, между развалинами и чувствовал ничтожность свою и всего земного!" (304)

Similar lofty thoughts occur to the narrator in a stroll around a ruined monastery near Cordova. Here the description seems to draw on the sentimental style of Karamzin. The narrator finds a stream below the ruins of a Christian monastery and is struck by the contrast between "the eternal movement of water and the eternal tranquility of these stones," which he sees as a kind of microcosm—"the whole universe in miniature"—based on the opposition between the temporariness of human existence and the eternity of nature.[179] He goes on to execute a mental "time travel" in the opposite direction from that described by the author of the preface, using the same verb: "The whisper of the water made me ponder even more: I was transported [*perenessia*] to the ages when these walls were still inhabited, when hermits, free and unfree, here tried to forget everything earthly and live for the Heavenly. How many tears were shed here. . . ."[180] This time it is the melancholy dream-image that wakes the narrator up, and instead of a cold wind, he experiences the beauty of nature: the sun shining through the trees onto the waters. Once again, he ends with a general conclusion, albeit this time more hopeful: "How small and perverse is man, how proud and weak! But I was comforted, and my eyes were raised to heaven with a grateful tear."[181]

Even before arriving in Rome, the narrator already contemplates the layers of history he will find there, each more ancient than the next, including ruins from the age of Augustus and that of Pope Leo X. The oldest relic is an imported obelisk: "a stranger from Egypt, a stranger

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[179] "Вечное движение воды и вечное спокойствие сих камней представляли разительную противоположность: я, казалось, видел всю вселенную в сокращении" (306).

[180] "Шепот воды заставил меня еще более задуматься: я перенесся в те веки, когда сии стены еще были обитаемы, когда отшельники, вольные и невольные, здесь старались забыть все земное и жить Небесному. Сколько здесь слез было пролито . . ." (306)

[181] "Как мал и превратен человек, гордый и слабый! Но я был утешен, и глаза мои с благодарною слезою поднялись к небу" (306).

from the misty age of fable, of which the Romans themselves spoke with a kind of reverential fear."[182] For the narrator, Rome exemplifies his argument that certain values persist despite the rise and fall of empires. After listing the number of times Rome has been conquered and sacked, he emphasizes that it will continue to retain a preeminent place the European sphere. Here he does include a hand-waving justification for why he does not continue the history of Rome past the time of Napoleon: "I will not speak of what has not yet been effaced from anyone's memory."[183] In fact, Kiukhelbeker does not include any significant discussion of the future history of the world after the early nineteenth century, when the novella was written, other than to note that Europe at some point fell into ruins. From a modern science fictional standpoint, this would seem to be a startling lack of worldbuilding, but in fact, any discussion of future history would have distracted from Kiukhelbeker's main purpose: a reanalysis of the real history of his own time.

## 2.10 Conclusion

Stepan Burachyok's 1840 review of Odoevsky's *The Year 4338* serves as a window into the reception of nascent speculative fiction by the informed Russian audience of the period. In a manner reminiscent of later science fiction aficionados, the reviewer demonstrates a keen interest in the depictions of future technology within the narrative, particularly the concept of the hydrophone, a musical instrument that he claims to have already thought of inventing. However, he criticizes the novella's portrayal of future literary factions engaged in exacerbated polemics

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[182] "[П]ришлец из Египта, пришлец из туманного времени баснословия, о котором сами римляне говорили с каким-то благоговейным ужасом" (308).

[183] "Не стану говорить о том, что еще не изгладилось ни из чьей памяти" (311).

surpassing those of his own time. His lament evokes a sentiment prevalent in early nineteenth-century discourse that emphasizes the moral implications of literature:

> It is painful to think that our highly enlightened descendants will be even more capricious than us in 2500 years. — For God's sake, intelligent, gifted, scholarly poet, do not hint at such things; you know how impressionable Russians are—they will immediately reproduce your theory in practice. . . Poor literature, poor poetry! Were you given to us for this?[184]

In a fitting twist, Burachyok employs the predictive lens intrinsic to future fiction to make his own prognostication regarding the influence of Odoevsky's novella. If their readers are innately susceptible to new ideas—which for Burachyok is particularly true of Russians—the genre of science fiction then becomes a way for authors not just to comment on the present, but to shape the future, for good or ill.

Experiments with future fiction continued throughout the nineteenth century. The Caucasus, despite its prominence in canonical Russian travel literature, did not figure in the works of Odoevsky, Bulgarin, and Kiukhelbeker discussed above. This gap was remedied by Vladimir Sollogub's comedy *The Night before the Wedding* (*Noch' pered svad'boi*, 1855), in which the Georgian protagonist falls into a drunken stupor at his bachelor's party and travels in his sleep to a version of Tiflis (Tbilisi) a thousand years in the future.[185] The play is replete with local color, national and gender stereotypes, musical interludes, and arguments about Georgia's civilizational and technological progress.

When compared to the genre of spatial fantasy discussed in the first chapter, the genre of temporal fantasy compelled authors to limit their imagination in one respect—their works are set

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[184] S. Burachek, review of 4338-i god: Peterburgskiia pis′ma, by V. F. Odoevskii, *Maiak sovremennago prosveshcheniia i obrazovannosti* 2 (1840): chapter 4, p. 32.

[185] V. A. Sollogub, "Noch′ pered svad′boi," in *Zurna, zakavkazskii almanakh*, ed. E. A. Verderevskii (Tiflis: Tipografiia kantseliarii namestnika kavkazskago, 1855), 337–75.

in the real world with existing geography and some amount of cultural continuity with their present. But this genre also allowed authors to expand their imagination in another direction—to explore questions of the impact of future technology, of climate change, and of the preservation or loss of history and the consequent persistence or disappearance of national identity and national difference. These writers constructed new polities in the future that explicitly or implicitly supported or refuted the empires and political structures of their own time. A third genre, metafiction, would seem to forego connections to both spatial and temporal reality, but it was still inevitably tied to real questions of nationality and empire, as I investigate in the next chapter.

# Chapter 3: Metafictional Travel

Despite their fantastic elements, the journeys through space and time analyzed in the previous two chapters still rely on a degree of realism, by upholding the conventional contract between author and reader. The works' protagonists end up in uncharted territories or future epochs, yet once these bounds are crossed, the narratives usually evolve in a manner that aligns with the reader's expectations. The author knows that his educated readers will not mistake fiction with reality, but hopes that they will yield to the illusion for a while, reveling in the description of a strange new world and perhaps benefiting from moral or political lessons embedded within. In this chapter, my inquiry will delve into instances where the very foundation of conventional storytelling is undermined through a type of fantastic travel I designate as metafictional. In nineteenth-century Russian fiction, this strain of travel writing is nowhere better exemplified than by Aleksandr Veltman's work *The Wanderer* (1831–32)—an amalgamation of a realistic travelogue and an imaginative game in which the reader is invited to partake.[186] I argue that Veltman's pioneering foray into metafiction, combining empirical accounts of the realities of the imperial borderlands with eccentric, unfettered digressions, afforded him a unique way to depict the multifaceted relationship among the Russian intelligentsia, the state, and various ethnic groups inside and outside the empire.

*Metafiction*, a term coined in 1960, signifies an author's engagement with the narrative that transcends the traditional boundaries of fictional storytelling.[187] Patricia Waugh defines it as

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[186] Aleksandr Fomich Vel′tman, *Strannik*, ed. Iu. M. Akutin (Moscow: Nauka, 1977). Page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.

[187] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "metafiction, *n.*" accessed June 12, 2023, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/239935.

"fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[188] The term is predominantly associated with postmodernist fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mark Lipovetsky traces the genesis of metafiction in Russian literature to the modernism of the 1920s and 30s, when it emerged as an intellectual response to totalitarian Soviet ideology that ensnared the Word and Truth in a "grotesque paradox."[189] Metafiction characterizes works such as Andrei Bitov's *Pushkin House* (*Pushkinskii dom*, written in the late 1960s), which interweaves the story of a philologist living in Leningrad with historical and literary digressions that come together to create a "simulation of reality."[190]

The tendency to place the beginning of metafiction in the early twentieth century depends on the premise of the preceding dominance of realism. Literary critics have historically perceived the evolution of literature until the nineteenth century as an inexorable march towards heightened verisimilitude. Most notably, Erich Auerbach identified mimesis—representing reality as it is—as one of the goals of true art, intertwined with democratic and humanistic values and stretching back to Homer.[191] The nineteenth century saw this drive to realism embodied in specific literary movements, such as the "natural school" of Russian critical social realism so praised by Belinsky, and ultimately the genre explicitly called "realism" in the late nineteenth century. For Soviet critics, nineteenth-century "critical realism" was a predecessor to Socialist Realism,

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[188] Patricia Waugh, Metafiction: *The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2.

[189] Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. Eliot Borenstein (London: Routledge, 2015), 11.

[190] Lipovetsky, 43.

[191] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953).

officially enshrined and enforced in the Soviet Union as the “truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development.”[192] Outside the Soviet Union, Marxist critics such as György Lukács, albeit with less rigidity, continued to connect the evolution of realism in literature to a heightened social consciousness.[193]

The assumption that metafiction arose in the context of a crisis of truth in the twentieth century, while partly convincing, obscures the complex interplay between realism, metafiction, and fantasy that existed in earlier periods. In Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, writers were engaged in an intense literary debate on the possibilities of a national literature and literary language, as well as a political debate on the future of Russia within the ever-evolving European community of nations. Writers were already discussing the role of fiction in representing and shaping different versions of reality, but the tools they chose to do this were varied. It was an open question whether *truth* referred to faithful reproductions of everyday life—as it would later in the nineteenth century—or some more subjective connection to a higher ideal, for example through the medium of lyric poetry, which had not yet relinquished its privileged place within the literary sphere.

Metafictional travel fiction can also be seen as a subgenre of travel writing, which was wildly popular in the nineteenth century. Looking at this genre as a whole give us a relatively clear case of the range of possible relations between fictionality and reality. At first glance, one might construct a diagram where fantastic or metafictional elements increasingly distance a text from reality:

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[192] Pervyi Vsesoiuznyi s″ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 1934: stenograficheskii otchet (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1934), 716.

[193] György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965).

| **Real travel** | → **Non-fictional travelogue** | → **Fictional travelogue** | → **Metafictional travelogue** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| • interaction with the material world: the landscape, the people | • focus on unusual aspects of places visited, often with a home audience in mind | • characters and events, but generally not places, are fictionalized | • the illusion of a real plot is disrupted by the intrusion of the author |
| • including aspects of everyday life not generally considered of literary interest | • more or less literary, involving stylistic choices and sometimes a plot structure | • generally has a unified plot<br>• sometimes based on real-life experiences | • lays bare its own narrative conventions, emphasizing that it is a text read by a reader |

But as I argue in this chapter, this linear model is too simplistic. A travelogue like *The Wanderer* shows how metafiction can draw on the techniques of both fictional and non-fictional

travelogues, and by creating a unique contract with the reader can actually simulate real travel. A more nuanced diagram would therefore be Figure 1.

