A Hero of Two Times: Erast Fandorin and the Refurbishment of Genre

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2013

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Abstract

This study investigates the popular *Adventures of Erast Fandorin* series of Boris Akunin, Russia’s best-selling author of detective fiction. With the aid of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of the chronotope and the zone of maximal contact, it addresses questions of genre (in a transnational context), serialization, and the role of *zlobodnevnye voprosy* (‘current issues’) in historical fiction. My analysis locates Akunin in the history of international detective fiction in order to appraise his contribution not only to the genre but also to modern Russian literature. To account for Akunin’s influential status in his home country, I hypothesize the reasons for the extraordinary success of his works and the cult around the protagonist of the series, as well as the significance of Fandorin’s values for contemporary Russian society.
Acknowledgements

During the entire course of this project I have been tremendously fortunate to have had the intellectual guidance and moral support of my advisor, Dr. Helena Goscilo, whose enormous patience and enduring trust in me helped to ensure that this thesis was eventually written. I would like to profoundly thank Dr. Goscilo for the time and effort she has invested and for the results of our collaboration. Our frequent meetings helped me to broaden my horizons, focus my thoughts, and refine my ideas. My prose, she tells me, has improved immeasurably.

I also would like to thank my committee members—Dr. Yana Hashamova, Dr. Jessie Labov, and Dr. John Davidson for agreeing to be part of this project. I appreciate the time that they have sacrificed in reading the thesis.

Lastly, I must express my gratitude to Boris Akunin and his inspiration to create such a memorable detective hero, without whom this dissertation would not have existed.
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Introduction

Triple Identity: A Marketable Formula Uniting Russia’s Past and Present

“Я не бальзамировщик трупов, а продавец в розницу.”
Grigorii Chkhartishvili

“С точки зрения литератора детективный жанр—это попытка соединить две несоединимые вещи: психологическую достоверность с неожиданным финалом.”
Boris Akunin

“To accept a mediocre form and make something like literature out of it is in itself rather an accomplishment.”
Raymond Chandler

“Today there is undoubtedly an increased interest in detective fiction [...] It is apparent that publishers and readers are continuing to look for well-written mysteries which afford the expected satisfaction of a credit plot but can legitimately be enjoyed as serious novels. A number of novelists have successfully moved between detective fiction, non-fiction and mainstream novels.”
P.D. James, Talking About Detective Fiction

“Genre fiction is not art?”

A cursory glance at recent bestselling books in the United States, Great Britain, and Russia reveals that titles by authors who write genre fiction

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1 “I’m not an embalmer of corpses, but a retail seller.” From a March 2002 interview with Chkhartishvili (<http://www.arba.ru/art/849/3>).
2 “From the literary viewpoint, the detective genre is an attempt to unite two incongruent things: psychological believability with an unexpected finale.”
continue to dominate those lists. For instance, Nicholas Sparks (romantic fiction), John Grisham (legal thrillers), and George R.R. Martin (fantasy) topped *The New York Times* bestseller list on 22 April 2013; Dan Brown (detective thriller), John Le Carré (crime fiction), and Harlan Coben (crime fiction) scored near the top of Amazon.uk's bestselling books for the week of 22 April 2013; and Maks Frai (fantasy), Boris Akunin (detective fiction), and Stephen King (fantasy/horror) were among the bestselling authors on the “Moskva” ranking, one of Moscow's largest booksellers. Yet despite commercial and popular success, literary and cultural critics have decried genre fiction for not being ‘real art’ (Theodor Adorno, Harold Bloom, Arthur Krystal).  

Peter Swirski sums up this sentiment as follows: “Numerically, at least, genre fiction is the nexus of modern culture, but this very popularity means that it is not art—or so goes the tacit consensus” (5). After all, he continues, “if genre literature were art, it would not appeal to so many people” (Swirski 5).

The social beliefs, aesthetic preferences, and moral values of readers invariably change from generation to generation, with each new era reassessing its priorities. Popular genres ranging from fiction, magazines, cinema, and television to popular music and video games reflect these shifting cultural and social priorities, inevitably affecting other cultural products in a dialogical manner. In practice, popular genres frequently influence and intersect with more highbrow literature. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism posits that one

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4 See Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and Arthur Krystal's article “Easy Writers: Guilty Pleasure Without Guilt,” published in the 28 May 2012 issue of *The New Yorker.*
literary work (and, by extension, all language and thought) is in constant
dialogue with multiple preceding works, ideas, and utterances, and anticipates
what will follow. Intrepid readers are drawn to all kinds of literature and are not
afraid to mix genres. Indeed, the bookshelves of many bibliophiles are filled with
works that encompass a wide range of genres. Part of the appeal of popular
literature is its familiarity: “Popular literature never seems the kind of literature
that you are reading for the first time. It always seems like something you are
reading for the second or third—or millionth—time” (Fielder 200). Readers are
drawn to popular fiction because they know that they will embark on an exciting
adventure and reach a predictable conclusion, but will be driven towards the
action-packed climax through a series of riveting episodes that will prove to be
pleasurable and entertaining, albeit possibly surprising and unnerving.

One of the more popular genres over the past century and a half has been
detective or crime fiction, perhaps because it engages a basic human desire for
justice, right conduct, and preservation of the status quo. As a testament to its
timeless appeal, the detective story in some form or other has been around for a
very long time. Early examples include biblical stories, Oedipus Rex, Hamlet,
Macbeth, and later, Crime and Punishment. Yet it was Edgar Allan Poe with the
publication of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) who set the standard for
the ‘whodunit,’ one of the genre’s fundamental formulas. Centered on a murder
or crime solved by the detective protagonist (and, by extension, the reader)
through investigation, deduction, the gathering of clues, and scientific thinking,
the detective/crime novel relies on an organized structure, recognized
conventions, challenging puzzles, and a logical resolution that answers an innate human desire to solve an enigma. The genre satisfies a basic need for justice and order in society inasmuch as the perpetrator is usually discovered and ultimately pays for the crime, thus providing reassurance that evil will not remain unpunished. Like many popular genres, the detective novel attracts readers through its formulaic structure, fast-paced plots, unexpected twists and turns, and exciting denouements. Judging by the current international popularity of bestselling detective and crime fiction authors such as Henning Mankell, Jo Nesbo, Stieg Larsson, P.D. James, Ruth Rendall, John Grisham, Michael Connolly, and Mary Higgins Clark, the detective genre has not lost its appeal and continues to entice readers who want to escape from the proverbial trials and tribulations of their daily lives.

When Grigorii Chkhartishvili (b. 1956), writing under the pseudonym Boris Akunin, burst onto the literary stage in 1998 with the publication of his first detective novel featuring the handsome and conscientious police investigator Erast Petrovich Fandorin, he offered the Russian reading public a series that not only has come to satisfy consumers’ demand for entertainment, but also belongs to a literature for the new middle class—a mixture of pulp fiction and highbrow aspirations, or what one might call middlebrow fiction (srednelobnaia proza). The detective genre was relatively new for Russia, because during the Soviet era ‘crime’ officially did not exist; therefore it was virtually impossible for a fictional police investigator, especially a private detective, to investigate a murder. The flood of homegrown potboilers that
swept the Russian book market in the 1990s, including Harlequin romances, action novels, detective stories, and translations of foreign pulp fiction, created a niche among more discerning readers eager for more highbrow prose. Akunin has famously said that he launched his Fandorin series because he was ashamed that his wife had to hide the novels she was reading in the Moscow metro behind a brown paper dust cover. His current status as the most popular best-selling writer in Russia can be attributed to several factors. Above all, he stands out from his contemporaries in crime fiction through his savvy references, both overt and hidden, to classical Russian and foreign literature—in a genre considered lowbrow.

**Akunin's professional trajectory and literary significance**

Grigorii Shalvovich Chkhartishvili was born on 20 May 1956 in Zestafoni, Georgia to a Georgian soldier and a teacher of Russian literature. Before he was two years old his family moved to Moscow, where Chkhartishvili was raised. After developing an interest in Japan while attending Kabuki theatre in Moscow, he decided to study Japanese culture. In 1979, he graduated with a degree in Japanese history and language from the Institute of Asia and Africa at Moscow State University. Originally a translator of Japanese literature, Chkhartishvili worked for the respected literary journal *Innostranaia literatura* [*Foreign Literature*], eventually becoming deputy editor in charge of Oriental [sic] literature, where he translated works from Japanese and English by such authors
as Yukio Mishima, Kenji Maruyama, Kobo Abe, Takeshi Kaiko, T. C. Boyle, and Malcolm Bradbury.

During the 1990s, Chkhartishvili, like many of his contemporaries in post-Soviet Russia, went through an existential crisis (Klioutchkine 5; Norris 67). In order to deal with his problem, he wrote *Pisatel’ i samoubiistvo* [*The Writer and Suicide*], which was published in 1999 by the prestigious academic press Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie (NLO). Targeting a wide audience, the book examines suicides in various literary works. Since Chkhartishvili found it emotionally difficult to write the book, he decided to start work on a detective novel as a form of amusement and therapy. The first volume in what would become the Erast Fandorin series, *Azazel’* [translated into English as *The Winter Queen* (2003)] was released in 1998 by the up-and-coming publisher Zakharov, which has since found commercial success by publishing both highbrow and lowbrow works, and has become one of Russia’s most powerful presses. After the success of *Azazel’,* Zakharov put out the next three Fandorin novels, all in 1998 (*Turetskii gambit* [*The Turkish Gambit*], *Leviafan* [translated into English as *Murder on the Leviathan* (2004)], and *Smert’ Akhillesa* [*The Death of Achilles*]). Success came quickly, and the cultural context easily explains why Chkhartishvili went from a complete unknown to a bestselling author and cultural celebrity in just one year. The highly stylized novels and their intertextual allusions attract those readers seeking ‘chAllanging’ literature and perspective on Russian history, while others can follow Fandorin’s adventures as he tries to bring a sense of justice to pre-
revolutionary Russia. So far, Azazel’ has sold fifteen million copies in Russia alone.

Hesitant about being identified as an author of a lowbrow genre and eager to avoid potential criticism from his journalist and academic peers, Chkhartishvili published his detective series under the pseudonym Boris Akunin. The surname ‘Akunin’ has at its root two Japanese hieroglyphs—‘aku’ and ‘nin,’ which may be translated as ‘evil person’ or ‘evil soul.’ For the educated Russian reader, the first name’s initial together with the surname—B. Akunin—evokes associations with Mikhail Bakunin (1814-76), a nineteenth-century Russian rebel and anarchist. Adoption of such a pseudonym is symptomatic of the author’s attraction to allusions, which abound in his fiction.

In addition to the Adventures of Erast Fandorin series, Akunin has published three Sister Pelagia books depicting a crime-solving nun in provincial Russia at the turn of the twentieth century; and the Nicholas Fandorin series, a trilogy of novels about Fandorin’s grandson, a modern-day British historian. Akunin has also launched projects in which he attempts to write novels in various genres: for instance, Detskaia kniga (The Children’s Book 2005) tackles children’s literature; Shpionskii roman (A Spy Novel 2005) is a spy narrative set during World War II; Fantastika (Fantasy 2005) is structured as a fantasy novel; and Kvest (Quest 2008) is written like a computer game. Akunin also has written a series of cinematic novellas, each of which represent a different film genre.

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5 Chkhartishvili revealed his identity as Akunin only after the first books in the Fandorin series were published and were well received among critics. For the sake of consistency, hereafter I refer to Chkhartishvili as Akunin.
Furthermore, he recently admitted that he is also the author of several historical adventure novels and a trilogy of fantasy stories published under the pseudonyms Anatolii Brusnikin and Anna Borisova. In 2004, Akunin, writing as Chkhartishvili-Akunin, released Kladbishchenskie istorii (Cemetery Histories), a collection of short stories and a novella in the style of the detective thriller.

Akunin’s creative activities are not confined to fiction, for he has branched out into other media: with his input, several celluloid adaptations of his novels have been made into TV series and feature films; he has an interactive website and several fan sites, which have sprung up over the past few years; and he has become a fixture on both popular and intellectual Russian talk shows. Astoundingly prolific, over the past fifteen years Akunin boasts an output of some 50 books, which have sold about 30 million copies worldwide (Thornhill, “Lunch With the FT” N. pag). His success not only has cemented his place in contemporary Russian literature, but also has turned both the author and his literary creation into bona fide celebrities, with every novel in the series a long-awaited event.

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Akunin admitted on his LiveJournal blog on 11 January 2012 that he created the figure of Anna Borisovna because he did not want to disappoint readers who, when they see his name on a novel, expect that the book is a detective or adventure narrative. Akunin claims that readers have accused him of deception when he tries to alter the ‘rules of the game’ and write a different kind of genre novel. Furthermore, in discussing the Borisovna novels, Akunin said that he wanted to attempt a novel written from a feminine point of view and to look at the world ‘through women’s eyes’ (‘смотреть на мир женскими глазами’). He even went as far as to create a digitized photo of Anna Borisovna by merging a photo of himself with that of his wife, Erika Ernestovna, in order to continue the pretense.
Recently, however, Akunin has begun to move away from the popular genre to focus more intently on history. In 2012 he published *Aristonomiia*, an ideological novel that considers the Russian Revolution, and he is now working on a historical series that explores the history of the Russian state. These more recent endeavors seem to be an indication that Akunin is trying to reinvent himself as a ‘serious’ author and influential cultural figure. Indeed, his was a prominent voice in the mass public protests against Russian President Vladimir Putin in late 2012 and early 2013. He has also spoken out in defense of jailed Russian political prisoners, such as the oligarch Mikhail Khordokovskii and punk rockers Pussy Riot.

Akunin’s astonishing success has made him one of the most highly recognized contemporary authors. Ever since his first novel, *Azazel’*, he has received critical praise for his books and translations, both in Russia and abroad. He won the Anti-Booker Prize for his novel *Koronatsiia (Coronation)* in 2000⁷; *The Winter Queen* was placed on the short list for the British Crime Writers’ Association Dagger Award in Fiction in 2003; in 2007, he received the Noma price for his translation into Russian of the Japanese author Yukio Mishima; in 2009, the Japanese government awarded Akunin the distinguished Order of the Rising Sun; and the Russian version of *GQ* named him Writer of the Year in 2012.

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⁷ A literary award established by *Nezavisimaia gazeta* in 1995 in response to Britain’s Booker Prize.
Akunin’s significance for contemporary Russian literature

During perestroika and the turbulent 1990s, the Russian book market was flooded with all kinds of literature imaginable, from translations of Western bestsellers to the most sordid popular novels (Nepomnyashchy 161-68; Olcott 1-13; Borenstein 1-23). Surprisingly, Akunin managed to find success in such a market, even though his novels do not include the formulaic ingredients of lowbrow popular narratives, which often teem with sex, violence, and profanity. In fact, his novels stand out partly because they contain little sex, infrequent physical aggression, and are crafted in an old-fashioned language reminiscent of nineteenth-century Russian prose (Aron, Russia’s Revolution 140). Yet, whatever his intellectual credentials may be, Akunin is, as one critic puts it, a “commercial project” (Sorokin 267) and ‘brand,’ whose task is to write popular books and make money. I contend that Akunin has all the requisite ingredients for success: (1) he is a professional who has the backing of Zakharov, one of Russia’s largest publishing houses, with a highly influential public relations department; (2) as a literary critic, translator, and expert in Japanese language and literature, Akunin is familiar with Russian, European, and Japanese culture—a knowledge he uses to good effect with the reading public; and (3) he has been able to place his fictional protagonist in an era for which Russians today nurture a profound nostalgia.

In the wake of the relatively peaceful breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia plunged into an uncertain era characterized by lawlessness and confusion, which, coupled with financial near-collapse, fueled a social crisis that has yet to be
resolved more than twenty years later. Akunin’s evocation of the past serves to draw parallels with the present. His historical novels show that widespread abuses of power are as prevalent today as they were ‘then.’ Investigating how Akunin employs history and postmodern techniques to offer his critique of contemporary Russian society, Elena Baraban (“A Country Resembling Russia”) contends that Akunin’s pre-revolutionary Russia is a “projection of Russia’s present” (403) and that Akunin brings past and present together in his novels to highlight themes that are relevant to modern-day Russians. Agreeing with Baraban that Akunin chose as his time period an era that suggests many associations with today—the emergence of liberalism, a decision to follow a pro-Western path, and a rise in crime—Lev Danilkin (“Ubit po sobstvennomu zhelaniiu” N. pag.) further posits that Akunin picked the nineteenth century because it includes the Golden Age of Russian literature, a period from which he could draw on a rich literary tradition. Indeed, many scenes, motifs, and characters in the Fandorin series are reminiscent of those found in Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol’, Fedor Dostoevskii, Ivan Turgenev, and Lev Tolstoi—all the ‘great writers’ from the earlier part of that era. Arguably, part of the reader’s enjoyment stems from recognizing these intertexts and from the comfort of knowing that the reader is entering a familiar fictional world. Popular fiction, with its established formula and familiar plots, furnishes such reassurance during times of political, economic, and social unrest.

Popular genres are attractive because they provide immediate gratification in their excitement and escapism. On another level, part of the
The appeal of detective fiction lies in the intellectual game the author plays with the reader, and Akunin’s intertexts add to the genre by ‘elevating’ it to a level that many readers find challenging. Andrei Ranchin (“Romany B. Akunina i klassicheskaia traditsiia” N. pag.) contends that by keeping plot and literary allusions separate, Akunin appeals to many kinds of readers, who can either find pleasure in the adventure plots of the narratives or engage in solving the intertextual puzzles layering the texts. I am interested in exploring the question of what Akunin brings to the genre. How does he take a formulaic genre, build on it, ‘tweak’ it, and present a finished product that is specific and unique to Russia, yet capable of cornering an international readership?

The dissertation

Akunin’s status on the Russian cultural scene is that of a popular figure credited with erudition, originality, and excellent prose. Though a handful of articles on the author exist, my dissertation constitutes the first full-length study of his Fandorin series, which holds a unique place in what has become the genre of choice in post-Soviet Russia. Such a study is warranted and overdue, I believe, not only because Akunin has made significant contributions to contemporary Russian literature, but because he has created a post-Soviet hero who is able to transcend national borders and appeal to a broad international audience.

My dissertation argues that Fandorin is a synthetic protagonist, one who is singularly ‘un-Russian’ inasmuch as he combines three archetypes: British gentleman, Russian intellectual, and Japanese samurai. One may legitimately
claim that he is a representative of the global society of the twenty-first century—a world that is familiar to contemporary Russian readers, no longer separated from the West as a consequence of the Cold War. The aim of my study is threefold: (1) to contextualize Akunin's works in both classical and contemporary detective fiction so as to identify their distinctive features; (2) to account for the widespread appeal of his novels, analyzing the plot, setting, and characters, especially Fandorin, to determine what precisely about the dashing sleuth has captured the attention of so many at home and abroad; and, (3) through literary analysis, to determine the values embodied by Fandorin and their relevance to modern Russian society.

My study consists of four chapters and a Conclusion. Chapter 1 locates Akunin in the history of international detective fiction so as to appraise his contribution to the genre, and also situates him in the history of Russian detective novels. The current popularity of the crime novel is due partly to people's psychological fascination with crime and also to the aesthetic factor, since readers derive intellectual and emotional stimulation from a pop genre that by definition provides entertainment yet affords the opportunity to exercise one's gray cells. As a genre closely tied to legal and social structures, the detective novel reflects the dominant social, moral, and political trends of the era in which it is written. Although for ideological reasons the detective genre was not nearly as popular in the Soviet Union as in the West (though Agatha Christie had numerous fans among the intelligentsia), its current widespread appeal is
partly indebted to Akunin and his ability to refurbish the genre in a post-Soviet environment.

Relying on the work of such detective fiction theorists as Julian Symons, Stephen Knight, John Cawelti, Marty Roth, Martin Priestman, John Scaggs, Heta Pyrhönen, and Charles Rzepka, this chapter first traces the international development of the genre as it changed from the classical tradition epitomized by the mystery stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy Sayers, and Agatha Christie to the infinitely more varied international crime fiction of today. The second part of the chapter tracks the development of the genre in Russia, starting in the middle of the nineteenth century to its near-disappearance during the Soviet era. Finally, the chapter ends with an assessment of several homegrown detective authors who emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s, including Aleksandra Marinina, Polina Dashkova, and Dar‘ia Dontsova, who provide a context for Akunin’s contribution to the genre on home territory.

Chapter 2 examines the manipulation of time and place in the Fandorin novels with the aid of Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope—the relationship between chronos/time and topos/place. Bakhtin’s notion is useful for any discussion of detective fiction, insofar as time and place are critical to the commission of a crime and to its investigation. Moreover, since Akunin’s novels are set in an earlier era, he needs to elaborate a historical chronotope for the fictional world in which events occur. Though place is easily particularized in the Fandorin novels, one of Akunin’s main challenges is to establish a convincing
sense of the end of the nineteenth century. To create what Henry James called "a habitable background," Akunin relies on an established practice of the detective genre: loading the mysteries with specific references to dates, times, and locations. Although Akunin references current events and pressing issues of the age, his historical era is not entirely rooted in historical fact. The author shapes, molds, and inverts the time period for his own purposes. In a sense, Akunin ‘manufactures’ or ‘repackages’ history and the period that he wants to portray, creating an illusion of reality that is similar to the actual historical era, but also contains elements from the author’s own world.

Chapter 3 analyzes how Akunin illuminates his detective hero as a potential exemplar for modern Russian society and casts his values as important ethical guidelines for the contemporary world. Various historical eras have embraced a range of heroes who represent the dominant moral, ethical, and behavioral mores of a specific age: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed that the heroic Great Man arose from the spirit of the times and personified the soul of the culture; Thomas Carlyle wrote about the importance of individuals in history; and Joseph Campbell highlighted a number of heroic stories that illustrate what heroes represent to and in different societies and cultures. Other commentators—and, certainly, Marxists—oppose the notion of individuals as heroes, arguing that social forces rather than exploits of a few individuals move the processes of history. In the modern era, the image of the heroic, superior individual has given way to an appreciation of ordinary heroes whose exploits provide an ideal towards which one can aspire. Until the appearance of Fandorin,
Russian literature lacked exemplary role models, and contemporary young Russians had only a handful of homegrown personae worthy of possible emulation. This issue became even more acute after the disintegration of the Soviet Union left entire generations searching for moral archetypes during a confusing, desperate era.

This chapter discusses Fandorin’s image as conceived by Akunin and focuses on externalization in the construction of his portrait. It speculates about the relationship of Fandorin to his creator, my contention being that, in a sense, Fandorin may be considered the third part of Akunin’s triple identity: Chkhartishvili is the master behind the concept, while his authorial persona Akunin and his literary protagonist both live a fictive life that has catapulted them to celebrity status for reasons that I explore.

Chapter 4 gauges how plots in Akunin’s novels adhere to or deviate from the established formulas of detective fiction. For the most part, plot is dominant in the detective genre, with individual character development secondary. While Akunin’s plots are straightforward and action-packed, they tend to comprise a series of linked episodes rather than fully developed storylines. Beginning with Aristotle’s definition of plot (mythos) as the most important element of drama, even more significant than character (ethos), this chapter discusses the structural function of plot in the detective novel. The Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp argues that what the characters do (i.e. how they move the action, their placement in the text, and their place in a sequence of actions) is more important than their individuality. Tzvetan Todorov draws on Formalist terminology to
look at the role temporality plays in detective fiction, distinguishing between the story of the crime (fabula) and the investigation (siuzhet). I engage these theories and others, to arrive at a tentative paradigm of the Akunin-Fandorin plot.

The Conclusion revisits the major points of my four chapters before assessing Akunin’s current standing in Russian culture and his plans for the future. It also maps out my intentions regarding future work on Akunin’s Fandorin series.

My dissertation contributes to and expands the field by addressing three key questions: First, how is Fandorin a new kind of hero for a post-Soviet age? Second, with what values does Akunin endow Fandorin, what is the significance of those values for contemporary Russian society, and what does Fandorin’s focus on personal responsibility say about a Russia struggling to form some kind of civil society? Third, what stylistic features of the Fandorin novels have helped to bring Akunin millions of devoted fans? As recent demonstrations in Moscow illustrate, the middle class has started to demand political stability, accountability, and justice. Thus Akunin’s Fandorin series perhaps not only satisfies consumers’ demand for entertainment, but also belongs to a literature for the new middle class—a mixture of pulp fiction and highbrow elements that tackles serious issues and suggests a way of combating and surviving in a corrupt and maimed world. In short, I believe that my dissertation, as the first comprehensive study to analyze more than two Fandorin novels, will add to the
scholarship on Akunin, in the process pinpointing Akunin’s originality in contemporary Russian detective and crime fiction.

My choice of dissertation topic was dictated by personal tastes. In the words of W. H. Auden, I have been an admitted “addict” of detective fiction ever since I picked up my first Sherlock Holmes mystery in primary school and was transported back in time to a foggy London where criminals who disappeared into the mist were hunted down and exposed by the brilliant British sleuth. I devoured as many of the so-called great detective novels as I could in my childhood and continued to do so afterwards, finding the genre a pleasant way to end a long day of work. Ever since, detective fiction has been a “guilty pleasure” for me, and now, with international detective and crime narratives flooding the market, it seems there is almost an unending source from which one can derive satisfaction and escape the tedium of the everyday world. When I started to read, and later study, Russian literature, I noticed that the Russian detective novel was essentially missing from comprehensive Slavic department reading lists and bookstore shelves. Thus, when I heard the buzz around Akunin’s first novel in the late 1990s, I was curious to see what the Russian contribution to the genre could be. Once I read the first novel, I was ‘hooked’ and propelled along with other readers through the subsequent installments. In the wake of Akunin’s astonishing critical and commercial success, I had expected an onslaught of new Russian detective novels to appear, yet for the most part that has not happened. It will be interesting to see whether Akunin (and those who copy him) has managed to refurbish the detective genre in Russia in such a way to lend it
greater respectability. Perhaps my scholarly investigation will provide some answers, however provisional.
Chapter 1
Revision or Revolution?: Boris Akunin and the Detective Genre

“Why does the mystery novel enjoy such enduring appeal? There is no simple answer.”
   John Connolly and Declan Burke, Books to Die For

“...there can be no doubt that the detective story produces a reassuring relief from the tensions and responsibilities of daily life; it is particularly popular in times of unrest, anxiety and uncertainty, when society can be faced with problems which no money, political theories or good intentions seem able to solve or alleviate.”
   P.D. James, Talking About Detective Fiction

Avid readers across the globe are flocking to detective fiction, leaving publishing houses rushing to keep up with soaring demand. The interest has spread to other media as well, judging by the success of and public enthusiasm for a multitude of televised police procedurals, traditional detective mysteries, PBS Masterpiece Mystery performances, BBC TV productions, reality court dramas, feature films, graphic novels, tabloid murder stories, and reports of political corruption. These developments beg the question of why the crime novel and its sub-genres are so popular today. Human beings have been

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8 In her book Talking About Detective Fiction, British crime writer P.D. James hypothesizes why murder is such an attractive crime. She writes that “the central mystery of a detective story need not involve a violent death, but murder remains the unique crime and it carries an atavistic weight of repugnance, fascination and fear” (11).
fascinated by crime stories for a very long time, and perhaps one reason is that “man ... has some basic trait that ... manifests itself in a fascination with tales of crime” (Cawelti, *Adventure* 52). Elements of this trait can be seen in the demand for the products in the above-mentioned list. The aesthetic factor also plays a role, since the detective story treats crime as entertainment and as a means of intellectual and emotional stimulation. Interest in crime fiction and its impact on society is not a recent development; novels by ‘canonical’ authors such as Honoré Balzac, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Fedor Dostoevskii, Charles Dickens, Lev Tolstoi, and Thomas Hardy earlier explored the metaphysical, moral, and social aspects of crime.

Anyone attempting to answer Connolly and Burke’s question on the enduring appeal of the mystery novel should take several factors into consideration. For instance, the detective novel provides a social commentary on important issues of the day, highlights the disparity between law and justice, and points to the desire harbored by civilized societies for some form of order. Perhaps most importantly, crime fiction explores human nature and, through that process, attempts to find an explanation for why we do the things that we do. In a society beset by violent crime, unrest, and instability, the detective story provides reassurance through the capture and punishment of the perpetrator, thereby removing the threat of danger and confirming hopes that we live in a

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These days even more ‘serious’ writers are jumping onto the detective bandwagon. Irish novelist John Banville, who won the Man Booker Prize in 2005, has started a series featuring Quirke, a consultant pathologist in the Dublin city morgue, who investigates the deaths of recent arrivals.
moral and just universe. The mystery novel also provides a sense of familiarity, since the genre’s penchant for a recurring hero means that the reader can return repeatedly to follow a favorite protagonist on another exciting adventure, secure in the knowledge that the hero (almost always) will capture the criminal and emerge triumphant. The puzzle element is another attractive feature; readers of detective fiction derive satisfaction because humans solve the mystery through rational deduction/intellect, not by luck or divine intervention. Unlike lived experience in the modern world, the detective story assures the reader that all will be well. However, the genre has been forced to adapt to changing circumstances over decades, and in today’s troubled times, the distinction between good and evil has begun to blur moral boundaries; evil is no longer predictably eradicated according to a formulaic ending. Yet despite ambiguous and pessimistic conclusions in works by such authors as Henning Mankell, Jo Nesbo, Stieg Larsson, John Connolly, Ian Rankin, and Stuart Neville, the enduring global popularity of the detective novel is a testament to readers’ longing to experience in mediated form a violent world that is often far removed from their own safe and domestic environment or that reflects theirs, but in more extreme form.

Attacked for decades by the Soviet government for its popular nature and failure to conform to Marxist-Leninist ideology, the detective genre made a

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10 The Soviets claimed that the detective novel was harmful to society because it ‘taught’ criminals how to commit crimes and was anathema in a country that was ‘rooting out’ crime, yet the government allowed the publication of crime novels because they sold
tremendous comeback in the 1990s after the breakup of the Soviet Union. A proliferation of daily crime, daylight mafia killings on Russian streets, economic collapse, escalating uncertainty about the future, and rampant corruption were reflected in the newly resurgent detective stories in Russia. This trend has continued since the first post-Soviet decade. According to a Publishers Weekly report on the Russian book market, in 2010 seven of the top ten best-selling authors in Russia wrote detective fiction.\textsuperscript{11} Fiction remains the most popular genre, specifically detective stories and fantasy penned by hugely successful authors such as Boris Akunin and Dar’ia Dontsova, and up and coming talents like Dmitrii Glukhovskii.\textsuperscript{12} Although accessibility to an array of new leisure activities in post-Soviet Russia has made Russians no longer the indefatigable readers lauded by Western intellectuals during the Soviet era, readership remains strong and detective novels enjoy enormous popularity with current book buyers.\textsuperscript{13}
The detective novel: continuity and change

Murder is one of the most horrific and violent acts a person can commit; therefore it is not surprising that detective and crime narratives present the reader with a number of religious, social, moral, and metaphysical dilemmas. Since crime is an offense against society, the criminal destabilizes the social order, violating its established practices, laws, and values. In the classic detective paradigm, unease, paranoia, and fear tend to prevail until the perpetrator is identified and punished, thereby returning society to more or less the state predating the crime. The detective represents society in his/her quest to bring the criminal to justice, thus reaffirming the validity of the existing order (Cawelti, Adventure 105). As a genre closely tied to legal and social structures, the detective novel reflects the dominant social, moral, and political trends of the era in which it is written. Accordingly, the mystery novel is often used as a form of social criticism, especially by such authors as Charles Dickens (Oliver Twist (1837-39), Little Dorrit, (1855-57), Our Mutual Friend (1864-65)), who depicts social injustices as factors directly related to criminal behavior, and more recently by Stieg Larsson, whose Millennium trilogy exposes the underbelly of Swedish society.

Early narratives romanticized crime via such heroic characters as Robin Hood and Juraj Janosik.14 These ‘criminals’ were portrayed as victims of a

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14 A character in many Slovak and Polish legends, films, and folk songs, Janosik achieved fame through his infamous exploits, which include robbing the rich and distributing the
corrupt regime or personal enmity, rebels and ‘noble’ outlaws, fighting to protect the common people from exploitation by the unscrupulous authorities. However, with the rise of scientific approaches to crime in the nineteenth century, greater emphasis was placed on understanding the reasons for criminal behavior, i.e. its social background and psychological causes.