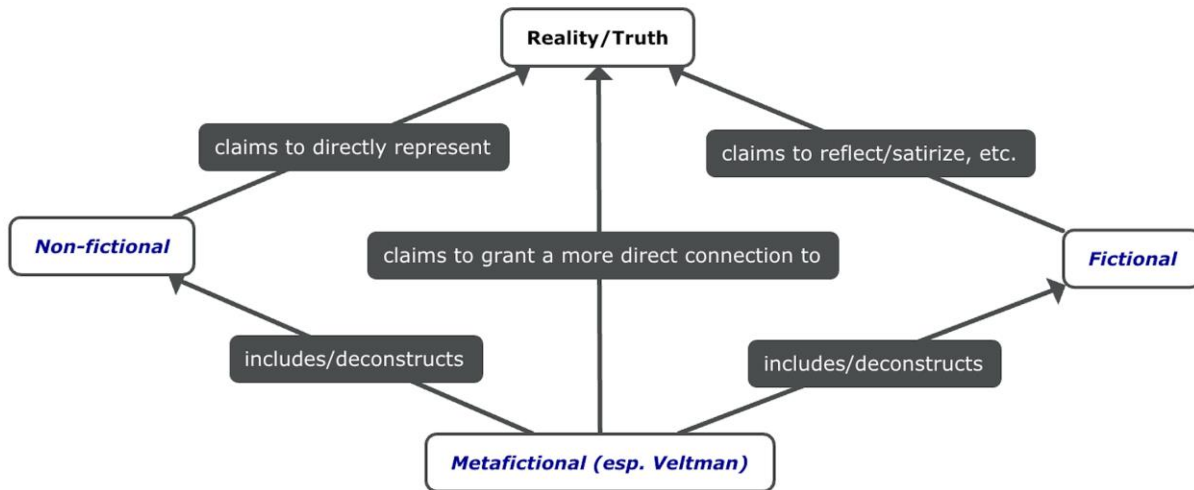


**Figure 1: Truth and fiction relations**

Any diagram will fail to capture the intricacies of actual literary works, but this one captures some of the essential relations among these genres and their corresponding notions of truth or reality. Non-fictional travelogues claim to represent real people, places, and events. Although many non-fictional travelogues may contain fictional embellishments, these are usually seen as violations of the contract with the reader, who may be relying on the author-traveler to obtain a faithful view of foreign lands and peoples. Fictional travelogues invent a new reality. This category could be further divided. In realistic works, the invented reality is meant to be a mirror of our own, whereas in fantastic works it may be more extraordinary, but it still operates in understandable ways. The author-reader contract includes a "suspension of disbelief." This now commonplace phrase was coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817, precisely in the context of reality and fantasy. Coleridge reported a difference between his poetry at the time and William Wordsworth's—the former applying a semblance of reality to the supernatural and the

latter opening the reader's eyes to the wonders of ordinary life.[194] As we have seen in the previous two chapters, fantastic fiction was often thought to require a realistic framing or disclaimer—perhaps indicating that the authors could not depend entirely on a suspension of disbelief.

The relation of metafiction to truth is complex, depending on its specific nature and manifestation within the work as an occasional device or a governing principle. In the beginning of his novel, however, Veltman claims that his metafictional work provides a deeper connection to reality than ordinary fictional or non-fictional travelogues: whereas ordinary readers are "eyewitnesses," his reader is a "clairvoyant."[195] Rather than simply traveling from point to point, the narrator *wanders* through physical and imaginary space. This wandering is presented merely as an amusing experiment, but as an interactive experience for the reader, reflecting the common human psychological experience of flitting from one impression to another. Veltman's metafiction (and that of similar authors such as Laurence Sterne) also openly borrows from non-fiction and fiction, but deconstructs both of these genres, by laying bare their conventions or disrupting the truth that they are usually meant to convey.

Using metafictional devices in travel narratives was already well developed by Veltman's day, although he may have been the first to conceive of a "journey through a map"—which forms the initial premise of *The Wanderer*. Both non-fictional and fictional travelogues were common enough in Europe by the eighteenth century that they were open to parody and reimagining. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is not only full of fantastic lands and

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[194] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria; Or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, vol. 2 (London: Rest Fenner, 1817), 2.

[195] "[O]ни самовидцы, а вы ясновидец" (9).

creatures—it also contains two preliminary, self-referential letters between the fictional Captain Gulliver and his fictional publisher and cousin Richard Sympson. Captain Gulliver claims that the events of his travels are the absolute truth and defends himself against the criticism of his fellow "Yahoos" (deformed human-like creatures in the novel that he metafictionally relates to humans of the real world). A more sustained metafictional experiment was undertaken by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne had greater influence in Russia through his structurally simpler travelogue, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, which provided a model for Aleksandr Radishchev and Nikolai Karamzin, as well as Veltman.[196] But the influence of *Tristram Shandy* is visible in Veltman's digressive plot and perhaps even in its geographic theme: Neil Stewart argues that *The Wanderer* "can generally be seen as an extension of Sterne's famous joke about the map of Namur, Uncle Toby, and his suggestion that Widow Wadman should 'lay [her] finger upon the place' (TS, 2: 773) where he received his wound."[197] Another important influence was Xavier de Maistre's *Journey around My Room* (*Voyage autour de ma chambre*, 1794, first translated into Russian in 1802), a novel written when the author was under house arrest in Turin. Drawing on Sterne and Rousseau, de Maistre uses his confined surroundings as inspiration for thoughts about his life and sentiments, in a continual game with the reader.[198]

Veltman's innovation, and the uniqueness of *The Wanderer*, was to combine this type of metafictional play with a plethora of different fictional and nonfictional themes and plot

[196] Stewart, "From Imperial Court to Peasant's Cot," 127–53.

[197] Stewart, 141–42.

[198] The first Russian translation was Xavier de Maistre, *Puteshestvie po moei komnate*, trans. Kriazhev (Moscow: Kriazhev, Got′e i Mei, 1802).

elements. Literary scholar Andreas Schönle, though he considers *The Wanderer* "barely readable" (I disagree), highlights the multilayered aspect of Veltman's work, identifying at least five separate journeys contained in the book: the cartographic journey through the map, the real journey taken by Veltman, "the erotic, the historical-mythological, and the philosophical."[199] Many more categories could be made–the historical parts, for example, are constructed differently according to the context (Ottoman, ancient Roman, ancient Greek, and so on). In this chapter, however, and in accordance with the above diagram, I will probe more deeply into three constitutive parts of Veltman's work that connect to my main argument about literature and empire: (1) the real imperial borderlands that served as inspiration for Veltman, as well as others in his social sphere; (2) the fictional travel plot, in which the narrator's opinions about interactions with local inhabitants are most clearly described; (3) the fantastic and metafictional digressions, which nevertheless connect to the "real" journey in various ways.

### 3.1 Real Imperial Borderlands

What imperial reality was Veltman attempting to capture through his metafictional work? Geographically, the work centers on the southwestern frontier of the Russian Empire. Veltman was not the only author to record his impressions of the area. Other Russian intellectuals such as Aleksandr Pushkin and Filipp Vigel ended up in the region in the service of the Russian state, and they quickly created a complicated collective vision of the frontier zone.

All of this was enabled by Russia's push westward at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth. In 1774, Russia began sending partisans into the Danubian

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[199] Andreas Schönle, *Authenticity and Fiction in the Russian Literary Journey, 1790–1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 159–60.

principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, vassals of the Ottoman Empire. It occupied the area during various wars with the Ottomans, who finally ceded a portion of the principality of Moldavia in the Treaty of Bucharest on May 28, 1812. The newly annexed triangle of land was bordered by the river Prut to the west, the Dniester to the east, and the Black Sea to the south. In contrast to the present country of Moldova, the Bessarabian region, formed in 1818, had a significant coastline, from the Danube delta to the Dniester estuary, now part of Ukraine.[200]

Bessarabia, like other newly conquered western territories, such as Poland and Finland, presented significant administrative challenges for the Russian government. Under Alexander I the region enjoyed more autonomy than the central regions of the empire, which led, however, to disagreements between Russian officials and local elites. As the historian George F. Jewsbury notes, "in war against the common Turkish enemy and in peace, the combination of Russians and Romanians produced governmental chaos." Alexander's treatment of the region also drew criticism at home, "from the conservative Karamzin to the revolutionary Pestel′."[201]

Like the rest of the Black Sea region, Bessarabia was ethnically and socially diverse. The social hierarchy of Moldavia was assimilated into the Russian system. At the top of the hierarchy were the boyars (boieri), who joined the Russian *dvorianstvo*, and the clergy. In the 1861 census, these two groups constituted 3.3 percent of the population and controlled 71.6 of the land. At the other end of the spectrum were the peasants (țărani), 58.6 percent of the population, who owned no land, although they were not serfs. In between were colonists, state peasants, and Cossacks.

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[200] George F. Jewsbury, *The Russian Annexation of Bessarabia, 1774-1828: A Study of Imperial Expansion* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1976). For a Soviet social history of the region, see L. N. Oganian, *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Bessarabii v pervoi chetverti XIX veka* (Kishinev: Shtiintsa, 1974).

[201] Jewsbury, Russian Annexation, 4.

There was also a significant population of Jews, and the most marginal group, the Romani people or "gypsies." Although they were "the only juridically unfree people in Bessarabia,"[202] from the perspective of Pushkin, in his 1824 poem *Gypsies* (*Tsygany*), their nomadic lifestyle represented a kind of freedom unattainable for the modern Western subject. The Russian administration actively encouraged immigration to fill the underpopulated region and strengthen its position as a frontier against the Ottomans. The ethnic composition of the region in the 1850s was "Romanians 66.4 percent, Ruthenians 13.1 percent, Jews 8.6 percent, Bulgarians 5.2 percent, Germans 2.6 percent, Great Russians 2.1 percent, Gypsies 1.0 percent, Ukrainian 0.5 percent, Armenians 0.2 percent, and Poles and Swiss 0.1 percent."[203]

The center of Russian administration was Kishinev, on the river Prut, which was ethnically even more diverse than the province. The nineteenth-century historian Bartenev wrote that in the time of Veltman and Pushkin the town was "extremely motley," consisting of "Moldavians, Jews, and Bulgarians" and also "Greeks, Turks, our Little Russians [. . .] Karaites, Arnauts, French, and even Italians [. . .] each with their own dialects and costumes." Despite the paternalistic inclusion of the term "our Little Russians," Bartenev says that there were few "true Russian settlers," mostly "soldiers and officials."[204]

Russian officials occupied a peculiar position in Kishinev society. Jewsbury describes them as alienated from and disdainful of the local culture: "Kishinev was as remote an

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[202] Jewsbury, 63.

[203] Jewsbury, 67.

[204] "Население Кишинева, в то время, было до чрезвычайности пестрое. Главную массу составляли, если не ошибаемся, Молдаване, Жиды и Болгаре; но тут же жили Греки, Турки, наши Малороссияыне, Немцы; попадались и Караимы, Арнауты, Французы, и даже Итальянцы, каждый с своим говором, в своих нарядах. Настоящих русских переселенцев было еще мало. Большую часть русского населения составляли солдаты и чиновники." P. Bartenev, "Pushkin v iuzhnoi Rossii: 1820–1823," *Russkii arkhiv* 8–9 (1866), 1124–25.

assignment for a Russian official, 1812–1828, as Santa Fe, New Mexico would have been for an American official in 1848–1860."[205] The Russians here included several notable figures of the time. Veltman was stationed there from 1818 to 1831 to perform a topographical survey. Other prominent figures were the Decembrists Pavel Pestel, Aleksei Orlov, and Vladimir Raevsky, and various other intellectuals such as Vigel. In 1820 Aleksandr Pushkin was assigned to Kishinev while serving in the College of Foreign Affairs. His reassignment from St. Petersburg was connected with his provocative behavior and the circulation of poems seen as subversive, most notably "Liberty: An Ode." Although the term "southern exile" is frequently encountered in Pushkin studies, this was officially a temporary reassignment. Only a year later, in 1821, did Pushkin begin to view his situation as an exile, drawing parallels between his relationship with the emperor and that of the Roman poet Ovid and Emperor Augustus, which had resulted in Ovid's banishment, also to the shores of the Black Sea.[206] Veltman's group of acquaintances in Bessarabia, including Russians and some Romanians and Greeks, totaled about 334 people.[207]

In Veltman's time, the population of Kishinev was growing rapidly, from 3,000 at the beginning of the century to 26,000 around 1822. Veltman described the immigrants from the principalities in his memoirs of Bessarabia, an excerpt of which was first published in *The Contemporary* in 1837: "[Kishinev] teemed with people. [. . .] It already seemed more like a confluence of people at a local festival, where the visitors settle in somehow, with whole families

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[205] Jewsbury, *Russian Annexation*, 134.

[206] Irina Reyfman, *How Russia Learned to Write: Literature and the Imperial Table of Ranks* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 47–50.

[207] Jewsbury, *Russian Annexation*, 137.

living in a single room."[208] Bartenev described it as "sprawled on the flat and dirty banks of the small river Byk, with narrow, crooked streets, dirty bazaars, low shops, and small houses with tile roofs, but also with many gardens of Lombardy poplars and white acacias."[209]

The rapid growth caused constant sanitation problems. In his "Remarks on the Current State of Bessarabia" Filipp Vigel, one of Pushkin's acquaintances, described the poor condition of the old part of town, both unpleasant and unsanitary:

> Entering it, one's eyes and the sense of smell suffer equally. It consists of winding lanes filled with Jews and lined with hovels, closely stuck to one another. Waste water and uncleanness flow here from everywhere. From here they fall into the Byk and in the summer heat they so infect the air as to produce general fevers.[210]

The condition of the city Vigel described is such that it is unpleasant or dangerous to walk outside. Again he saw the problem as connected to a particular aspect of national character—laziness—but here there was also a class dimension: the richer residents move about only in carriages. Although Vigel was the most ardent in his criticism, his opinions were apparently common in his circle of acquaintances. In a poem he sent to Vigel, Pushkin called Kishinev a

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[208] "Народ кишел уже в нем. Вместо двенадцати тысяч жителей тут было уже до пятидесяти тысяч на пространстве четырех квадратных верст. Он походил уже более на стечение народа на местный праздник, где приезжие поселяются кое-как, целые семьи живут в одной комнате. Но не один Кишинев наполнился выходцами из Молдавии и Валахии; население всей Бессарабии, по крайней мере, удвоилось." A. F. Vel′tman, "Vospominaniia o Bessarabii," in *Pushkin v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov*, 3rd ed. (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1998), 1:272.

[209] "Во время Пушкина он состоял почти из одного так называемого старого города, раскинутого по плоским и грязным берегам небольшой реки Быка, с тесными, кривыми улицами, грязными базарами, низенькими лавками и небольшими домиками, крытыми черепицей, но за то со множеством садов из пирамидальных тополей и белых акации." Bartenev, "Pushkin v iuzhnoi Rossii," 1124.

[210] "Въезжая в нее, равно страдают и взор, и обоняние, она вся состоит в излучистых переулках, наполненных Жидами и унизанных лачужками, тесно друг к другу приклеенными. Помои и нечистота стекаются сюда из всех мест, отсюда упадают в Бык и в летние жары так заражают воздух, что производят повальные лихорадки." F. F. Vigel′, *Zamechaniia na nyneshnee sostoianie Bessarabii: pisano v Oktiabre 1823 goda* (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1892), 26.

"cursed town" with "sinful roofs" and "filthy Jewish shops," which were so bad they could not even be compared to Sodom.[211]

Vigel makes a revealing extended comparison between the Moldavians of his day and the Russians before Peter I. Bessarabia was an ideal place to observe the "remnants of eastern customs and the beginning of European education." The similarities between Moldavians and the old Russians were numerous: "the name of the boyars, their long clothes, long beards, tall hats, the rich furs in which they cover themselves, their ignorance, rudeness. . . ." The domestic spaces they occupied were also similarly uncomfortable: "a lack of the most essential items needed for a convenient and pleasant life; low rooms, in which the decoration consists of wide benches covered with carpets; tables weighed down by a multitude of tasteless dishes," and so on. In contrast to the mixing of the sexes in society brought about by Peter I, Bessarabia continued the "separation of women from any participation in common life." The comparison extended even to the form of Cyrillic used by Moldavians, "with hooks and tildes over the letters, exactly the same as the ancient columns of the Moscow Archive."[212]

The combination of overlapping cultures, combined with loose policing, led to the flowering of several related revolutionary movements in the early nineteenth century. One was the *Filiki Hetaireia*, or "Friendly Society" of revolutionaries striving to overthrow Ottoman rule

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[211] "F. F. Vigeliu," in Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 9:75.

[212] "[О]статки Восточных обычаев и начало Европейской образованности [. . .] Название бояр, длинная их одежда, длинные бороды, высокие шапки, богатые меха, коими они покрываются, их невежество, грубость. [. . .] [Н]едостаток в самонужнейших предметах для удобства и приятности жизни, низкие комнаты, коих убранство состоит в широких лавках покрытых коврами; столы отягощенные множеством невкусных блюд [. . .] удаление женщин от всякого участия в общежитии. [. . .] [С] крючками и под титлами писанные, похожи ни дать ни взять на древние столбцы Московского Архива." Vigel′, *Zamechaniia*, 30.

in Greece. Their aims overlapped with those of Romanian leaders hoping for the independence of their principalities. As Richard Stites notes, Kishinev was an "ideal base" for anti-Ottoman activities. It was the heart of large network of hetairists, led primarily by Alexandros Ypsilanti, who "maintained correspondence far and wide throughout Ottoman and diaspora lands."[213] The other group consisted of the future Decembrists. Kishinev was home to one of the fifteen chapters of the secret society known as the Union of Welfare, founded in 1818, and its successor the Southern Society, founded in 1821. Its leader was Pavel Pestel, who had come to Kishinev to confer with Ypsilanti and gather information about the situation in Moldavia. These disparate groups of radicals maintained social connections, including at the Masonic lodge, Ovid, no. 25, founded by Ivan Pushchin in early 1821 and later joined by Pushkin.

The history of these radical movements is too complex to discuss here, but is important to note that Bessarabia served as a unique zone in the Russian Empire for the development of radical activities and for exchange and support between revolutionary activists across southeastern Europe, even if not all of these revolutionary movements were successful. Although censorship prohibited Veltman from mentioning Russian revolutionaries in *The Wanderer*, he does mention the Greek hetairists several times and the losing battle they fought at Skulyany (166), an event later taken up by Pushkin in his story "Kirdzhali" (1834).

## 3.2 Fictional and Non-Fictional Representations of Imperial Reality

In *The Wanderer* Veltman crafted a text that at times ties his readers down to imperial reality—with a profusion of minutiae concerning the frontiers of the Russian and Ottoman

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[213] Richard Stites, The Four Horsemen: Riding to Liberty in Post-Napoleonic Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 199–200.

Empires—and at other times whisks them away on uninhibited tangents to disparate places and times, as well as into the phantasmagorical recesses of the mind. As Andreas Schönle observes, extracting a cogent plot from The Wanderer requires serious intellectual exertion from the reader.[214] The most clearly discernible plot line consists of the narrator's journey through the liminal zones of the Russian and Ottoman Empires—but even that aspect of the narrative requires effort, as most of the towns villages he mentions would have been obscure to most Russian readers without recourse to a map. The Soviet scholar Yury Akutin argued that a number of the love poems form an extended narrative of Veltman's affair with a married woman, Ekaterina Isupova, but there is no direct evidence in the text that she is the addressee, or even that all the poems refer to the same woman.

Although we can readily believe that the more realistic passages of the travelogue are in some way based on Veltman's own experiences in the region, they are still fictional, and their fictionality is put into relief by the inclusion of more explicitly "non-fictional," historical passages. The most extreme example of the latter is a military report on the "Occupation of the position at Şumnu" in chapter 260.[215] Here is described, in glowing terms, "the decisive and glorious crossing of the Russian troops across the river Danube on the twenty-seventh of May, ordered by the Tsar himself."[216]

Other sections with a mostly non-fictional, non-plot-oriented tone are the descriptions of cities visited by the narrator, which draw their effectiveness from copious amounts of material,

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[214] Schönle, Authenticity and Fiction, 160.

[215] This section is omitted in Akutin's edition, either through inadvertence or perhaps because the editor saw the section as completely divorced from the fictional plot.