The classic British detective story or ‘whodunit’ took shape in the period between the two world wars and established the basic formulaic schema for the genre—a closed circle of suspects, often in an isolated setting; with the appearance of a body, a mystery emerges, and the detective must be called in to resolve the crime (Anderson 24-25). In “The Guilty Vicarage” (1948), his essay on detective fiction (the title of which is derived from Agatha Christie’s Murder in the Vicarage (1930), Miss Marple’s first case), W.H. Auden argues that a successful detective story should present a crime that is committed in an idyllic rural setting. The victim must be innocent and everyone must come under suspicion. In this unique, tranquil setting, the corpse is out of place and causes alarm among the upper-middle-class denizens. Though suspects proliferate, the identity of the criminal is concealed until the end. Almost always an outsider, the criminal eventually and inevitably is caught, publically exposed, and punished. The detective’s job is to restore “the state of grace in which the aesthetic and ethical are one” (Auden 154); thus s/he must be an exceptional individual of extraordinary astuteness and have a rare eye for detail and inconsistencies.

proceeds to the poor. He is based on the historical Juraj Janosik (1688-1713)—a famous highwayman and a symbol of resistance to oppression from the Hungarian nobility, who was executed by the authorities for his crimes.
Auden contends that readers crave detective narratives because such stories satisfy personal fantasies about restoring the Garden of Eden and returning society to a state of innocence, thereby removing evil from the world. It was against this historical background of more than sixty years ago that Auden confessed his guilty pleasure: for him, “the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol” (146). Auden envisions a rigorous framework for detective narratives, rooted in a Miltonian paradise lost, with a society awaiting an instrument of divine retribution to restore justice. Yet Auden’s specific, civilized, English rural setting no longer corresponds to the genre’s exponential expansion today, which encompasses a range of settings, detective heroes, villains, social groups, and crimes.

Detective theory has changed significantly since Auden’s idyllic formula set in the British countryside, as rapid social and political developments in the wake of World War II have forced people to try to come to terms with new realities. The rural village setting has expanded geographically—Miss Marple is a village sleuth, while Poirot is an international traveler—and the reader can now be transported to locations across the entire globe without leaving the safe confines of the armchair. The three general categories of detective fiction—the traditional analytical detective story (C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Lord Wimsey), the hard-boiled detective novel (Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, Lew Archer), and the spy thriller (James Bond, George Smiley, Jason Bourne)—are interconnected with “much crossing back and forth across the few borders that remain” today (Roth xii). The elastic genre is constantly evolving:
contemporary authors of detective fiction have achieved huge international success by creating a fictional world vastly different from that of Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, or Agatha Christie. The justice of pre-World War II detective narratives is not that of today's crime novels, where the criminal often eludes punishment and the protagonist not only can fail to restore balance to society, but also may be morally questionable in his/her own actions. Examples include Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallander, Jo Nesbo's Harry Hole, John Connolly's Charlie Parker series, DCS James Langton in Lynda La Plante's Anna Travis series, and DCI Jane Tennison in Prime Suspect. With the advent of the American hard-boiled detective and the cynical Cold War spy thriller, good and evil are not so clearly defined and differentiated; protagonists often find themselves pawns “in a game much deeper than the one they think they are involved in” (Denning 138). Examples in both print and film include the hard-boiled variety (Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe and Jake Gittes in Roman Polanski's Chinatown [1974]); and the spy, often alcoholic and disillusioned, who eventually realizes that the justice he is fighting to maintain may not be any better than what he is fighting against (Alec Leamus and George Smiley in John le Carre's The Spy Who Came in From the Cold [1963] and Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy [1974]). Many contemporary writers provide a social commentary that reveals how moral and religious values have changed and eroded: Maj Sjowall and Per Wahloo's Martin Beck navigates Sweden in the 1960s-1970s, plagued with the problems of a welfare state; Jo Nesbo depicts a Norwegian society troubled by its Nazi past; Henning Mankell examines how Sweden is coping with the influx of
immigrants from southeastern Europe and Africa after the fall of the Iron
Curtain; John Connolly and Stuart Neville probe a lack of ethical norms in today’s
society; Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlings confronts racial inequality in Los Angeles
in the 1940s-1960s; and Jakob Arjouni’s German-born Turkish protagonist
Kemal Kayankaya explores issues of immigration, nationalism, and religious
prejudice in modern Germany.

While the world has changed, crime fiction continues to employ the
devices, codes, and conventions established by earlier works, and in reading
these narratives, the literary critic, like the detective, is engaged in an
investigation of retracing “a chronological chain of cause and effect in order to
make sense of the present, and the literary texts that it produces” (Scaggs 3). The
ability of the genre to modify with the times is perhaps one of its most enduring
traits, since it provides a form of social history. Bringing the detective story out
of its traditional setting of rural England not only ‘demythologizes’ Auden’s
‘graceful’ fantasy, but also makes contemporary narratives more relevant to
readers’ own lives. Crime and violent acts were, are, and will be a part of society.
Contemporary writers have recognized this fact and have engaged the reader in
difficult social and moral issues for quite some time. As P.D. James contends,

Crime fiction today is more realistic in its treatment of murder, more
aware of scientific advances in the detection of crime, more sensitive to
the environment in which it is set, more sexually explicit and closer than
it has ever been to mainstream fiction. (180)
Though the fascination with crime narratives remains steady, several aspects of the genre have altered. Today’s writers are ‘tweaking’ the formula and introducing detectives dramatically different from the C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, or Lord Wimsey models. Thus we have alcoholic and emotionally troubled detectives (Kurt Wallander, Harry Hole, Jane Tennison, John Rebus), those who sleep with suspects (Raylan Givens), use drugs or are addicted to painkillers (Harry Hole, James Langdon), fix evidence and set up suspects (Lisbeth Salander, Mikael Blomkvist, James Langdon), and cheat on their spouses/romantic interests (Hole, Givens). All of them are forced to navigate the complicated modern world as best they can.

**Snagging the reader: the serialized narrative**

In contrast to the epic, with what Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes as its “finalized, epic past” and a fully-formed hero completely separated from the present era, the detective genre is a narrative of elasticity and continuity, located in the zone of maximal contact. While the reader knows what will happen to the mythic or comic-book hero and how he will vanquish the enemy (Hercules will perform all twelve labors, from slaying the lion to capturing Cerberus, Superman will defeat Lex Luther, King Arthur will push back the invaders, Spiderman will overcome the giant lizard), the modern novel, and by extension

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15 Eliot Borenstein defines continuity as “the implicit recognition that events in one episode can have repercussions in the episodes that take place after. When continuity is at work, episodes are not entirely autonomous but interconnected, allowing for intricate plot entanglements and references to prior events” (103).
the crime novel, captures the reader’s interest through the “unpredictable nature of what will happen” that marks the genre (Eco 109). The reader continues to page through the book because “the event has not happened before the story; it happens while it is being told”; thus the reader is propelled forward by a strong desire to find out what will happen next (Eco 109)—precisely the human curiosity that saves Scheherazade’s life in One Thousand and One Nights. The reader’s satisfaction stems from the unexpected twists and turns along the journey, for a major feature of a serial narrative is that it puts off the conclusion as long as possible. Cawelti posits:

> While the detective mystery seems to reach an end with the detective’s solution of the crime and the apparent restoration of order, the serial character of mystery texts assures us that in the next story or novel, the detective will encounter still another crime. (347)

The appeal of revisiting a familiar and recurring character and following his or her next adventure is one of the reasons readers keep returning to a favorite series, lured into consumption of the subsequent installment.

Once publishers realized that continuing narratives published in weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly installments were an excellent source of revenue, serialization became a popular practice in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Marketing techniques and subject matter targeted the relatively new segment of middle-class readers, who were prepared to pay for the literature they liked (Sutherland 41-42). Authors who published in installments could build suspense and provide surprise endings, while often incorporating current events into the
narrative, and handing the reader fiction that was fresh from the writer’s hands.

From the 1840s-1860s in England, four new innovations appeared that “opened an enlarged supply of fresh, quality fiction to literate, but not necessarily wealthy classes of the population” (Sutherland 20). These included “part publication, the ‘Leviathan’ circulating library, the collective reissue, and magazine serialization” (Sutherland 20-21). Different forms worked better for different authors: a master of suspense such as Dickens worked well within a shorter format, while “a more discursive writer—a George Eliot—could find such shorter boundaries impossibly constricting and a threat to artistic dignity” (Todd 90). In Russia, the monthly ‘thick journals,’ such as the Russian Messenger (Russkii vestnik), were the most popular form of serialization from the 1840s-1880s, in part because the length of installments was longer (ranging from thirty to one hundred pages), which meant that the authors had “more latitude—in length of the part, in frequency of their [the novels’] appearance, and in duration of the novel” than those who wrote in shorter segments (Todd 90). Most installment novels were completed in one subscription year; thus readers could look forward to following favorite characters and plots on a regular basis and knew that the narratives would be resolved within a certain publication cycle. The ‘thick’ literary journal remained a popular and prestigious publication throughout the Soviet era, but the circulation of these journals declined in new, post-Soviet market conditions.

Today the United States’ influence on the serialization market is immense, and serialization extends far beyond the bounds of popular literature
to include movie sequels and prequels, hit television shows, and Internet projects. The media industry's investment (one that is directly tied to the money-making potential) in drawn-out stories encompasses such genres as the soap opera, situational comedy, superhero comic books, TV series and cliffhangers, miniseries, and web serials. While writers no longer publish novels in serialized format to the extent that was standard practice in the middle of the nineteenth century (Dickens, Dostoevskii, Doyle, Victor Hugo, Herman Melville, Henry James, Bolesław Prus), several authors have published novels in installments: Stephen King released *The Plant* in separate e-book versions in 2000; Ronan Bennett’s *Zugzwang* was published in weekly installments in Britain’s *The Observer* in 2006; and Michael Chabon’s *Gentlemen of the Road* was serialized in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2007. Not surprisingly, serialization is undergoing a resurgence in the current age of e-books and online websites; Margaret Atwood is publishing episodes of a new novel, *Positron*, on the Internet site Byliner.\(^{16}\) The serialization market has expanded dramatically, and with the advent of the cable series and the DVD boxed set, it seems that readers and viewers will never tire of tuning in to see the next installment of their favorite show or their favorite character.\(^{17}\)

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\(^{17}\) The secret, however, of serials is to keep the interest of the reader/viewer and know when to stop. Such phenomenally successful TV series as *Lost, ER, The Guiding Light, The Sopranos*, and *Friends* were canceled after long runs because viewers simply lost interest in rehashed plots and a lack of new ideas.
Formulaic pulp fiction became popular in Russia in the late nineteenth century and included such forms as the lubok tale, the newspaper serial, the Russian detective story, and the women's novel (Brooks xix-xx). Face-paced thrillers captured the public's attention with their exciting chases, dangerous escapades, thrilling plots, and final punishment of the criminal. Pre-revolutionary serialized literature was popular because the reader could return to a ‘recurring character,’ delving into a new adventure without necessarily having to have read the previous story or the following one (Borenstein 105-6).

The serial novel tapered off during the ideologically oppressive years of Josef Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev, but a few authors emerged with a series of novels featuring a recurring hero. In his popular spy series, Iulian Semenov (1931-93) depicts the adventures of the Russian double agent Stirlitz (Maksim M. Isaev), who infiltrated the Third Reich and passed on information to the Soviet government.\(^{18}\) The serial regained popularity near the end of perestroika, and Russia experienced a boom in imported serialized fiction in the post-Soviet era, largely in the form of translated popular fiction and foreign-made TV shows. Homegrown detektivy, such as Aleksandra Marinina’s wildly successful series featuring Anastasiia Kamenskaia, and boeviki (action novels), epitomized by Viktor Dotsenko’s Beshenyi (Mad Dog) series, soared to popularity in the 1990s.

No longer driven by the picaresque or bandit hero, these new potboilers focus on

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\(^{18}\) Indeed, Semenov’s series featuring Isaev was so successful in the Soviet Union in the 1970s that one of the novels, Semnadtsat’ mgnovenii vesny (1969), was made into a twelve-episode TV miniseries (1973; directed by Tat’iana Lioznova) that became a runaway hit in Russia and across Eastern Europe.
the investigator, superhuman action hero, and crusader for justice who attempts to restore order in a turbulent era.

The changing paradigm of the detective hero

Since heroes continue to hold society in thrall, an appealing detective-protagonist is almost always the key to a successful series. What constitutes a charismatic or intriguing investigator, however, has changed in the past 150 years. The Golden Age of detective fiction ushered in the methodical detective, who “employs a particular method” (for example, Poirot’s exercise of his “little grey cells”) that includes observation and an awareness of causality (Scaggs 39). The skills of the methodical detective are a combination of acute attention to detail, rational deduction, and analysis of the collected facts. Often an unmarried loner and slightly eccentric (Holmes, Poirot), the detective is not interested in establishing personal relationships, preferring to spend his time honing his cerebral acumen. There are several exceptions to this early detective prototype: Georges Simenon’s Commissaire Maigret is happily married; G.K. Chesterton’s Father Brown establishes a rapport with all kinds of people; Dorothy Sayers’s Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane marry and have three children; and Miss Marple has a wide network of village friends.

Even the solitary or socially anomalous detective usually has a sidekick or confidant with whom to discuss the aspects of the case—a confidant whom the author presents with a degree of irony or humor, for he functions as a foil of sorts, emphasizing the superiority of the detective-protagonist. Accordingly, the
foil’s intellect cannot match that of the detective and is lesser than that of the reader, to whom he frequently reveals the detective’s actions and thought processes. While the detective may occasionally venture far afield to gather evidence, much of the narrative is structured around internal movement and action, i.e., ratiocination. In the traditional analytical detective story, the emphasis falls on how the detective resolves the crime, rather than on high-paced action or dangerous situations. Though solving an intriguing puzzle for personal satisfaction is paramount for the detective, through his skills s/he nonetheless restores moral order to the given community. Sherlock Holmes epitomizes this type.

By contrast, the detective or private investigator in the contemporary crime or detective novel resembles an anti-hero and recalls such characters as Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, who exemplifies the hard-boiled detective and constantly finds himself in dangerous situations. He is a professional police investigator instead of an amateur sleuth like Holmes, Miss Marple, or Margery Allingham’s Albert Campion, a development that reflects the recent trend to portray events as realistically as possible. Though a good cop and revered by his colleagues, the investigator solves the case through hard work, persistence, and a bit of luck; s/he lacks the brilliance and deductive powers of his/her predecessors. Typically, the investigator has neither skill nor interest in fulfilling the daily tasks of a civil servant and finds the demands of daily police work slow and boring. Forced to deal with work-related problems (competition for a promotion, conflicts with colleagues, professional jealousies, stifling
bureaucracy, budget cuts), today’s investigators are often frustrated. Their short temper frequently gets them into trouble with their superiors, as does their penchant for acting against direct orders. There are numerous examples of these ‘loose cannons,’ such as Harry Hole, John Rebus, Raylan Givens,19 Charlie Parker, Jane Tennison, and James Langton. Yet crime authors generally present these traits as admirable or at least appealing to the anticipated reader, for they suggest the investigators’ focus on more significant problems.

Social, economic, and cultural changes since World War II account for the disappearance of the classical aristocratic, amateur detective who solved crimes largely as a pleasurable leisure activity. Yet readers still gravitate towards an elite detective who is elevated above the rank-and-file citizen and who has refined tastes; amid changing class structures, culture now substitutes for upper-class privilege. The astute Adam Dalgliesh is the epitome of the tall, dark, and handsome British gentleman who is courteous, respectful, and intelligent (the fact that he is a published poet only adds to his appeal). Colin Dexter’s Inspector Morse embodies upper-middle-class Englishness, is saddled with a number of prejudices, and loves classical music, especially opera. By contrast, his assistant, Inspector Lewis, is Welsh, lower class, and a family man. The police detective Kate Miskin, who assists Dalgliesh in A Taste for Death (1986) and other novels, is a painter. Kurt Wallander is a huge opera buff and listens to Maria Callas in his car, while Wallander’s father is an artist who paints kitsch

landscapes. Shifting social norms, broader education, and widespread population movement have made it possible for the lower class to rise through the ranks. DCI John Rebus is a departure from the traditional investigator in his working class roots and identity as a Scotsman; despite having a father who is a convicted felon, Raylan Givens manages to become a successful federal marshal.

The role of the private detective has changed as well; today's detective is often a police investigator and, although s/he frequently disobeys direct orders and is impulsive and ruthless in the pursuit of the villain, s/he eventually has to work together with an investigative team that serves as a foil to the investigator's rashness. The educated and cultural elite detective inspector often has to gain the trust of his team. In the BBC's *Whitechapel* series, the investigative team initially distrusts and mocks DI Joseph Chandler, whose posh education and quirky mannerisms conflict with the middle-class background of his colleagues, and much of the initial conflict in the series stems from Chandler's interaction with his deputy DS Ray Miles. In Mankell, Wallander's team—Ann-Britt Hoglund, Svedberg, Martinsson, Nyberg, and Bjork—provides much of the appeal of the series precisely because of the tensions, petty jealousies, and genuine trust among these colleagues from different social strata and educational backgrounds.

Predictably, female investigators have a difficult time proving to their male colleagues that they can do their job just as well as any man; DCI Jane Tennison, DI Anna Travis, and Linda Wallander all face constant harassment, discrimination, bullying, and jealousy on the job. Reflecting today's globalized
society, the rise of the professional police investigator who interacts professionally with people from all segments of society democratizes the crime novel by overcoming class barriers and social prejudices, which is a marked departure from the leisurely pastime and deductive puzzle that mysteries represent for Dupin, Holmes, Lord Wimsey, and Poirot.

The modern day detective is a kind of maverick or lone ranger, doling out justice as s/he sees fit. The detective will do whatever it takes in order to obtain the information necessary to catch the criminal and will pursue a villain until he is captured, punished, or killed. This means that the investigator is constantly doing things that are legally questionable, including beating up a suspect to quickly find out information, planting evidence, illegally breaking into homes and enterprises, torturing the suspect, and claiming that everything is done as part of the case—actions unthinkable for Holmes, Poirot, and Miss Marple. Yet Harry Hole has no qualms about beating a suspect to gain the information he needs; Charlie Parker cooperates with criminals in order to capture the villain; Anna Travis goes to the opera and dinner with a serial killer in order to pump him for evidence; and Raylan Givens lies to extract the information he needs—a choice that eventually leads to his suspension as a federal marshal. In *Black and Blue* (1997), DCI Rebus misrepresents the truth so much in his search for justice that he even begins to believe his own lies.
One of the most striking differences between the detective of today and pre-World War II prototypes is his isolation and alienation from society, and his problems in developing and sustaining close personal relations with others. The breakdown in family relations during the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century—the 50 percent divorce rate, dysfunctional generational communication, the huge number of children growing up without one parent, international financial crises, the spike in unemployment, and widespread decline in parenting—inform the crime genre today. Accordingly, maintaining personal relations is problematic for the detective, and even if he has children, he is often estranged from them and from his ex-wife, as well as from his parents, of whom usually only one is still alive and criticizes him and his way of life. In those rare instances when the detective maintains a steady relationship, it is usually with a divorced or married woman, and both situations pose difficulties (the ex-husband, the threat of discovery by the current spouse, an angry child). Raylan Givens’s relationship with his ex-wife causes her marriage to fall apart; Harry Hole’s troubled relationship with Rakel pushes her son Oleg to drug use and eventual murder; and Michael Dibdin’s Aurelio Zen struggles to maintain relationships with his ailing mother and his girlfriend. The detective repeatedly breaks off relations because he feels that his sexual partner is either threatened by his presence (the villain might go after the lover to hurt the

20 Sherlock Holmes is melancholic and a drug user, but not isolated through circumstances; detached and obsessive he is not very interested in people other than as subjects for his experiments or study.
detective) or he simply cannot commit to a sustained, by and large conventional, relationship.

The modern-day detective usually suffers from some degree of depression, which is directly responsible for his unhealthy lifestyle. The detective often smokes, eats poorly, is an alcoholic or a drug addict, lives alone, does not get on well with his colleagues, and cannot stay in a relationship. There is usually a tragic incident in his past for which he feels responsible and that has marked him to this day. Mankell’s Wallander shot a man and is constantly plagued with guilt over this act; Arnaldur Indriñason’s Inspector Erlendur Sveinsson is still scarred from losing his eight-year-old brother in a blizzard when he was a child; Adam Dalgliesh lost his wife in childbirth (and ever since has been cautious with relationships) and suffers from melancholy and bouts of depression. In keeping with this paradigm, Akunin’s Erast Fandorin went prematurely grey at the temples after his fiancée was killed by an assassin.

However, not all detectives remain loners: in The Private Patient (2008), Dalgliesh eventually marries Emma Lavingham, a lecturer in literature at Cambridge; Alexander McCall Smith’s Precious Ramotswe marries Mr. J. L. B. Matekoni, and the two establish a stable home life. While the brooding and tortured detective dominates contemporary crime fiction, the notable exceptions show that a type of balance can be found between the brutality of the work place and the security of the home.

Since personal problems are not only widespread but also constantly discussed in the media, they have become part of everyday baggage in the public
sphere. The reader can often recognize himself in the protagonist, or at least traits of himself that the media relentlessly debates in shows such as Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Phil, Jerry Springer, Ricki Lake, Rachel Ray, and *The View* in the U.S., and Jeremy Kyle, Trisha Goddard, and Vanessa Feltz in the U.K. Mankell’s Wallander is a poor father, has a difficult relationship with his daughter Linda, and has to grapple with health problems. Wallander has diabetes, is pudgy, drinks too much, and in *The Troubled Man* (2009), the final book in the Wallander series, is revealed to have Alzheimer’s. Harry Hole’s on-and-off-again relationship with Rakel looks as though it is finally over in *Phantom* (2011), the most recent Hole novel; Michael Connelly’s Harry Bosch’s personal life is a mess and he has a new love interest in almost every new novel. By contrast, other detectives or police investigators can have both a successful professional career and a happy personal life: Ruth Rendell’s Inspector Reginald Wexford is a hard-working, conscientious police office at peace with his job and has a wife who provides him with a satisfying home life; Donna Leon’s Guido Brunetti is happily married to Paola and they have two children. Brunetti’s intimate family life is contrasted with the corruption and cruelty that he deals with at work. These problems facing detective-protagonists have existed for centuries, but what makes them significant as part of today’s crime fiction is the changes in communication via technology: TV, the Internet, Twitter, and the various media’s public exposure and discussion of personal issues make the protagonist more interesting when he has to confront many of the problems that are part of today’s public discussion.
The detective’s sphere of activity and his tools

The setting of modern crime novels has shifted from English country estates to large urban centers, which are depicted as cesspools overflowing with crime, drugs, and misery. Crime is portrayed “as an everyday occurrence arising from the tensions of modern life” (Scaggs 93), not Auden’s social aberration. The detective’s role is to question the morality of, and try to come to terms with, a world that allows the murder of children, human trafficking, female slavery, prostitution, rape, and serial killings. The genre is constantly expanding geographically. Scandinavia is not alone in producing bestsellers, and the international success of detective fiction now includes women (P.D. James, Ruth Rendell, Val McDermid, Lynda La Plante, Alexandra Marinina, Donna Leon, Sara Parentsky, Minette Walters), and a vast array of international writers (Umberto Eco, Roberto Bolano, Boris Akunin, Arturo Perez-Reverte, and countless others) who portray a variety of exotic and novel locales, including Botswana, South Africa, the Congo, Rwanda, Moscow, Hong Kong, Mexico, and New Mexico’s Navajo reservations. In a nod to the forgotten liminal regions of the world, detective settings encompass borderlands such as Sicily, Northern Ireland, Malmo, northern Mexico, and Iceland, whose criminals have become adept at moving undetected across moral and geographic boundaries. Moreover, other media now supplement or adapt print versions of crime fiction. Many novels are now being adapted as made-for-television dramas, blockbuster movies, and hit mini-series. Some detective novels even seem to have been written exclusively for the screen. Stuart Neville’s Inspector Jack Lennon trilogy, which deals with a
post-conflict Northern Ireland confronting its past, is written like a screenplay, with visually gripping scenes, cliffhangers, and shootouts. Talks are currently underway about bringing the first novel in the series, *The Twelve*, to the screen.

Not only investigators’ location and behavior have changed, but so have their professional tools. Due to recent scientific and technological advancements, most notably revolutionary DNA testing, detectives now have vast resources available to them, unlike the less fortunate Holmes, who had to carry a magnifying glass with him to gather clues. Lisbeth Salander is a computer genius and can hack into any computer system to gain information, extract personal details, and plant evidence. In the BBC’s TV series *Sherlock* (2010-), Stephan Moffat and Mark Gatiss’ contemporary update on the Holmes mysteries, John Watson has a blog where he posts the results of Holmes’ cases and makes inquiries. In *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and Showtime’s recent hit series *Homeland*, computers and technology are used to analyze clues and information in order to capture the perpetrator or terrorist. Thanks to new modes of communication and accelerated travel, international cooperation and collaboration between law enforcement agencies has become an essential component in pursuing and capturing criminals as global crime becomes the norm in today’s world: Kurt Wallander frequently relies on Interpol, Harry Hole has undergone training with the FBI in Chicago, and in Lynda La Plante’s *Above Suspicion* (2004), DCI James Langton contacts his colleagues in the FBI when he is gathering evidence against serial murder suspect Alan Daniels.
Bureaucracy also plays a significant role nowadays in an investigator’s work. The legal rights of individuals force the investigator to follow strict guidelines for collecting evidence and for building a case to ensure that the perpetrator is properly punished under the law. Unlike his earlier counterpart, the modern detective has to balance a fine line between legal rights, bureaucracy, and internal politics, which sometimes means that the perpetrator is not punished and society remains at risk.

**Today’s criminals**

The detective’s tenacious, uncompromising, even fanatical commitment to ensure that the criminal is brought to justice lends a special intensity to his or her relationship with the perpetrator, because the detective personalizes the wrongs villains commit against society, thus becoming obsessed with capturing them. However, the detective’s pursuit of the criminal often has unexpected consequences. Unlike in earlier crime narratives, where the detective resided in a superior sphere that made him impregnable, today’s detective is vulnerable to the criminal’s machinations. It is not uncommon for the criminal, often a murderer, to kill the detective’s partner or colleague, to murder another victim out of a desire to prove that s/he is still in control, or, in the worst case, to kill the detective’s wife, lover, or child. In Showtime’s *Dexter*, Dexter Morgan’s wife, Rita, is brutally murdered by the Trinity killer; Harry Hole’s girlfriend Rakel is kidnapped and abused by the serial killer, the Snowman, only to leave Harry after she emerges from the shock of her ordeal; and in *Knots and Crosses* (1987),
John Rebus’s former army buddy Gordon Reeve, in his quest for revenge, kidnapes and strangles a series of young girls, including Rebus’s teenage daughter Samantha (although she is saved just in time).

Though there is no doubt that the criminal has committed horrendous crimes, s/he often is cast as a victim of the social and legal system. For instance, Larsson’s Salander is a victim of society and was forcibly committed to an insane asylum, where for years she was subject to physical and sexual abuse by her doctors. Larsson’s narrative is an indictment of the Swedish welfare state and the political corruption that would allow such terrible things to happen to a teenager. The trilogy implies that for Salander to take revenge against those who harmed her, knowing that the legal system will not help her, is understandable, and certainly takes a clever form. The contemporary crime novel’s penchant for portraying the psychological development of the criminal reflects social concern and fear about the factors that create such (perceived) monsters.

More than in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, modern detective fiction often emphasizes the environmental and social conditions that shape (and nurture) the serial killer, murderer, etc., suggesting that the villain’s depravity is a product of circumstances beyond his or her control; therefore society has to shoulder some of the blame for the perpetrator’s psychological development.

\[21\] Stieg Larsson created one of the more colorful ‘anti-heroes’ or ‘sympathetic criminals’ in recent years in Lisbeth Salander. She is a computer hacker whose main talent is digging up compromising information about people, and she goes to extremes to protect her personal safety, even to the extent of torturing and tattooing a man who had raped her. One could say that her actions are as vicious as those perpetrated against her, yet the reader wants her to prevail. Auden would never have sanctioned an individual member of society rising to the occasion to expel the serpent from the Garden of Eden.
state. That perspective offers a social critique absent from Poe, Doyle, and Simenon, but is foregrounded in works by Christie, Sayers, Chandler, and P.D. James. Given the ‘explanatory narrative’ of the criminal’s background, the detective, in understanding its psychological ramifications, is occasionally sympathetic towards his adversary. In Peter Robinson’s Aftermath (2001), Inspector Banks is more understanding towards Lucy Payne, who assists her husband in the rape and murder of four teenage girls, after Banks uncovers her past, which includes sexual abuse as a child. Youthful traumas, broken homes, drug use, and child prostitution are frequently at the root of a serial killer’s dark tendencies: Matthias Lund-Helgesen blames his mother, who he believes was a prostitute, for his dark yearnings to kill the women he loves in Nesbo’s The Snowman (2007); four-year-old Dexter Morgan witnessed the bloody murder of his mother; and Stefan Fredman, a schizophrenic teenager, kills his father and other adults who he believes abused his sister in Mankell’s Sidetracked (1995). The genre’s social critique often identifies the breakdown of the family, the foster system, the lack of parenting, and people falling through the ‘cracks in the welfare system’ as the fundamental cause of a criminal’s psychological problems and motivations for violence. Moreover, there are numerous incidences when the villain, who, in a mirror reflection of the detective, by misguided and often horrific methods, tries to shape society to his or her own moral code.22

22 In Justified, Deputy Federal Marshall Raylan Givens works with his old friend and main criminal adversary of the series, Boyd Crowder, to bring down even larger criminals who are corrupting society. Although Crowder resorts to violence and sometimes murder, he, in his misguided way, is rooting out evil in the county and is
Additionally, sometimes the criminal is revealed to be a colleague of the detective or inspector. In the Harry Hole series, Hole’s colleague Tom Waaler, who turns out to have taken the law into his own hands regardless of the legal ramifications, is very similar to Hole in many ways and shares his moral dilemmas. Under circumstances that mitigate the act, Hole eventually kills Waaler in self-defense, though his conscience continues to trouble him. What is disturbing in this scenario is the knowledge that the detective can be as corruptible as many sectors of society; it is no longer certain that the detective, as the representative of the law, is honest. In his quest to deliver justice at any cost, the detective may not have to travel much further down the morally questionable path in order to become his adversary. In short, the detective lives in a liminal space where moral and legal boundaries are hazy and frequently crossed.

Where to now?: the implications of the ending

Although much has changed in detective fiction since the so-called Golden Age, the ending has remained largely the same—the restoration of some kind of balance and justice. Contemporary society has undergone radical transformation since the nineteenth century; yet there is still a social need for reassurance on the part of society and readers alike, and law enforcement agencies step in to provide it. However, the threat today is much larger than it was before the attempting to restore his own vision of God’s grace. Givens’ actions in his quest to bring order to society are also morally and legally questionable. Needless to say, the series accepts the thin line between good and evil, right and wrong.
Second World War. In a ‘global world,’ international crime has proliferated. Moreover, it is more difficult to find a closed circle of suspects, because the modern villain is able to blend in with the general population, to become one person among millions, with access to modern technology and extremely dangerous weapons. Paranoia has crept into modern society, creating an unease and suspicion that make the detective’s job even more challenging, and, taking recent developments in communications into account, also more reader-orientated.

Crime fiction remains a public forum for debating the pressing issues of the day and for exploring the social origins of crime. If in earlier works the “device of reducing the killer to something purely evil or animalistic restores an ideal status quo, and is a corresponding validation of the social order that is specifically not responsible for social aberration” (Scaggs 100), recent crime narratives lay much of the blame at the family’s door and, as a logical correlative, at that of society, which inevitably influences family paradigms. This complex relationship explains why the individual (and individualistic) detective—the agent who restores balance to society—is often pitted against that very society. S/he can question and challenge the existing social order, raising issues that are smoldering just below the public consciousness.23

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23 In an interview with the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Andrea Camilleri, author of the hugely successful Montalbano series, says that he conscientiously uses the crime novel for social commentary. “In many crime novels, the events seem completely detached from the economic, political and social context in which they occur. It brings me back to the example of Maigret again. There’s very little sense of the history of France in the Maigret books. There is no social fact or an event that allows the story to
Not only social dilemmas but also politics play an increasing prominent role in contemporary crime fiction—Larsson’s leftist social and political views are highlighted in his Millennium trilogy; Mankell has publically explained his liberal views on issues ranging from Palestinian autonomy to the plight of poverty and orphans in Mozambique; Boris Akunin has used his public position to make strong statements about Putin’s authoritarian regime; Andrea Camilleri deals with recent Italian events, such as Italy’s transition from the lira to the euro, the country’s problems with the mafia, and the turbulent government of Silvio Berlusconi. Current Scandinavian detective fiction, for example, engages such ‘hotbed’ issues as the region’s Nazi past, illegal immigration, xenophobia, racism, political corruption, social injustice, unemployment, human trafficking, widespread drug use, etc. British authors explore the effects of the country’s welfare state, immigration, changing class and social roles, and political problems. U.S. detective fiction investigates the country’s racial past, white-collar crime, the role of women, recent immigration, and ethnic problems. In The Bat (1997), Jo Nesbo examines the racist attitudes towards Australian aborigines; Alexander McCall Smith delves into social issues concerning women in traditional vs. non-traditional occupations, Christian belief vs. traditional beliefs in Botswana, and AIDS and AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the detective usually captures the villain, social and legal justice is not always be dated. In my books, I deliberately decided to smuggle into a detective novel a critical commentary on my times. This also allowed me to show the progression and evolution in the character of Montalbano" (http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2012/jul/06/andrea-camilleri-montalbano-life-in-writing).
restored. The investigation repeatedly reveals a pervasive evil and corruption in society that is impossible to extirpate, hence the frequency of narratives that indict the upper echelons of government. Larson’s trilogy, for instance, depicts how the Swedish government covered up the defection of a Soviet spy and Mankell’s *The Troubled Man* (2009) raises the phenomenon of Swedish spies during the Cold War. Yet it is still the detective who takes responsibility for restoring as much of “God's grace” as possible.\(^{24}\) Despite the tragic endings of many modern crime and detective novels, and failed attempts to right the wrongs that are committed, some kind of balance is eventually restored to society. In a reflection of current reality, the individual can continue to live her life (the majority of rape, attack, and murder victims are female) mostly secure in the knowledge that law enforcement agencies are still able to provide protection from criminals, even if not all evil can be eradicated.

Though the theory of detective fiction has evolved since Auden wrote about the moral implications of the genre, the majority of basic assumptions have remained intact. While the world has seen drastic changes, and everyday violence is becoming ever more widespread, justice is still handed down in the end. Society still requires some kind of closure, a way to reestablish moral balance. The endings of detective narratives may not return the individual to

\(^{24}\) Not everything is as grim as many crime narratives present, and the endings sometimes do leave a flicker of hope. Lisbeth Salander is a case in point. Salander has been a victim of legal institutions and suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of her tormenters, yet the series ends on a somewhat upbeat note, as she opens the door and lets Blomkvist back into her life. She, the ultimate victim of political intrigue and social injustice, has softened, changed, and is seemingly ready to reach out to someone.
Auden’s Great Good Place, but evil is dealt with in one way or another, and a modicum of justice is confirmed at the end. That sense of justice, especially at a time when widespread crime has flourished in both violent and sub rosa forms, partly accounts for the success of Akunin’s Fandorin series, which has revised the status of the detective novel in Russia. Stymied under the communist regime, the detective series has restored prestige to a genre commonly relegated to the category of “boulevard literature” (бульварная литература), pulp fiction, or potboiler.

Detective authors are garnering more acclaim as the genre is becoming increasingly respectable and highbrow: crime fiction awards and honors have been established (the Edgar Allan Poe award, the Crime Writers’ Association Dagger award, Scandinavia’s Glass Key Award) and the British have bestowed titles on several of their most renowned crime authors: P.D. James was created Baroness James of Holland Park in 1991, and Ruth Rendell was made a life peer as Baroness Rendell of Babergh in 1997. Akunin’s mixture of low and highbrow prose has won him a huge following in Russia, making him one of the country’s top-selling authors, the recipient of countless literary awards, and an authoritative voice in Russian society, especially in light of his recent political and social activity.25 Yet Akunin does not seem satisfied with his established and honored status in contemporary Russian literature. Despite his impressive range of fictional works and phenomenal commercial success, Akunin has indicated

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that he would like to move away from the detective genre and write more 'serious' novels. In June 2012, the novel Aristonomiia came out, written under the name Akunin-Chkhartishvili; with this five-hundred-page philosophical novel about the Russian Revolution, Akunin claims at last to have become a writer.\textsuperscript{26} Regardless of his critical doubts about the quality of his crime fiction, Akunin's contribution to the detective genre in Russia is significant; he has refurbished a genre that had declined to such an extent that the 'respectable' reader would not be caught dead reading it. By doing so, he has (re)introduced millions of readers to 'quality' detective fiction.

\textbf{The Russian contribution to the detective genre}

Long a fixture in the West, detective fiction became popular in Russia in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The relatively liberal reign of Alexander II (1855-81) spawned a number of reforms (the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, relaxed censorship, changes in military regulations, increased local government), but the revamping of Russia's outdated and corrupt legal system was perhaps the most significant event for the development of the detective

\textsuperscript{26} Akunin has said that when he writes detective novels, he is a writer of popular fiction; when he writes non-fiction, he is a essayist, and now he has written his first 'serious' novel and has finally—after sixteen years of writing—become a writer ("Когда я пишу развлекательную литературу, я беллетрист. Когда пишу что-то нехудожественное («Писатель и самоубийство» или ту же «Любовь к истории»), я эссеист. И только теперь, на пятьдесят шестом году жизни, на шестнадцатом году сочинительства, я стал писателем. Потому что написал первый серьезный роман"). (See Akunin’s LiveJournal entry found at: http://borisakunin.livejournal.com/63290.html).
genre. Russia has a firmly established tradition of journals in which political discussions frequently take place, starting from the early nineteenth century and continuing through the Soviet era. *Publitsistika*, or discussions “in print on the pressing problems of social-political life,” became an important forum for public expression in the late nineteenth century (Whitehead 233). In a fine example of moving between genres, the “beliefs expressed, the points made, and the arguments conducted in the non-fictional genre of *publitsistika* were picked up and used by the authors to help shape literary fictional treatments of crime” (Whitehead 234). Early detective writers (such as N. P. Timofeev, P. I. Stepanov, S. A. Panov, A. A. Shkliarevskii, N. D. Akhsharumov) latched onto one of the new reforms and introduced the figure of the *sudebnyi sledovatel’* (examining magistrate), who became the prototype for the new investigator. Frequently depicted as professional and incorruptible, the fictional examining magistrate was a morally sound individual functioning as a force for the general good in Russian society. In contrast to the pre-reform era, when aristocrats could use their position and influence in society to enable one’s literally getting away with murder, the new reforms introduced the concept of equality before the law.

Relying on education, intelligence, and rationality, the examining magistrate strove to ensure that justice was served, though he often faced opposition from

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27 Other reforms include open courtrooms and trial by jury. See Whitehead (“Debating detectives: the influence of *publitsistika* on nineteenth-century Russian crime fiction”) for an intriguing discussion of how *publitsistika* served as an intermediary between legal reform and the development of detective fiction. Whitehead argues that discussions of judicial reforms in such journals educated the public about the “new legal landscape” and, by extension, such discussions found a larger audience “through their literary dramatization in fictional detective stories” (258).
corrupt local police officials (Whitehead 243). Unlike in the Anglo-American tradition, these early detective stories focus on professional criminal investigators rather than private detectives—a trend that continued until the late Soviet period, when the KGB appeared as the safekeepers of order and probity.

Despite the examples of the authors mentioned above, Russian detective stories were “generally identified as an ‘import’ from the West” (Nepomnyashchy 162) and were adapted from foreign originals, featuring such heroes as Sherlock Holmes, Nat Pinkerton, and Nick Carter (Brooks 142).

Earning the stamp of approval of both intellectuals and the Formalists, detective fiction became popular again in the liberal period of the 1920s, when the state, realizing the appeal of the genre as entertainment, promoted the use of ‘revolutionary adventures’ that “were politically correct but written in a popular style” (Stites 42). Communist leaders of the time encouraged the writing of ‘red detective stories’ or ‘red Pinkerton novels’ that would “serve the interests of the state, of the masses, and of their own art by blending propaganda, adventure, and parody” (Stites 43). Both highbrow and lowbrow readers were attracted to these stories, eager for the escapism of plot-orientated adventures and light-hearted ‘fun.’

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28 Viktor Shklovskii’s “Novella tain” analyzes Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories and the author’s ability to build suspense through retardation techniques. In “V poiskakh zhanra” Boris Eikhenbaum reflects on the plot construction of the adventure, crime, and science fiction story.
Detective fiction, however, almost ceased to exist under Stalin because the genre inevitably points out failings in the pertinent social system, which Soviet propaganda claimed did not exist (Nepomnyashchy 163). Moreover, the Soviets loudly proclaimed the absence of crime in the workers’ paradise, which rendered any fictional treatment of it irrelevant. Indeed, the Soviet government considered detective fiction a threat, since the genre “depends upon an individual actor who is pursuing a private form of retribution for what often was another individual’s loss of private property”—concepts openly hostile to the Soviet belief in collectivism (Olcott 5). Another problem for Soviet ideology was that “the private detective is a defender of civil society and not the state...it is to him, rather than to the authorities, that society must look for security” (Brooks 37). Soviet detective novels typically show society as stronger than the individual and explore how crime harms the state and why crime continues to exist, rather than focusing on restoring society to the norm preceding the criminal act. According to the Soviet viewpoint, the sources of criminal behavior are ‘curable’; therefore the genre focuses on identifying deviant traits, extirpating them, and returning the ‘healed’ perpetrator to society. By contrast, the Western examples of the genre are interested in psychological analysis, but not the rehabilitation of criminals once they are captured; their paramount concern is the reinstatement of normalcy.

A more relaxed ideological atmosphere fueled a revival of Soviet detective novels in the 1960s and 1970s. The most popular writers in the genre included Arkadii Adamov, Leonid Slovin, Georgii and Arkadii Vainer, Nikolai Leonov, and
Iulian Semenov. Focused on the police, the military, and the intelligence services, their works featured a protagonist who battled forces that threatened the Russian state and its future. This renewed interest in the genre created new demand for foreign detectives, which was met primarily by the novels of James Hadley Chase (1906-85) and Agatha Christie. With the advent of perestroika, the fall of the Soviet Union, and a changed market, the detektiv, which “loosely encompasses murder mysteries, thrillers (alternatively called trillery), and sundry crime narratives” (Goscilo “Ratiocination”), became extremely popular. The lawlessness and criminalization of Russian society in the 1990s pushed readers towards narratives that reflected the reality of their daily life, yet provided a sense of assurance, since the crimes in the detektivy were usually resolved (Goscilo “Ratiocination”). Based on the foreign literary model of the Anglo-American murder mystery, the detektiv offers the intellectual thrill of following the detective’s rational mental processes to expose the perpetrator, explores the psychological complexities of the crime, and focuses on the motivation behind it. The return to Western models drastically changed the Soviet detektiv formula from the law enforcement officer who protects the well-being of the state to the emergence of a bona fide private investigator. The content of the detektiv changed as well to reflect Western originals:

Bodies, formerly in short supply, littered the pages, the identity of the villain only became known in the final dramatic climax, twists and red herrings became de rigueur, the personality of the investigating officer
became less two-dimensional, and the range of stylistic techniques widened considerably. (Morgan 99)

The changes introduced by a more liberal political policy made it possible for the market to respond to clamorous demands by readers, now widely exposed to Western culture, for more entertaining literature. As a result, models for the criminal investigator swiftly changed as readers avidly consumed narratives that melded fast-paced action with elements of daily life.

A number of detektiv sub-genres emerged in the 1990s, including the boevik (action novel) and zhenskii detektiv (female detective fiction). Read by a mostly-male audience, the boevik is a fast-paced adventure story in which a warrior-like masculine hero fights enemies who want to destroy the country. Based on “audiovisual foreign models” (Borenstein 161), such as Sylvester Stallone films, and overflowing with physical violence and gratuitous sex, the conflict is frequently resolved through gory physical combat, with little psychological development of the main hero. Women in the boevik usually appear as sex objects and victims, to be saved by the hyper-masculine hero, whose fights, chases, and violence pave the way for his eventual triumph over all threats. The most popular authors in this sub-genre of macho fantasy are Danill Koretskii and Viktor Dotsenko, whose Beshenyi (‘Mad Dog’) series spawned the “most popular and recognizable Russian action hero of the 1990s” (Borenstein 160). Drawing a clear distinction between good and evil, the boevik places the blame for Russia’s current problems on foreign villains and provides reassurance through the larger-than-life homegrown hero intent on protecting
the *rodina* from sinister plotters. In short, the genre retains many of the values touted by the Soviet state.

Lagging decades behind Western counterparts (Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, P.D. James, Ruth Rendell, Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, Lynda La Plante), the female detective writer only emerged in Russia in the 1990s. Aleksandra Marinina soared to the top of the bestselling charts in the mid-1990s to become the reigning ‘queen’ of the genre, and was later joined by Tat’iana Poliakova, Maria Serova, Tat’iana Ustinova, Polina Dashkova, Ol’ga Troitskaia, and Dar’ia Dontsova in the 2000s. Focusing on the psychological motivations behind the crime, the female detective was a novelty in a male-dominated genre populated by cardboard action heroes intent on shooting their way to a stunning finale. The *zhenskii detektiv* “focuses on relationships, eschews descriptions of extreme violence and often blends the classical detective paradigm with other paradigms such as adventure and romance” (Morgan 100). Dashkova frequently portrays naïve heroines who stumble upon a crime, then are helped by a male love interest to solve the mystery. Dashkova, who usually invents a new heroine for each novel, puts her clever, well-educated, and moral protagonist at the wrong place at the wrong time. Emerging out of her protected and insular world, the heroine is forced to survive in a risk-laden environment where she encounters violence for the first time. In a different and much lighter vein, the three protagonists of Dontsova’s series—Evlampiia Romanova, Viola Tarakanova, and Dasha Vasil’eva—are amateur sleuths embroiled in soap-opera plots who unravel crimes through female intuition. These mysteries are largely
optimistic and have a fairy-tale element, features that doubtlessly have contributed to their widespread success.

By contrast, Marinina offers intellectual and nonviolent mysteries, where the crime is a logical puzzle solved by intellect, not by physical violence.\(^2^9\) Her alter-ego heroine, Anastasia Kamenskaia, is a lieutenant colonel in the Moscow police noted for her deductive abilities and her passion for solving crime puzzles (in this respect she resembles Holmes, Poirot, Miss Marple, and Precious Ramotswe). Unlike the femmes fatales found in hard-boiled detective fiction, Kamenskaia uses her brain, not her body; while her physical appearance is nondescript and inconspicuous, her mind is extremely sharp. Her appeal for readers partially stems from her ordinariness, and Marinina emphasizes Kamenskaia's emotional and physical limitations. An expert at research and deduction, Kamenskaia tackles her responsibilities with a high degree of professionalism and dedication. Marinina's *detektivy* depict a world of rampant crime, in which corruption has permeated the upper levels of the government, and the police force and security services cannot be trusted to act solely for the public good. Whereas Dontsova and Dashkova create a romance-tinged reality, Marinina directly confronts contemporary social issues and the grimness of post-Soviet reality, soberly reflecting on Russia's current conditions. Marinina's success with a male and female readership can be attributed to such factors as

\(^2^9\) Marina Alekseevna (b. 1957), who worked as a lieutenant colonel at the Moscow police, published her first novel under the pseudonym Aleksandra Marinina in 1993 (*Stechenie obstoitel'stv* (A Confluence of Circumstances)). Since then she has written over thirty novels, seen several of the Kamenskaia novels turned into a popular sixteen-part TV miniseries (*Kamenskaia* (1999-2000)), and won numerous literary awards.
her complex and interwoven plots, which emphasize the psychological motivations of her characters, her references to literary classics and high culture, and her readable prose style (Borenstein 134-35). Her authorial commentaries on the state of Russian society and her acknowledgement of the fact that the criminal will not always be punished bring Marinina’s world and the Russian detective genre in line with contemporary crime fiction.

Revision or revolution?: Akunin’s appeal to readers

If Marinina “revitalized the standard Soviet procedural formula” (Morgan 101) by creating a new kind of professional and psychologically developed police investigator working in modern Russia, Akunin has crafted a morally sound private detective steeped in the rich tradition of the nineteenth century. Tapping into Russians’ nostalgia for an era when political and everyday life was perceived as less chaotic and calmer than it is today, Akunin creates a safe and contained environment for his narratives. His novels rely on the nostalgically-tinted perceptions of the late nineteenth century—an era that Russians believe was a more civilized age, where people acted in a proper and just manner, and when the image of the British gentleman was the ideal behavioral model. While this romantic view of the era is largely inaccurate, it satisfies readers’ desire to escape from the violent and disorientating modern world and be transported back to an age where life seems to have been reassuringly ordered and protected.
from chaos.\footnote{The recent global success of the hugely popular BBC series \textit{Downton Abbey} is a testament to viewers’ desire to return to an era where order and decorum prevailed and where a segment of the population lived amidst vast wealth. Such costume dramas give viewers access to a world that they will never experience directly and takes them away from their everyday \textit{realia} for an hour each Sunday evening (the day and time the program is broadcast on PBS in the U.S.).} Akunin’s narratives evoke nineteenth-century novels by Dickens, Balzac, Hugo, Dostoevskii, and Doyle, relying on a ‘tried and true’ genre to pull in his readers and create an environment where good usually triumphs over evil, the criminal is punished, and justice prevails. However, Akunin has modified the genre’s formulaic elements and expectations to bring his fictional world close to contemporary Russia, where politicians are corrupt, crime is rampant, greed is pervasive, and the ‘good guy’ does not always ‘come out on top.’ While appearing safe at first glance, Fandorin’s milieu is actually a mirror reflection of the modern world, enhanced by some added touches of stylish and gentlemanly behavior.\footnote{The Fandorin novels are set in 1876-1914. Akunin published the “last” Fandorin novel in November 2012, yet he has said that there will be two more Fandorin collections of short stories about the sleuth’s adventures in the early twentieth century.}

Akunin’s attraction for Russian readers extends beyond the glamorous world depicted in his historical \textit{detektivy}. In contrast to the authors of translated foreign popular novels that saturated the Russian market in the 1990s, Akunin is a Russian brand targeting a Russian audience; i.e. the Fandorin novels are a homegrown series created by ‘one of their own’ (\textit{svoi}). The novels are not cheap, imported, lowbrow thrillers and romances brimming with sex and violence written for a Western readers. Moreover, Akunin has carved out a niche in Russian popular fiction thanks to the quality of his novels. He writes well, and his
prose attracts the more educated reader who wants to read a gripping and exciting adventure novel, yet also wants to engage with complicated or philosophical issues cast in correct, even stylish Russian. In answering a question about the secret of Akunin's success, Russian scholar Elena Rabinovich said:

Quality is probably the most important [element]. Akunin writes well and coherently. It has almost never happened [in Russia] that a person who can write at a relatively high level for this type of literature has undertaken this.32

His fans commend Akunin for offering a new kind of detective novel—‘cultural crime novels’ (“культурные детективы”)—that are perceived as “more difficult, i.e. more cultural” (“сложнее, то есть культурнее” (Ranchin)) than those offered by other popular writers. Akunin has made it possible for Russians to engage with a narrative that combines the excitement of an adventure novel with the detective genre written in their native language in a style vaguely associated with an earlier, less fraught era. In a sense, Akunin has legitimated the genre. In fact, he famously announced that he started writing detective novels so that his wife would not be ashamed to read such works in the Moscow metro. The anticipated audience of his Fandorin series is the intellectual or pseudo-intellectual who wants to be considered educated, but who also yearns for entertaining literature that provides mental engagement and the excitement of

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32 “Наверно, главное все-таки — качество. Акунин хорошо пишет, складно. У нас почти не бывало, чтобы человек, который умеет писать на достаточно высоком для такого рода литературы уровне, за это брался.”
adventure. In this respect, Akunin cleverly taps into the Russian market and what today's Russian readers demand.  

In addition, Akunin’s popularity stems from the political atmosphere and cultural milieu of the era he evokes. His novels conjure up Russia at the peak of its imperial glory, providing the reader with a glimpse into the unknown world of the Russian imperial court and its pre-revolutionary wealth and glamour, an era rendered all the more impressive and alluring in the wake of the economic disasters and political chaos of the 1990s and early 2000s. The Fandorin novels also guide the reader on a tour through mysterious and exotic locales and plots: Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish War; an international luxury ocean liner; Japan in the 1880s; the foreign spies spinning intricate conspiracies to wreck havoc in Russia; Moscow's seedy criminal underworld and cultural

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33 Akunin has said the following on the differences between popular and highbrow literature: “Отличие массовой литературы от литературы высоколобой заключается, на мой взгляд, в следующем. Высоколобая литература раздвигает рамки литературы, она создает новые формы, она все время экспериментирует. Ею не может наслаждаться большое количество людей, потому что она рассчитана на людей очень взыскательных, на профи. В то же время функция массовой литературы [...] не монолог художника с Богом или с самим собой, а диалог с читателем. Это очень вежливый жанр. Она все время держит в поле зрения большое количество людей и все время помнит о том, что «я балбачу не для себя, я должен быть интересным, у меня люди не должны вставать и выходить из зала».” (“In my opinion, popular literature differs from highbrow literature in the following way. Highbrow literature expands literature's boundaries by creating new forms and by constantly experimenting. The majority of people cannot enjoy this kind of literature because it is targeted at sophisticated people or professionals. At the same time, the function of popular literature is not a monologue between the artist and God or with himself, but is a dialogue with the reader. This is a very polite genre. It always keeps in mind a large number of people and is constantly reminded that “I am not talking for myself. I have to be interesting [so that] people don’t get up and leave the room””) (See http://mir24.tv/news/culture/3731813).
underground; and the secret workings of terrorist cells. To lend his narratives credibility, Akunin saturates them with references to historical events and innovations that enrich the reader’s experience, thereby transporting the reader back not only to an earlier era, but also to a world recognizable through a general knowledge of classical literature and history. Russian readers’ familiarity with and enthusiasm for Doyle, Christie, and other detective writers is essential to an appreciation of the Fandorin world; readers of the Fandorin series negotiate an understandable and familiar terrain. Despite the certainty of the outcome—Fandorin will prevail against another devious opponent after a thrilling battle of wits—the reader’s excitement is sustained through a series of nail-biting episodes leading to the ending, which frequently benefits from a surprising twist.

What accounts for Akunin’s current status as the most popular, best-selling writer in Russia? Above all, he stands out from his contemporaries in crime fiction through his savvy overt and hidden references to classical Russian and foreign literature—in a genre considered lowbrow. Educated readers find self-affirmation in decoding the intertextuality of the intellectual puzzle; during the course of the novel, the reader uncovers allusions to various texts, is able to identify the criminal, and finds (self-)satisfaction in grasping the veiled (and not-so-veiled) references to present day reality. The Fandorin series deftly constructs a narrative composed of several layers: a formal story, historical and cultural references, and an authorial philosophy (Sobolev 67-68), which on this merit alone distinguishes Akunin from his peers. Yet a cleverly structured
narrative, a recognizable historical world, an engaging interplay, and a challenging philosophy are not enough to sustain a reader’s interest over a series of fourteen novels to date. What is needed is a daring and attractive detective hero.

As blogs devoted to Akunin’s series testify, his protagonist is the chief seduction of the Fandorin franchise. Unique in the genre of the detektiv, Erast Fandorin is a new kind of protagonist, combing traits of the romantic hero and the rational detective—a mixture/synthesis of such predecessors as Dupin, Holmes, Pechorin, Stavrogin, and countless others from nineteenth century Russian literature. The figure of the gentleman detective, long established in British detective fiction as “natural and organic” (“естественна и органична”), is a rara avis in Russia (“то в России джентльмен-сыщик выглядит белой вороной”) (“Boris Akunin”). Boasting good looks, stylishness, intellectual powers, integrity, and commitment to his calling, such a figure is a novelty in Russian detective fiction and one that readers have flocked to in droves. Unlike the aloof and evasive Holmes, Fandorin is profoundly human: an orphan, he stutters, loses his wife and other women he loves, and struggles against society’s ills. In the Russian context, he is forced to deal with the same kind of problems that his readers face: personal struggles and loss, tough moral decisions, living in (or on the verge of) a rapidly changing society and under a corrupt government. His eccentricity and stiff reserve create a mystery around the Russian sleuth, prompting the reader to return to each new installment in the series in the hope of discovering new revelations about Fandorin. Much like his Western
predecessors, Fandorin adheres to a strict moral code, but it is based on a combination of Eastern and Western values, which, in his interactions, sets him apart from other Russian and foreign private investigators. Outside the rich history of Western European detective tradition, Akunin has fashioned a unique and developing protagonist specifically geared to a Russian society undergoing rapid and painful changes. Judging by the Akunin/Fandorin websites and blogs and Akunin’s LiveJournal site, the Russian author is involved in a rich dialogical relationship with his readers, ensuring that they continue to have a vested interest in the fate of his detective hero. Such a relationship can only add to Akunin/Fandorin’s unprecedented charisma.

**Conclusion**

As anti-Putin demonstrations in 2012 and 2013 in Russia’s major cities illustrate, the nascent middle class has started to demand justice, stability, and accountability from the government. Thus Akunin’s Fandorin series not only satisfies consumers’ demand for entertainment, but also belongs to a literature for the new middle class—a mixture of pulp fiction and highbrow aspirations, or what one might call middlebrow fiction (*srednelobnaia proza*). Perhaps most importantly, in the figure of Fandorin Akunin has elaborated a uniquely multi-purpose protagonist around whom the series revolves. As numerous blogs confirm, many perceive Fandorin as a hero for post-Soviet Russia—a ‘moral citizen’ for a new and troubled age, one in which persistent action in the interests of justice seems rare among Russian citizenry. Thus the drama of
Akunin’s man of action may well fulfill a compensatory function for readers unused to challenging the status quo, not unlike the role of Harlequin romances for female audiences devoid of a romantic male ideal who find passive pleasure in a fictional version of that paragon.

Akunin has gained international success and renown in part because his historical and action-packed detective narratives depict an era that attracts a variety of readers and boasts a hero of our (i.e. Russia’s) time. Like many of their Western cousins, Russian detective novels portray the national experience, depicting a country that has undergone accelerated and radical political, social, and cultural transformations. Despite the proliferation of crime novels in post-Soviet Russia, Akunin is the only Russian writer of detective fiction to have found a measure of success in the West. Marinina, Dontsova, Dashkova, and Dotsenko have not been translated into English and have not achieved the astounding popularity of Scandinavian detective fiction in Europe or in the Anglophone world. While it remains to be seen whether Russian detective fiction can make inroads into Western markets, there is no doubt that the genre has experienced a remarkable rebirth in Russia in the past two decades. Even amid declining sales, it looks as though Russians will be willing to part with their hard-earned rubles for many years to come in order to indulge in entertaining literature that confronts the crime accompanying the transition to a post-Soviet state.

34 It is not surprising that Akunin is better known in Europe than he is in the U.S. He regularly attends international book fairs (in Britain, Germany, Italy), owns a home in France, and has a more public profile overall in Europe than in the U.S.
Chapter 2
The Fandorin Chronotope: Time and Setting

“Place, after all, is where the characters play out their tragicomedies, and it is only if the action is firmly rooted in a physical reality that we can enter fully into their world.”

P.D. James, Talking About Detective Fiction

“Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch’s hand moves more quickly than did mine.”

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart”

The first assertion above, by British crime writer P.D. James, contends that one of the most important elements of any detective novel is the setting, because it “exerts a unifying and dominant influence on both the characters and the plot” (131). As proof of this statement, James mentions examples of memorable settings in Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights, Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, E.M. Forster’s Howards End, and George Eliot’s Middlemarch; one could add to this far-from-extensive list seminal works such as Conan Doyle’s The Hound of the Baskervilles, Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles, Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express, and James Joyce’s Ulysses. While a detailed description elaborates an objectified sense of place, the temporal framework of a detective novel is equally important. The detective has to solve the mystery, meaning that s/he has not only to
recreate the biographical background of the victim or suspect, but also to retrace the events and victim’s movements leading up to the discovery of the corpse or the perpetration of the crime. This results in a kind of spatial-temporal triangle, where who did what is directly related to where and when that person was located. All of these are essential elements that must be in place in order for the investigator to solve the crime. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, or the relationship between *chronos*/time and *topos*/place, can be a useful instrument in analyzing detective fiction, especially when looking at how time and place are handled in terms of the crime and its investigation.

Though place is easily particularized in the Erast Fandorin novels, one of Akunin’s main challenges is to create a convincing sense of the end of the nineteenth century. And most of his efforts are expended on depicting a felt temporality. There are three time registers in the novels: (1) the historical era; (2) the establishment of a precise time for each crime, as well as suspects’ whereabouts at any given moment, i.e. who did what when (as well as where); and (3) the passage of time in a city, in an army camp, and on board ship. Though time supersedes space in importance, Akunin relies on various genres used in detective fiction to diversify setting: the crimes in the series occur in Moscow, in the midst of the Russo-Turkish war, and on an enclosed luxury liner. These choices allow Fandorin to travel, bringing him into contact with a wide array of individuals, ideologies, and philosophies. Fandorin’s adventures give Akunin the opportunity to engage with *zlobodnevnye voprosy*, or the ‘burning issues of the day,’ and to comment on Russian society today.
Bakhtin: the crime chronotope

Bakhtin discusses the chronotope in terms of its “intrinsic generic significance” (84-85), drawing his examples from the Greek romance up to the Rabelaisian novel. Bakhtin defines, albeit rather loosely, various chronotopes that are found in literature, including, among others, the adventure chronotope, the idyllic chronotope, the chronotope of the road, etc. In the genre of detective fiction, the chronotope addresses not the specifics of place and time so critical in establishing the identity of the murderer, but an author’s treatment of the two interrelated categories. As Bakhtin contends, authors manipulate time through the “special increase in density and concreteness of time markers—the time of human life, of historical time—that occurs within well-delineated special areas” (250). When confronted with a confined space, time inevitably is perceived to ‘slow down’ (e.g., a prison, a hospital ward, an army camp) and becomes the object of focus. Time becomes subject to change; it swells and diminishes, losing its urgency. In the detective novel, most significantly in the locked-room mystery located in an isolated setting, the “slow-motion chronotope” (Ladin 221) is often enclosed within the general narrative framework, and, with the walls seemingly moving in and with the protagonist desperately seeking a way out, this chronotope creates “a claustrophobic effect, narrowing narrative space and dilating narrative time, so that the narrator’s tale actually threatens to swallow the reader” (Ladin 222). The restricted and contracting setting is relayed through the protagonist’s growing sense of shrinking space and, in the crime or
horror novel, growing sense of terror. These chronotopes enter into a dialogical relationship, playing off one another, eventually drawing readers and their time into the fray through their intense involvement in the narrative. The reader is so caught up in the action of the novel that s/he, in a sense, becomes involved in the action and is concerned about the fate of the detective hero. In this way, the chronotope “enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers” (Bakhtin 252), thus implying that the reader is pulled from his chronotope and enters the time and space of the narrative. This sensation usurps the reader’s initial intention to engage with the story as an intellectual puzzle to solve and replaces it with the reader’s increasing investment in the fate of the characters. In this case, the three chronotopes interact—the slow movement of time, the overarching timeframe of the narrative, and the reader’s own time and place.

Of the four Fandorin novels discussed in this study, perhaps the best example of tracing the movements of time is Leviafan, where time turns into an endless span of days spent within the confines of the ship. Space becomes crucial because its limitations allow time to assume greater significance. Spatial constraints transform the passengers into prisoners, as, trapped and incapable of leaving, they experience mounting terror, since no one knows the identity of

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35 This sensation is perhaps most skillfully depicted in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), where the narrator literally moves more slowly than time. As the narrator recounts his tale from his prison cell, the reader experiences how time becomes amplified during the narrator’s confession as the walls move in to enclose him and the murderer’s senses are amplified (he literally hears the beating of the dead man’s heart).
the murderer. Tension builds through the knowledge that the killer is among them and no one can predict who will become the next victim.

This scenario is well laid out in Agatha Christie’s (1890-1976) novel Ten Little Indians/And Then There Were None (1939), which brings together ten people on an island, all of whom are subsequently murdered in sequence. There, too, the tension and fear are heightened because there is no way off the island. And since the isolation of the place also means that there is no ‘outsider,’ the simple fact that the murderer is ‘one of them’ creates a palpable, increasing sense of terror. While borrowing from Christie, Akunin reduces the space within which time ticks away by shrinking her island to a liner. And the resultant augmentation of tension is further underscored by the very instability of a vessel in open waters, as opposed to the terra firma in Christie’s famous mystery.