[216] "Решительный и славный переход Российских войск чрез р. Дунай, 27 Мая, сами Царем распоряженный." Aleksandr Fomich Vel′tman, *Strannik*, part 3 (Moscow: V tipografii Semena Selivanovskago, 1832), 41.

linguistic, and cultural detail, based in part on the author's real-life experiences. In describing Kishinev, for example, the narrator focuses, as do Vigel, Senkovsky, and Pushkin, on the dust and dirt of the border provinces. What Veltman adds to these clichés, however, is a connection between the disordered nature of life in this frontier town and its ethnic and linguistic diversity:

> The first things that struck my eye were the taverns and petty shops: in almost every house on the windowsills stood bottles of wine and vodka, and on the wide sliding shutters hung tobacco, sulfur, nails, bullets, rope, *meşti*, *cuşme*, pipes, *caşcaval*, oil. . . .[217]

The foreign words in this novel—especially Romanian, but also French, German, English, Latin, Turkish, Arabic, and Greek—are only sometimes translated in this novel, giving the reader the same sense of being in a bewildering, diverse, foreign landscape. Although this is clearly based on a real setting, it fulfills the same function as the "cognitive estrangement" a science fictional traveler experiences when arriving on a new planet.

### 3.3 Multiethnicity and Multilingualism

In *The Wanderer*, as in many imperial and colonial texts, seemingly objective displays of scientific knowledge are also combined with subjective stereotyping of different ethnic groups. Here again, the overall impression is of great cultural diversity—appealing for the narrator as anthropologist, confusing for the narrator as a subject from the imperial center. It is not surprising that the narrator is fascinated with the story of the tower of Babel and its supposed archaeological remnant in the region of Baghdad (48).

The narrator depicts the Moldavians as a simple people, with a mixture of Western and Eastern characteristics, which align with gender differences. A Moldavian host is hospitable to

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[217] "Первое, что мне бросилось в глаза, были шинки и мелочные лавки; почти во всяком доме на окошках стояли в бутылях вино и водка, а на широких опускных ставнях табак, сера, гвозди, дробь, веревки, мешти, кушмы, трубки, кочковал, масло. . ." (26–27).

his Muscovite guest but gruffly imperious to his own Albanian servant. His Ottoman characteristics (divan and fez) are emphasized, and he speaks a mixture of Russian and Romanian:

> Passing through the hall, my ear was struck with the clapping of hands and loud imperious sounds: "*Iorghi, ciubuce!*" In the next room the master of the house was sitting in all his grandeur on the divan. As soon as we entered, he sat up, took off his fez, and grandly pronounced: "Your servant! *Poftim, șezi!*" and then repeated "*Iorghi, ciubuce!*"[218]

The marked otherness of the host contrasts with the appearance and behavior of Romanian women in the novel. For example, mistress of one house where the narrator stays is "a young woman in a black dress, which adhered to her like springtime to nature," who greets him in French and invites him into her apartment—an erotic encounter is hinted at in the following chapter. [219]

These examples of the othering of the ethnic groups of the Danubian principalities, along with the stark gender differences, align with the European Orientalist fantasy analyzed by Edward Said, and which can also be found in the works of other Russian writers of the period such as Pushkin, Lermontov, and Bestuzhev-Marlinsky. But several features distinguish Veltman's relation to other cultures. One is the diversity of ethnic groups and languages that he includes in the novel, motivated by his journey through Bessarabia and other multiethnic regions. *The Wanderer* foregrounds the extreme diversity of languages in many ways. Sometimes this

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[218] "Проходя залу слух мой поражен был хлопаньем в ладоши и громкими повелительными звуками: Иорги! чубуче! — В следующей комнате хозяин дома сидел на диване всею своею особою. Едва мы взошли, он приподнялся, снял феску и произнес важно: слуга! пуфтим, шец, а потом повторил снова: Иорги! чубуче!" (30–31)

[219] "Молоденькую женщину в черном платье, которое к ней пристало, как весна к природе" (32).

diversity is painted in a positive light. In Bucharest, the narrator describes the rows of carriages filled with well-dressed young ladies out for display. The narrator appreciates this spectacle:

> Thus hundreds of carriages stretch through Bucharest like moving greenhouses. The sounds: "*Kali imera sas! Hoş geldin! Seara buna! Vecher dobry! Bon soir! Guten Abend! Wie befinden Sie . . . Sie . . . Sie . . . Sie . . . sich?*" merge with the clatter of the wheels and continue until they are exhausted.
>
> This is evidently one of the enjoyments of the fairer sex here.[220]

Once again, the narrator's acceptance of foreignness is connected to gender. In the masculine context, though, language diversity is appreciated only when it serves to support the Russian imperial project. When the narrator describes a crowd assembled to praise Emperor Nicholas I, the cheers are heartening in their multilingualism: "they watch in awe, murmuring in different languages: Russian, Moldavian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Serbian, German, French, Italian, and Greek."[221]

Overwhelming language diversity often comes across as troubling. In a digression about the Muslim paradise, the narrator joins the common Orientalist fascination with the houris, or the virgins of Paradise promised to the Muslim faithful. Despite this tempting image, the narrator is disturbed by one element of this heaven:

> Imagine also the angels there, with 70,000 mouths each, and each mouth has 70,000 tongues, and each tongue praises God 70,000 times a day in 70,000 different dialects. This is terrible! What a noise, what an outcry! No! It would be a misfortune to be in the Muhammadan Eden, in spite of the wonderful food and the ever-virgin houris.[222]

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[220] "Таким образом тянутся вдоль Букареста сотни экипажей, как движущиеся оранжереи. Звуки: Кали имера — сас! Хош — гэлдын! Сара буна! Вечер добрый! Bon soir! Guten Abend! Wie befinden Sie... Sie... Sie... Sie... sich? сливаются со стуком колес и продолжаются до утомления. Это одно из видимых наслаждений прекрасного здешнего пола" (83).

[221] "Смотрит и удивляется; толки его раздаются на языках: русском, молдавском, булгарском, турецком, сербском, немецком, французском, италианском и греческом" (93).

[222] "Вообразите себе там же ангелов, имеющих по 70 000 уст, каждые уста по 70 000 языков, и каждый язык, хвалящий бога 70 000 раз в день на 70 000 различных наречиях. Это ужасно! что за шум, что за крик! Нет! беда быть в магометовом Эдеме, несмотря на прекрасный стол и вечно девственных гурий" (33).

This imagined place is even worse than the imperial borderlands: the erotic temptation is not enough to overcome the narrator's aversion to this excessively multiplied, multilingual din.

The problem of language difference and incomprehensibility is taken to an extreme in a striking dream sequence inserted in the middle of the narrator's descriptions of his military activities in northeastern Bulgaria. The dream nature of the story, however, is only revealed at the end; the narrative shifts dramatically in tone as the narrator describes traveling to a town in which the residents answer his questions only with letters of the Hebrew alphabet: *alef, bet, gimel*. . . . Increasingly anxious, the narrator runs around, finally ending up at a palace where he is presented to a beautiful maiden, who initially proves to be a source of relief for the narrator:

> The charming sound she made was not like the rapturous French *ah!*, the dry Greek ἆ!, ἰού!, or ὦ!, the proud Latin *iah!*, the sentimental German *ach!*, the sharp Italian *ah!*, or the silly Hebrew *okh!* No, it was a tender Russian *akh!* in the midst of the profoundest silence. It penetrated deep into my heart.[223]

Here different languages are associated with different emotions, as was common in nineteenth-century discourse. Here we can interpret the epithets assigned to each language as stemming from the reaction of an educated Russian observer, familiar with Western European languages, but prejudiced against markers of Judaism. But the Russian *akh*—though essentially identical in sound to the German equivalent—is the only one with the magical power to affect the narrator's emotions, connecting him in his wandering for a moment to his native land and culture. *Akh* was the Russian sentimentalist interjection *par excellence*, used frequently in Karamzin's works, and was often parodied.

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[223] "Этот очаровательный звук не был похож ни на восторженное *ah!* французское, ни на сухое ἆ! ἰού! или ὦ! греческое, ни на гордое *iah!* латинское, ни на чувствительное *ach!* немецкое, ни на резкое *ah!* итальянское, ни на глупое *йох* еврейское; нет, это было нежное русское *ах!* посреди глубочайшего молчания. Оно проникло в глубину моего сердца." (132)

This scene layers multiple elements of the Russian traveler's experience in the imperial borderlands. The real-life problem of incomprehensibility caused by lack of a common language is here taken to an extreme, as the dream-world residents are not speaking any language that could be understood, though the narrator tries, misidentifying the chanted letters as German and later Sanskrit. A second layer of the text is its anti-Semitism, of a type that was common in Russian travelogues of the time. Apart from their use of the Hebrew alphabet, the characters are not explicitly marked as Jewish.[224] But the Hebrew alphabet does link the characters to a religion and culture that was seen as Other and perhaps connected to a disturbing mysticism. The gender dynamic is the same as before: a woman provides comfort to the narrator who is distressed by the overwhelming presence of the Other. In this case, the comfort is short-lived, for the maiden herself eventually begins to chant the Hebrew letters, before the narrator finally wakes up. This scene may be compared with the "Taman′" story in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, in which, as Valeria Sobol notes, the Russian frontier town of the title "emerges as a space fraught with danger, incomprehensibility, and otherness," partly because of the uncertain nationality of Taman′ natives, who respond in Ukrainian to the protagonist Pechorin, but speak in Russian among themselves.[225] The uncanny, seemingly Jewish residents of the dream town seem to reflect a similar anxiety over ethnic difference in the mind of Veltman's narrator.

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[224] In Akutin's edition, the narrator does at one point shout, "Demon! Jew!" but in the first and second editions this line is "Demon! Sanskrit!" Sanskrit is here a negative marker of an incomprehensible language—quite different from its function as a signifier of wisdom in Shcherbatov's *Journey to the Land of Ophir*, discussed in chapter 1.

[225] Valeria Sobol, "The Uncanny Frontier of Russian Identity: Travel, Ethnography, and Empire in Lermontov's 'Taman′,'" *Russian Review* 70, no. 1 (2011): 66.