By contrast, the movement of time is depicted differently in the other three Fandorin novels. In Azazel’, time moves in chronological order from May to September 1876, with a few temporal gaps in the narrative. Time moves forward at a ‘normal’ pace, except for a few key moments in the plot, such as Akhimas’s attack on Fandorin, when events occur[ed] very quickly, “but to Erast Fandorin time seemed to be standing still. He had time to notice many things, time to think about many things, but he was quite unable to move” (66) (“но Эраста Петровичу померещилось, что время застыло. Он много успевал заметить, о много успевал подумать. Только вот двинуться никак не было возможности”(62)). Time is suspended again right after the explosion of the bomb that results in Lizardka’s death and “everything was quiet, dark, and
peaceful” (241) (“Какое-то время было тихо, темно и покойно” (223)). Time moves more rapidly in Smert’ Akhillesa (The Death of Achilles): the narrative is structured within a condensed framework made up of four tension-filled days, during which Fandorin is engaged in a race to capture the villain before the latter flees Russia. Shifting narrative viewpoints serve to slow down the narrative periodically because the same events are frequently told from the different perspectives of the two main characters. In addition, Smert’ Akhillesa contains a dual narrative structure. Relying on a device most easily seen in Arthur Conan Doyle’s A Study in Scarlett (1887), Akunin interrupts his narrative just over halfway through at a pivotal point in the plot, to travel back in time to tell Akhimas’s story.36

Temporality slows in Turetskii gambit (The Turkish Gambit) and there are gaps of several months at a time. Most of the action takes place in a Russian army camp where everyone is waiting for something to happen: for the siege to be over, for the army to move forward, for the war to end. To compensate for special constraints, the narrative fills in the biographical details of the major players through letters, stories, diplomatic reports, and newspaper items. This device provides the characters with ways to pass the time as they continue their endless wait.

Space is crucial when its limitations allow time to assume greater significance. People who are not mobile and have to spend days confined to one...

36 Doyle leaves Holmes and Watson in London, while the narrative and reader travel back in time to Utah to reveal a Mormon conspiracy that is directly tied to the murdered victim in the present.
place eventually rely on interiority to expand a sense of time. Locked in the confines of the upper deck, the passengers on the *Leviathan* launch into philosophical discussions, tell personal stories, and engage with current political events in order to get through the long, seemingly endless days on board. In *Turetskii gambit*, the relatively restricted setting of the Russian army camp and the siege of Plevna allow the group to discuss issues of women’s liberation, global events, and political ideology. The introduction of Fandorin’s Japanese manservant Masa in *Smert’ Akhillesa* provides Akunin the opportunity to comment on Russians and xenophobia from a foreigner’s viewpoint. Upon his return to Moscow from a four-year sojourn in Japan, Fandorin, who has accepted many tenets of Eastern philosophy, is able to implement his new ideas in his Moscow life. As physical space constricts, time has to expand in compensation.

The detective novel is often built around the crime of murder, which the detective hero and reader investigate, eventually arriving at a resolution, or final solution, to the crime. Tzvetan Todorov argues that the classic detective story has a dual structure, and, by extension, dual temporalities, since it presents two stories—the story of the crime and the story of the investigation (44). In the classic formula, the crime takes place in the “murder time” or “real time” of the narrative, which continues until the investigation begins. At that juncture, time moves backward as the investigation retraces events, thus creating a double

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37 The story of the crime, which tells what actually happened (the *fabula* in Formalist terms) ends before the second story (the *siuzhet*) begins, which subsequently explains “how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it [the crime]” (45). There is no action in the story of the investigation, rather the characters learn as they gather information to solve the crime.
temporality. Yet this paradigm has changed since the Golden Age of detective fiction, when private investigators such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot never seemed to do very much to solve the crime. They did not travel very far from the location where the body was discovered; they largely detected and deduced from their observations; and, most importantly, they never came under deadly threat. The basic formula has remained the same—a corpse is discovered along with several clues, and the investigator must retrace the events that resulted in that moment; however, what happens next has become important for contemporary authors who emphasize suspense. The reader’s interest “is sustained by the expectation of what will happen” (Todorov 47), because the story no longer begins and ends with the solution as to why the corpse is there; instead the story moves forward from that initial discovery. The narrative captures the reader’s attention because “the desire to know “whodunit” is excited alongside the fear that whoever it was might repeat his crime” (Porter 328). This is the dominant tenant today when the detective is no longer ‘safe’; s/he is frequently the target of the criminal and subject to bodily harm.38

Although the detective genre has changed from the framework of the whodunit, it continues to portray two mirror narratives—one that moves backward in time as the investigator reconstructs the events leading to the

38 James Bond is frequently captured and tortured in Ian Fleming’s novels and the subsequent Bond films, while Henning Mankell’s Kurt Wallander is shot, kidnapped, and chased. Jo Nesbo’s detective protagonist Harry Hole is a virtual superman who cannot be killed. He has been shot, kidnapped, buried alive, and tortured. Additionally, he increasingly comes under pressure in a race to save his ‘loved ones’ from a villain’s revenge (his love interest Rakel and her son, Oleg, end up in dangerous and life-threatening situations in the later novels in the series).
discovery of the corpse or the crime, and the subsequent story of the investigation. The second story is frequently set in the present day. And the detective protagonist is often flawed and struggles to come to terms with the modern world, thereby allowing the author to introduce complex moral issues into the narrative.

**Historical crime fiction: setting the stage**

Stephen Knight has noted that the British love “to revisit the past” (145), and the soaring popularity of the crime fiction sub-genre, the historical mystery, is a testament to this passion among readers not only in Britain, but also worldwide. The publication of Agatha Christie’s *Death Comes As the End* (1944), a historical mystery set in ancient Egypt, and John Dickson Carr’s *The Bride of Newgate* (1950), set at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, launched this new brand of mystery. Since the end of World War II, the volume of historical crime fiction has multiplied and has expanded beyond Britain. Umberto Eco’s (b. 1932) landmark *The Name of the Rose* (1980), a detective narrative set in a Benedictine abbey in Medieval Italy, perhaps deserves a great deal of the credit for the widespread popularity of historical crime fiction. Charles Rzepka posits that “Eco’s book helped to launch a new wave of ‘historical’ detective novels set in various eras of the near and distant past, ranging from ancient Rome to nineteenth-century New York City” (232). According to *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery*, a historical mystery is:
either entirely set in some particular period but was not written during it
(“period” mystery), or that has a detective investigating an event more or
less remote in time (“transhistorical” mystery). Of these two types, the
former is the most [sic] difficult to handle. (247)

A partial list of historical mysteries includes such international writers as James
Ellroy (b. 1948) (his novels are set in 1940s Los Angeles), Walter Mosley (b.
1952) (post-WWII Los Angeles), Caleb Carr (b. 1955) (1890s New York), Michael
Pearce (b. 1933) (Tsarist Russia), Anne Perry (b. 1938) (Victorian England),
Lindsey Davis (b. 1949) (her Falco novels take place in the Roman empire), Iain
Pears (b. 1955) (An Instance of the Fingerpost (1998), England in 1663), and
Akunin’s Pelegia series (which depict the adventures of a crime-solving nun in
turn-of-the century Russia). Not surprisingly, given the popularity of the
medium, historical mysteries have crossed over into television: Cadfael (1994-
98) stars Derek Jacobi as a medieval monk who investigates murders; Foyle’s
War (created by Anthony Horowitz, 2002 -) is set during and after World War II
in England and revolves around Chief Superintendent Christopher Foyle’s
criminal investigations; and BBC America’s Copper (created by Tom Fontana and
Will Rokos, 2012), depicting the investigations of a maverick Irish police
detective in New York City in 1864, proved to be a hit with audiences in the
autumn of 2012. The success of these novels and TV series begs the question of
what is the attraction for readers and viewers in historical crime fiction? Knight
contends that “this new subgenre indicates both the flexibility of crime fiction,
here appropriating the historical novel, and the recurring need among many
readers for a [sic] fully escapist, cultural weighty data” (146). By traveling back to the past, readers can revisit the glories of a previous era, engage in nostalgia, or completely sever themselves from their present lives to embark on an exciting adventure.

By setting his Fandorin series in the late nineteenth century, Akunin faces the task not only of establishing a historical period, but also of credibly sustaining the illusion of a past era. For writers of historical crime fiction, it is not enough to create a believable world based on the reader’s presumed knowledge of an earlier period; rather, the author has to furnish his world with a “wealth of period detail,” including “descriptions of daily life, clothes, foods, houses, transportation, social activities, and more” (Scaggs 126), so that readers have a particularized sense of the time period. For the story to be relevant to the reader, the era should be related to the present and evoke some kind of emotional or intellectual response. Akunin’s Fandorin series relies on readers’ pleasure not only in solving a challenging puzzle, but also in unraveling references to historical events and reliving an exciting era.

Akunin cannily draws on a period that many Russians perceive as a glorious era for their country—a period that coincided with the emergence, then the establishment, of the modern detective novel within the increasingly lucrative realm of popular fiction. Contemporary readers familiar with the detective novels of Poe, Conan Doyle, or Christie feel comfortable with the conventions of the genre when they turn to Akunin’s works, where they find aesthetic satisfaction in following the twists and turns of cases set approximately
in the period associated with detective fiction’s most famous early creators: Conan Doyle’s inaugural Holmes mystery, *A Study in Scarlet*, appeared in 1887. Akunin’s reliance on readers’ associative tendencies may be seen in *Leviafan*, where he presents precisely ten suspects, thereby referencing Christie’s most successful work, *Ten Little Indians/ And Then There Were None* (1939)—adapted more than once to the screen.

To create what Henry James called “a habitable background,” Akunin relies on a tried and true practice of the detective genre: loading the mysteries with specific references to dates, times, and locations, including newspaper articles, letters, notes, police reports, diplomatic reports, and personal journals. Akunin references current events and pressing issues of the era, such as widespread terrorism, global competition, modern inventions and gadgets, and scientific innovation. He employs Peter the Great’s infamous table of ranks and invokes modes of address that identify a person’s status in society and political power. The narratives are saturated with references to popular trends of the day and fashion. In fact, clothes, uniforms, and accessories figure prominently in the novels—indeed, Fandorin is a smartly dressed dandy. This helps to create the illusion of a glamorous era when high society, and court and public officials, enjoyed vast privilege. These techniques aid the reader in envisioning an era that

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39 A recent example of credibly establishing a historical era is the movie *Argo* (Ben Affleck, 2012), which mainly takes place in 1979. Affleck deftly recreates the year 1979 through fashions, hairstyles, and references to cultural and historical events. He mixes real news broadcasts with fictional ones, includes period music, and employs grainy cinematography. The viewer is immediately transported to a 1979 that is believable and ‘authentic.’
has largely only been present in history books and, in the post-Soviet era, is perceived as a time when Russia was great and strong.

Yet Akunin’s historical era is not entirely rooted in historical fact. The author shapes, molds, and inverts the time period for his own purposes. In a sense, Akunin ‘manufactures’ or ‘repackages’ history and the era that he wants to portray, crafting an illusion of reality that is similar to the actual historical era, but which also contains elements from the author’s actual world. Akunin manipulates historical facts to fit his plots, characters, and ideology, but it is a world that is still recognizable to the modern reader. In historical fiction “the law of verisimilitude is often bent, and depictions of past places and cultures will often lie somewhere along a line that stretches from the realistic, but alien, to the palatable, but anachronistically modern” (Hunt 37). Akunin populates his mysteries with characters based on actual historical figures, yet he alters them enough so that, while recognizable, they cross the line of reality and thus become part of the historical world created by the author. For example, General Mikhail Sobolev is loosely based on the Russian General Mikhail Skobelev, and Moscow's Governor General Prince Vladimir Dolgorukoi conjures up Moscow's founder, Yuri Dolgorukoi, former Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, and President Boris Yeltsin. These recognizable historical figures help to authenticate Akunin's historical viewpoint and familiarize the era for the modern reader, who is fascinated by “pre-revolutionary history, aristocratic genealogy, antiques and ancient manuscripts” (Marsh 311). Akunin relies on the historical crime fiction genre to provide a rich and attractive background for his purpose of telling a
compelling story and relaying a specific ideology that taps into a perceptible longing to find continuity in a fragmented world.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a period of political chaos and economic destruction that forced a global superpower to its knees. Post-Soviet Russia was plunged into poverty and hardship so severe that a proud nation had to beg for financial aid from its former political enemies. It is natural during such a dramatic period for people to look back and to some extent idealize daily life before the revolutionary changes occurred. Popular nostalgia is frequently used as a “defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (Boym xiv) as people search for meaning in a tumultuous present. Svetlana Boym identifies two types of nostalgia: (1) restorative nostalgia, which attempts to rebuild the past through nationalist revivals, engages in the myth-making of history, and reconstructs the monuments of the past (41); and (2) reflective nostalgia, in which the past is seen as the past and no attempt is made to reconstruct it. Akunin’s works can be viewed as restorative nostalgia in that they engage with Russians’ perceived memory of the end of the nineteenth century as a more stable and understandable epoch than the present one, even if that past is seen through ‘rose-colored glasses.’ Actually, the period witnessed the growth of the revolutionary movement, widespread violence, political assassinations, terrorist groups, rampant corruption, and a huge disparity in wealth. Indeed, in this sense, the era has similarities with Russia today, which no doubt also attracts readers to Akunin’s works. Boym states that the turbulent 1990s “was accompanied by a
popular nostalgia either for the nation’s past glory or at least for the stability and normality that preceded the epoch of great change” (66). Russian President Vladimir Putin has skillfully used nostalgic sentiment by relying on Soviet myths, patriotic language, autocratic behavior, and public antics to retain his firm grip on power. Boym points out that “nostalgia relies on temporal and spatial distance” (70) and the fact that Putin has essentially built his autocratic regime on a longing for stability, a desire to restore an ancient nation’s pride, and a yearning for Russia to regain its ‘rightful place’ on the global stage is a testament to the power of restorative nostalgia (and to Putin’s propaganda machine). Not only politicians are using Soviet nostalgia. Post-Soviet Russian cinema taps into this hunger for an idealized glorious past, the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II (which is the single event uniting all Russians today), and Russia’s desire to embark on its own path. Akunin lures his readers into the attractive nineteenth century, but then he uses that forum to present his personal, political, and social views—opinions that are repeatedly at odds with the official rhetoric.

**Azazel**: establishing the historical era

Wasting no time in providing the reader with a temporal framework, Akunin’s first novel establishes a precise time and location right away in the first paragraph: "понедельник 13 мая 1876 года в третьем часу по полудни, в день по-весеннему и по-летнему теплый, в Александровском саду...” (7)“On Monday the thirteenth of May in the year 1876, between the hours of two and three in the afternoon on a day that combined the freshness of spring
with the warmth of summer, numerous individuals in Moscow’s Alexander Garden...” (3)). This precise setting is reminiscent of the opening paragraph of Ivan Turgenev’s (1818-83) *Fathers and Children* (*Otsy i deti* (1862)), which establishes the date (20 May 1859), setting, and social class in the novel in the first paragraph, critical details in a narrative concerned with generational conflict on the eve of the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. *Azazel’* takes place near the end of the relatively liberal reign of Tsar Aleksandr II (1818-81), who ruled for nearly three decades and who freed the serfs (in a nod to Turgenev). During the four months depicted in the novel, there are numerous references to specific dates, and calendar dates are inserted repeatedly into the text through postmarks and newspapers. In this way, Akunin establishes the scene and, at the same time, links *Azazel’* with classical works of Russian literature, a technique that accesses “certain associations in the popular imagination” (Scaggs 126) about that historical era through readers’ familiarity with the so-called Russian classics. While useful in evoking the atmosphere of the previous age, saturating a narrative with specific dates and times is not enough to establish a believable historical era.

To delineate the time period and establish the importance of social status in it, Akunin relies on linguistic markers, employing addresses and titles that were widely used in late nineteenth-century Russia. This not only authenticates his historical narrative, but also places the reader in a setting reminiscent of nineteenth-century Russian novels. In Akunin’s narrative, the reader encounters such old-fashioned titles and addresses as *sudar’/sudarynia* (‘Sir,’ ‘Madame’),
baryshnia ('young woman'), and vashe vysokoblagorodie ('Your Worship'), as well as hereditary titles that were abolished by the 1917 Revolution (prince, count, Grand Duke). Additionally, the first names and patronymics of Akunin's characters evoke an earlier age and many of them are rarely used in Russia today (Ksarverii Feofilaktovich, Porfirii Martynovich, Agrafena Kondratievna), yet they are often encountered in the novels of Dostoevskii or Tolstoi. The presence of ethnic Germans in the narrative (Lizan'ka's governess, Fraulein Pful', Ivan Brilling) harks back to Peter the Great and the Germans who moved to Russia during his reign and later under Catherine the Great, as well as to the plethora of Germans in classic Russian short stories and novels, from Germann in “The Queen of Spades” (1834), Schiller in “Nevskii Prospekt” (1835) to the elderly pawnbroker in Crime and Punishment (1866), and Stolz in Oblomov (1859).

Descriptions of contemporary clothing also convey the time period and Akunin refers to fashion throughout the narrative. Fandorin wears a Lord Byron corset (which was not only fashionable at the time, but serves a dual purpose when the corset deflects the knife used in the attack on Fandorin, thus saving his life) and he is always impeccably dressed. Several characters wear a pince-nez, which was a fashionable accessory during the era, and are stylishly dressed, such as the young aristocrat Nikolai Akhtyrtsev, while Amalia Bezhetskaia is “lovely” in a formal scarlet dress. To further create a sense of time and popular trends,

40 Indeed, Akunin has said that he often goes to cemeteries to seek out older names on gravestones that he later uses in his novels.
Akunin cites advertisements from popular magazines and describes social events. The wedding of Lizan’ka and Fandorin, who is marrying into a higher social class, is a major social event, with “all of Moscow” gathered at the function, including Moscow Governor General Prince Dolgorukoi. Fashion, advertisements, and social events fill in the historical details, helping the reader identify Akunin’s temporality.

Time is also delimited in the narrative through references to current cultural events in 1876, such as a new Dostoevskii novel (Dnevnik pisatelia [The Writer’s Diary], 1876), and to other contemporary authors, including the American writer Mark Twain. In a not-so-subtle nod to the state of Russia in the late 1990s, Akunin depicts a police force plagued with an outbreak of terrorism in the country fueled by nihilists and other organizations, which causes Brilling to state that the fate of Russia is at stake, “судьба России на карту поставлена” (73). Fandorin uncovers a global conspiracy in which powerful countries are conspiring to encroach upon Russia’s oil rights in the Caspian Sea, parallels to which can be drawn in NATO’s rapid eastward expansion after the fall of the Soviet Union and in Western companies flooding the Russian market with goods and services during the Yeltsin era.

Fandorin, as a member of the technological vanguard, is fascinated by recent technological inventions, such as the telephone, described by Brilling as: “Это настоящее чудо современной науки” (“That is a genuine miracle of...

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41 Incidentally, the latest Fandorin novel Chernyi gorod (The Black City, 2012) is set in oil-rich Baku on the eve of World War I.
modern science” (161). The St. Petersburg detective also provides Fandorin with a new model, special order Belgian Herstal pistol (“Новинка, специальный заказ” (169)), a sleek weapon for a more civilized European, in contrast to the heavy revolvers used by “American cowboys and their drunken shoot-outs in the saloon. It’s no use to a serious agent” (“Это для американских «коровьих мальчиков», спьяну в кабаке палить. Для серьезного агента не годится” (168)). Drawing on the age of the Gothic novel and Romanticism—an era that had ended a few decades before Akunin’s novel takes place—Dr. Blank’s laboratory echoes that of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, and the doctor’s experiments recall the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94). By referring to cultural events, world politics, innovation, and technological progress, Akunin makes it easier for the reader to believe in his historical world and to draw parallels with the present day.

Akunin’s first novel sets the historical stage for the subsequent novels, establishing a longing for pre-Revolutionary Russia and for an era of legitimate institutions. A generational conflict emerged in Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century (depicted in such literary works at Pushkin’s *The Captain’s Daughter* (1836) and, more explicitly, in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Children*), one that Akunin’s comments on in *Azazel’* through the two students, Kokorin and Akhtytsev, who, as part of the ‘золотая молодежь’ (‘the golden youth’), rebel

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42 Incidentally, Brilling tells Fandorin that the Russian Third Department has installed a telephone line between the German Kaiser’s and Bismarck’s residence to spy on the German leaders (161).
against their parents’ generation. A report Grushin reads on Kokorin’s suicide laments the state of Russia’s youth and youthful stupidity:

To what depths of unbelief and nihilism have our gilded youth descended if they would make a vulgar spectacle even of their own deaths? If our homegrown Brutuses adopt such an attitude to their own lives, then how can we be surprised if they care not a brass kopeck for the lives of others, incomparably more worthy individuals?43 (12)

This conflict between fathers and sons continues throughout the Fandorin novels, and it is related to (il)legitimacy, an issue that has plagued post-Soviet Russia.

Russia has continuously produced strong leadership in past centuries, ranging from the Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, a series of Tsar’ batiushka figures, Vladimir Lenin, and Josef Stalin. Yet after Stalin’s death the country lost its ‘father figures’ as geriatric or drunken leadership represented by Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Boris Yeltsin, assumed power. Nevertheless, the system of concentrated and absolute power continued in a largely unbroken line from Peter the Great and Catherine II—who established legitimate and institutionalized power, with a hierarchy, order, and conventions—to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Naturally, there has often been opposition to institutions of power stemming from a desire for more individual freedom. This

43 "До какой же степени неверия и нигилизма дошла наша золотая молодежь, чтобы даже из собственной смерти устраивать буффонаду? Если таково отношение наших Брутов к собственной жизни, то стоит ли удивляться, что они не в грош не ставят и жизнь других, куда более достойных людей?" (15).
tradition has existed in Russia and has included such figures as Emelian
Pugachev, Soviet dissidents, independence movements in post-Soviet Russia, i.e.
Chechnya, and the recent anti-Putin demonstrations. But these were social and
political movements that, while significant, did little to change the make-up of
political power and society at large. It was only with the disintegration of the
Soviet Union, and the subsequent catastrophic collapse of the majority of Soviet
institutions, that Russians found themselves in a symbolic orphanhood, deprived
not only of a paternalistic leader and ‘father figure,’ but also of a legitimate
country and lawful leadership, institutions that are usually passed down from
father to son. Akunin embodies this ‘orphanhood’ and ‘search for legitimacy’ in
Fandorin’s struggle to first find himself, and then restore a moral balance to the
world by solving crimes and holding people responsible for their actions.

In his study of the *Bildungsroman* (1987), Franco Moretti posits that the
genre focuses on youth and youthful restlessness, which, in turn, is a symptom of
modernity (4-5). Modern youth is not content to remain in one place, but instead
has an urge to travel, to be mobile, and to explore—to see the world and to
acquire knowledge. Issues of history are significant as well, since the youth are
not interested in looking back at the father’s generation, youth “seeks its
meaning in the future rather than in the past” (Moretti 5) and is committed to
moving forward. In the *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist is frequently ejected
from his home for various reasons by the older generation, and consequently is
forced to undergo a passage of discovery. During the journey, the protagonist
changes both internally by gaining new insights and ways of looking at the
Fandorin, who stems from an ancient aristocratic line, is a scion of the ‘old, established order’ (and thus is a representative of legitimacy). Although he represents the ‘golden youth’ who are rebelling against their perceived tyrannical fathers, he is not one of them because his parents have died. In a sense, Fandorin no longer has a past or a previous generation that he needs to emulate. This isolation and loss are clearly portrayed in Azazel’ as Fandorin struggles to find his place in the world and to perform well in his profession. As he looks towards the future he is afraid of making the mistakes of his father (Fandorin refuses to gamble, unless he is forced to, because of his father’s disastrous luck with cards), while, as an orphan, he is constantly searching for guidance from a father figure. This search and longing mirror those of post-Soviet society, which yearned for direction and legitimacy in the chaotic world of the Yeltsin era. Russian society found a perceived leader with the appearance of Putin in 2000 and, since then, the country has embarked on what is widely (in Russia) perceived as a more orderly path, with strong, legitimate institutions of government and power. In other words, the myth of the paternalistic leader has returned, and Russian society is once again subject to a strong ruler and a clearly defined order.

**Moscow: in search of the familiar**

While Akunin convincingly depicts the time period in Azazel’, space is less pronounced. Most of the action in the narrative takes place in pre-Revolutionary Moscow, which, while familiar to contemporary Russians, is set far enough in the
past to be defamiliarized. Many of the buildings, shops, and streets no longer exist. Akunin’s task is to reconstruct a credible and historical Moscow that his readers will be able to visualize, to sense, and to experience. Detailed maps are prominently placed in Christie, Mankell, Nesbo, and Eco novels, yet Akunin never provides his readers with maps of locations, although he sometimes inserts diagrams into the narrative (Fandorin draws a diagram of the bania when he and Masa are laying out their plans to expose the government informant in *Statskii sovetnik* (*The State Counsellor*, 1999). Violent crimes are committed in Akunin’s Moscow, a modern city full of seedy characters and other criminal elements, which has echoes of the contemporary megapolis. To some extent Akunin’s contrived Moscow is recognizable to a contemporary reader. The setting is familiar, yet Akunin distances events sufficiently to cast an aura of ‘romance’ over the scenes he portrays. Akunin uses Moscow as a ‘stage-like’ backdrop to provide a historical setting for his readers, but it is a city devoid of life, color, and everyday people. Akunin focuses almost solely on his main characters with almost no mention of ordinary Muscovites, who would have been going about their daily tasks, except for the promenading public in the novel’s second

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44 Umberto Eco has pointed out that construction of the historical world and its concrete setting is critical to a historical mystery. While he was establishing the coordinates of the abbey in *The Name of the Rose*, Eco “conducted long architectural investigations, studying photographs and floor plans in the encyclopedia of architecture, to establish the arrangement of the abbey, the distances, even the number of steps in a spiral staircase” (Eco 513). Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) masterfully depicts the setting in the opening pages of *Père Goriot* (1835), starting with a detailed description of Madame Vauquer’s lodging house, located at the beginning of a steep slope. Balzac describes the colors of the street, the sounds, shop signs, the angles of the buildings, odors, and temperature, all of which are richly particularized. If fact, the description is so detailed that it seems as if the reader is watching an actual movie of the scene. It is this clear and perceptible grasp of place that is missing in Akunin’s works.
paragraph or the various individuals who act as witnesses to events throughout the narrative. Akunin does not convey to the reader the grime, the smells, the extreme poverty, or the general hardship that characterized Moscow at the end of the nineteenth century. Similarly, the description of London sounds as though it comes from a Baedeker guidebook, with passing references to famous landmarks scattered throughout the narrative (the Old Vic Theatre, Waterloo Station, the London fog, the “bleak and uninviting” Thames (119)). The narrative carries the reader along with the main protagonists, while the physical setting of the major European cities Fandorin travels through on his way to London is simply ignored.

Despite the narrative’s shortcomings in creating a historic Moscow, private, individual space is well delimited in Azazel’. By providing a glimpse into Fandorin’s inner problems, which concern love, betrayal, injustice, and finances, Akunin makes his investigative hero a figure that elicits readers’ sympathy. Time in the narrative is expanded through Fandorin’s interior world and psyche, where his readings of David Hume’s philosophical essays and the Indian Brahmin Chandra Johnson introduce both Western and Eastern ideas into the narrative. In this way, Akunin expands the temporal limitations of Fandorin’s world, enabling him to engage in an international dialogue on a metaphysical level.
**Balkan intrigue: the perils of a Turkish gambit**

In his second novel, Akunin moves the setting from the familiar, Moscow, to the near abroad of Bulgaria in 1877, a time when Russia was embroiled in a war with the Ottoman Empire “to liberate its Slavic brethren” (“за освобождение славянских братьев”). The novel is littered with specific dates; most of the chapters begin with a citation of news, cultural, or literary items from various contemporary foreign newspapers about the Balkan conflict, the soldiers fighting in the war, anecdotal stories, or world politics. This lends a kind of second, or ‘authentic,’ outside commentary to the narrative as it provides another view of what is going on in the world. The time span in the novel ranges from the first newspaper report, dated 14 July 1877, to 10 March 1878, the end of the war and the signing of the ill-fated Treaty of San Stefano. The narrative depicts scenes that, while arranged chronologically for the most part, are largely selected episodes in which months are missing between chapters, and time drags when it should move forward, especially in the battle scenes, which are randomly depicted and stylized.

Time is also defined in the novel by specific references to historical events (the battle of Plevna),\(^45\) letters, and official government documents and reports that reveal the current political situation and political intrigues. Russian Tsar Alexander II even makes an appearance at the front to look into the

\(^{45}\) Various historical sources refer to the name of this Bulgarian town differently. In a conversation with Yana Hashamova, she clarified that the town is called Pleven in Bulgarian sources, while it is referred to as Plevna (or Plevne) in English and Russian sources. It is quite ironic that the name of the town that plays such a key role in Akunin’s mystery is clouded in ambiguity.
investigation related to the enemy spy in the Russian camp and to distribute medals and awards (including the prestigious St. George’s Cross) after the siege of Plevna. Akunin depicts the period as a time of a global conspiracy against an aggressive Russia. The Russian government believes that a political alliance made between England and Turkey is intended to destroy the Russian empire—a suspicion that turns out to be true. Anvar-esfendi, a representative of the Ottomans, is determined to bring Russia into his web of deceit, to defeat once and for all the Russian threat to mankind. He confesses to Varvara during the novel’s denouement that his actions are targeted at stopping the forces inside of Russia that sooner or later will affect the rest of the world ("дикие, разрушительные силы, которые рано или поздно вырвутся наружу, и тогда миру не поздоровится" (194)). Such sentiments echo current efforts by the global community to implement sanctions against and isolate Iran, Syria, and North Korea, countries that are widely perceived (albeit largely in the West) to pose a threat to humanity. Akunin deftly employs elements of the spy novel (indeed, Turetskii gambit is billed as a spy novel, or ‘шпионский детектив’), including spying, espionage, dangerous missions behind enemy lines, political killings, and secret identities, in order to create a relatively face-paced thriller with strong ties to the present day. The global nature of the conflict is underscored by the variety of nationalities—mostly journalists—at the Russian army camp: Seamus McLaughlin is an Irish correspondent for the British newspaper The Daily Post; Charles d’Hevrais is a French journalist who writes
for the *Revue Parisienne*; and the Romanian Colonel Lukan is a representative of Prince Karl of Romania.

Akunin tackles one of the important social issues of the era through Varvara, the product of a well-to-do family, with progressive ideals, and who is representative of the women’s liberation movement in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rebelling against the expectations of a young woman of her social status, Varvara has worked in several professions, including training to become a midwife and a stenographer. She eventually becomes one of the first female telegraphists in Russia. To contextualize her actions and aspirations, Akunin describes how this movement wanted to change the position of women in Russia, citing such milestones in the movement as women’s attainment of the right to vote in Wyoming in 1869. Varvara also mentions Mary Jacobi (1842-1906), one of the first women doctors in the United States, and Antoinette Blackwell (1825-1921), the first woman to be ordained as a minister in America.

Acting under the influence of Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s 1863 novel, *Chto delat’? (What Is to Be Done?)*, Varvara and her friend Petr lived in a platonic ‘marriage’ in St. Petersburg, modeled on the relationship between Vera Pavlovna and Dmitrii Lopukhov, until Petr enlists as a volunteer in the fight against the Turks. Chernyshevskii’s novel had a strong impact on the radical youth and Russian women “with aspirations toward independence” (Stites, 89). The novel generated a wealth of social discourse, especially among feminists, about the importance of women’s education, and economic and sexual independence. As a novel that looks towards the future:
the theme of the radical remaking of Russian society [in the novel] was vividly implicit as was its summons to women to free themselves from social incarceration in order to join the ranks of the ‘new people’ who would one day effect the social revolution. (Stites 89)

Yet Varvara, despite her progressive ideals and belief in sexual equality, still nurtures notions of romantic love (she follows Petr to the Russian camp in Bulgaria, then falls hopelessly in love with Fandorin), social decorum (she is very ‘proper’ in her relations with men), and, even though she tries to be an emancipated and independent woman, perpetuates traditional gender roles (overly concerned with fashion, she faints at the sight of blood and is flattered to be surrounded by a retinue of suitors). She is taken advantage of, manipulated, and used as a pawn in Anvar-efendi’s game. Her naivété about the ‘world of men’ and war gets her into trouble quite quickly after she implements her plan to follow Petr to the front. Indeed, when Fandorin first meets Varvara at the Bulgarian tavern, she is nothing else than a ‘damsel in distress.’ Fandorin references the Irish-American adventure novelist Mayne Reid (1818-83), whose narratives take place in wild and exotic settings akin to the foreign Balkan lands. The Russian sleuth plays the role of chivalrous knight who rescues the helpless maiden from the dark and surly enemy, to bring her to safety. Although Akunin tackles the controversial issue of women’s liberation, he ultimately undermines the movement’s goal by portraying Varvara as a romantic, naïve, and idealistic young woman who is guided more by ideas of ideal love rather than developing into an independent and mature woman.
In contrast to Azazel, place in Turetskii gambit is vaguely defined. While the setting has moved from Moscow to Bulgaria, an exotic setting for most Russian readers, there is no felt sense of location. The novel expands over a large geographic area: several characters travel to Bucharest; Fandorin makes a journey to London and Paris; and the final confrontation with Anvar-efendi takes place outside of Constantinople, but nowhere does Akunin provide a convincing description of place. Varvara’s walk along Bucharest’s ‘fashionable Calea Mogoshoaiei’ street reminds her of Nevskii Prospekt, with its “smart carriages, striped awnings above the shop windows, dazzling southern beauties, picturesque dark-haired men in light blue, white, and even pink frock coats, and uniforms, uniforms, uniforms everywhere” (100) (“щегольские экипажи, полосатые савицы, картинные брюнеты в голубых, белых и даже розовых сюртуках, и мундиры, мундиры, мундиры” (97)). Such a description pales in comparison to Balzac’s Paris, Charles Dickens’s London, or Raymond Chandler’s Los Angeles.

The narrative takes place during a war and while there are cursory descriptions of the fighting, wounded soldiers, and military life, they are poorly depicted. There is neither a sense of the horrors of war nor any feeling of what the combatants are fighting for. Although the novel is set in Bulgaria and numerous Muslims populate the narrative, the descriptions of these figures, usually provided from Varvara’s viewpoint, are not believable. Varvara makes stereotypical comments about the Bulgarians: her local guide Mitko robs her, there are numerous negative cultural references (the Bulgarians nod their heads
when they mean ‘no’), and Varvara is terrified by the horrible expressions of the Bashi-Bazouks, a group of armed bandits. Except for a few Bulgarian and Turkish words and phrases scattered throughout the narrative (Bulgarian: *korchma*, *vodach*, Turkish: *kizlyar-agazi, ikbal, gediklas*), as well as linguistic commentaries on Bulgarian and some descriptions of the local clothing, Akunin does not adequately convey a sense of place other than passing references to local customs and bloody warfare.

**Leviafan: murder on the open seas**

*Leviafan*, the third book in the Fandorin series, contrasts sharply with Akunin’s *Turetskii gambit*, which, though set mostly in Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish war, stretches over a broad geographical expanse. That expanse allows Fandorin to travel, fight in battles, and unmask the enemy spy in the outskirts of Constantinople. In contrast, set in the confined space of a ship, *Leviafan* is a locked-room mystery, a narrative in which the murderer is one of the suspects.

To a greater extent than in the previous novels, the recording of time and exact locations is much more prominent in *Leviafan*, a device crucial to retracing the murderer’s steps. Reginald Milford-Stokes, a British aristocrat traveling to Tahiti, who is plagued by guilt for causing his wife’s accidental death, and Gintaro Aono, a scion of an old Japanese family who after seven years is returning home after studying medicine in France, are especially diligent in recording time and precise locations. In addition to anchoring the narrative’s
events in well-defined time and space, “the central presence of timetables, clocks, and chronology,” Scaggs contends, “is also a marker of a modern, industrialised society” (51), compared to the “pastoral idyll” of the Golden Age of detective fiction. Above all, it is Fandorin who represents forward-looking society, most notably in his deductive methods, which are based on close attention to detail, analytical rigor, and advances in modern forensics. Fascinated by modern inventions and gadgets, Fandorin embraces the products of the age by using a typewriter and riding his new bicycle on deck. He also carries a Herstal-Agent compact revolver, a new type of gun (a product of Akunin’s imagination), and a swordstick, i.e., a cane that hides a sword. These details not only help the reader to identify Fandorin as a progressive individual, but also locate the intrepid sleuth within a specific time period.

That device is abetted by references in the narrative to current events, such as the ‘recent’ Russo-Turkish War and the Franco-German War of 1870, further tethering the plot to a historical moment. A Franco-British shipping consortium owns and financed the *Leviafan*, foreshadowing the globalization of today, linking ‘then’ to ‘now.’ Indeed, Inspector Gauche, who wants the murderer to be tried in France, is worried that other governments might fight to try the perpetrator in their courts since the ship is multi-national property—a scenario familiar to contemporary followers of attempts to extradite Boris Berezovskii from London and Roman Polanski from Switzerland.

To create a palpable sense of the era, Akunin also provides descriptions and allusions to popular trends of the day. Professor Sweetchild, who unravels
much of *Leviafan*’s central mystery, is an Indologist and represents the late nineteenth century’s interest in India. Allusions to then prevailing trends include mesmerism and the occult (one of Marie Sanfon’s ‘disguises’ is as a mesmerist), the slave trade in Africa (the black stowaway is assumed to be trying to find his way back home), the opium trade, Hong Kong drug gangs, and suffragettes. These supplement the descriptions of clothing, hairstyles, and grooming fashionable at the time.

Not only details of everyday life, but also concerns and ideologies articulated in the novel aid in establishing its temporality. For instance, when the topic of global politics arises, the passengers focus on the increasingly aggressive role played by Russia in the world. Competing global politics plays a role at the end of the novel after Fandorin has revealed that Renate Kleber, the pregnant Swiss banker’s wife who is actually the sinister Marie Sanfon and the murderess, has had the Indian shawl—the key to finding the rajah’s treasure—all along. Representatives of the various nations fight over the shawl: Miss Stamp claims the shawl for Britain, while Dr. Truffo wants the treasure for France—a conflict of interests true to the political situation in Europe in the 1870s, which

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46 This was a time when India was in the news. It was not only Britain’s “Jewel in the Crown” when the kingdom was at its peak of world power, but many people were traveling to India and Asia in general. This interest was not only due to the exotic appeal of this part of the world, but, in a more avaricious vein, business wanted to exploit the region’s wealth.

47 Fandorin and Clarissa Stamp, who wants to impress the dashing sleuth, play a game in which Stamp blindfolds Fandorin. Based on what he hears, Fandorin is able to describe several passengers that he had never seen before in detail, using the science of deduction. Much of this ‘game’ relies on what the person is wearing, hairstyles, etc.—all of which provide a wealth of period detail. Additionally, Gauche says that Stamp dresses well and in the latest Parisian fashion.
witnessed repeated crises resulting from bickering nations intent on self-enrichment and acquisition of greater international clout. Ultimately, it is Fandorin who steps in as the representative of a neutral power and, by allowing the shawl to literally fly out of the window, prevents both Britain and France from imposing their will on the world. In accordance with the traditional self-promoting ideology of the intelligentsia, Akunin presents Fandorin, and by extension Russia, as a morally superior player who is ‘above’ fighting over money, concerned only with revealing the murderer, attaining justice, and restoring a moral and psychological norm.

**Smert’ Akhillesa: a tangled web of political conspiracies**

Though time is not as defined in *Smert’ Akhillesa* compared to the first three Fandorin novels, there are nonetheless references to specific dates and cultural events. The main narrative takes place over the course of four days in Moscow in 1882, while the second part of the novel is a biographical account of Akhimas, Fandorin’s main rival, that spans forty years. This shift allows the narrative to move back in time at a critical moment in the story (a nineteenth-century device employed by Conan Doyle in his sudden backward shift at a crucial moment in the plot in Sherlock Holmes’ first case, *A Study in Scarlet*). To establish a historic background, Akunin describes Moscow through Fandorin, who, returning to the Russian capital after six years, notices the numerous changes that have occurred: cobblestones have been placed on the roads, people are clean, horse-drawn trams follow fixed routes, and women are now allowed
upstairs in hotels. Fandorin comments on the new monument to Aleksandr Pushkin, which was unveiled in 1880, and construction has begun on the Cathedral of Christ the Savoir. In another reference to the table of ranks and in an acknowledgement of his ambition, Fandorin has been promoted to College Assessor. Additionally, official titles are widely employed.

As in previous novels, newspaper items relate world events that establish the time period: Russian explorer Nikolai Miklukha-Maklai (1846-88) is returning to Russia from his latest voyage; there are comments on U.S. advertising; an item announces literary talks devoted to Ivan Turgenev's novels; and a discussion concerns the construction of a tunnel under the English Channel. A report about a child killer’s trial provides an example of the new trend towards journalistic sensationalism. Politically, Russia continues to be plagued with terrorists and anti-government plots that reach the highest levels of the Tsarist regime. General Mikhail Sobolev, the hero of the Russo-Turkish war, has secretly established a political party that foreshadows nationalistic movements in Russia today: Sobolev promotes the idea of Russia for Russians, a united Slavdom, and a non-European path for Russia. The general is killed because he is plotting an internal coup against the Russian government that would put his party into power and his nationalistic ideas into practice—a move that in the eyes of his political opponents would push Russia towards war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, which would be disastrous for Russia.

Fandorin’s tools of his trade speak to the historical era as well. He has an investigation case containing a series of magnifying glasses, an electric flashlight,
and a fingerprint kit (in this respect, Fandorin is looking towards the future when a fingerprint database will become one of the standard ways in which criminals are identified. However, at this time he is still laughed at by the authorities for his ‘silly’ ideas). Unlike in the three previous novels, Fandorin is now armed with Japanese weapons (a testament to the time he spent as a diplomat in Japan): *sharinken*, or sharp and pointed ‘throwing stars’ that warriors throw at their enemy, and *nunchaku*, a traditional Japanese weapon composed of two sticks that are attached by a short chain or rope (when wielded, these sticks become deadly). Investigation tools and Japanese weapons are not the only devices that work in Fandorin’s favor: the new invention of the telephone also assists the Russian sleuth in a pivotal moment in the plot when he uses it to deceive the club singer Vanda and to discover the location of Akhimas’s hideout.

As the setting, Moscow is a mercurial city that Fandorin has difficulty recognizing. Akunin employs an abundance of street names, many of which should be familiar to the reader, yet Fandorin’s exploits in the metropolis’s seedier regions create a sense of defamiliarization, in part because the slums (especially the gang-ridden Khitrovka district) no longer exist in the contemporary Russian capital. Similarly, the recent BBC American series *Copper* is set in Five Points, in lower Manhattan, a district that gained international notoriety as a crime-infested and disease-ridden slum in the nineteenth-century. In *Smert’ Akhillesa*, Fandorin, for the first time, ventures away from the upper-class world that he has frequented in the first three novels to visit districts
where crime is rampant, gangland warfare dominates, and poverty is widespread. After arriving on the train from St. Petersburg, Fandorin’s movements are restricted to the physical space of Moscow, yet although his exterior world is limited, his interior world expands exponentially.

The introduction of Fandorin’s Japanese valet, Masa, and his Japanese customs, not to mention Fandorin’s own adherence to Eastern philosophy, extend the novel’s temporality. The second part of the narrative also expands time as the reader follows Akhimas’s adventures from childhood to the point when he is forced to confront Fandorin. The plotline of the hired assassin not only provides a worthy adversary for Fandorin, but also reveals a novel character in Russian literature: a successful and solitary mercenary with no regard for human life, who hires himself out to the highest bidder. The enhanced interior world of Akhimas expands the narrative to include the philosophy of a person who also lives by a kind of moral code, albeit one with immoral implications.

**The plot: who, where, when?**

On the level of plot, the task of the detective, police officer, or amateur sleuth in a ‘whodunit’ is twofold: to discover the identity of the criminal, collect evidence, conduct interviews, and follow clues in order to verify the whereabouts of the suspects, on the one hand; and, on the other, to orient the

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48 Fandorin will re-enter the world of homeless orphans who have become thieves in _Liubovnik smerti_ (The Lover of Death, 2001), which depicts, in Dickensian terms, the life of the orphan-thief Sen’ka in the crime-infested Khitrovka district.
reader, who likewise follows the procedure of detection at one remove. In this respect, three questions become very important—who, where, and when? Since the crime occurred at a specific time in the past, the detective must know who was where, when s/he was there, and why s/he was at that location. In this intersection of time and place, the two aspects have equal importance. One or both can prove problematic in the detective’s suspicions of various characters that ultimately turn out to be innocent of the crime: either the place or the time does not fit the coordinates of the crime. ‘Who’ depends on ‘where’ and ‘when,’ and alibis are a way to eliminate characters that were at another place or another time when the crime was committed.

Accordingly, Christie’s Belgian detective, Poirot, pays careful attention to the map and the clock. As one critic puts it, for him, “the relation of people in time and place is usually the central issue” (Knight 120), and his task is to see through the murderer’s deception, usually in the form of inconsistent claims or outright lies. Thus, precise time is one of the foundations on which the ‘whodunit’ rests. John Scaggs contends that there is an “objectified sense of time in the proliferation of times, clocks, timetables, and alibis” (51) in the work of such writers as Christie, because pinpointing time and defining location is central to the plot and to the resolution of the story.49 Despite the many decades separating contemporary mysteries from Christie’s bestsellers, the chronotope

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49 A broken watch plays a crucial role in establishing the exact time of the murder of Mr. Ratchett in Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). Furthermore, Poirot is meticulous in providing times for each suspect’s alibi.
remains the pivot for the plot and the process of detection in today’s crime narratives, from Jo Nesbo and Henning Mankell to P.D. James and Val McDermid.

Faced with an apparent suicide and the violent murder of a young aristocrat, Fandorin’s task is three-fold in Azazel’: (1) to identify the motive behind Kokorin’s suicide; (2) to find the murderer and/or the person who ordered the killing of the young aristocrat and university student Akhtyrtsev; and (3) to discover the mastermind behind the global conspiracy Fandorin has uncovered. Brilling and Fandorin identify four main suspects during the course of the murder investigation in Azazel’, eventually settling on Count Zurov as the prime suspect, largely based on the simple fact that he has no alibi and came home just before dawn on the night Akhtyrtsev was murdered. Brilling and Fandorin cannot account for Zurov’s whereabouts during the attack on Akhtyrtsev. Zurov argued with the victim earlier in the evening; moreover, he had time to plan the killing. Thus, while circumstantial evidence implicates him, it is eventually revealed that Zurov is not behind the crime. However, the cabal of orphans proves to be a bigger threat to the fate of Russia than finding Akhtyrtsev’s killer.

Clock time is not as essential in identifying the mastermind behind the global conspiracy and the students’ deaths in Azazel’ as is the prominence given to calendar dates. By deciphering and analyzing charts and dates, Fandorin is able to put the pieces of the puzzle together and, after arriving at several wrong conclusions, eventually unravels the case. The discovery of a list of persons, with dates next to each name, leads Fandorin to initially deduce—falsely it turns
out—that it is a list of future victims. It is only after Fandorin has a discussion with his chief about recent government changes in various countries that he realizes it is not a list of future targets, but rather the members of a secret organization. The dates indicated are an update on each member. Subsequently, Fandorin pores over a series of secret diplomatic reports on prominent orphans, only to discover—by chance—that the age of the child and the date on which s/he made their appearance in society is crucial to identifying the organization's members (the orphans were kept at Lady Ester's orphanages until they were ready to embark on their missions). In his final confrontation with Lady Ester, Fandorin realizes (belatedly) that Gerald Cunningham, who worked undercover as a teacher at Ester's school, could not be the head of the organization because the dates and ages do not match: “Антрепид найден в море двадцать лет назад! Каннингему тогда было всего тринадцать. Доббс разбогател четверть века назад, Каннингем тогда еще и сиротой не стал! Нет, это не он!” (195-6) (“Intrepide was found at sea twenty years ago! Cunningham was only thirteen then. Dobbs got rich a quarter of a century ago. Cunningham was not even an orphan then! No, he’s not the one!” (212). As Fandorin pieces together time (calendar dates) and place (where the suspects were at a certain time), he discovers that Ester is the leader of the organization, because, according to her age, she is the only one whose whereabouts fit the case's framework for time and place.

_Turetskii Gambit_ is structured as a spy thriller, a genre that Martin Priestman defines as one that "highlights danger within the present rather than
(merely) the past action, hence its protagonists must be threatened by powerful
forces of some kind” (1998: 43). The enemy is often part of a conspiracy or
foreign threat that has put a nation in danger. The chief hero, who is usually a
spy, is involved in an urgent search to unmask the identity of the double (or
triple) agent before s/he is able to inflict more damage. Such narratives are often
full of (foreign) sabotage and usually conclude with a twist at the end. The
protagonist must uncover the truth and sort through the web of lies that is
seemingly everywhere and capture or kill the enemy spy.

A development in the genre since the end of World War II is that
everything is not so black and white as, for example, in the earlier Ian Fleming
novels, where secret agent James Bond battles a good and evil that are clearly
defined and absolute. In contrast, it is much more difficult to define the world of
John le Carré, whose protagonists find themselves in an environment where it is
hard to separate right from wrong. In *Turetskii gambit*, Anvar-efendi, the ‘evil
spy,’ in his own way is also fighting to save his nation from foreign domination.
The question then becomes whether his goals—to strike a blow against an
aggressive Russia—are any more reprehensible and devious than Russia’s aim to
conquer the Ottoman Empire. Moral ambiguity is an integral part of the modern
world, and through Fandorin’s moral dilemmas, Akunin continues to deal with
issues of moral responsibility.

Coincidence, chance encounters, and the sequence in which events occur
play a more important role than the establishment of a precise clock time (a
specific hour and minute) in *Turetskii gambit*. As the murders and
disappearances continue to mount, Fandorin has to reconstruct the chronology of events in order to identify where the main suspects were at the time each death occurred. To complicate matters, the enemy spy stages each death is such a way that suspicion inevitably falls on another person; in this way Akunin saturates his narrative with red herrings and misleading clues. In addition, the tension increases daily because, although it is known that there is an enemy agent lurking in the Russian camp, his identity remains a mystery and people are still being killed.

Given the primacy of time and place in the crime novel, a topos in the process of deduction is the presence of people in places or circumstances that cast suspicion on them. As Fandorin embarks on his investigation, he retraces the movements of each victim in an attempt to determine where that person was on the day of the murder, who saw the victim and when, and what the victim said to the witness(es). During his final summary when he reveals the secret agent’s identity, Fandorin explains how he had to reconstruct events, providing a precise chronological timeframe as to when each suspect arrived at the camp and what his movement was from that point on. In the case of d’Hevrais, who is revealed to be the enemy Turkish agent Anvar-efendi, the Russian sleuth discloses information he discovered on a recent trip to Paris. Fandorin uses newspaper stories that d’Hevrais had written during his journalistic ‘career’ (Anvar-efendi is masquerading as a French journalist) and the dates that each article was published to put together an account of d’Hevrais’s whereabouts and movements. Unwittingly, the Turkish spy has left a literal paper trail through
which an investigator can pinpoint his movements. Armed with this knowledge, Fandorin follows the dots (time and place) and is able to identify Anvar-efendi as the spy. In an unfortunate (for Anvar-efendi) oversight, the pseudonym the Ottoman agent chooses—Paladin d’Hevrais—is the seminal bit of information that leads Fandorin to identify him once and for all.\footnote{This \textit{nom de plume} is Anvar-efendi’s undoing, since, being a clever reference to place, the name reveals that he “was born in the small Bosnian town of Hef-Rais. Paladin d’Hevrais; the ‘Champion of Hef-Rais’” (193) (“что наш главный оппонент Анвар-эфенди, по некоторым сведениям, родился в боснийском городе Хевраис. D’Hevrais, «Хевраисский» (185). With this information, the final pieces of the puzzle fall into place for Fandorin.} Although Fandorin’s investigation and narrowing down of suspects is assisted by each individual’s (un)timely deaths, mapping out the coordinates of each suspect is an essential tool to identify the crime’s instigator.

In his fourth Fandorin mystery, Akunin returns to the crime thriller/spy genre in which the Russian \textit{rodina}, once again, is in danger. Although at first glance the danger seems to stem from a foreign threat once the German agent Herr Knabe falls under suspicion for Sobolev’s murder, the conspiracy is eventually revealed to be homegrown. Marty Roth identifies two worlds in detective fiction: the ordinary world and the underworld, whose denizens devote “all their thought and energy to penetrating the ordinary world and causing disruption” (226). The detective’s task is to find the criminal, end his dangerous activities, and restore balance to the world. In the hard-boiled fiction genre, the second world is “the underworld into which the quest hero must descend” (Roth 241) and, although Fandorin rarely enters this world, his journey...
to Moscow's seedy, crime-laden Khitrovka district is an example of just such a sphere—one plagued by conspiracies and devious plans. The “conspiratorial aspect characterizes the fictive world as a world of conspiracies” (Scaggs 118) and this is the view of the world that Fandorin encounters in the first four novels. In contrast to Roth’s framework, the conspiracies in the Fandorin novels are not hatched in the criminal underworld, but rather in the upper echelons of society (represented by a rogue’s gallery containing the likes of Lady Ester, Anvar-efendi, Maria Sanfon, Grand Duke Kirill Aleksandrovich, the tsar’s brother) and they employ figures from the underworld as agents to implement their plans. Akhimas and Inspector Gauche are such agents and, even though they have managed to pull themselves out of the lower world (the world of law enforcement can also be considered on a lower plane, with its questionable and, for the most part, easily corruptible figures), they will never fit into the upper crust society that they, perhaps unwittingly, long to join. These two worlds exist in a very delicate balance and, once that balance is disrupted, it falls on the detective hero to restore some kind of equilibrium, even if that means—in Fandorin’s case—harm to the protagonist’s own status or circumstances.

Realizing the things are not as they seem with Sobolev’s apparent heart attack, Fandorin has to sort through the trail of chronological evidence leading up to the death/murder and construct a temporal framework for Sobolev’s movements. Fandorin accomplishes this by pinpointing the time of death and placing Sobolev in a location at that moment, by interviewing witnesses who can confirm where Sobolev was at a specific time, and by figuring out who met with
whom and when that meeting took place. Initial conclusions are discredited, however, when new information or eyewitnesses turn up. Sobolev’s mistress, Ekaterina Golovina, a teacher in Minsk, arrives in Moscow with vital information about a missing briefcase full of money and tells Fandorin about Sobolev’s secret political views. As he pages through the daily calendar of Khurtinskii, the murdered head of the secret police, which contains a catalogue of business meetings, audiences, and reports, Fandorin must identify any suspicious activity or meetings. A crucial clue is revealed when Fandorin discovers that Khurtinskii met a certain Klonov on 22 June in the Metropol’ Hotel. Once Fandorin establishes that Klonov is the agent responsible for the killing, he begins to assemble the pieces of the puzzle.

Clock time also proves crucial in the narrative because, as the bodies continue to pile up, tension builds and Fandorin literally has to ‘race against the clock’ to prevent the next murder—which turns out to be an attempt on his life. In a skillful build up of a series of suspenseful moments, Akunin merges the story of the past (Sobolev’s murder and the events leading up to it) with that of the present (the investigation) and the future (Fandorin’s attempts to avert yet another murder). Todorov posits that this form of detective fiction “serves as a transition between the whodunit and the thriller” (51) and puts the detective hero in jeopardy. In this kind of story the “detective loses his immunity, gets beaten up, badly hurt, constantly risks his life, in short, he is integrated into the universe of the other characters, instead of being an independent observer as the
The careful pacing of cause and effect creates suspense and keeps the reader involved in the fate of the detective hero.

The locked-room mystery has been a popular setting for writers of detective fiction ever since Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841). The crime or murder usually takes place in a “hermetically sealed environment” and the detective must figure out how the crime was executed (Scaggs 51). In addition, “the locked room—with its imagery of enclosure and entrapment, and its reference only to elements within its own finite space—provides a perfect metaphor for the inherent self-reflexivity of the genre” (Sweeney 2). During the process of deduction, the detective hero often retreats to a private space, where, alone, s/he sorts through the evidence and data. To focus his thoughts, Fandorin frequently fingers a jade rosary, draws the same Japanese character repeatedly, or lapses into self-reflection. The locked-room mystery offers a restricted setting that the protagonists can neither leave nor enter, while at the same time limiting the number of suspects. The characters on the Leviathan move around the upper deck and their cabins, a locked and isolated space where the other passengers and the reader cannot see what is happening. Secrets abound on the ship and suspicions increase when the other passengers do not know what is transpiring inside cabins or what some people are writing in their diaries. The ‘secret’ thoughts of the characters are hidden from their fellow passengers. Furthermore, the ship’s limited space means that the passengers are forced to remain together until the murder is solved. Anxiety increases exponentially because everyone is suspect, yet no one can leave the ship.
Leviafan follows Christie’s practice in her Poirot novels by underscoring the importance of time for the detective (Gauche and Fandorin) through the simple device of peppering the narrative with timepieces, ensuring that time is constantly foregrounded. For instance, the gigantic Big Ben towers over the salon and plays a crucial role at the end of the story. Specific references to exact times and places abound: Milford-Stokes and Aono record hours, dates, and geographic locations in their journals; the newspaper coverage of Lord Littleby’s murder, which opens the novel, provides a tight chronological outline of when Littleby and his household were murdered; and Akunin documents efforts by Gauche and Fandorin to ascertain the various suspects’ movements during the murders aboard the ship. Additionally, to increase suspense and mislead the detective and the reader, at one point Akunin places the murderess in a room with other people who function as witnesses, vouching for Sanfon’s whereabouts, thus supplying her with an alibi at the time of the second murder.\(^{51}\) In a standard ploy of detective fiction, subsequent discoveries invalidate this alibi.

Eventually the dual temporalities come together as the investigation nears its conclusion, the detective is able to piece together and decipher the clues and evidence in order to establish the identity of the criminal, and a kind of

\(^{51}\) Sanfon is able to do this because of her accomplice husband, Charles Renier, who is not in the same place as Sanfon at the time of the murders. This serves to deflect suspicion from Sanfon, because how can she be the murderess if she is somewhere else when the murders take place? Moreover, Sanfon is seen as the victim after she is ‘attacked’ by the African, thus removing any suspicion on the part of Gauche as to her guilt. Tellingly, it is Aono who first becomes suspicious of Sanfon due to his acute powers of observation, even before Fandorin does.
justice is restored to society. During the course of *Leviafan*, time is intentionally suspended for several reasons: firstly, the author provides the characters with a human element as the reader becomes better acquainted with them in the course of the investigation. Secondly, it gives the author a chance to ‘play’ with the reader before revealing the criminal’s identity, often providing two solutions to the mystery—one in which there seems to be a restoration of justice and one where that false sense of security is withheld. In *Leviafan*, there are two solutions to the mystery—Charles Renier, Lord Littleby’s murderer, is killed, which restores justice to the world in that he has been dealt the ultimate punishment and will not kill again. However, Akunin offers a second ending, where he allows the real mastermind of the crime, Marie Sanfon, to (most likely) escape justice, making it possible for her to continue a life of crime and murder. Interestingly, this type of ending is closer to many contemporary detective novels, where ‘traditional’ justice is no longer restored and society must face a world where evil is a constant presence.

**Conclusion**

The early Fandorin novels were published in Russia with the following statement on the back cover of the hardback editions, in homage to the nineteenth century: “when literature was great, faith in progress was unlimited, 

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52 Tellingly, several of Akunin’s female villains manage to escape justice, perhaps to strike another day. There are signs that Lady Ester was not killed in the bomb blast in *Azazel* and Marie Sanfon, which slightly injured, will only get a short prison sentence for the attempted murder of Aono. The exception is Dr. Lind in *Koronatsiia*, who is killed at the end of the narrative, yet not before murdering the young Grand Duke.
and crimes were committed and solved with elegance and taste" ("когда литература была великой, вера в прогресс безграничной, а преступления совершались и раскрывались с изяществом и вкусом"). The format of the books also harks back to an earlier age: the novels are bound in black, with a nineteenth-century illustration on the cover and each chapter has a title relating what happens. Later novels contain ‘authentic’ period illustrations. This clever marketing device prepares the reader psychologically for the historical world s/he is about to enter and provides a point of reference from which the reader is about to depart. Once the reader is captured by the narrative, Akunin continues to foreground both time and space.

Akunin manages to depict a convincing picture of late nineteenth-century Russia in the first four Fandorin novels. He establishes a credible temporal setting, complete with historical details, period clothing, linguistic markers, and cultural and political references. That historical world and the reader’s contemporary world are brought closer together through the depiction of events that, in many instances, reflect the same kind of occurrences, or political and economic changes that are taking place in Russia right now. While Akunin has more problems creating a believable sense of place, he accomplishes this task well enough that the settings play a decisive role in the crime and its resolution. The intrepid sleuth Fandorin is largely successful in his task to establish the temporal and spatial coordinates of each suspect, for the only way to solve the crime is to recreate the victim’s movements and the suspect’s actions leading up to the criminal act. It is crucial to the resolution of the narrative that Fandorin
establish where each suspect was when the crime took place, when s/he was there, and what s/he was doing. Finally, a skilled handling of time and space is essential to the detective story, as shrinking or expanding spatial and temporal elements add suspense, terror, or excitement to the narrative. These elements are not as distinct in Akunin’s novels as they are in the works of other authors of detective fiction, yet Akunin manages to unfold a mostly convincing narrative that contains the classic requirements for a crime narrative. In this way, Akunin has invented a plausible ‘Fandorin chronotope.’

By its very nature, a continuing series featuring one detective hero does not end with each individual novel, but continues into the future in a seemingly unending number of books. If the detective hero ages, as Fandorin does, then eventually he will become too old to continue his investigative endeavors. Indeed, Chernyi gorod (The Black City), the latest novel in the series, was published on 21 November 2012 and it is already a bestseller.53 The novel depicts the adventures of the now 58-year-old Erast Petrovich in Baku in 1914. Continuing a tried and true tradition, Fandorin engages the issues of modern-day Russia: windfall oil profits, pervasive greed, worker exploitation, social unrest, and economic problems. Judging by the successful sales of the book, Russian readers have not yet tired of the ageing sleuth or his prolific creator.

Chapter 3
The Celebrity Detective as Post-Soviet Hero

“A serial detective has, of course, particular advantages: an established character who does not have to be introduced afresh with each novel, a successful career in crime-solving which can add gravitas, an established family history and background and, above all, reader identification and loyalty.”

P.D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*

“Герой Нашего Времени...портрет, но не одного человека: это портрет, составленный из пороков всего нашего поколения, в полном их развитии.”

Mikhail Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*

“...I set out to create a real hero; one whom girls would fall in love with, and one whom boys would admire and want to imitate.”

Boris Akunin

“I Need a Hero”

One of the biggest pop hits of the 1980s was Welsh singer Bonnie Tyler’s recording of the song “Holding Out For a Hero.” The lyrics, composed by Jim Steinman and Dean Pitchford, tap into the seemingly deathless human need for

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54 “The Hero of Our Time is...a portrait, but not of one person: it is a portrait of the vices of our entire generation in their ultimate development.”

heroes and their requisite traits: “Where have all the good men gone and where are all the gods? / Where’s the street wise Hercules to fight the rising odds?”

Tyler yearns for a hero who is strong and fast, “fresh from the fight,” and “larger than life”—an image that conjures up the folkloric warrior who rides in on his white horse to save the damsel in distress. The warrior embodies a mixture of magical traits and superhuman strength: “Racing on the thunder and rising with the heat / It’s gonna take a superman to sweep me off my feet.” In that anxiety-ridden, Cold War era, the lyrics took the pulse of a time when the world seemed to be on the brink of nuclear war and when it looked as though only an extraordinary warrior could save human society from destruction. Ten years later the heroic image had changed: Bruce Springsteen’s 1992 song “Local Hero” describes an ordinary person from the community who has accomplished a feat deemed heroic by his fellow citizens: “Somebody with the right style / Lookin’ for a local hero / Someone with the right smile.” Subsequently, Enrique Iglesias’s 2001 song “Heroes” no longer idealizes the warrior, but depicts a strong and reliable ordinary man to stand by a person’s side: “I can be your hero, baby / I can kiss away the pain / I will stand by you forever / You can take my breath away.”

These songs articulate a desire that we instinctively recognize as timeless and universal. Human society has had a need for heroes since the beginning of recorded history. The Greeks believed that stories of heroism could serve as moral examples for citizens; some of the first heroes were descended from the Greek gods, such as Perseus, Hercules, and Achilles. As individuals and as a collective, we admire and wish to emulate heroes, who usually provide a model
for just and decent behavior. Various historical eras have embraced a range of heroes who represent the dominant moral, ethical, and behavioral mores of a specific age. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel believed that the heroic ‘Great Man,’ who accomplished the needs of the age, arose from the spirit of the times and personified the soul of the culture. For Hegel, Napoleon exemplified the *Zeitgeist* of the era, which valued a man who climbed his way to supreme power through his military achievements and, albeit unknowingly, contributed to the advancement of civilization. Hegel believed that great men do not make history, but great times produce the man. Similarly, Thomas Carlyle, in his work *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), emphasized the important function of individuals in history, which, he argued, is created by a few great men. Carlyle’s heroes were political and military figures, both good and evil, who sought to organize change for the benefit of humankind. All heroes, according to Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), embody a large monomyth consisting of several stages: departure, trials and initiation, and a return to society. Campbell illuminates a number of uniting themes of heroic stories that illustrate what heroes represent to and in different societies and cultures.