### 3.4 Historical Imagination

In contrast to the dirty streets of Kishinev, the rest of Bessarabia included numerous sites of historical interest to the newly arrived Russians. For example, in 1821, Pushkin either planned to or did in fact visit Bendery, where Charles XII of Sweden had lived after fleeing from his defeat at Poltava; Ismail, the Ottoman fortress captured by general Suvorov in 1791, and other sites of historical interest. The very same sites served as inspiration for Veltman's imaginary travelogue *The Wanderer*. The narrator inserts a mini-story about Charles XII's actions at Bendery as the Ottomans are storming his "palace," after he had exhausted their hospitality (38–39). When it comes to Russian history, the narrator is generally laudatory, attributing, for example, legendary greatness to the Russian victory at Izmail: "Here Suvorov in the course of eleven hours did what the Egyptian pharaoh Psammetichus with 400,000 troops barely managed to do in 254,040 hours at the Assyrian fortress of Azotus in Palestine."[226]

Equally important as the recent battles was the ancient history of the region. Bessarabia's position at the edge of the Greek and Roman world motivated the new residents of the province to form both scholarly and fanciful links with the classical past. The scholarly side included writers like Veltman, who in 1828, perhaps building on his topographical work, published *An Outline of the Ancient History of Bessarabia, with the Addition of Historical Excerpts and a Map*. As the title suggests, this work focuses on the pre-Ottoman and pre-Russian history of the region, with several pages devoted to such questions as the origin of the earthworks known as "Trajan's Wall"—Veltman anticipates the modern consensus that this was not in fact built by Trajan. The conclusion, however, contains an assessment of the recent past:

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[226] "Здесь Суворов 133 в продолжение 11 часов то наделал, что египетскому царю Псаметтиху с 400 000 войском едва удалось сделать в 254 040 часов пред ассирийскою крепостью Азотом в Палестине" (48).

> Perhaps no other space on earth has seen as many tribes of people of different origins on its surface as Bessarabia.
>
> For almost 2,500 years, it was a restless abode amidst ruling nations, not knowing where its permanent possessors resided. But the year 1812 decided the fate of Bessarabia: the double-headed eagle spread its wing farther to the south—and the region now lies under a reliable shelter protecting it from the storms that disturb the welfare of nations.[227]

Veltman, in this passage, constructs a distinct spatial and temporal narrative of empire: the past is characterized by the diversity of tribes and the dominance of non-Russian rulers; the present and future are defined by the Russian annexation, which is portrayed with an air of optimism, suggesting a peaceful and stable future for the region under Russian paternalistic control. Just as in *The Wanderer*, Veltman has a cartographer's perspective—one could imagine how in a fictional version of this passage the eagle might have literally spread its wings over the map. In line with this perspective, however, the fate of the local inhabitants is not mentioned.

For classically educated Russians, the fact that the Roman poet Ovid was exiled to the town of Tomi, somewhere on the western coast of the Black Sea region was a motivation for scholarly inquiry and a source of local pride—for example, the Masonic lodge in Kishinev was named after him. According to a tradition first recorded perhaps by Dimitrie Cantemir in his *Description of Moldavia*, Tomi was located near Akkerman in Bessarabia, on the Dniester estuary; the same tradition led to the naming of the town of Ovidiopol', founded in 1793.[228]

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[227] "Может быть, нет на земле другого пространства, которое бы видело на поверхности своей столько племен людей различного происхождения, как Бессарабия. Почти в продолжение 2500 лет она была между владычествовавшими народами неуспокоенною обителью, не знавшею, где живут постоянные ее обладатели. Но 1812 год решил жребий Бессарабии: двуглавый орел расширил крыло далее на юг — и она под надежным кровом, куда не досягнут бури, нарушающие благоденствие народов." Vel'tman, Nachertanie drevnei istorii Bessarabii s prisovokupleniem istoricheskikh vypisok i karty (Moscow: Semën Selivanovskii, 1828), 54.

[228] Demetriu Cantemir, "Descriptio Moldaviae," in *Operele principelui Demetriu Cantemiru,* vol. 1 (Bucharest: Typographia Curtii, 1872), 9; "Ovidiopol'," in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona*, vol. 22a (St. Petersburg, 1897), 664.

After Pushkin's initial service term in Bessarabia was extended, Pushkin began to view this as a kind of banishment, for which he found a convenient classical parallel in the life of Ovid. Ovid appears in *Eugene Onegin* as a "sufferer" who "ended his brilliant and rebellious age [. . .] in Moldavia, in the remote steppes, far from his Italy."[229] Elsewhere Pushkin draws a more explicit link between himself and the Roman poet. He addressed him directly in an ode in 1821:

> Ovid, I live near the quiet shores,
> To which you once brought your expelled paternal gods,
> And left your ashes.
> Your bleak lamentations glorified these places;
> And the gentle voice of your lyre is not yet dumb;
> This land is still full of your words.[230]

Ovid also figures in a poem Pushkin sent to the Nikolai Gnedich (1821) and in the narrative poem *Gypsies* (1824), in which an old man tells of a foreigner with a "wondrous gift for song" and "a voice like the sound of the waters," who lived on the banks of the Danube.[231]

For the Russian literary elite enduring the vexations of frontier life in Kishinev, Ovid represented a connection to a nobler, if tragic, purpose. In fact, in the same ode to Ovid, Pushkin linked his own story not only to Ovid's, but also to Ypsilanti's:

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[229] Была наука страсти нежной,
Которую воспел Назон,
За что страдальцем кончил он
Свой век блестящий и мятежный
В Молдавии, в глуши степей,
Вдали Италии своей.
Pushkin, Evgenii Onegin, chapter 1, stanza 8, in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 4:14.

[230] Овидий, я живу близ тихих берегов,
Которым изгнанных отеческих богов
Ты некогда принес и пепел свой оставил.
Твой безотрадный плач места сии прославил;
И лиры нежный глас еще не онемел;
Еще твоей молвой наполнен сей предел.
Pushkin, "K Ovidiiu," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 1:140–41.

[231] Pushkin, "Iz pis′ma k Gnedichu," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 1:165. "Имел он песен дивный дар / И голос, шуму вод подобный." Pushkin, "Tsygany," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 3:166.

I wandered in those days, when the noble Greek
Summoned freedom to the banks of the Danube.[232]

As Jostein Børtnes notes, in this ode "Pushkin visualizes from a point of view in the future how the days of his own exilic solitude [. . .] will be associated with the historical events that took place during his banishment to Bessarabia in the neighbouring Danubian Principalities."[233] Here Pushkin summons a grand historical legacy for himself, in a similar manner to his "Monument" poem discussed in the previous two chapters.

For the more academic Veltman, the appeal of Ovid was less romantic and more connected to his interest in antiquarian discussions. Current scholarly consensus places Tomi at the site of modern Constanța in Romania, and the association with Bessarabia had already questioned by the 1820s. Pushkin seems to have favored a location at the mouth of the Danube, as seen in the quotations above. Veltman was more accurate, placing it near the present-day town of Mangalia. In *The Wanderer*, he quips about this controversy: "Maybe some Genoese ship conveyed his tombstone as ballast to the site of present-day Ovidiopol and unintentionally sowed doubt regarding the tradition in the minds of future generations."[234] In contrast to Pushkin, Veltman is much less concerned with a grand historical narrative and does not see the need to connect Ovid's story to his own—in fact, the Romantic self so carefully crafted by Pushkin is largely absent from Veltman's work. Instead, Ovid appears in *The Wanderer* as simply one of

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[232] "Скитался я в те дни, как на брега Дуная / Великодушный грек свободу вызывал." Pushkin, "K Ovidiiu," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 1:167.

[233] Jostein Børtnes, "Pushkin's Ovid," in *Romans and Romantics*, ed. Timothy Saunders et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 225–42.

[234] "Может быть, какой-нибудь генуэзский корабль завез надгробный его камень вместе с балластом на место нынешнего Овидиополя и неумышленно поселил в потомстве сомнение к преданиям" (41).

the many figures from past, present, and future that inhabit Veltman's metafictional version of the Black Sea coast.

### 3.5 Metafiction in Veltman

The mixture of fiction and non-fiction and the attention to historical details described in the above section would have been unremarkable in a normal travelogue of the time. What distinguishes *The Wanderer*, and what has earned it praise and criticism from the time of its publication to the present, are the numerous digressions and jumps from one subject to another. In a letter to Elizaveta Mikhailovna Khitrovo, Pushkin gave *The Wanderer* this partial approbation: "Il y a du vrai talent dans ce bavardage un peu maniéré" (There is some real talent in this slightly mannered chatter).[235] Not all readers reacted positively. A copy of the book held at the Russian State Library in Moscow includes two humorous cases of marginalia left by readers, presumably from the nineteenth century. In the first, a reader penciled a caption under the vignette of a sheep: "portrait of the author." In the second, under the printed initials "K. V. Ch.," meant to indicate "end of the second part," a reader provided another interpretation of the same letters: "mess, rubbish, nonsense" (see Figure 2).[236]

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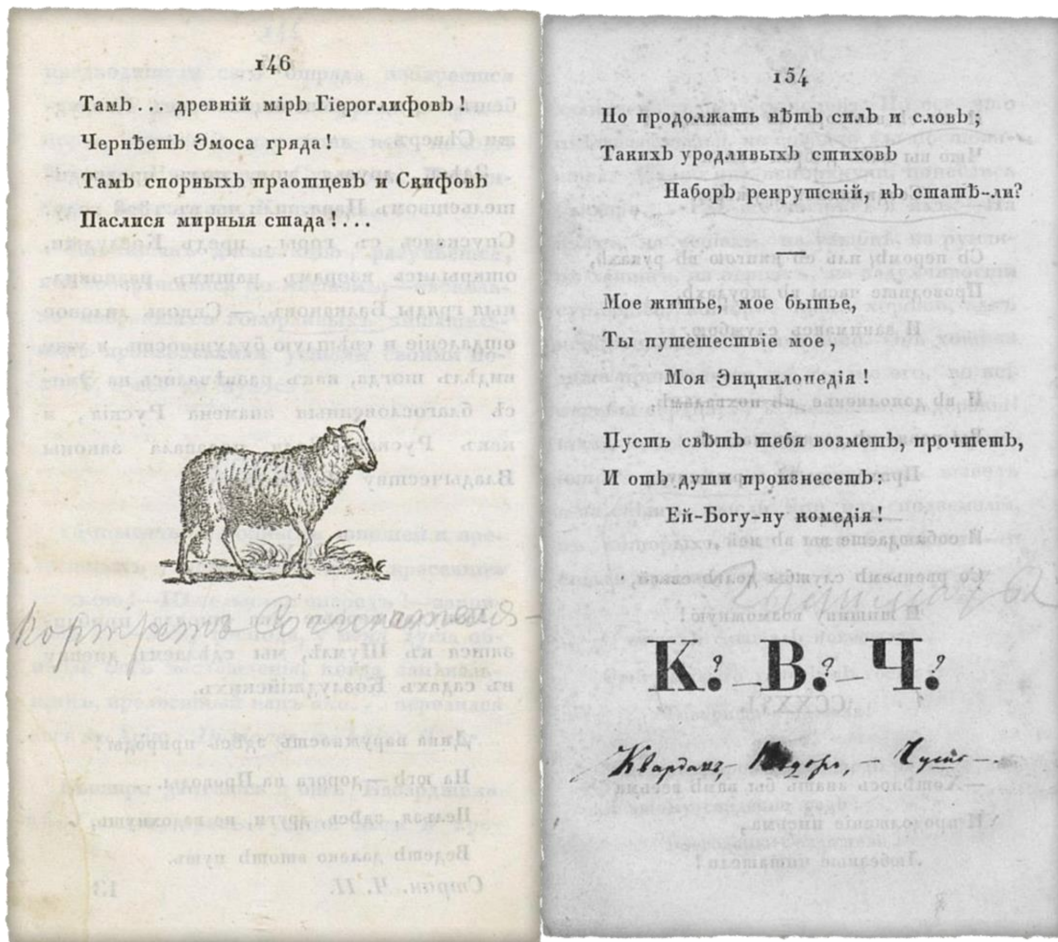
[235] "E. M. Khitrovo," in Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, 10:30.

[236] "Портрет сочинителя," "К[онец] В[торой] Ч[асти]," "К[а]вардак, Вздор, Чушь." A. F. Vel′tman, *Strannik*. vol. 2 (Moscow: Semen Selivanovskii, 1831), 146, 154, https://search.rsl.ru/ru/record/01003821817.



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Тамъ . . . древній міръ Гіероглифовъ !

Чернѣетъ Эмоса гряда !

Тамъ спорныхъ праотцевъ и Скифовъ

Паслися мирныя стада ! . . .

154

Но продолжать нѣтъ силъ и словъ ;

Такихъ уродливыхъ стиховъ

Наборъ рекрутскій, къ статѣ-ли?

—

Мое житье, мое бытье,

Ты путешествіе мое ,

Моя Энциклопедія !

Пусть свѣтъ тебя возметъ, прочтетъ,

И отъ души произнесетъ :

Ей-Богу-пу комедія !

К.? В.? Ч.?

Figure 2: Two pages of the Russian State Library copy of *The Wanderer*

Although Veltman would not have been happy with these ratings of his work, he might have found pleasure in these readers adding another layer to the metafictional games he included in the text. The first example of metafiction in the text is the journey through the map, which is introduced in a dialogue the narrator has with himself:

> Bored with my sedentary, monotonous life, I said to myself one day, “Let’s go, sir! Let’s go traveling!”
>
> “What, where, how?” I replied, lying on my large divan, and deep in thought I took a puff on my *dübek*. “We need money!”

> “You need a head; you need determination and imagination. Believe me, by these means we can satisfy all our curiosity; without leaving the spot, we shall be everywhere and learn everything.[237]

The narrator’s divan and *dübek* (a variety of Turkish tobacco) not only display his belonging to a world of cultural mingling but also symbolize a leisurely cosmopolitanism that transcends geographical boundaries. He is at once static and mobile, simultaneously participating in global culture and refuting the need to physically explore it. There is some irony in this refutation, since the realistic sections of the travelogue, as we have seen, draw heavily on Veltman’s own experiences.

The narrator amusingly addresses himself with the plural or formal singular pronoun *vy*. But as the opening paragraphs unfold this internal dialogue seems to expand to include his reader, who participates in the discovery and exploration of the cartographic space:

> Kindly stand up, take Europe by its ends, and spread it out on a table. Now sit down! There it is—Europe! But don’t look at the entire enlightened part of the land all at once. Occupying your eyes, ears, or thoughts with several objects at the same time is terribly harmful to the mental faculties.[238]

A few sentences encompass a multitude of relations to space. In the most logical interpretation, the reader is invited to unfold and examine a map of Europe. But the word map is never mentioned, allowing an additional, perhaps humorous reading of Europe as a real place or an idea that can be picked up and moved around. It is also up to the reader to determine whether the

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[237] “Наскучив сидячею, однообразною жизнию, поедемте, сударь! — сказал я однажды сам себе, — поедемте путешествовать! — Как? куда, каким образом, с чем? — отвечал я, лежа на широком диване, и с глубокомыслием затянулся дюбеком, — нужны деньги! — Нужна голова, нужны решительность и воображение; поверьте, что с этими способами можно удовлетворить самое мелочное любопытство; не сходя с места, мы везде будем, все узнаем.” (9).

[238] “Потрудитесь, встаньте, возьмите Европу за концы и разложите на стол... Садитесь! Вот она, Европа! Но не смотри вдруг на всю просвещенную часть земли. Занимать очи, слух или мысли в одно и то же время несколькими предметами ужасно как вредно для умственных способностей” (9).

"enlightened part of the land" is all or only part of Europe. Veltman's advice to avoid overburdening the mind is ironic given the effort he will subsequently demand of the reader; but hear it is also an excuse for the narrator to focus our attention on the town of Mogilyov (now Mohyliv-Podilskyi in Ukraine), at the border between the regions of Podolia and Bessarabia, where the journey begins:

> So, here's Europe! You've covered Podolia with your elbow. . . . Chase that fly away! . . . Here's Tulchin. From here we shall go to known places, places where we spent the winged time of our life. Go over to the Mogilyov gate! — Listen! Just in time, the post bell outside has begun to ring. . . . The whip has cracked; farewell, my friends! *Audaces fortuna juvat!*[239]

Note that this travel is achieved not through any rationalized system of magic (as in a modern fantasy novel), but through a quick verbal switch from the sofa/map space (signified by the elbow and the fly) to the real space (signified by the sounds of the bell and the whip).

Although the main journey described in *The Wanderer* is along the west coast of the Black Sea, an evocative digression to the Caucasus builds on the original device of a journey through a map. This detour not only reflects Veltman's dexterous narrative manipulation but also situates his literary undertaking within the wider ambit of Russian literary tradition. In day 41 of his wandering, the narrator, in a bid for diversion, casts his gaze upon the map. His ensuing struggle to focus his eyes propels him into an imaginative role-play of blindness, wherein his fingers trace the contours of the Caucasus mountains—the map apparently has a fantastic connection to the real terrain. This tactile engagement becomes a springboard for the construction of a "complete logical idea" (154)—a phrase that suggests how abstract and distant

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[239] "Итак, вот Европа! Локтем закрыли вы Подолию. Сгоните муху! . . вот Тульчин. Отсюда мы поедем в места знакомые, в места, где провели крылатое время жизни. Ступай в Могилевскую заставу! Чу! кстати на улице зазвенел почтовый колокольчик. . . Бич хлопнул, прощайте, друзья! audaces fortuna juvat!" (10)

from concrete imperial reality this passage is, in contrast to the descriptions of the places in which Veltman actually lived. What follows is an intensely sensory depiction that could in fact refer to any secluded mountain expanse:

> Look at this wilderness enriched by the sky, the throng of mountains, the bright streams of living water, this lavish, virgin land untouched by the plowshare, these fertile forests, these slopes dotted with flowers and valleys covered with dense greenery, these layers of snow, by which you could determine the age of the universe, this air as fragrant as the rose that blossomed during the creation of Eve![240]

Veltman's portrayal diverges from the more inhabited landscapes rendered by Pushkin and Lermontov in their Caucasian stories and poems, with their mentions of tribes, customs, villages, and battles. Veltman's Caucasus is an ethereal tapestry of unspoiled nature—pristine, uninhabited, and impervious to human touch. Through a postcolonial lens, this description could certainly be construed as mirroring the colonial rhetoric that predicates territorial expansion on the grounds of *terra nullius*. But in Veltman's hands, the Caucasus also morphs into a refuge—a sanctum detached from the banalities and tribulations of his life in Bessarabia. It assumes the guise of an Edenic oasis where the narrator, in tandem with his readers, can indulge in an immersive communion with the natural world.

### 3.6 Epigraphs

Apart from the overall story and the scattered digressions, metafiction and intertextuality also manifest themselves in Veltman's novel through the medium of the epigraph. This can be defined simply—a quotation at the start of a book or one of its chapters—but the role it plays as

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[240] "Посмотрите же на эту природу, обогащенную небом, на столпившиеся горы, на светлые ручьи воды живой, на эту щедрую, девственную землю, не тронутую сошником, на эти плодоносные леса, на эти испещренные цветами скаты и покрытые густою зеленью долины; на эти громады скал, на эти слои снегов, по которым можно было бы определить возраст Вселенной; на этот воздух благовонный, как роза, распустившаяся во время создания Эввы!" (154)

a literary device is more complex. Epigraphs are typically borrowed from other books, especially ones regarded as classics. Appropriated but not assimilated, an epigraph is placed at the edge of the text—a location Gérard Genette calls the *exergue*.[241] Its function is thus different from that fulfilled by the narratorial voice in the actual text. In the typical epigraph, the author chooses the quotation and where to place it, but is not supposed to change the words themselves. This seeming creative limitation—this diminished power to shape meaning in the usual writerly way—nevertheless provides other possibilities. For the Russian literary scholar Iakov Zundelovich, "the epigraph represents, as it were, a mask behind which the author hides when, not wanting to speak directly, he indirectly defines his attitude to the events that he depicts in the work."[242] In other words, the epigraph is distancing device, similar to the dissociation of the narrator from the author present in many works of fiction, which nevertheless implies something about the author's opinions. However, breaking through these layers of meaning to determine the author's attitude is at least as difficult as it is with regard to the actual text.

Zundelovich categorizes epigraphs as lyrical—summarizing the content of the work or a chapter in a poetic way—or evaluative—providing a satiric perspective, though some epigraphs combine both categories. Epigraphs can also deviate from the norm in various ways. An autographic epigraph (Genette's term) is actually written by the author himself—a fact that may or may not be revealed explicitly. Authors may also include inaccurate epigraphs, deliberately or accidentally, by modifying quotations or misattributing them.

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[241] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 144.

[242] Ia. Zundelovich, "Epigraf," in *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia: slovar' literaturnykh terminov*, ed. N. Brodskii et al. (Moscow: L. D. Frenkel', 1925).

The epigraph is a relatively recent phenomenon. Genette traces its origin to seventeenth-century French works by La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère. Epigraphs were usually in Latin, and were more common in philosophical works than in works of poetry or fiction. By the mid eighteenth century, Latin epigraphs started to appear on the title pages of novels such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759)—perhaps claiming a higher status for the oft-maligned novel. But it took the Gothic genre to vastly amplify the use of epigraphs by adding them at the start of chapters. The first innovator in this area seems to have been Ann Radcliffe, who in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) consistently includes epigraphs at the start of each chapter—often from poets such as Shakespeare and James Thomson, but sometimes of her own making. Her example was followed by other late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century authors, most notably Walter Scott and Victor Hugo.