Whatever their differences, such concepts focus on individuals as exemplars—extraordinary beings incarnating the ethos of a given age who, however, usually become timeless archetypes. By contrast, counterviews attribute heroism to society and social forces, opposing the notion of individuals as heroes. For instance, Karl Marx argued that history was made by social forces
engaged in class struggles, rather than by the exploits of a few individuals. Yet even the proponents of this philosophy acknowledge its shortcomings. Despite the dominance of massive social forces at play in certain historic eras, “social determinists of all hues cannot write history without recognizing that at least some individuals, at some critical moments, play a decisive role in redirecting the historical wave” (Hook 12). In Socialist Realism, which tried to reconcile the individual and social forces, the positive hero “is an emblem of Bolshevik virtue, someone the reading public might be inspired to emulate, and his life should be patterned to ‘show the forward movement of history’” (Clark 46). Although the positive hero exemplifies moral and political virtue, he is deindividualized and his image is rooted in saints’ lives and folklore. As an ideal, this hero is larger than life, full of vigor and stamina, as exemplified by “metro workers, aviators, polar explorers, etc.” (Prokhorova 132). This modern-day superhero was to forge the new Soviet society of the future.

Several reasons may explain the seemingly ubiquitous psychological need for heroes. Often conceiving of himself as the father of a country and frequently regarded by his followers as a father figure (Hook 20), the hero or great man fulfills the function of parental authority whose leadership skills satisfy the human need for security and protection. Times of great crisis call for a figure who can organize people and lead them, conduct himself in a manner worthy of emulation, and inspire others through his exploits. In a society where individuals strive to better themselves and their circumstances, a hero serves as a representative figure whose traits and achievements provide an ideal towards
which one can aspire. While different kinds of heroes have existed throughout history, several constant aspects of the hero can be identified. The most common traits of the individual hero include intelligence, strength and courage, charisma, selflessness, a strong moral code, resilience, loyalty, and reliability. Historical examples of great heroes include Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Winston Churchill. A sampling of inspirational folkloric and literary heroes includes Odysseus, Sir Lancelot, King Arthur, Gandalf, Tarzan, and Harry Potter. Comics have generated such figures as Superman, whose superhuman strength and moral conviction have inspired generations since he first appeared in 1939; Batman, whose just behavior in a dark and evil world propelled him towards his highly personalized version of vigilante justice; and the Avengers, tasked with protecting humanity from both earthly and otherworldly threats. Whether historical or imaginary, heroes have either emerged or have stepped up in a time of great need to protect and reassure the populace. Yet by the middle of the twentieth century, the classic hero had almost disappeared from fiction. The anti-hero, in the figure of a victim or of a man suffering from a variety of circumstances, has largely replaced the mythical hero (Boorstin 77), which reflects the changing ethos of the modern era.

Some aspects of the hero’s traits have changed since Tyler’s song, which longs for a “larger than life” godlike warrior. Western society has moved away from such a mythological ideal and now seems to value ordinary heroes. The media and music industry focus on the heroic feats of firemen, the police, and soldiers. Ordinary people who have made a difference in someone else’s life are
now also recognized as heroes: the person who rescues a girl from a burning house, who overcomes a daunting task, who accomplishes an athletic feat, and who “does what is right and moral.” This is evidenced by the annual broadcast of *CNN Heroes*, a show devoted to discovering unsung heroes; the *Heroes* television series (2006-2010; created by Tim Kring), which depicts ordinary people who discover that they have supernatural powers and, subsequently, have to deal with their changed lives; and Joss Whedon’s popular series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), which tells the story of a California cheerleader who discovers that she is the ‘chosen one,’ the heir to a long line of slayers, one of whom is born each generation to protect humans from vampires, demons, and other mythical creatures. These portrayals attest to the advancement of democratic societies, where there is a tendency to demystify the superhuman and transfer abiding heroic traits onto ordinary individuals.

**Russian heroes**

Russian literature abounds in superfluous men (Onegin, Pechorin, Bazarov), ‘little men’ (Evgenii from *The Bronze Horseman*, Akakii Akakievich), extraordinary men (Raskol’nikov), mad men (Chatskii, Evgenii), predatory men (Svidrigailov, Stavrogin), military men (Andrei Bolkonskii, Aleksei Vronskii), revolutionary men (Rakhmetov), nationalistic men (Chapaev, Pavel Korchagin), drunken men (Semen Marmeladov, Benedikt Erofeev’s Venichka), and action men (Viktor Dotsenko’s Beshenyi), yet the majority of these masculine literary protagonists have a character flaw that disqualifies them as exemplars for young
Russian readers seeking positive role models. Mikhail Lermontov’s Pechorin is unsavory and amoral; Ivan Turgenev’s Evgenii Bazarov is arrogant and destructive; Fedor Dostoevskii’s Prince Myshkin is passive and weak; Lev Tolstoi’s Aleksei Vronskii is an oversocialized ‘stud’ lacking in sensitivity; and nationalistic heroes are politicized and verge on the maniacal. By contrast, Western entertainment fiction offers the bold, carefree Robin Hood, the adventurous d'Artagnan, the rebellious Huckleberry Finn, the cerebral Sherlock Holmes, and the dashing James Bond to counter the likes of Pierre de Laclos’ cynical Vicomte de Valmont, Thomas Hardy’s puritanical Angel Clare, and George Eliot’s pedantic Edward Casaubon. Other authors have used the Old American West as a setting to develop a heroic protagonist who surmounts social barriers to become a symbol of fairness and justice. Examples include the cowboy hero of the Old West; Karl May’s Chief Winnetau and German adventurer Old Shatterhand; and the Lone Ranger and Zorro.

Until the appearance of Erast Fandorin, contemporary young Russians only had a handful of homegrown persona worthy of possible emulation. In accordance with the ideological norms of the Soviet era, many of those heroes died in service to their country: the youth Pavlik Morozov denounced his father to the authorities as a conspirator and died a martyr’s death for his actions. During World War II, Zoia Kosmodem’ianskaia volunteered as a teenager to join a partisan detachment. She was captured, tortured, and eventually killed by the Germans, but she did not betray her comrades. Aleksandr Fadeev’s novel, The White Guard (1951), depicts how Oleg Koshevoi organizes and leads a brigade of
young soldiers to defend a Donbass mining town from the Germans in late 1942. Eventually, Koshevoi and the group are arrested, tortured, and executed. In commenting on his childhood heroes in an interview with the British newspaper *The Telegraph*, Akunin states:

"You cannot pretend when you are 11 or 12 that you are a hero of Turgenev. What would you do? Sob? Complain? I approached this problem in a scientific way. I grafted a bit from every protagonist in Russian literature whom I admire. I took 10 per cent of Andrei Bolkonskii [from *War and Peace*], 10 per cent of Prince Myshkin [*The Idiot*], 10 per cent of Lermontov's Pechorin. Then I added a recipe of my own design, mixed and stirred. At the beginning he looked like a Frankenstein, a homunculus. Then miraculously he came to life, for me at least, and started not doing what I wanted him to do. Now for me he is more alive than most of the people I know." (Rees)

In Fandorin, Akunin presents an attractive literary protagonist and a popular celebrity detective who has come to represent the ideally envisioned spirit of a nation finally emerging from the turbulent post-Soviet decade.

**Fandorin as a New Hero**

Perhaps as famous as Akunin is his literary creation—the dashing and intrepid sleuth Erast Petrovich Fandorin, whose first name alludes to Nikolai Karamzin’s tale *Bednaia Liza* (*Poor Liza*, 1794), evoking the doomed relationship between the young lovers Erast and Liza, which Akunin depicts in revised form
in his first Fandorin novel, Azazel’ (1998). Unlike his namesake, however, Fandorin is traumatized by the loss of his beloved, which leaves him with a streak of grey in his dark hair and an occasional stammer—visible and audible proof of his sensitivity. Fandorin’s surname reflects his European roots: Erast Petrovich is a descendant of the German officer Kornelius Von Dorn, who came to Russia in the seventeenth century and served at the court of Aleksei Mikhailovich, the first Romanov tsar. Over time the surname became Russified, though it still provokes comments when first encountered. For instance, Count Zurov cannot remember how to pronounce it correctly when the two first meet in Azazel’, which infuses the detective’s image with an element of foreignness and thus exoticism.

Intent on creating a ‘national hero,’ Akunin has crafted a special detective who adopts the deductive methods of Sherlock Holmes and embodies the civilized qualities of an English gentleman. Akunin’s new hero is original inasmuch as he is a ‘cultured’ European of the period, who dresses in the latest fashion, likes to travel, has been touched by tragedy (which lends him an air of mystery), and practices the inner harmony of Eastern philosophy. Indeed, Fandorin embodies many features that the typical Russian male notoriously lacks: he is moderate in his actions, values order and rationality, and possesses an inner calm that generally keeps his emotions in check. Fandorin’s moral qualities raise him above his colleagues and contemporaries, giving him an exceptional identity, one that is attractive to readers, who are reassured that someone in Russia is honorable and decent.
Fandorin is distinct from other literary detective-heroes such as Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Inspector Maigret, and Miss Marple because he does not arrive on the scene fully formed. Instead, he develops and matures throughout the series from an eager, rosy-cheeked twenty-year-old youth in Azazel’ to a cynical, fifty-eight-year-old embattled warrior in Chernyi gorod (The Black City, 2012), the final book in the series to date. In essence, the series is an extended Bildungsroman, and part of its appeal for the reader is watching how Fandorin’s professionalism, ideology, personal life, and values develop in each subsequent installment. The older Fandorin, who is callous, calculating, and practical, is very different from his younger counterpart—an inexperienced police functionary full of romantic dreams of glory, youthful enthusiasm, adolescent eagerness, and budding romance. This transformation reflects the changing atmosphere of the era: Fandorin is first introduced in 1876, a time of relative stability and continuity in Russia; as the series progresses, however, Fandorin experiences the turbulent 1890s, when increased terrorism, corruption, incompetence, and conspiracy threaten to rend the social, economic, and political fabric of Russian society, much as in the 1990s. In the later books in the series readers witness how the political and social upheavals at the turn of the twentieth century affected Fandorin, whose somewhat jejune lofty ideals have been replaced by skepticism, melancholy, and pragmatism. Much as in Russian life during the Putin era, the optimism and excitement of the early 1990s have given way to

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56 Fandorin was born is 1856, exactly one hundred years before his creator, Akunin.
increased financial stability and improved standard of living, but at a cost of civil liberties, social safety nets, and moral responsibility.

A composite of many Western literary characters such as those listed above, Fandorin's literary image runs counters to the typical standards of masculinity in Russia, where hard-drinking, bania-going, womanizing, unemployed males who see no future for themselves abound. Rather, Akunin styles his protagonist as a cultured and intelligent master of disguise who speaks several languages, travels the world, and regularly confronts complicated social and moral issues, invariably making 'the right choice.' Bringing together a variety of familiar and popular literary traditions, Fandorin serves as a strong role model in an age short on upstanding moral heroes. Derived from prototypes of the late nineteenth century, his combination of integrity and panache has captured the imagination of countless readers in the post-Soviet era. As much is evidenced by several blogs that have sprung up since 1998. Akunin’s own official website at www.akunin.ru offers an interactive approach to the Russian detective, and the fan website Fandorin! (www.fandorin.ru) provides a forum where Fandorin fans post comments and information on various aspects of the Fandorin phenomenon. Recent posts have included anecdotes about the intrepid detective, comments on Akunin's historical mistakes, interviews with the author, and concern that the Fandorin novels are coming to an end. Additionally,

57 Somewhat inexplicitly, considering Akunin's huge success, the website has not been updated since 2005.
58 Indeed, Akunin has said that although he plans two more short story collections focusing on Fandorin, there will be no more novels.
Akunin launched a personal blog in November 2010 called *Liubov’ k istorii* (*A Love of History*) where he weighs in on political, historical, social, and cultural issues, as well as posts updates on his various projects and solicits feedback from readers. According to a survey conducted by Akunin, the majority of those who follow his blog live in Russia, are between 20 and 40 years old, and work for other people, i.e. are not self-employed.\(^{59}\) Not surprisingly considering his literary and celebrity success, Akunin’s blog is ranked seventh on the site’s overall user ratings.\(^{60}\)

In crafting a nineteenth-century detective with twenty-first century appeal, Akunin relies on a synthesis of the tried and true British detective tradition, the image of the brooding and dark romantic hero, and Russians’ nostalgia for the past. In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the political, economic, and social chaos that followed, Russians looked to the era of Imperial Russia—a time when Russia was perceived to be at the peak of its global power and glory—in an attempt to make sense of the troubled recent past and present. In order to create a palatable sense of the bygone era, Akunin relies on a canny use of time and space and tightly paced plots. Yet he needs a believable and attractive detective protagonist who is intelligent, perceptive, and of sound moral fiber to serve as an example for today’s readers. Since “detective fiction is all about a man who enthralls because he performs a miracle of accomplishment” (Roth 53), Akunin makes his protagonist part of an alluring

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\(^{60}\) See: http://www.livejournal.com/ratings/users?page=1&country=cyr.
and established profession. Much of Fandorin’s credibility stems from his links to the past: he is cast as a British gentleman, has a distinctive style, employs a deductive methodology, wears disguises in his pursuit of the criminal, and seems unfailingly attractive to women. Fandorin possesses the deductive reasoning of Edgar Allan Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin; the attention to detail of Emile Gaboriau’s Lecoq;61 and the intuition of Sherlock Holmes, perhaps the greatest fictional detective of all time.

Introduced to the reading public in 1887, Holmes is a representative of late nineteenth-century Victorian England, an era rich in scientific progress, innovative technology, and social change. Holmes bases his conclusions on scientific facts, targeted experiments, and rational deduction; he employs the modern investigative tools available to him, tracks down criminals, works with the police, and is paid for his services. He keeps abreast of current events by reading the newspapers and journals and, as an inhabitant of the bustling London metropolis, is a member of the educated newly growing upper middle class. John Watson informs the reader that Holmes ignores literature, for his interest lies in acquiring ‘useful’ knowledge that he can employ in his investigations. Holmes is patriotic, a good citizen, rational, practical, brave, and adventurous—all attributes viewed as desirable in Victorian Britain. He is

61A writer of the roman policier, Emile Gaboriau (1832-73) introduced the police investigator Lecoq—a young, ambitious, modern professional who makes brilliant deductions during the course of the investigation. When necessary, Lecoq is helped by his mentor, Tabaret, an eccentric and enthusiastic amateur detective. The character of Lecoq was a major influence on Conan Doyle’s Holmes.
cultured (he plays the violin), athletic (he is a proficient boxer and swordsman), and has an excellent knowledge of the law and poisons. Although eccentric and prone to solitude (he can spend days lying on his couch in a cocaine-induced daze or playing his violin), Holmes is forced to face everyday problems, such as earning a living for himself (even if Watson is the more financially minded of the two). Although Holmes “through his skills as a consulting detective became an icon of British pragmatism and imperial superiority” (McReynolds 10), he is prone to doubt and pessimism, and has a touch of modern cynicism. In this way he not only represents his age, but today’s world as well. Evidence of this in Great Britain and the U.S. is the current popularity of the latest Holmes TV series, *Sherlock* (created by Stephen Moffat and Mark Gatiss, 2010-).

The figure of the British gentleman has particular appeal in Russia, for he possesses traits utterly lacking in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia: he is aristocratic, polished, refined, self-assured, and reserved, with a well-defined code of conduct. Particularly popular during the 1990s in Russia, the British gentleman then was touted as an ideal in glossy magazines, which introduced new Russians, politicians, and cultural celebrities to the key traits of this paragon, prompting them to adopt the fashions identified with the British aristocracy, purchase the appropriate accouterments, favor studying British English (instead of American, Canadian, or Australian English), and send their offspring to British schools.62

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62 For more details on the glossy magazines that flooded the Russian market in the 1990s, see Goscilo, “Style and S(t)imulation: Popular Magazines, or the Aestheticization
Accordingly, when launching the Fandorin series in the late nineties, Akunin endowed Fandorin with inflexible principles, steady reserve, and an unswerving calm in dangerous situations—the fabled British “stiff upper lip.” Although impoverished in the first novel, Fandorin comes from the Russian nobility, has had an upper-class education, and is able to move fluidly in high society. His honesty, dedication to service, and loyalty to his superiors are admirable personal and professional qualities. Moreover, his appearance adds to his stylish appeal: extremely handsome and fashionable (he is immaculately dressed and has all the latest fashion accessories), Fandorin has an athletic body and impeccable breeding.

Fandorin’s professional endowments complement and overlap with his personal talents. Employing the deductive method in the tradition of Holmes, he possesses an impressive intellect (although not as superb as the British sleuth’s), acute observation skills, the ability to interpret people’s actions, and an intuition about human nature that proves invaluable in solving cases. Since he does not succumb to unnecessary emotion, he is able to remain focused on the case and usually see through the cloud of deception and lies surrounding the suspects. The ‘British gentleman’ aspect of Fandorin’s personality makes him a unique character in Russian literature and suggests the ratiocination of an earlier age when law, order, and decorum prevailed.

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Fandorin: a true professional

Akunin’s stylized Fandorin series evokes not only nineteenth-century literary heroes but also detective novels of that century through the figure of the detective hero, his deductive methodology, his method of pursuing the criminal and investigating the crime, and the eventual capture of the perpetrator. Although not as brilliant as the cerebral Holmes, Fandorin is attentive to detail, competent in gathering clues, and quick to follow new leads. Once he has collected the evidence, he logically and methodologically offers various scenarios to explain the case, eventually narrowing in on the perpetrator, and revealing his findings in a stunning finale. To emphasize the logic of Fandorin’s methods, Akunin gives him the habit (picked up from Brilling during the Azazel’ case) of stating the points in his argument one by one (“raz, dva, tri”). Not only logic, but also powers of observation and interpretation distinguish the sleuth, for his second salient professional skill is an astounding ability to read people’s behavior, thus providing him with an invaluable asset in uncovering lies and deceit. In short, in the tradition of Holmes, Fandorin solves crimes by a mixture of deduction, common sense, observation, and intuition.

New scientific and technical discoveries are of invaluable use to a detective, and the nineteenth-century abounded in innovations. Advances in forensic science, fingerprint evidence, crime scene investigation, and criminal psychology drastically changed police and detective work in the late decades by making it easier to identify and trace the perpetrator (discussed in Chapter Two). In the absence of DNA and forensic evidence, detection at that time
primarily involved deduction and intuition. Today the procedure sooner resembles a science, with the detective spending countless hours sifting through a wealth of evidence to put together a case.

Attuned to the technological advancements and social fads of his age, Fandorin is fascinated by nineteenth-century gadgets: he owns a bicycle, is an automobile enthusiast, has one of the first typewriters on the market, owns the latest weapons, and possesses a fingerprint kit. Also, he is an avid newspaper reader and stays up-to-date on the latest news and social trends. For instance, he reads ‘new age’ books on the proper art of breathing, studies Eastern philosophy, is a physical fitness fanatic, with his own exercise equipment, and has a solid knowledge of global events. With time, he also become adept at determining how a victim has died, and is able to identify various poisons using his—at times limited—scientific knowledge.

Fandorin stands out from other detectives as someone with whom the modern Russian reader can identify because of his professionalism (he is no amateur Holmes) and ambition (he is intent on advancing his career). The typical police investigator in Soviet and early post-Soviet detective fiction is an honest professional who works to battle forces that threaten the state and status quo, yet whose actions remain within the parameters of the established system. In this respect, Fandorin is an oddity in the Russian tradition of the genre; an investigator for ‘special assignments’ (osobyie poruchenija), he ostensibly serves the federal government, but is loyal to Moscow, which is ruled—in medieval fashion—by his patron, Governor General Prince Vladimir Dolgorukoi.
member of the Tsarist police force in the early novels, in *Statskii sovetnik* (*The State Counsellor*, 1999) Fandorin leaves government service after he is asked to compromise his ethics, but he continues to work closely with the police (albeit reluctantly at times) and maintains personal contacts in law enforcement. While Holmes regularly cooperates with Inspector Lestrade, but despises working with the police, Fandorin is often assigned to officers from local law enforcement and the security forces, whom he frequently finds incompetent, corrupt, and/or laughable. In every case he investigates, Fandorin is the single essential component, for, despite an abundance of false clues and red herrings, he usually manages to untangle the knotted threads of the case before his police colleagues, which underscores the primacy of his deductive methods.

Since trailing suspects and gathering evidence are crucial elements of a detective's investigation, the inventive sleuth frequently elaborates a range of disguises that allow him to move undetected, even among those who know him well—a topos established by Holmes, whose clever disguises largely set the standard for the genre. Following in his footsteps, Fandorin is a master of disguises, which he uses to infiltrate criminal hideouts and in stakeouts. Curiously, when disguised, Fandorin does not stammer at all, as if playing the role of another person enables him to absorb completely the personality of the disguise. Some of his more ingenious disguises include those of a French artist with shaggy red hair (*Azazel’*); a hotel guest hiding behind a bushy mustache, a Tyrolean hat with a feather, and an Alpine coat (*Azazel’*); and a beggar whose clothing hides an impressive arsenal of Japanese weapons (*Smert’ Akhilles* [*The
Death of Achilles]. Fandorin is not the only master of disguises in the novels—his opponents also prove adept at creating different personalities in order to deceive others, and in some sequences the battle between right and wrong seems to be fought with the weapons of disguise. For example, the professional assassin Akhimas appears in a different guise for each of his sinister assignments (Smert’ Akhillesa); the Turkish spy Anvar-efendi works undercover as a French journalist (Turetskii gambit [The Turkish Gambit]); the master of disguises Momos runs around Moscow deceiving everyone he meets, including Governor General Dolgorukoi (Pikovyi valet [The Jack of Spades], 1999); Marie Sanfon pretends to be the pregnant wife of a Swiss banker (Leviafan [Murder on the Leviathan]); and the evil Dr. Lind (cast as a Moriarty figure vis-à-vis Fandorin’s Holmes) masquerades as Mademoiselle Declique (Koronatsiia [The Coronation], 2000). Fandorin’s various disguises help him to observe suspects and aid him in his reconnaissance missions, but some of the more outrageous disguises also provide comic relief in serious and life-threatening situations. More humorous than Fandorin, the sleuth’s devoted manservant, Masa, adopts an array of disguises, including those of a grubby Kirgiz and a squat Chinese peddler. The scenes when both Fandorin and Masa are in disguise provide welcome relief at times to offset the seriousness of the investigation, as well as harking back to the early days of the detective genre. One could argue that the plethora of assumed identities are not only standard for the genre, but also suggestive on the meta-level and in today’s sociopolitical context. In a sense, Akunin is the Russian disguise behind which Chkhartishvili, the Georgian specialist in and translator of
Japanese language and culture, briefly hid his ‘true’ identity. And the adoption of a benevolent, righteous persona is what made the KGB agent Vladimir Putin so popular during the 2000s. In general, the collapse of the Soviet Union forced all Russians to forge a new persona manifested on the visible level.

“A white knight upon a fiery steed”

Enhancing his image as a contemporary and unique hero is Fandorin’s exceptional physical appearance and athletic physique, which beg for a transfer to a visual genre. Tall, with a slender build and wide shoulders, he has blue eyes, a thin, black mustache, and black hair, which is silver-gray at the temples—a distinguishing feature that appears after his wife’s death at the conclusion of the first novel in the series. This mark of traumatic experience was a clever device of Akunin’s, for in subsequent novels it casts Fandorin in a mysterious light as someone with a past, someone who has suffered prematurely. Pain, however, does not prohibit attention to style. Always impeccably groomed, Fandorin dresses in the latest fashions, and, at times, is vain and, by today’s standards, foppish: he wears a Lord Byron corset in Azazel’, has a jeweled pin in his necktie and a red carnation in his buttonhole. That his labor is mental and not physical is signaled by his manicured nails. And in several novels (e.g., Leviafan, Smert’ Akhillesa) he carries a fashionable walking cane. In short, he would not look out of place in a fin-de-siècle Parisian fashion magazine.

Along with his foppish appearance, Fandorin is extremely attractive to women and boasts a strong measure of sex appeal—qualities that make him
unique in contemporary Russian literature. This dangerous but irresistible attraction ties him to the Byronic hero, deftly recast in the eponymous protagonist of Aleksandr Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin* (1825-32) and Lermontov’s Pechorin in *A Hero of Our Time* (1841). Indeed, Varvara compares Fandorin to Pechorin because of his intriguing pallor, languid glance, and nobly graying hair (*Turetskii gambit*). Not only surface appeal, but also bodily strength characterize the young hero, who, to maintain his athletic physique, engages in an array of exercise routines, weight lifting, and sparring matches with Masa, his manservant.

Fandorin’s superb physical physique and athletic prowess set him apart from his contemporaries, and puts him among the ranks of superspy James Bond and modern-day action/adventure heroes, such as Indiana Jones, Captain Jack Sparrow, and Aragorn from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). Like Bond, Fandorin is seemingly invincible: he survives a game of Russian roulette (a scene that echoes “The Fatalist” section in *A Hero of Our Time*); recovers after Akhimas stabs him with a knife; breaks out of a Turkish prison; is shot by Marie Sanfon; almost drowns in the Thames; and escapes from the devious clutches of Dr. Blank, who wants to cut into his brain. In this respect Fandorin is a superhero who, true to the Russian saying, neither burns up in fire nor drowns in water (“он в огне не горит, и в воде не тонет”).63 By contrast, the lives of Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Hercule Poirot, or Miss Marple are almost never in

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63 Interview with Aleksandr Adabash’ian, director of the TV miniseries *Azazel’* (2002), which is included in the bonus features on the DVD.
danger. Unlike these purely cerebral talents, Fandorin possesses physical
prowess as well as brains, which is why his escapades resemble Agent 007’s
constant close brushes with death. Despite overwhelming odds, the blend of
superior physical as well as mental capacities is what makes them invariably
emerge triumphant.

Self-preservation, however, does not guarantee omnipotence. Although
Fandorin may be a superman who rides in and sweeps women off their feet, he
cannot always save them from danger or death. Fandorin’s female romantic
interests are frequently endangered: his first wife, Elizaveta [Liza] is killed on
their wedding day; 64 Varvara Suvorova is captured by Anvar-efendi, the Turkish
spy. Likewise, Fandorin is not always able to save his friends: Count Zurev is a
victim of Anvar-efendi; General Sobolov is assassinated; and Fandorin’s mentor
Grushin is killed during an undercover operation. Fandorin’s failure to rescue
those for whom he cares, like his stammer and gray temples, displays a
humanizing vulnerability: his occasional inability to save the victim prevents
him from appearing superhuman, despite the hyperbolic attributes of his
persona.

A moral hero for a troubled age

Fandorin’s intellect, moral fiber, self-discipline, resourcefulness, and
respect for others set him apart from other Russian national heroes and

64 This parallels the killing of James Bond’s wife, Teresa di Vicenzo, by his bitter enemy
Ernst Stavro Blofeld, hours after their marriage ceremony, in On Her Majesty’s Secret
Service (1963).
previous literary detectives. In contrast to the brilliant, aloof, and eccentric
Holmes, Fandorin is smart, but not overly clever. He makes mistakes during the
course of his investigations; at times these errors drag out the case and,
sometimes, result in tragic consequences (in Turetskii gambit he does not
uncover the identity of the Turkish spy in time to save Zurov; in Azazel’ he brings
Grushin into a situation that results in the mentor’s death).

Normally able to control his emotions, Fandroin's Zen-like calm stems
from his Confucian inner harmony and lends him a stately reserve. In dangerous
situations it helps him to focus and think lucidly, without panic. Much of his
discipline stems from his martial arts training, which exceeds physical skills, for
it is grounded in a philosophy that provides Fandorin with an inner voice that
orients him in questions of right and wrong. He embodies the harmony of
Eastern philosophy (the basis of his moral core) and the code of the Japanese
samurai (the source of his dedication to serving an [honorable] government or
leader). Not merely a hobby, the Asian martial arts that Fandorin pursues
develop a rigor that informs his professionalism. A strong work ethic is a quality
valued in the West, but has not been a widespread practice in the Soviet Union
and in post-Soviet Russia. Judging by the detective’s popularity, his values—stay
true to yourself, work hard, live according to a moral code, help others, abide by
laws, and do not take bribes—are valued by Russian citizens today, probably
because they are so rare. Furthermore, Fandorin’s East-West identify conjures
the phenomenon of Eurasianism, which, on the basis of Russia’s geographical
and historical straddling of East and West, was embraced as a political concept
by the first Russian emigration in the 1920s, and more recently has become the cornerstone of publications and pronouncements by several public figures who lay claim to philosophy, notably Aleksandr Dugin.

The ultra-rightist Eurasianism movement envisions the revival of Russian identity based on an all-powerful, reconstructed Eurasian empire that embraces the country’s rich historical past rooted in Asia (Clowes 44). Dugin, the movement’s main ideologue, promotes a mixture of Slavophile values, Eurasian thought from the 1920s, and neo-fascism (Clowes 44). Several intellectual tendencies manifest themselves in his thought: “a political theory inspired by Traditionalism, Orthodox religious philosophy, Aryanist and occultist theories, and geopolitical and Eurasianist conceptions” (Laruelle 108). Russian émigrés in the 1920s wanted to re-establish the Russian empire by fully embracing the Asian aspects of Russian history, economy, and culture, albeit without autocratic oppression. In the post-Soviet geopolitical world, Dugin conceives of a strong Russian state based on Russia’s historic position between East and West that will act as a powerful counterweight to the Western alliance, i.e. NATO. Dugin views the world in bipolar terms: a ‘Heartland,’ which tends towards authoritarian regimes, and the ‘World Island,’ characterized by a democratic and commercial system (Laruelle 116). Dugin believes that Russia has a natural tendency to ally itself with certain countries, especially Iran, which he admires for its moral rigorism, and Japan, esteemed for its pan-Asian ideology (Laruelle 117). Russian geopolitics must be Eurasian, since that is where the country will restore its status as a world power.
Drawing on Cold War rhetoric, Dugin stipulates that a Eurasian empire should position itself against the Atlantic alliance, Western liberalism, and pervasive globalization. Dugin postulates Russia’s right to develop along a unique path, free from foreign interference—a concept that is echoed in Vladimir Putin’s policy of ‘sovereign democracy,’ which stipulates that Russia has the right to create its own brand of democracy, even if that entails one-party autocratic rule. According to Dugin, the Russian penchant for a state ruled by force and terror are an inheritance from the Mongols. Harkening back to Nazi ideology, Dugin believes that identity and mentality are determined by environmental factors; therefore the Russian north and northeast are sacred ground that must position itself to protect that region of the world. Consequently, the new Eurasian empire must be based in Moscow. Indeed, Russia today is attempting to maintain and develop political and economic relations with the East (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)) as the country attempts to reinvent itself as a Eurasian superpower. In stark contrast to Dugin, Edvard Limonov, Aleksandr Prokhonov, and other ultra-conservatives and neo-fascists, Akunin has Fandorin draw on Russia’s Eastern heritage and his knowledge of Japanese culture not to help create a new world power, but to enhance his moral qualities of righteousness, morality, and inner harmony. Tellingly, Fandorin does not enflame fear and hatred in a nation already plagued with xenophobia, racism, statism, and neo-fascist slogans.
Possessing an amazing ability to keep politics and ethics separate, Fandorin bases his important professional decisions on relations with people, not the state, and acts in accordance with his own convictions. In fact, he strictly distinguishes between Russia, to which he exhibits unfailing loyalty, and the state, which he accords neither trust nor admiration, for its representatives often inspire neither. When dealing with corrupt officials, Fandorin does not compromise with them; instead he leaves the investigation or resigns from the police force, as in a key episode described in *Statskii sovetnik* (The State Counsellor). Unlike the numerous corrupt officials in the novels who populate the upper echelons of the Russian government (secret police head Khurtinskii, Grand Duke Kirill Aleksandrovich, Prince Pozharskii, General Khrapov), Fandorin is a patriot in the sense that he serves Russia, not his personal interests, Like Aleksandr Griboedov’s troubled nineteenth-century protagonist Chatskii, Fandorin serves the national cause, not powerful individuals ("служить делу, а не лицам"), and he believes in service, not in being subservient. His devotion to his patron Prince Dolgorukoi shows that Fandorin is loyal to those who serve Russia and are honest. When Mizinov, head of the Third Section, accuses Fandorin of being disloyal and shirking his duty, the sleuth replies: “Ваше в-высокопревосходительство…я служу не вам, а России” (38) ("Your excellency, it is not you that I serve, but Russia" (37)), and he declares that he will not take part in any war or action that will ruin Russia. After uncovering a plot instigated by members of the royal family and highly placed government officials to overthrow the Russian government, Fandorin is almost forced to go
into hiding, but remains faithful to his principles, asserting, "I have betrayed nothing; it is my fatherland that has betrayed its faithful servant!" (308) ("Нет, не изменивший, это отечество предало своего верного слугу!" (316)). Faced with the staggering extent of government corruption at the end of Smert' Akhillesa, Fandorin cites Confucius as a model for decorum: “You should read Confucius, you fine gentlemen who watch over the throne. Where it says that the noble man can never be anyone else’s tool” (316). ("Читайте Конфуция, господа блюстители престола. Там сказано: благородный муж не может быть ничьим орудием") (308).