The epigraph was already a common enough literary device by the time Pushkin wrote *Eugene Onegin* that he could experiment with the form, including chapter epigraphs in Russian, French, Italian, English, and Latin, both from usual sources, such as Byron as well as more unusual ones, such as a "private letter" in French. Chapter 2 has a playful epigraph, in which Horace's Latin "O rus!" (O countryside!) is reinterpreted as the Russian "O Rus′" (O Russia!). Chapter 7 is headed by three epigraphs on the subject of Moscow, which seem to compete with each other for significance.

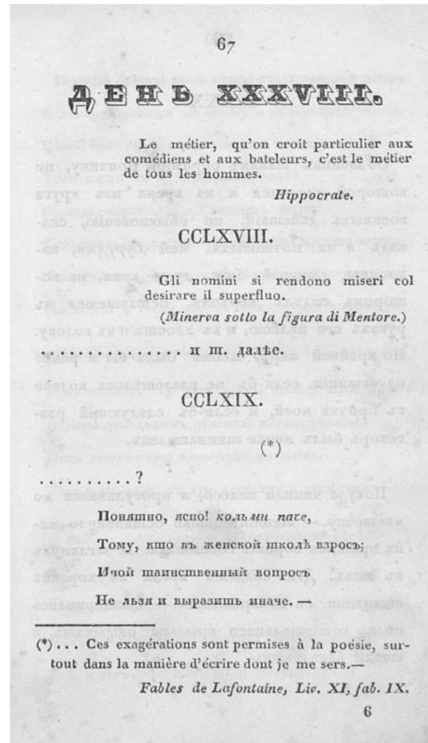
The epigraphs in *The Wanderer* are unusual first in their frequency within the novel. Although epigraphs figure at the start of each of the three parts, chapter epigraphs only appear in part three, published in 1832. Here is a visualization of the frequency of epigraphs:

**Figure 3: Frequency of epigraphs in *The Wanderer***

This change in frequency may reflect an evolving conception of the novel and corresponds to what Boris Bukhshtab saw as the essential disunity of the novel's plot (*siuzhet*), which consists of "a play of several contrasting plans, a play based on the collision of contrasts, the conflict of the plans, their mixture, substitution, and destruction of each other."[243] But the appearance of epigraphs is not consistent even in part three. They appear intensely at the beginning, but they are entirely absent for ten chapters (283 to 293), perhaps because of other metafictional elements

[243] B. Bukhshtab, "Pervye romany Vel′tmana," in *Russkaia proza*, ed. B. Eikhenbaum and Iu. Tynianov (Leningrad: Academia, 1926), 198.

already present, such as the dialogue between Ovid and Augustus. At one point three epigraphs appear in close succession, on one page in the first edition:


67

ДЕНЬ XXXVIII.

Le métier, qu'on croit particulier aux comédiens et aux bateleurs, c'est le métier de tous les hommes.

*Hippocrate.*

CCLXVIII.

Gli nomini si rendono miseri col desirare il superfluo.

*(Minerva sotto la figura di Mentore.)*

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . и т. далѣе.

CCLXIX.

(*)

. . . . . . . . . . ?

Понятно, ясно! *кольми паче,*

Тому, кто въ женской школѣ взросъ;

Иной таинственный вопросъ

Не льзя и выразить иначе. —

(*) . . . Ces exagérations sont permises à la poésie, surtout dans la manière d'écrire dont je me sers.—

*Fables de Lafontaine, Liv. XI, fab. IX.*

6

**Figure 4: Page of *The Wanderer* with multiple epigraphs**

Note that this page not only includes Russian, French, and Italian, but also several examples of non-language: the ellipses and the asterisk. The empty epigraph indicated by the asterisk is "justified" by the footnote from La Fontaine, which is in fact a footnote in the original edition of La Fontaine's fables.

In fact, the main distinguishing feature of Veltman's epigraphs is the unusual nature of his sources, including a grammar book, a phrasebook, a multiplication table, garrison service rules and much more. Three epigraphs in proximity to each other are not from written sources but from representatives of three borderland nationalities: "A Moldavian" (115) "Ein Jude" (116) "Little Russian Exclamation" (117). One epigraph—a quotation from a French translation of the *Aeneid*—is not at the beginning, but at the end of a chapter (168). Several epigraphs are

autographic: the one the opens the entire book is a quotation from a poem in part two, though the ending of the poem is not the same. In part 3, chapter 260, we find an extreme example of an autographic, recursive epigraph: a poem with the attribution "*The Wanderer*, Part III, Chapter CCLX." Chapter 294 contains an autographic epigraph with a more obvious function, to remind the reader of a story begun in an earlier chapter and continued here. Even more usual epigraphs reveal their complexity once we examine them more deeply. The French playwright Saint-Foix is cited three times, but for some reason one of the times is from an Italian translation. In the epigraph to Day 32, Shakespeare, the favorite epigraphic source for Radcliffe and Scott, is cited, but not directly from one of his plays, rather from a note in a French edition of *King Lear*.

Veltman's innovative use of epigraphs underscores his novel's themes of border-crossing, linguistic experimentation, and the play between reality and fiction. The inconsistencies, interruptions, and autographic recursions within these epigraphs not only reflect the novel's fragmented nature but also invite the reader to partake in a literary game, where meanings and references are continuously destabilized, echoing the broader narrative's preoccupation with contrasts, collisions, and the fluid boundaries of understanding.

## 3.8 Conclusion

> "My horse is tired, my journey ends!"
> "Prrrr/uuuu" cried the Wanderer, dismounting.
> "Quite long enough, my reader friends,
> Have I amused you with recounting."[244] (170)

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[244] Мой конь устал, устал и я!
Прррр/уууу — молвил Странник вдруг и спешил.
Довольно, милые друзья,
Своею скачкой вас потешил.

Translated literally, this final poem in *The Wanderer* ends with the line “Dear friends, I’ve amused you enough with my gallop.” *Skachka*, “gallop,” can be read as a pun on *skazka*, “fairy tale,” but rather than just providing a bit of humor, this equation of a physical ride or journey with the recounting of a journey. It is common, in Russian as in English, to use “travels” in the sense of “travelogue,” but in the case of *The Wanderer*, through some sort of literary transubstantiation, the travelogue actually becomes the journey: readers participate by appearing in the text as characters and by entering into the epigraphic and intertextual games of the author.

The metafictional experimentation in *The Wanderer*—including the “journey through a map,” the complex use of epigraphs, and the addresses to the reader, surely contributed to the initial success of his book, but it may have also led to its decline in popularity—once its novelty had worn off for most readers. Nevertheless, the novel captured a particular historical experience—of the highly educated Russian traveler exploring domains both inside and outside the confines of the Russian Empire, sending his imagination in all directions and bringing the reader along on his journey.

*The Wanderer* marked Veltman’s literary debut, and he wrote it at a crossroads in his own journey—the transition into civilian life following military retirement. In this his first large work, he was unafraid to experiment across an array of genres. In the ensuing chapters of his life, Veltman gravitated towards more grounded narratives, though still in an unconventional style. *The Wanderer* can be perceived as a creative endeavor through which Veltman sought to vicariously re-engage with the tapestry of military escapades and scholarly pursuits that peppered his past, all while ensconced in his new domestic life—and in doing so, extending an invitation for his readers to partake in this immersive odyssey. Though sometimes the digressions seem excessive, Veltman created an ingenious metafictional apparatus that—in accordance with his

stated goal—furnishes the reader with a different type of truth about the world and a particular view into the complexities of life at the fringes of the Russian and Ottoman Empires.

# Conclusion

In the scope of this study, I have embarked on an exploration of fantastic travel narratives born within the Russian Empire during the transformative era from 1784 to 1855, which saw an evolving relationship with Western Europe, wars and invasions, the vast territorial expansion of Russia, and the awakening and quashing of hopes for liberal reform. In this context, the ethnically-diverse Russian-speaking intelligentsia strived to redefine its own national, social, and political identities. In focusing on the fantastic genre, my dissertation unravels how these works served both as conduits for discourses on national identity and imperial destiny and as sites of literary and philosophical experimentation, illuminating the nuanced and sometimes paradoxical conceptions of the Russian Empire. These texts form part of a broader history of the use of fantasy and science fiction to comment on and reimagine imperial realities.

While some of the works explored in this dissertation enjoyed considerable popularity in their time, they did not secure a place within the enduring canon of Russian literature. However, the genre of fantastic travel continued to develop. Writers in the late imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods found new ways to engage with themes of imperial politics and national identity, in step with the changing ideologies of the societies they lived in.

Two better-remembered writers from the later part of the nineteenth century left us examples of dream utopias. The first is a temporal fantasy found in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* (*Chto delat'*, 1863), centered on the character of Vera Pavlovna, who escapes her domineering family to find love and independence. The novel advocates a socialist reorganization of society on individualist and feminist principles, some of which are developed in the course of four dreams that Vera has over the course of the novel. In the fourth dream, she encounters visions of women's subjugated status from prehistoric times to the present. The

dream then transitions into a futuristic vision of a world of equality between the sexes. This new Russia features a futuristic science house of cast iron, glass, and aluminum and a society in which machines have freed mankind from onerous labor.

Literary scholars have rightly been interested in the social politics of this novel, which were quite radical for its time. But the imperial foundations of this future utopia are often overlooked. A woman from the future world gives Vera a vision of New Russia, which turns out to be a highly developed version of the region of that name, in present-day southern Ukraine, that was forcibly annexed from the Crimean Khanate and Ottoman Empire in the late eighteenth century and settled by Russians over the course of the nineteenth century. Vera's guide shows her how previously unused land, apparently in Crimea has been transformed: "These mountains were formerly bare rocks [. . .]. Now they are covered with a thick layer of soil, and among the gardens grow groves of the tallest trees."[245] The fertility of this land is demonstrated by its varied agricultural production, including coffee, dates, figs, grapes, sugarcane, wheat, and rice. Such imagery reveals an underlying ideology that justifies imperial expansion through the supposed improvement of the land, converting a barren wilderness into a profitable agricultural utopia.

The absence of non-Russian ethnicities aligns with the policies of Russification in the Russian Empire during Chernyshevsky's time. Only ethnic Russians—not Ukrainians, Tatars, or the other peoples of the region—are mentioned as part of this process cultivating the land: "every year you, the Russians, push the boundary of the wilderness further south."[246] Yet, the novel's

[245] "Эти горы были прежде голые скалы [. . .]. Теперь они покрыты толстым слоем земли, и на них среди садов растут рощи самых высоких деревьев." N. G. Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?: Iz rasskazov o novykh liudiakh*, ed. T. I. Ornatskaia and S. A. Reiser (Leningrad: Nauka, 1975), 286.