As a true aristocrat, the sleuth guards his privacy, keeping his thoughts and emotions well hidden, while simultaneously adopting the tendency of the middle class to rely on itself, not higher institutions of government (Aron 2007). No doubt this streak of self-reliance in his personality is yet another feature attractive to Fandorin fans, many of whom belong to the Russian middle class and view the post-Soviet government with skepticism, if not outright distrust. Fandorin’s refusal to consider the authorities as sacred not only gives him an edge, for he is willing to entertain everyone as a suspect, but also doubtless resonates with many Russians, even those who might find him overly reserved and cold-blooded.

However professionally gifted Fandorin may be, his creator has also made him extremely lucky. In this regard Akunin is tremendously generous with his hero, for Fandorin’s extraordinary luck is essential to his success in virtually all his cases, and that luck not only enhances his public image, but also is
addressed by Fandorin himself. The series teems with occasions where sheer luck and good fortune render Fandorin invaluable assistance. For instance, he wins a game of cards and emerges unharmed after a gun misfires several times during a duel with Count Zurov in *Azazel*; he earns his freedom from a Turkish captivity in a game of backgammon in *Turetskii gambit*; he survives a gunshot and a falling gigantic clock in *Leviafan*; and he miraculously dodges bullets and somersaults unharmed through windows during the climatic showdown in *Smert’ Akhillesa*. To ward off readers’ incredulity regarding Fandorin’s exceptional luck, Akunin has Count Zurov comment upon the detective’s good fortune in *Azazel*. After Fandorin has beaten chance in a game of Russian roulette, Zurov tells Fandorin that he has a protective halo:

There’s something about you…I don’t know, perhaps you’re marked in some way [...] They’re special people, the ones with that halo. Fate watches over them—it protects them against all dangers. It never occurs to the man to think what fate is preserving him for. You must never fight a duel with a man like that—he’ll kill you. Don’t sit down to play cards with him—you’ll be cleaned out, no matter what fancy tricks you pull out of your sleeve [...] I don’t meet people like you too often.65 (157)

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65 “Есть в тебе что-то… Не знаю, печать какая-то, что ли [...] Особые это люди, у кого нимб, судьба их хранит, от всех опасностей оберегает. Для чего хранит—человеку и самому невдомек. Стреляться с таким нельзя—убьет. В карты не садись—продуешься, какие кунстюки из рукава не мечи [...] Редко таких, как ты, встретишь.” (145-46).
In other words, not unlike the early Greek heroes, Fandorin has the favor of the gods; special and chosen by them, he may rely on their inexplicable aid, which defies logic but enhances his heroic persona.

**A lonely, active Russian intellectual**

Against the background of the ideological Socialist Realist heroes and the *rodina*-serving spies of the Soviet era, Fandorin's image as a man of the world makes him exceptional in the pantheon of Russophile protagonists. It is presumably his travels that have shaped his *Weltanschauung* and given him a unique, worldly perspective from which to view both human nature and politics. Although he lives and works in Imperial Russia, which adds to the detective's allure for Russians yearning for a glamorous past, Fandorin is not typical of his era. Rather, he is someone crafted for a modern-day Russia—a country and society struggling with many of the challenges facing Fandorin. Although he identifies as a Russian and a patriot, Fandorin embodies cosmopolitan attributes: he speaks several foreign languages (English, German, Japanese, French, a smattering of Turkish and Serbian), has experienced other cultures and visited world capitals, is versed in literature, and has served in a foreign diplomatic post. His travels and adventures evoke those of other literary heroes, such as Homer’s *Odysseus*, Voltaire’s *Candide*, Ignacy Krasicki’s *Nicholas Wisdom*, and Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin*, whose wanderings not only bring them back to their homeland irrevocably changed by their journeys, but also lend these figures an air of mystery and exoticism. Fandorin's years spent abroad
make him an oddity in Russian society, especially since he has adopted Japanese
customs and behavior—an assimilation that causes his contemporaries to look
at him with suspicion and curiosity. In essence, Fandorin is both a nineteenth-
century Russian intellectual and a well-traveled modern European—a blend
with which today's privileged Russian upper- and middle classes have begun to
identify.66

Though Akunin provides a detailed description of Fandorin's physical
appearance and its impact on those he meets, as well as tracking Fandorin's
actions, what do we know about Fandorin's inner world? The object of readers'
fascination, Fandorin is an enigma because much of what the reader learns about
him is revealed through the viewpoint of other characters, who speculate and
offer opinions, but ultimately cannot unravel the mystery of his persona. In the
absence of an informative omniscient narrator or an outsider who works closely
with the Russian detective, the reader has little access to Fandorin's psyche,
especially since the reticent sleuth does not reveal a great deal about his
personal life and background. This externalization of Fandorin adds to his

66 In an interesting parallel with Fandorin, Akunin’s increasing opposition to the
government has propelled him to leave Russia for extended periods. Akunin now
spends his time between Moscow and Brittany, in northern France. In a recent
interview with the Financial Times, John Thornhill writes the following about Akunin:
“When he walks along certain boulevards in Moscow, Akunin says, ideas just jump into
his head and he has to stop to jot them down. But when he wants to turn those thoughts
into words, he retreats to his home in Brittany with his wife, who helps edit his works.
“There is a place close to the Yauza river where I walk where the air is thick with culture
and energy. Moscow is wonderful for energy. But when it comes to writing the text it
needs discipline and order and that is awful there. St Malo is rainy and windy. It is
perfect [says Akunin].”
mysterious allure, because the reader and other characters in the narrative rarely know what he is thinking, what factors motivate his decisions, or precisely what he feels about the corruption and evil that he confronts on a daily basis. Essentially a loner, Fandorin is not married, does not have any friends (except Masa, who is his subordinate), does not like to socialize, and rarely frequents restaurants, parties, or clubs. Akunin largely operates by negatives: that is, Fandorin seldom drinks alcohol, curses, or lies; he remains aloof from the cronyism, deception, bribery, and corruption that permeate his world. While providing an exemplary model of external behavior for both nineteenth-century and today's society, Fandorin is somewhat eccentric and avoids excessive social contact. Nevertheless, judging by the number of women friends he has throughout the series, Fandorin must have some basic need for human companionship beyond that of his Japanese manservant. Part of his attraction for readers likely stems from their inability to ‘decode’ him, which also accounts for his image as a magnet for women.

As in the fictional lives of James Bond and Dr. Who, a new female companion appears in Fandorin’s life with each new case or installment—a phenomenon that enhances his reputation as a lady-killer. After his wife’s death, and until he meets the Japanese *femme fatale* Midori in *Almaznaia kolesnitsa* (*The Diamond Chariot*, 2003), Fandorin does not seem interested in any kind of relationship with women, who flock to him throughout the series: in *Turetskii gambit*, Varvara Suvorova follows him around the Russian army camp like a love-stricken puppy, yet Fandorin seems immune to her presence (although he
almost shows some emotion at their parting on a Turkish railway platform); Clarissa Stamp openly declares her love to Fandorin on board the *Leviafan*, but Fandorin turns her down, while consistently acting in a gentlemanly manner. It is not until Esfir’ in *Statskii sovetnik* and Princess Ksenia in *Koronatsiia* that Fandorin succumbs, in his peculiar fashion, to a woman’s charm. Not surprisingly, these instances occur after Fandorin has fallen in love with Midori. Traditional literary detectives like Holmes, Poirot, and Miss Marple lack a romantic interest, seemingly because that person would divert the detective’s full concentration from the case when the investigator needs to have a clear head and avoid spontaneous emotional reactions. Similarly, in Fandorin’s case, he is usually alone when he is closing in on a perpetrator. For instance, in *Turetskii gambit*, he leaves the Russian army camp and travels to Paris in search of clues about the enemy spy’s identity. In *Smert’ Akhilessa*, he leaves the lounge singer Vanda alone while he tracks down Akhimas. Essentially, in order to maintain Fandorin's image as an exceptional hero, Akunin cannot domesticate him. Instead, he envelops him in an aura of tragedy that not only evokes both sympathy and attraction from the reader, but also eliminates the possibility of a stable romance with a woman that would require a ‘prose of intimacy’ that seems alien to Akunin, if one may judge by his treatment of Fandorin’s relationship with Liza and Midori. Fandorin’s personal tragedies have left him with deep scars and hinder him from building any kind of sustained, trusting relationship with another person. And it is perhaps this very elusiveness (whether abetted by Akunin’s limitations in limning a fully rounded character or
not) that lies at the core of Fandorin’s charismatic appeal, frustrating only those readers with a preference for characters with depth.

**Hero-worship: the Dr. Watson connection**

As discussed in Chapter One, the detective usually has a sidekick or confidant with whom he discusses aspects of each case—a confidant whom the author presents with a degree of irony or humor, for he functions as a foil of sorts, emphasizing the superiority of the detective-protagonist. Not as intelligent as the detective, the sidekick often provides a commonsense, first-person narrative about the detective’s activities and the nature of his deductive process. Examples of the detective-sidekick tandem include Dupin and his American confidant; Holmes and Watson; Lord Peter Wimsey and Bunter; Hercule Poirot and Captain Hastings; and Inspector Clouseau and Cato. Female detectives tend to work alone, as illustrated by Christie’s Miss Marple and Lynda La Plante’s Jane Tennison (*Prime Suspect*). The sidekick—always a male in the canonical works—should have enough in common with the detective to make a plausible long-term companion. Additionally, he has to be entirely trustworthy so that the reader believes his observations. Masahiro (Masa) Sibata is not only Fandorin’s Japanese manservant, but also his professional and personal confidant, sparring partner, and spiritual advisor. Unlike Watson, however, Masa does not provide a first-person narrative very often. Instead, his role is to act as a counterbalance to Fandorin’s eccentricities and serve as a devoted companion to the detective-
hero, though just as frequently Masa, as a foreigner, appears the more eccentric and certainly alien of the two.

After Fandorin wins a game of dice, thereby saving Masa’s life from a criminal gang (an incident related in Almaznaia kolesnitsa), the young Japanese travels with Fandorin, first to Moscow, then accompanying the Russian detective on his global adventures. Orphaned as a small child, Masa, like Fandorin, has no family. His father killed his mother and threw the three-year-old Masa into the sea; the youth miraculously survived. Extremely loyal to Fandorin, almost to the point of hero-worship, the Japanese calls the Russian his onjin, lifelong “benefactor.” However, Masa’s debt to Fandorin is repaid many times, for, in the spirit of the genre, he often arrives just in the nick of time to rescue his master, provide much needed assistance, or help him in a physical fight. The two ‘orphans’ share a strong brotherly bond. Their symbiotic relationship not only provides comic relief in the series, but also makes Fandorin more receptive to human companionship. Moreover, as a character, Masa enables Akunin to showcase his familiarity with Japanese culture and, whether intentionally or not, to step outside the confines of Russian mores and certify his own credentials as a cosmopolitan.

Masa is an asset and a valuable assistant to Fandorin in several respects: firstly, he is devoted to Fandorin, providing a source of loyalty and blind trust that Fandorin has not had from anyone else in his life; secondly, Masa serves as a direct connection to Fandorin’s life in Japan (where he advanced his career, fell in love, learned martial arts, and studied Eastern philosophy) and he is a direct
conduit to the sleuth’s inner harmony. Thirdly, Masa humanizes Fandorin by not allowing him to isolate himself: Fandorin’s bouts of depression are relieved by Masa, who serves as his nursemaid, exercise partner, sounding board, and link to the world. Though the two could hardly differ more in temperament—Masa complains constantly, is lazy, and likes to sleep, while Fandorin is active, scholarly, and taciturn—the duo’s relationship works well for them and, like Holmes and Watson, they become close friends. Within that relationship, Masa is not the only one to look out for the other: after Grushin, Fandorin’s first mentor, is killed during a confrontation with a villainous gang, Masa is ready to kill himself over a deep sense of responsibility for the policeman’s death. Fandorin manages to dissuade him from the deed in a tender scene that evokes the benevolent master/trusting servant relationship of Frodo Baggins and Sam in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Much of the comedy in the series stems from Akunin’s portrayal of Fandorin and Masa as polar opposites—a perennial ploy of comic routines, from Abbot and Costello, Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner, to Britain’s Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, and Ant and Dec. Unlike the physically fit and stylish Russian sleuth, the round-faced Masa is short, bandy-legged, and plump. He adorns himself in a variety of gaudy outfits, wears wooden sandals, carries all sorts of Japanese items (a paper fan, lacquered boxes, Japanese weapons), and literally has a hard head. A stranger in a foreign land, Masa frequently voices his opinions about Russians: he calls the denizens of the Russian capital big-eared barbarians, who look odd and smell strange—a perspective that Akunin, presumably, does
not share but that permits him to distance the narratives from a narrow nationalistic stance. Masa’s roguish taste for Russian women, whom he finds tall and fat (i.e., much better than their Japanese counterparts), proves fertile ground for a number of comic scenes and additionally provides an ‘alien’ viewpoint. During his years at Fandorin’s side, Masa never really comes to understand Western ways or grows accustomed to Russian food. His clumsy attempts to study the language give rise to hilarious situations: for instance, at one point he studies the dictionary, one page at a time and often misunderstands what is said to him. Consequently he relays erroneous information to Fandorin, which also results in funny scenes that lighten the tone of the novels. In like vein, many of the Asian rituals in which the pair engage are comic, as when they ch Allange each other to see who is more adept at running up the walls of a hotel room. In short, Masa fulfills several functions: he renders invaluable assistance to Fandorin in times of trouble and is a loyal, trusted companion. At the same time, his views on Russia rescue the works from a national parochialism and provide comic relief. Though Fandorin participates in scenes intended to be humorous, he himself never appears comic, for that is Masa’s lot. The two stand together and in so doing instance genuine solidarity between two figures from very different regions of the world.

**Conclusion**

As the glamorous individual at the center of the novels, Fandorin is a new kind of hero for post-Soviet Russia, the heir to such Soviet-era cult figures as
Iulian Semenov’s heroic double agent Stirlitz, who was touted as the new Soviet hero in the 1970s. By the 1990s, the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in a dearth of heroic figures and it was not until the appearance in 1997 of Danila Bagrov in the blockbuster film *Brat* (*Brother*; dir. Aleksei Balabanov) that a new, radically different, national hero found favor with Russian audiences. Yet even with his childlike naiveté and the boyish smile that won the hearts of numerous female fans, with time Danila’s status as a ‘real’ hero of the times came under question because of his rampant violence and vigilante ‘justice.’ Indeed, he personifies the street violence, senseless killings, and breakdown of social values that are characteristic of the Yeltsin era.

By contrast, Fandorin has strong moral values, is a professional law enforcement official, and stands out as a law-abiding citizen. Fandorin’s intelligence, deductive skills, integrity, and physical prowess set him apart in an age of widespread greed, comprehensive corruption, and pervasive unprofessionalism. He epitomizes the hero with a Herculean strength of character and probity amid the disorder of the age. Bonnie Tyler’s song heralds the arrival of a Wagnerian-like hero who will bring order to the chaotic elemental forces: “Through the wind and the chill and the rain/And the storm and the flood/I can feel his approach/Like the fire in my blood;” Fandorin arrives with a whimper, but eventually develops into the ‘larger than life’ hero who takes up the mantle and attempts to root out the evil threatening or blighting the country. Fandorin exists to serve and protect Russia, and he devotes his life to doing just that.
Much like Russia’s own transformation from a fledging state following the collapse of the Soviet Union, amidst the euphoria that prevailed in an era of *glasnost*’ and freedom from censorship and control, Fandorin’s political and social conscience changes from that of an optimistic youth to a cynical middle-aged male. If the youthful Fandorin represented the ethos of the late 1990s, what kind of hero is Akunin suggesting for the second decade of the 2000s? Based on Akunin’s increasing political activism and his voluntary semi-exile from Russia, it will be interesting to see how Fandorin develops in the final installments of the series and if, indeed, he will continue to be the quintessential hero of two times.
Chapter 4

Investigating the Case: Plot and Devious Plotters

“I have always been fascinated by structure in the novel, and detective fiction presented a number of technical problems, mainly how to construct a plot which was both credible and exciting with a setting which came alive for readers, and characters who were believable men and women faced with the trauma of a police investigation into murder.”

P.D. James, Talking About Detective Fiction

“You can’t get out backwards. You have to go forward to go back”

Willy Wonka (Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, dir. Mel Stuart, 1971)

“What was the starting point of this chain of events? There lay the end of this tangled line.”

Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Musgrave Ritual”

‘Whose Body?’

Dorothy Sayers’s (1893-1957) first novel, Whose Body? (1923), opens with the discovery of a dead body in a bathtub wearing nothing but a pair of gold pince-nez, which, Sayers writes, “mocked death with grotesque elegance.” With this captivating initial scene, Sayers launched a popular series featuring the eccentric amateur investigator Lord Peter Wimsey and made a significant contribution to the Anglophone tradition of the detective genre with her clever
plots, well-written prose, memorable characters, and melodramatic flair (largely through the passionate romance between Lord Peter and Harriet Vane). Suggestively, the question mark in the novel’s title directs the reader’s attention to one of the two core questions at the heart of any detective narrative—‘Whodunit?’ and ‘Who is guilty?’ The posed questions capture the reader’s imagination through an inherent human curiosity to figure out, during the course of the narrative, who committed the crime and why. In a twist on the traditional narrative, the mystery element incites the reader to look forward to the novel’s ending; in other words, the puzzle presented in the opening scenes “prefigures at the outset the form of its [the novel’s] denouement by virtue of the highly visible question mark hung over its opening” (Porter 86). In the detective genre, the consequences of a crime are usually revealed before the causes that led up to it. Unlike in other fictional genres, in the mystery, the detective’s job is to move backwards through time to reconstruct the series of events that preceded the incident; therefore “the plot aims at establishing a linear, chronological sequence of events that will eventually explain its own baffling starting point” (Pyrhönen “Detective Fiction,” 103). While novels contain embedded biographies that rely on the past to delineate characters, the detective genre is the only form that necessitates a comprehensive return to and retracing of the past. So the genre sooner tackles the issue of “what happened then?” than “what happens next?”, though the former unavoidably influences the latter.

In this sui generis backward-moving structure, reconstruction of the past not only leads to the guilty party, but also often illuminates the motivations and
human behavior that instigated the criminal act. As the plot develops, the

*Vorgeschichte* often displaces the narrative present as the focal point, for only
preceding events and as yet unrevealed psychological impulses and complexities
can lead to the crime's solution. The author 'plays' with the reader by relying on
deception and trickery in an attempt to erect obstacles in the investigator's (and
the readers') path, thereby providing a challenging and interactive 'game of wits'
between the author and both the detective and the reader.

The structure of the detective plot hinges on the desire to identify the
criminal and the pleasurable frustration of experiencing suspense, created by
the delay of the solution until the ending. The detective and reader are engaged
in a hermeneutic game of interpreting clues and events to discover the answers
to the questions posed at the outset. In a marked departure from its early
practitioners, the detective genre has developed in such a way that the crime and
the investigation (hence plot structure) are treated differently today in the
variety of sub-genres of detective fiction that have developed since the
nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Classical detective fiction presents crime as a puzzle subject to strict rules
that the detective and reader race to solve. Examples include Edgar Allan Poe,
Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Ngaio Marsh.67 Hard-boiled detective

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67 Various attempts have been made over the years to establish 'rules' of 'fair play' for
the detective genre. S.A. Van Dine came up with “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective
Stories” (1928), which include the notion that the reader should have access to all
information that the detective does and should know about all the clues the detective
possesses. In his “Detective Decalogue” (1928-29), one of Ronald Knox’s ten claims is
that the detective must not commit the crime. Other authors have also chimed in on the
fiction depicts an investigator who works alone, on a quest to battle criminal forces infesting social structures. Rather than trying to solve an enigma, the reader follows the heroic investigator on his, frequently personal, quest to bring justice to a corrupt world, as in the works of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Mickey Spillane, where the narrative's focus is on the detective's psyche and 'smarts.' Today's police procedural, by contrast, is structured around a plot that alternates between the criminal's planning and commission of crimes, on the one hand, and the investigative team's collaborative attempts to locate the criminal using an array of procedural devices to collect evidence and apprehend the perpetrator. Some of the best-known examples include the best-selling mysteries of Lynda La Plante, Jo Nesbo, P.D. James, Colin Dexter, and Ruth Rendell. The metaphysical or postmodern detective story comprises a plot that “manipulates temporal and causal relations without establishing the ground from which to organize the pieces narrated into a coherent whole” (Pyrhonen “Detective Fiction,” 103). The postmodern detective usually does not provide a convincing or final solution, leaving it largely up to the reader to interpret the text. In this way, postmodern detection “exploits detective stories by expanding and changing certain possibilities in them” (Holquist 165). Those possibilities include an open-ended plot, indecipherable clues, unclear motives, and unresolved endings—“in short, all the wayward possibilities of real life that the traditional detective story deliberately excludes from its highly rational, causally
coherent universe” (Rzepka 233). Fiction by writers better known for their literary endeavors who qualify in this sphere include Vladimir Nabokov and Umberto Eco.

Although drawn from a variety of sources, the plots in Boris Akunin’s Fandorin series are more traditional than postmodern, and, for the most part, model themselves on the classical detective paradigm. The sequence of events holds readers’ attention and keeps them involved until the end of the narrative through a series of thrilling moments and fast-paced action, including chases through the streets of Moscow, shoot-outs with terrorists, exploding bombs, narrow escapes, and battling ninjas. While Akunin’s plots are straightforward and “presented in a series of highly dramatic descriptions” (Sobolev 69), they tend to comprise a series of linked episodes rather than fully developed storylines. Yet Akunin’s plots are quite complicated, suspenseful, and challenging for the reader. Moreover, they involve government conspiracies, royal kidnappings, suicide cults, international spies and terrorists, and ninja warriors, confronting readers with surprising twists and turns: in Azazel’, Fandorin’s mentor, Ivan Brilling, turns out to be a key figure in Lady Ester’s conspiracy; the evil Dr. Lind is revealed to be no other than a governess in Koronatsiia (Coronation 2000); Fandorin, without realizing it, captures his own son and is responsible for his death in Almaznaia kolesnitsia (The Diamond Chariot 2003), and so forth. In most cases, Fandorin, in the classical tradition of the genre, works his way backwards in time to establish the causality of events
that led up to the crime and, in doing so, exposes the human behavior that poses general, insoluble questions about motivation and moral choices.

**Forward in reverse: theories of plot and detective plots**

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines plot (*mythos*) as the most important element of drama, even more vital than character (*ethos*). Moreover, a good plot must have a beginning, middle, and end, and the plot elements must relate to each other. Plot is conceived as the shaping outline of the story’s elements, which supports and organizes the narrative. One of the most important functions of plot is its ability to evoke emotions in the audience; for example, a tragedy will arouse fear and pity in spectators/readers, while a comedy will induce laughter and humor. In his study *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1992), Peter Brooks defines plot as “the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements—incidents, episodes, actions—of a narrative” (5). Following in Aristotle’s footsteps, the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp gives precedence to *mythos* over *ethos*, arguing that characters are essentially agents of the action. For Propp, what is important is how characters move the action, their placement, and their place in a sequence of actions, not their individuality. E. M. Forster defines plot as a narrative of events, with the emphasis falling on causality: “The king died and then the queen died” is a story. “The king died, and then the queen died of grief” is a plot” (Forster 86). Plot is essential to mystery and detective fiction because the genre relies on a process of making
connections in order to reach a logical and temporal conclusion to the question posed at the beginning of the narrative. In looking at the role temporality plays in detective fiction Tzvetan Todorov draws on Formalist terminology, arguing that the reader encounters two stories—(1) the story of the crime (fabula) and (2) the investigation, or how the events are presented in the narrative (siuzhet). Dennis Porter contends that in detective fiction “the denouement determines the order and causality of all that precedes” it (25); therefore, the ending is essentially written first, with the beginning in mind. Accordingly, the structure of a detective novel is that of a novel in reverse. Plot is of vital significance because each event in the narrative chain was written with the resolution in mind and each event is arranged in a specific order to reach a logical conclusion. The detective novel charts two narrative lines: how the events occurred and how the reader/detective puts them together. The interplay between these two distinct activities in reading the text provides the suspense and excitement that are so vital to detective fiction.

Traditionally viewed as a popular genre, the detective novel attracts all kinds of readers, including those who never contemplate consuming any other popular genre: the highbrow reader, who is drawn to the intricate plots, artistic gratification, intellectual stimulation, the excitement of escapism, and curiosity about life in an unfamiliar place. The lowbrow reader is attracted by the tightly paced plots, escapism, and thrills of the genre (Rzepka 23). In the words of Peter Brooks, the reader is “reading for the plot.” Brooks argues that that attraction of the detective narrative lies in the pleasure provided by the act of reading.
towards the conclusion. Brooks sees “the text itself as a system of internal
ergies and tensions, compulsions, resistances, and desires” (xiv) that instills in
the reader a desire to reach the end. The investigation is a retracing of events,
which gives the reader gratification; during the investigation, the detective hero
retraces, repeats, and recreates the actions of his predecessor, the criminal.
Thus, the narrative is presented as repetition and rehearsal, where the
important element is the “constructive, semiotic role of repetition: the function
of plot as the active repetition and reworking of a story in and by discourse”
(Brooks 25), eventually resulting in the detection and apprehension of the
original plot-maker, the criminal (25). In a somewhat different vein, Roland
Barthes in his work on narrative theory, S/Z (1970), identifies plot as the
interplay of two different codes: the proairetic, which creates suspense in
narrative by offering unanswered questions; and the hermeneutic, which
concerns the questions and answers that structure a story and creates suspense
by the anticipation of an action’s resolution. Obviously, the detective story
instances the hermeneutic code, because everything in the story’s structure and
its temporality depend on the resolution of the central mystery. Based on this
schema, the reader will keep reading in order to achieve at the end of the
narrative the sense that everything finally makes sense. Brooks sums up as
follows: if “the motor of narrative is desire […], the ultimate determinants of
meaning lie at the end, and narrative desire is ultimately […] desire for the end”
(52). Here Brooks relies on Sigmund Freud’s notion of the death drive, in that the
reader is propelled forward in the narrative by an intense desire to experience
the thrills of the text, yet paradoxically the ultimate pleasure for the reader is to reach the closure that the ending predictably provides. It is only at the end that the structure of the narrative becomes clear and provides meaning to what has come before. In this way Brooks associates the structural function of narrative closure with the death drive, with the ultimate knowledge that the reader seeks, "the knowledge that comes after, stands on the far side of the end, in human terms on the far side of death" (95).

Counterviews posit that while the reader is certainly motivated in reaching the end so that the missing pieces eventually all fall into place, "what the reader of detection desires at each step of the reading process is not its end, but its immediate continuation" (Rzepka 27). If the reader is interested only in reaching the end, then the thrill of the process of getting there hardly matters and the pleasurable experience of attainment will be finished all too quickly. Indeed, the reader derives considerable satisfaction from the puzzle element and the intellectual challenge of trying to solve the crime before the investigator does so. The reader more likely anticipates additional opportunities to continue this thrill than to end the game. Rzepka argues that "what we read 'for' in detection is not 'the end,' but what the approach of the end makes even more urgent and exciting, namely, the exercise of our powers of imaginative invention" (25). The thrill of the detective narrative is the process of looking backwards and trying to reestablish the chain of events that led to the crime, identifying the criminal, and working through all the false leads, red herrings, and false solutions that the reader constantly encounters. The genre provides
both challenge and entertainment by allowing the reader to unravel and connect—by moving backwards—the many threads that will eventually reveal the solution to the crime.

If the success of detective fiction, along with its melodramatic elements, depends on the genre’s ability to generate suspense, then one of the key devices employed is a “form of impediment” (Porter 30). Detective novels are constructed in such a way that they must move forward towards the resolution, yet, in order to keep the reader engaged and interested in the text, the narratives often take unexpected digressions along the path towards the conclusion. One method of delaying the ending is the use of peripeteia, which is a discovery or event that deflects or hinders progress toward the resolution (Porter 32). Examples in the Fandorin novels include parallel intrigues in the narrative (Fandorin works to stop Akhimas from killing again while the assassin is focused on completing his agenda in Smert’ Akhilles (The Death of Achilles); love motifs (in Azazel’ Fandorin is distracted from the case by his romance with Liza, while Varvara acts an impediment to his investigation in Turetskii gambit (The Turkish Gambit); and false solutions (Azazel’, Turetskii gambit, and Smert’ Akhilles all offer several wrong solutions to the crime until the final, accurate resolution is announced). The criminal also slows down the action, throwing the detective off the track, threatening his life, or impeding his work through various tactics. In the Holmes’ novels, Watson and Lestrade frequently misread evidence or conduct their own investigations—misguided conduct that misleads the reader until Holmes steps in to correct their errors and resolve the case. All too often
the detective-protagonist also adds an element of suspense because, at least in
the classical tradition, his thoughts and insights are withheld from the assistant
and/or reader, thereby making the announcement of the resolution even more
unexpected. Finally, individual episodes typically also obstruct progress
towards the ending by providing a series of genuine and false evidence, which
makes it much harder to sort through and analyze the available information. The
challenge of the detective novel is to maintain the momentum of forward
movement while providing a series of thrilling episodes, suspenseful scenes, and
surprising twists and turns. Upon reaching the resolution, the reader should not
only gain satisfaction from the cerebral challenge of solving the crime, but also
experience a sensation not unlike an adrenaline rush after a well-played game of
sport.

The body in the library: the plot paradigm

In his seminal work *Morfologiia skazki (The Morphology of the Folktale*
1928), Propp identifies a series of formulaic elements present in many fairy
tales, and such a list can be drafted for detective fiction as well. Stories of
detection unfold according to an organized structure and well-known

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68 This technique has changed with the appearance of the hard-boiled and modern-day
detective. Works of this type are often told from the first-person or third-person point
of view. For the most part, the reader knows what Harry Hole, Kurt Wallander, Anna
Travis, and Adam Dalgliesh are thinking and has access to information either before or
as the detective discovers it. Additionally, the reader often knows what the criminal or
suspects are thinking, thereby possessing knowledge that the detective does not have.
Fandorin’s thought process, however, remains frustratingly elusive. In that sense, one
could accuse Akunin of not playing fair with the reader.
conventions. The narrative opens with the introduction of the detective, who is either a professional or an amateur, and the crime that he is tasked with solving. Subsequently, clues are discovered concerning that crime, which can include witnesses, suspects, red herrings, and false solutions. Next, there is an investigation, which leads to the announcement of the solution, followed by an explanation of the solution, then a denouement (Shklovskii, “Novella” 115; Cawelti, *Adventure* 81-91).

Along with this basic paradigm, the formula also involves situations that depict the major characters and their relationships to one another and to the crime. Such characters include the victim, the criminal, the detective, and those who are threatened by the crime, but are incapable of solving it (Cawelti 91-96). As a narrative that poses a question at the very beginning, the detective plot has two main elements: ratiocination or detection, and mystification. The detective hero has to work his way through the case, gathering and interpreting clues, and arrive at a rational and credible solution to the question posed at the outset. It goes without saying that plots should hold readers’ attention and sustain enough interest in the narrative that readers will continue reading. Therefore the author must be inventive in revealing clues and suspects to generate (ultimately misplaced) enthusiasm without distracting from the interplay of investigation and mystification, or without revealing too much before the moment of revelation (Cawelti 108). Since in the classic paradigm, both the detective and the reader are engaged in a race to the end of the story, the reader cannot be distracted from the detection element for too long. In other words, the reader
cannot be too focused on the characters, though contemporary detective fiction tends to elaborate more on psychology than we find in earlier works in the genre.