[246] "[С] каждым годом люди, вы, русские, все дальше отодвигаете границу пустыни на юг." Chernyshevskii, *Chto delat'?*, 286.

depiction of these practices is complex. While echoing imperial and colonial themes, it also combines these with a vision of a peaceful socialist future utopia, full of shared prosperity and collective endeavor.

Another dream utopia, involving spatial fantastic travel, is contained in Fyodor Dostoevsky's fantastic short story "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," first published in his *Writer's Diary* in 1877. The story has a realistic frame, narrated in the first-person by a typically Dostoevskian figure: a "ridiculous man," tormented by his inner thoughts and contemplating suicide. His plans are interrupted when he meets a young girl in the street who is in distress, but he drives her away. It is when the narrator returns to his garret that science fiction starts to intrude into the story. Perhaps inspired by a star he saw on his walk, he ponders whether one could feel shame for an act committed on another planet. Still delaying his suicidal plans, the ridiculous man falls asleep and has a profound dream that serves as the central, fantastic narrative of the story.

In his dream, the narrator shoots himself, dies, and is buried, until "some dark and unknown being" raises him from the grave and carries him through space to the star he had seen. They arrive at a planet inhabited by beings of perfect innocence and happiness. He marvels at their utopian society, devoid of crime, suffering, or vice. However, as time passes, the narrator corrupts these beings with his Earthly knowledge, introducing them to concepts like shame, envy, and violence. Their society quickly descends into a dystopian state resembling the worst aspects of Earth. The story, just as C. S. Lewis's later *Space Trilogy* (1938–45), has allegorical elements that recall the biblical fall of man. Dostoevsky's disintegrated extraterrestrial society also reflects specific aspects of Russian society that he condemned, such as rationalism and nihilism. But from another perspective the story can be viewed as a colonial or anthropological

encounter: the narrator meets the natives and is surprised by their childlike nature and lack of science; he tries to live with them, but his influence corrupts them. The narrator observes this corruption happening in accelerated time:

> Yes, yes, it ended with me corrupting them all! How it happened, I do not know, I do not clearly remember. The dream flew through millennia and left in me only a sense of the whole. I only know that I was the cause of the fall into sin. Like a nasty trichina, like an atom of plague infecting entire states, so I infected this happy, sinless earth before me.[247]

Just as Kiukhelbeker's narrator could survey the collapse of European states in an imagined future, the ridiculous man has a grand historical view of the downfall of this happy planet. The notion of spreading disease to an innocent land also conforms with the colonial context.

Dostoevsky uses the common device of a dream to frame his utopia, just as Shcherbatov, Odoesvky, Ulybyshev, Chernyshevsky, and others did before him. But unlike Odoevsky's *The Year 4338*, which suggests that the somnambulist may actually have real knowledge of the future, Dostoevsky's narrator clearly states that his vision was a dream, and even uses scientific language to describe the sensations he felt. Another key difference from other dreams we have seen is what happens when the narrator wakes up. The narrator in Ulybyshev's *Dream*, for example, was awoken by the sounds of a drunk peasant being arrested and must return from a perfect utopia to a crude, harsh reality. In contrast, when Dostoevsky's ridiculous man awakes, he is inspired to see the benign possibilities of his own world, realizing that the potential for a utopian society exists within every human being. Inspired by this revelation—and again in true

[247] "Да, да, кончилось тем, что я развратил их всех! Как это могло совершиться — не знаю, не помню ясно. Сон пролетел через тысячелетия и оставил во мне лишь ощущение целого. Знаю только, что причиною грехопадения был я. Как скверная трихина, как атом чумы, заражающий целые государства, так и я заразил собою всю эту счастливую, безгрешную до меня землю." F. M. Dostoevskii, "Son smeshnogo cheloveka," in *Sobranie sochinenii v 15 tomakh*, vol. 14 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1995), 134.

Dostoevskian fashion—he decides to dedicate his life to spreading this message of love and hope to others.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fantastic travel fiction in Russia acquired more obviously science-fictional forms and began to deal with some of the key hopes and anxieties of modernity. Anindita Banerjee argues that the Russian science fiction of this period was characterized by "inimitable epistemological polyphonies between rationality and spirituality, individualism and collectivism, and [. . .] historical and messianic approaches to time."[248] An important work of the period is Aleksandr Bogdanov's novel *Red Star* (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 1908), in which the revolutionary Leonid is invited by a Martian comrade to travel to Mars, where he learns about Martian society's achievements in science and social organization, characterized by communism, equality, and free relationships. Leonid discovers that the Martians are contemplating colonizing Earth to secure those resources or risking the exploration of Venus. Bogdanov's novel has reminiscences of Lyovshin's *Newest Journey*, with its bidirectional journeys of Narsim to a utopian society on the Moon and Kvalboko to the imperfect society on earth. But what distinguishes Bogdanov's work is that the inhabitants of his utopia—the communist Martians—are presented as capable of intervening in human society, perhaps for its own good.

Another work, written after the establishment of Soviet power, dealt with a Mars-Earth comparison but in a different way. Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoy's *Aelita*, published in 1923 and adapted into a silent film in 1924, uses the same premise of travelers from Earth encountering a new civilization on Mars, but develops this interplanetary dynamic in a very different way. In the

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[248] Anindita Banerjee, *We Modern People: Science Fiction and the Making of Russian Modernity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 13.

novel, engineer Mstislav Los builds a rocket and journeys to Mars with a retired soldier, Aleksei Gusev. They encounter an advanced, capitalist Martian civilization, with the ruling class living above ground and workers confined to underground corridors, which is struggling from a depletion of natural resources. While Gusev leads a popular uprising against the ruler, Los falls in love with the Martian princess Aelita. After the rebellion is violently suppressed, the travelers flee Mars, and Aelita's fate remains uncertain. Apart from the themes of class struggle and ecological disaster, the novel also features a complicated dynamic of imperial competition. Mars has its own colonial history, complete with a racial dynamic: the rulers are descendants of ancient Atlanteans who migrated to Mars twenty thousand years ago. But Gusev is also fomenting a revolution to annex the planet to the Soviet Union. This aligns with the existing Marxist doctrine at the time of writing—that the success of communism depended on a worldwide (or in this case solar system-wide) proletarian revolution. But from an external perspective it is easy to reinterpret Gusev as an agent of Soviet colonialism and expansionism.

The comprehensive examination of fantastic travel in Soviet literature, including the broader genre of science fiction, falls outside the scope of this study. However, it is worthwhile to briefly explore how my third category—metafictional travel—developed. As noted in chapter 3, metafiction experienced a resurgence in postmodernist literature, breathing new life into this literary device. A quintessential example of a postmodernist Soviet travelogue is Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow–Petushki* (published in 1973; sometimes translated as *Moscow to the End of the Line*). The hero of this "prose poem," the intellectual alcoholic Venichka, travels a 124-kilometer railway route from Moscow to Petushki. Throughout the journey, he indulges in lengthy monologues on alcohol, history, philosophy, and politics, while entering a surreal world of dreams and hallucinations. The destination, Petushki, is depicted as a utopia, but the trip

descends into confusion as Venichka realizes he is actually headed back to Moscow, where he meets a violent end.

*Moscow–Petushki* bears the clear influence of Radishchev's *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. But at times the work, though quite different in tone, has similarities to Sterne's and Veltman's metafictional writing. One example is the short preface, in which the author notes how he had to remove a chapter "Serp i Molot–Karacharovo" (the name of the first railroad stop means "hammer and sickle") because it was full of obscene words. He writes that in the "first edition" he warned all the young women to avoid that chapter, but his warning was in vain, and all his female readers immediately went to that section and read it.[249] This is all a hoax; there was never an edition with such a chapter. This recalls Veltman's own games with the reader, his specific references to male and female readers, and his use of imaginary or lost chapters.

In the midst of the proliferation of science fiction by the late Soviet period, the earlier works examined in this dissertation were not entirely forgotten. Multiple anthologies were published collecting some of the early stories and making an argument for the special contribution of Russian writers to the history of the genre. One such anthology, *A Glance through the Centuries* (*Vzgliad skvoz' stoletiia*), published in 1977, included excerpts from the four works discussed in this chapter, as well as a foreword by the Soviet science fiction author Aleksandr Kazantsev, in which he compared fantasy to a river down which the "brave reader" must travel. The early Russian stories were a "bright stream flowing from the East"—not as dramatic or thrilling as modern science fiction, but still worth reading for the ways in which the

[249] V. V. Erofeev, *Moskva—Petushki* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 15.

writers “strove to reveal to the reader their aspirations about the greatness and well-being of the Russian people.” Kazantsev praises these writers’ progressive ideas for being ahead of their time, though of course still not corresponding to the Marxist-Leninist standard:

> However, it must be noted that the authors' inherent class limitations objectively prevented them, to varying degrees, from understanding, clearly envisioning, and painting a truly realistic picture of a future society living according to the laws of social justice. Nevertheless, they sincerely believed in the triumph of the Russian people’s reason, in the immortality of their beloved Russia, and ardently desired to sow “the good, the eternal” in people.[250]

The validity of this moralist and nationalist vision of literature (“the good, the eternal” is a quotation from Nekrasov’s 1877 poem “The Sowers” [*Seiateliam*]) for all of the works included in the anthology is doubtful. But this foreword and this anthology demonstrate the continuing appeal of these works to historically inclined readers of Russian literature and science fiction.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to imitate the authors I study in one way, by bring my readers on a journey of the imagination, to the hidden corners of Russian fantastic literature. I have added my own particular interpretations—bound by the limits of my own space and time—to these already multilayered and intertextual works. I do not claim to have written a comprehensive or definitive study of these works—their very open-endedness means that is a foolish endeavor. But I hope to have given my readers a deeper understanding of a set of texts that will continue to intrigue scholars of imperial Russian literature and science fiction far into the future.

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[250] “Вместе с тем нельзя не сказать о том, что известная классовая ограниченность авторов объективно мешала им в той или иной степени понять, ясно представить и нарисовать действительно реальную картину общества будущего, живущего по законам социальной справедливости. Однако они искренне верили в торжество разума русских людей, в бессмертие любимой их России, страстно желали посеять в людях «доброе, вечное».” Aleksandr Kazantsev, “Predislovie,” in *Vzgliad skvoz' stoletiia: Russkaia fantastika XVIII i pervoi poloviny XIX veka*, ed. V. Guminskii (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1977), 5.

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