As Iurii Tynianov asserted many decades ago, genres inevitably evolve over time (“The Literary Fact” (1924) and “On Literary Evolution” (1927)). Traditional detective fiction elevates plot above all else, relegating character development to a subordinate status. Since then, however, the genre has bifurcated into two kinds of detective novels: (1) the familiar plot-driven detective story, which subordinates characters to the plot, and (2) the character-based plot, which focuses on the detective protagonist and other characters, their personal lives, and the ways in which people’s emotional problems affect their work. Whereas this variant explores how the crime and the investigation influence everyone’s psychological makeup, and changes that occur to the characters after the crime, in the more traditional paradigm the most important elements are collecting and interpreting clues, investigating the case, and solving the crime. Since here the detective’s personal life is not the focus, not much information is provided about it because such knowledge would only serve to distract from the focus of the narrative. The amateur private investigator from the Golden Age of detective fiction is a general example of the first kind of plot, while the modern investigator, with a plethora of personal problems and issues, is an example of the second. The first privileges the horizontal axis, the second favors the vertical.
In the plot-driven detective narrative, the presentation of characters—even the investigative protagonist—is shallow; usually “a few details are given, and a general summary of the person’s nature suffices” (Knight 124). Sherlock Holmes is recognizable by his physical features, his intellect, his pipe, and his eccentric behavior. Hercule Poirot is all surface detail: vain, fussy, and foppish, with a Belgian accent and peculiar mannerisms and habitual phrases (“Mon ami,” his “little grey cells”). Knight sees classic detectives as “marionettes” (124), functioning as pawns within the larger game of the mystery plot in which they play a part (Scaggs 36). Yet Scaggs contends that it is “because of this flatness of character, rather than in spite of it, that Poirot, like most of the other Golden Age detectives, is so memorable” (36). The genre relies on metonymy, establishing associations about the detective’s physical and verbal features that settle in readers’ memories: Holmes is tall and thin, with piercing eyes and a hawk-like nose; Poirot has a ‘funny’ foreign accent and foppish mannerisms. For the most part, these characters have no depth and remain constant during the course of the narrative. Holmes, Poirot, and Miss Marple stay essentially the same, do not noticeably age, and show no shifts in their personal lives that are in any way significant.

There are exceptions to this rule, however, such as Lord Peter Wimsey: the flashy aristocratic sleuth dramatically matures in both outlook and personal life from his first appearance in *Whose Body?* (1923) to the much later *Busman’s Honeymoon* (1937). As discussed in Chapter Three, Fandorin also undergoes a marked transformation from the first novel, *Azazel*’ (1998), to the latest
installment in the series, *Chernyi gorod* [Black City 2012], a process that adds to his overall appeal because the reader is anxious to see how the investigator will continue to develop. However, even though Fandorin grows and matures, he is still largely composed of surface detail. We never get into his head for very long, nor do we get to know much about him.

This mode of exteriorizing his hero allies Akunin with the Golden Age of detective fiction rather than with his contemporaries abroad. The latter reflect the changes in criminal detection and the nature of investigatory work since the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps one of the most profound developments is the dramatically increased attention given to the investigator’s personality and inner world. As examined in Chapter One, the reader frequently is invited to enter the mind of the detective, is privy to knowledge about the investigator’s past, which provides valuable insight into how the protagonist behaves and how the investigative process unfolds. For instance, Lynda La Plante’s Anna Travis is a fully developed character whose personal history, numerous insecurities, internal struggles, and countless professional mistakes hinder her progress during the investigation, yet they also make her much more appealing to readers who also experience many of the same problems as Travis; Jo Nesbo’s Harry Hole is a psychological and physical mess, but by virtue of being acquainted with the significant events in his past, the reader understands what made Hole what he is today—an understanding that in many ways makes Hole more human and sympathetic; and Stieg Larsson’s Lisbeth Salander’s troubled childhood is a crucial element to her erratic and paranoid behavior. However, the basic plot
paradigm has remained the same: the story opens with a crime, the detective appears, an investigation takes place, a solution is found, and soon afterwards the story winds up.

With the appearance of more violent and diverse criminals (serial killers, terrorists, international crime bosses), who, moreover, have access to more dangerous weapons and deadly devices, detection has become a serious business. There is a plethora of different plotlines in police procedurals today that serve several functions: their variety makes for original, unusual suspense; they allow for successes and failures in solving the crimes, thereby emphasizing the fact that the detective is also prone to human frailties and errors. In addition, more central characters can be put into dangerous situations, thus amplifying the suspense and complicating the action. Since the contemporary investigator usually works with a team, there are more individuals involved in each case who are assigned to specific roles, depending on their set of skills, thereby expanding opportunities to kill off more characters or devise complicated relationships.

The police investigator today is a professional, but, perhaps what is more important in comparison to the Golden Age detective, is that modern-day investigators are ordinary people with families, children, and careers who, in an increasingly darker and more complex world, are struggling to do their job effectively. Unlike Holmes, Poirot, Father Brown, or Miss Marple, they are not involved in a game of detection for their own pleasure. Rather, they are protecting the public from dangerous threats, which often stem from situations that reflect problems in the world today: terrorism, murder for profit, organized
crime, human trafficking. In short, detection has become a perilous occupation with potentially global repercussions, a far cry from the ratiocination of amateurs who, generally remote from crimes' perpetrators, tackled essentially local murders.

**Hide and seek: Akunin's plots**

The plot structure in Akunin's Fandorin novels is a mixture mainly of classical detective fiction, where the plot drives the action and the characters, and, to a lesser extent, individual-driven plots, when Fandorin's actions propel the plot forward and he evolves, changes, and makes mistakes. The primary focus in the novels is the mystery, the gathering and analysis of clues, and the resolution, which usually contains an unexpected twist. The case is solved, yet when Fandorin appears in the next installment he is older and perhaps less idealistic, but otherwise remains largely unchanged by the specific events in the previous novel(s), although those events are sometimes referred to and characters recur in subsequent novels. For instance, Fandorin's first police mentor, Grushin, reappears in *Smert’ Akhillesa*; Fandorin's friend Count Zurov plays a role in *Turetskii gambit* and meets a tragic end; General Sobolev is a commanding presence at the Russian army camp during the Bulgarian campaign and his murder lies at the heart of *Smert’ Akhillesa*; the professional assassin Akhimas appears in both *Azazel’* and *Smert’ Akhillesa*; and the *Azazel’* case is referred to in *Turetskii gambit*. Exceptions to the ‘unchanging character’ paradigm include Fandorin's prematurely grey temples and the stutter he
acquires in the first novel after the death of his young wife; the subsequent aura of sadness that surrounds him throughout the early novels; his growing awareness that the government he serves is not entirely honorable; and his decision finally to leave government service to strike off on his own as a private investigator. These personal changes come about as a direct result of incidents related in the plots of the corresponding novels, yet not enough information is provided in the narrative to fully understand to what extent Fandorin's various encounters have on his psychology and precisely how they motivate his subsequent decisions. What precisely accounts for his maturation and eventual disillusionment? As discussed in Chapter Three, the mystery and melancholy surrounding Fandorin add to his appeal, yet the reader never really understands the depths of his inner world.

Akunin’s plots tackle sundry crimes varying in significance. The novels open with a crime, a murder, a questionable death, suspicious circumstances, or a strange event. *Azazel’* begins with a student's dramatic suicide just outside the Kremlin’s walls; the mystery plot in *Turetskii gambit* is launched when a crucial place name is changed in a telegram warning of a pending Turkish attack; the beginning of *Leviafan* describes the murder of Lord Littleby and his household; and *Smert’ Akhillesa* depicts the mysterious death of General Sobolev, a Russian war hero, who has just arrived in Moscow. While these events launch the narrative and provide the catalyst for Fandorin’s investigations, they are really only signs of a deeper criminal conspiracy, evil design, or ultimate motive. The investigation into the suicide in *Azazel’* eventually uncovers a plot for world
domination; the quest to discover the Turkish spy in Turetskii gambit reveals a government conspiracy targeted at inflicting devastating political and economic harm on Russia; the criminal plot in Leviafan reveals a devious plan hatched by an international criminal to steal a treasure of precious Indian stones; and General Sobolev’s murder in Smert’ Akhillesa eventually brings to light a government conspiracy that was behind the general’s death because of his political activities.

This revelation is a not-so-veiled reference to the notorious series of political assassinations and persecutions in the 2000s in Russia: to name but the best-known, the investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaia, murdered in her apartment building (2006); the ex-FSB secret service agent Aleksandr Litvenko, who died from radioactive poisoning in London, likewise in 2006; the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovskii, imprisoned and serving two sentences on partly fabricated charges of tax evasion; and the journalist Mikhail Beketov, who died in April 2013 from brain damage and other injuries he suffered after being attacked in 2008.69 Much like his historical allusions (discussed in Chapter Two)

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69 A crusader against government corruption, Beketov was founder and editor of the Khimki newspaper. He campaigned against the construction of a highway through the Khimki forest near Moscow and, presumably because of his investigations, was attacked on 13 November 2008 outside of his home by two men with an iron bar. As a result of the attack, Beketov’s right leg was amputated, he lost most of the fingers on his left hand, sustained severe brain damage, and was left unable to speak. He died on 8 April 2013 as a result of his injuries. (See Shaun Walker’s piece for the Independent newspaper published on 11 April 2013, “Russian Journalist Mikhail Beketov Endured a Life of Torment in Pursuit of the Truth.” (http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russian-journalist-mikhail-beketov-endured-a-life-of-torment-in-pursuit-of-the-truth-8569285.html)) In addition to journalists, human rights activists and members of the opposition movement have also been imprisoned and/or killed in Russia under the Putin regime. The number of so-
in the Fandorin series, Akunin’s plots partially evoke events familiar to the contemporary Russian reader (political conspiracies, mysterious deaths, government corruption, shady financial schemes), which make them relevant to modern Russia reality.

A number of plot devices common to the detective genre are used to complicate the narrative’s action in order to delay the resolution and to sustain the reader’s interest in the narrative. Shifting suspicions, false solutions, red herrings, misleading trails, coincidences, foreshadowing, subplots, and setbacks help to create an atmosphere of suspense and anticipation while, at the same time, contributing to the narrative’s overall intellectual puzzle. Fandorin is misled in almost every case (often by his criminal opponent or a self-serving government official), and all too often he initially suspects the wrong person before he eventually ties the threads of the case together. In Azazel’, Fandorin first suspects Amaliia Bezhetskaia before Brilling convinces him that Count Zurov is the most likely culprit behind the murders. Subsequently, Brilling manipulates the young sleuth into traveling to London ostensibly on official business (though Brilling actually plans to send Fandorin to his death) and creates a series of false leads for the Russian police officer to follow. Fandorin eventually figures out that Lady Ester is the mastermind behind the plot for world domination and that Brilling is one of her loyal followers. In Smert’
called political assassinations continues to rise. The death of the exiled oligarch Boris Berezovskii at his estate outside London on 23 March 2013 provoked widespread speculation that he was murdered. British police, however, are investigating his death as a suicide.
Akhillesa, Fandorin draws two false conclusions, and it is only after he finds Khurtinskii's notebook and discovers more clues that Fandorin starts to put the pieces of the case together.

Relying on a common plot device found in the picaresque novel and tales of adventure to propel the plot forward, Akunin populates his narratives with coincidences and chance occurrences: characters overhear random conversations or encounter individuals most unexpectedly and not always convincingly. Fandorin just happens to glimpse Akhmas's 'pale' eyes as he is driving away from the wedding; the characters in Leviafan are constantly overhearing and witnessing events, many of which they misinterpret; in Turetskii gambit Fandorin receives information from people who eavesdrop or run into someone by chance. For example, Varvara often relays conversation she has had with various people to Fandorin, little realizing that she is providing him with valuable (albeit sometimes not so reliable) intelligence.

Employing the format of nineteenth-century detective fiction that appeared in serial publications, Akunin's chapters have a subheading that foreshadows what will happen in that section, and the chapters often conclude with a cliffhanger or tension-filled moment that propels the reader to turn the page quickly so as to learn what happens next. As one may predict, Fandorin is frequently left in a dangerous situation at the end of a chapter: tied up in a sack and left to drown in the murky waters of the Thames; engaged in a fight to the death with Akhimas; knocked unconscious ("everything suddenly just went black"/"для него просто наступила чернота—внезапно..."). Just like today's
viewers of popular TV serials, the reader has to wait for the next installment or subsequent chapter to find out how the protagonist manages to get out of a perilous situation.

During the investigation Fandorin also faces countless setbacks that delay the solution and regularly throw both the sleuth and the reader off the track. Fandorin is attacked and almost killed several times in Azazel; he is mistaken a number of times about the identity of the culprits in Turetskii gambit and Smert’ Akhillesa; he falls victim to the Marie Sanfon’s cunning lies in Leviafan that divert his attention to other suspects. Not only retardation, but also foreshadowing is a device employed to keep the reader engaged in the narrative: Fandorin’s Lord Byron corset will save his life during the Azazel case; Turkish spy Anvar-efendi’s newspaper articles, written while he was working undercover as a French journalist, eventually help Fandorin to track down and uncover his real identity; the hideous grandfather clock Fandorin wins on the Leviafan will play a key role in the story’s denouement. These plot elements keep the detective and reader looking ahead while retracing the perpetrator’s steps.

Often literally hard to put down, well-plotted detective novels capture readers’ imagination and curiosity, stimulating their forward momentum in pursuit of the perpetrator’s identity. Akunin’s narratives are no exception. The Russian author fills his narratives with plot twists, rapid action, sudden, unexpected moves, exciting chases, and surprising appearances that make it hard to stop reading. Suspicion shifts, sometimes at lightning speed, from one suspect to another: in Azazel’, the list of prime suspects moves from Zurov, to
Bezhetskaia, to Cunningham, and finally to Lady Ester; there are at least three major suspects in *Smert’ Akhillesa*: Herr Knabe, Khurtinskii, Akhimas. Mysterious strangers show up—sometimes at Fandorin’s very door—to shed light on the case: General Sobolev’s sister, Countess Mirabeau, visits Fandorin to provide information about a secret meeting, and Sobolev’s mistress, Ekaterina Golovina, tells Fandorin that a briefcase containing a great deal of money has gone missing. Fandorin also chases suspects through the streets of Moscow, endures a grueling physical fight with Akhimas (which, for Fandorin, also serves as a personal act of revenge against the man responsible for the death of his wife), races back to Russia in record time to intercept a telegram sent from London in *Azazel’*, chases a German secret agent through nocturnal Moscow while dodging bullets, is locked in a cellar by “Little Misha,” the dwarfish ‘king’ of Moscow’s criminal underworld, and is outplayed by Maria Sanfon in the first-class salon of a luxury ocean liner. Despite the sometimes incredible predicaments that Akunin thinks up for his detective hero, Fandorin, like the proverbial Saturday morning cartoon hero, always manages to escape danger and emerge largely unscathed from dangerous situations. Indeed, he is a compelling hero, as indicated by the enthusiasm of numerous bloggers.

A melodramatic element is frequently injected into the novels through the antics of Fandorin’s numerous female admirers, some of whom are genuine *femmes fatales*. The Cleopatra-like Amaliia Bezhetskaia first seduces, then tries to kill Fandorin before running away with Count Zurov; Fandorin falls hopelessly in love with Liza, only to watch her die on their wedding day; the emancipated
Varvara Suvorova tries (almost successfully) to seduce the attractive Fandorin on the Bulgarian front, but ultimately returns to Russia with her fiancé; Clarissa Stamp impulsively declares her love for the elusive Russian sleuth; Fandorin is attracted to the chanteuse Vanda, who is deeply involved in the Sobolev affair. Female love interests serve the purpose of distracting the Russian sleuth from the case, complicating the plot, and providing romance. Yet throughout the series, in the end, Fandorin emerges from the case alone.

Subplots slow down the narrative in the Fandorin novels and distract the Russian sleuth from focusing on the investigation. In Azazel’, the romance between Fandorin and Liza is important for the plot in several respects: it provides a melodramatic interlude as Fandorin struggles to untangle the case; it offers a logical conclusion to the fervent passions of the young romantic protagonist, who eventually marries the woman he loves; and the relationship plays a pivotal role in Fandorin’s development as a character since the death of his young bride proves to be one of the defining moments in his life, though never analyzed or discussed in subsequent works. In Turetskii gambit, the Petia, Varvara, and Fandorin romantic triangle distracts the reader from Fandorin’s investigation. Moreover the narrative frequently follows Varvara’s actions and travels, while Fandorin disappears for long periods of time. In Fandrin’s absence, Varvara’s observations, trips, and experiences relay important information to the reader about what the main suspects are up to. The atmosphere of suspicion created by forcing a group of strangers to remain in close quarters on a luxury liner while murders continue to mount creates a great deal of the tension in
Leviafan. Gauche and Fandorin’s investigation is complicated by the fact that the passengers are hiding information about their pasts, which serves to mislead both the reader and the detectives, especially Gauche. The background stories of Clarissa Stamp, Reginald Milford-Stokes, Gintaro Aono, Renata Kleber (aka Marie Sanfon), and Lieutenant Renier eventually reveal secrets they have striven to keep hidden, although without much impact on the main plot (except in the case of Sanfon and Renier). However, since these stories are divulged slowly, the various subplots deflect and create suspicion about the guilt of each character, while also fleshing out other characters. This plot device helps to hide the identity of the true culprits until the end of the narrative. In Smert’ Akhillesa, the Akhimas subplot, or parallel plot, interrupts the action at a pivotal moment in the narrative to depict the professional killer’s background story and reveals information relevant to the tragedy of Fandorin’s personal life that launched him on his path to becoming a police investigator.

Although the plot in the Fandorin series steadily progresses in tension-filled episodes towards the resolution, Akunin punctuates the narrative with more leisurely pacing. The plot slows down usually during scenes in which Fandorin is privately analyzing a case, is injured, or departs for a relatively long period to investigate. There are gaps in the temporal structure of Azazel’; for example, when Fandorin recovers from his knife wound; two weeks are lost while he travels to London, the events only revealed to the reader at a later moment; and in Turetskii gambit Fandorin disappears for months at a time to conduct his investigation into the Turkish spy. Fandorin is usually brought up to
speed by a colleague who informs him what has taken place during his absence or illness. For instance, Grushin recounts the arrival of Brilling, the brilliant and forward-looking police investigator newly arrived from the capital; in *Statskii sovetnik* (*The State Counsellor* 1999), Prince Pozharskii fills in Fandorin on what occurred after he almost died in the attack at the bania. A similar deceleration accompanies Fandorin’s ruminations about the case: he retreats to his bath, sits drawing Japanese hieroglyphs, or reviews the details of the investigation in his head.

Though fans find the series exciting and inventive, Akunin’s plots have their harebrained moments—Fandorin is captured in a mechanized chair; his head is almost cut into by the evil Dr. Blank; a ‘ghost’ in the form of Bezhetskaia appears to Fandorin in *Azazel*; Akhimas steals the briefcase containing the money in *Smert’ Akhillesa* simply by donning a police uniform, and so forth. Yet those plots stimulate the hermeneutic reader’s desire to resolve the enigma presented in the opening chapters and “transform[s] the activity of reading the novel into the search for an answer” (Porter 86) to this initial question. Intent on following the plot, the reader keeps reading in order to make connections and bridge the gaps “in the chain of cause and effect” (Scaggs 35). By and large Akunin’s plots are carefully constructed, usually make sense, emphasize the puzzle element, and provide both aesthetic and intellectual enjoyment. Judging by the sales figures for the series and fan expectation for continuing installments, Akunin has found a plot structure that works.
The investigation: Fandorin’s calculated moves and interpretation of clues

Much of the reward in reading a detective story is the satisfaction the reader experiences in competing with the detective trying to solve the puzzle and figuring out the solution. For the reader to unravel the mystery before the detective does, several prerequisites are necessary. According to the genre’s classical notion of ‘fair play,’ not only must the reader have access to each clue or piece of evidence, but s/he also must have a good idea of what the detective knows in order to be engaged in the game. During the course of the investigation, the detective uses signs that function as signposts on the road towards the explanation of the mystery. The intelligent detective’s extraordinary ability to interpret clues highlights his capacity to put seemingly unrelated pieces of a puzzle together to discover the truth. John Reilly posits that clues function on two levels in the narrative: “Clues offer structure to description of detection, while on another level they are means for the author to entice the reader’s interest” (78). The clue is a curious object for both the detective and the reader, for it appears to have no reason for being where it is and for being what it is. Marty Roth contends that the detective’s task is to analyze the various clues and pieces of evidence in order to discover the missing links, put all the elements together, and decipher the new narrative they create: “The task of the detective is so to interpret and integrate the clue that, far from being accidental and peripheral, it will become the central fact of a new history” (Roth 188). Franco Moretti posits that “clues are more often metonymies: associations by contiguity (related to the past), for which the detective must furnish the missing term”
The detective has to look at a clue and decide what is significant about it, for a clue by nature is out of place, which is why it is noticed in the first place. Poirot’s famously line “This is significant” is important because “he finds himself before something that transcends the usual, literal meaning” (Moretti *Signs* 146). The detective must establish the links between the significance of the clue (i.e. its ultimate meaning for the investigation) and the identity of the person who left it (i.e. the perpetrator)—a process that rescues him from the darkness of unknowing into the illumination toward which the narratives moves.

A clue is presented in a number of ways: it can be found lying somewhere (a briefcase, a button, a piece of thread, a gold pin); it can be a trifle or minutia that is simply out of place; it can come in the form of witnesses’ testimony; or it can be a nagging suspicion that “something is just not quite right” (Roth 179-204). Akunin places clues in his narratives that Fandorin seems to find quite easily. For instance, he discovers Kokorin’s hidden will early in *Azazel*, which places the ostensible ‘suicide’ into question and leads the sleuth to his first suspects—the beautiful Amaliia Bezhetskaia and the student Nikolai Akhtyrtsev. Fandorin later discovers telegrams, secret ledgers, and diplomatic reports, all of which eventually enable him to piece together the case. In his subsequent investigations, Fandorin finds out information through accounts relayed by various people, by relying on his formidable intuition (the Russian sleuth has an astonishing ability to read people, which proves invaluable in his unmasking of the Turkish spy Anvar-efendi and the Belgian opportunist Marie Sanfon), by
selective eavesdropping, by close observation, and by a thorough examination of crime scenes. In this last respect he resembles Holmes, who scrutinizes each and every detail in his initial investigations.

No doubt much of the appeal of the Fandorin novels hinges on this puzzle element, yet a major problem in the series is that, even though the reader knows the clues that Fandorin discovers, s/he knows very little, if at all, about how Akunin/Fandorin solves the cases. Despite Fandorin's trademark “raz, dva, tri” (‘one, two, three’) method of logical reasoning, the series suffers from a dearth of deduction. When after the fact Holmes explains to Watson how he arrived at a given solution, he (or Watson on his behalf) simultaneously clarifies each stage of the process for the reader. Not so Fandorin, who has little interest in revealing the various stages that gradually lead him to the solution.

In general, Fandorin operates by close observation, orderly thought, ingenious moves, and lucky breaks. Additionally, the Russian sleuth misleads and deceives suspects, conceals important information, and sets traps during the course of the investigation. In Smert’ Akhilesa, he tricks Vanda into unwittingly betraying the location of Akhimas’s hideout; he goes undercover in disguise; and he sets traps, as when he intentionally leaves the window open on board the Levaifan so that the Indian shawl will fly out, thus thwarting Marie Sanfon’s ultimate plan and preventing anyone else from acquiring the treasure. Although in these situations Fandorin takes the initiative and helps to move the plot forward, in general he responds to a series of events and is propelled along by the action of the story rather than by his own force. Not unlike the prototypes
developed by Poe and Doyle, the way Fandorin’s mind works and his cerebral activity in sorting through the pieces of a case are largely concealed behind a mysterious, closed exterior. Yet in Akunin’s case, there is no Watson figure to explain to the reader what the Russian sleuth is doing, for the role played by Fandorin’s sidekick Masa is that of a sparring partner and trusted confident, who provides comic relief.

The few glimpses Akunin offers into the sleuth’s deductive methods rely heavily on interiority. Fandorin’s years in Japan, immersion in Japanese culture, and martial arts training have instilled in him a reverence for the traditions of Confucius and have provided him with an inner calm. These tenets help Fandorin to meditate and to focus his thoughts. On board the Leviafan, the Japanese passenger Gintaro Aono says that Fandorin has a profound, almost Japanese intellect, and “possesses the most un-European ability to see a phenomenon in all its fullness, without losing his way in the maze of petty details and technicalities” (89) (“Фандорин-сан обладает неевропейской способностью видеть явление во всей его полноте, не увязая в мелких деталях и технических подробностях” (93)). In Smert’ Akhillesa, he focuses his thoughts by drawing Japanese hieroglyphs, exercising with Masa, and through deep meditation. Later in the series Fandorin has a jade rosary that he holds in his hand, and he fingers the beads when he tries to think something through or to analyze the data that he has gathered. Ideas or statements made by other people often trigger an insight or connection in his mind; for instance, in Azazel’, a chance remark by Fräulein Pfühl about a slouching student with a pince-nez
leads Fandorin to Akhtyrtsev; in *Smert’ Akhillesa*, an undercover Russian agent provides Fandorin with information that allows him to recognize and follow Herr Knabe, without which Fandorin’s mission would have been unsuccessful. At the same time, Fandorin is sometimes slow to see what is right in front of him or is about to happen: he does not suspect that Marie Sanfon will shoot Inspector Gauche when the two are locked in a cabin; he does not realize that Brilling, Cunningham, and Lady Ester are the leaders of the global conspiracy; and he does not discover the identity of the Turkish spy in time to prevent more killings, a mistake that almost results in Varvara’s death at the hands of Anvar-efendi. In short, Fandorin’s extraordinary success notwithstanding, he is not infallible, and his oversights humanize him.

Not one to supply a wealth of details about his detective’s deductive process, Akunin draws on the ‘Watson’ device to give the reader an account of developments. For example, in *Turetskii gambit*, Varvara affords a rather comprehensive record of Fandorin’s movements and actions in the army camp, without understanding why he behaves as he does. In *Smert’ Akhillesa*, Akhimas relays a list of Fandorin’s actions that are aimed at thwarting the Caucasian agent. And the narrator in *Azazel’* offers an objective description of Fandorin’s movements in London without knowing or explaining why Fandorin is visiting and staking out certain places. Such accounts can be problematic because they not only deny the reader access to Fandorin’s thoughts, but also decelerate and confuse the narrative. *Leviafan* is a good example of how this structure can be clever and irritating simultaneously. The narrative is taken up from the point of 185...
view of several characters, all of whom have their own personalities and prejudices about what they are seeing. As in Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* (1868)—often considered the first British detective novel—and Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* (1950), one event is told from several different perspectives. This technique adds to the suspense and overall mystification of the narrative, but it calls into question the reliability of the information confronting the reader.

Instead of sorting through a clear, multi-stage deductive process during the course of the investigation, the reader is told that Fandorin undergoes a “dramatic change,” is “struck by an idea or thought,” has a “lively imagination,” or “suddenly” realizes a connection. Though Fandorin notices details and is a careful observer, readers have no idea how he puts the pieces of the puzzle together. Unless Fandorin is “thinking aloud” in a section, readers have no opportunity to become familiar with how his famous deductive method works. Withholding this information, of course, frees Akunin from the obligation of elaborating the step-by-step explanation that is central to the majority of detective fiction. Certainly, Akunin never gives his readers a clear mapping of how Fandorin solves his cases other than through sheer luck, by stumbling upon a solution, or by thinking aloud, which seems to lead magically to intelligent and correct deductions. In the end, the reader is left somewhat confused and disappointed in the unraveling of the mystery, despite the text’s occasional forays into Fandorin’s thought processes. In that sense Akunin violates the principle of ‘fair play’ with his readers.
The villains: Fandorin and devious plotters

The heart of the detective story rests in the crime, the protagonist's search for the criminal, and the cunning distractions the perpetrator erects to avoid detection and manipulate the detective hero. Heroes of detection narratives react to a series of moves enacted by criminals, who, in an attempt to avoid exposure, “camouflage and manipulate or distort the signs of their crimes, anticipating the possibility that someone might investigate their transgression” (Pyrhönen 65). In an effort to escape detection and to control the movements of the detective protagonist, the criminals create at least two stories, “the authentic story of the crime and the deceptive one(s)” (Pyrhönen 65). Criminals have several main plot functions: to drive and manipulate the plot; to determine the final outcome; and, through their decisions and actions, to affect many of the

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70 As the genre has developed, the nature of the crime and the type of criminal have changed to reflect the shifting moral values and emerging threats in the world. For instance, early detectives such as Dupin and Holmes needed a clever, almost superhuman, criminal who was able to challenge the detective’s superb intellect in a nail-biting battle of wits with the detective, while Poirot and Miss Marple, who solved crimes not so much with a superb intellect, but through close observation and common sense, investigated crimes orchestrated by a criminal with a lesser intellect. The criminals in G. K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers, Christie, and Ngaio Marsh were mostly ordinary people motivated by revenge against the victim for something done to them in the past; the crimes were usually directed against one person, were cleverly concealed, and after the resolution life more or less was restored to its former state. By contrast, the criminal in contemporary detective fiction is often much more sinister and dangerous, and not only threatens the detective’s life, but also the entire local community. While the backstory of the criminal in Holmes, Christie, or other Golden Age detective narratives is usually revealed at the conclusion, the personality and the personal history of the criminal in modern detective fiction play an integral role throughout the investigation. Indeed, it is the attempt by the detective to ‘get inside the criminal’s head’ that contributes to the suspense, because the investigator is trying to unmask and discover the criminal before another, often horrific, crime is committed, and it is this increasing tension that drives the narrative. The battle of intellects between the detective, his/her opponent (a battle engaging the reader) is an essential component in detective fiction, both in traditional and modern versions.

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characters in the narrative, including the detective hero. Akunin’s criminals are crafted in the vein of the nineteenth-century villain; they are quite cunning and, at times, almost outwit his intrepid detective. Mixing the Doyle (intellectually brilliant) and Christie (concoctor of clever crimes) type of criminal, Akunin populates his series with villains who devise clever plots to throw Fandorin off the scent, hide in plain sight, and remain several steps ahead of the Russian sleuth. In tune with the Anglophone tradition, they usually turn out to be the most unlikely suspects.\footnote{In Azazel’, Lady Ester in her role as the ‘friendly schoolmarm’ and head of the orphanage deftly deflects suspicion from her position as the mastermind behind the global conspiracy to take over highly placed government positions. Even when Fandorin meets Lady Ester to confront her about his suspicions concerning her butler Cunningham, he fails to put the pieces of the case together until the final moment: “Erast Fandorin stared back unblinking at her in silence, stunned by his hideous realization. “So it wasn’t Cunningham...” he whispered. “It was you all the time...You!” (212) (А Эраст Петрович молча уставился на нее, сраженный страшной догадкой. —Так это не Каннингем...,—прошептал он—Это все вы...Вы сами!’ (196).}

One of the more common motifs in detective fiction is criminal cooperation between two persons working in tandem to control the detective’s movements (Pyrhönen 175). In Leviafan, Marie Sanfon and Charles Renier are the scheming pair of lovers who orchestrate the events taking place on the ship. Renier, acting on the orders of Sanfon (who holds the real power in their partnership), commits a series of murders designed to deflect suspicion from the conniving pair as Gauche and Fandorin tighten the noose around the passengers’ necks. Greed motivates the couple as they resort to murder to obtain fabulous wealth. In the tradition of the Holmes-Moriarty duel, Sanfon plants a number of
misleading clues into Fandorin’s investigation, leading him to remark at one point that he has made a mistake and bemoans the fact that he has always been a step or more behind the criminal (‘Кажется, я допустил ошибку,— пробормотал Эраст, сделав шаг к двери.—Я все время на шаг, на полшага отстаю от .’. (209)). A similar pattern is employed in Azazel’, as Brilling, presumably acting on instructions from Lady Ester, creates a trail of clues that Fandorin follows, first to London, then to St. Petersburg, and back to Moscow. The conniving Brilling plots to murder Fandorin in London, and it is only due to the detective’s uncanny luck that he escapes the numerous attempts on his life. In this first case, Fandorin is passive, easily manipulated, and obediently follows the deceptive trail designed by the Azazel’ criminal group.

Controlling events behind the scenes until the very end of the narrative, the villain frequently determines the final outcome in Akunin’s plots. Prepared though she is to allow Dr. Blank to experiment on Fandorin’s brain and later die together with him, Lady Ester takes pity on the young policeman after he declares his passionate love for Liza, and Ester allows him to leave the basement room before the bomb explodes. In this instance, Ester continues to direct the plot until the final moment when she decides to spare Fandorin. Despite her devious plans for world domination and the blood that is on her hands, Lady Ester’s ‘motherly instincts’ seemingly win out in the end. Akunin designs a plot structure where the villain’s character traits can be invoked to save a life, thus making moral judgments more difficult, since the criminal can and does display moments of compassion. For instance, Anvar-effendi releases Varvara after
holding her hostage at gunpoint, and in a surprising behavioral twist, as he lies
dying, the assassin Akhimas provides Fandorin with a piece of crucial
information.

In *Turetskii gambit*, Turkish spy Anvar-efendi manipulates events to
divert suspicion from himself while he ingeniously devises way to get rid of his
enemies: masquerading as the French reporter D'Hevrais, he ‘leaks’ false
intelligence that results in the Russian army attacking at the wrong moment; he
kills Count Zurov and army officer Kazanzaki, then stages their death to make it
look as though the two killed each other; and he orchestrates the final train ride
into San Stefano. Though Fandorin eventually exposes him as the Turkish spy
before the dramatic climax, it is Anvar-efendi who controls events until the very
end after he takes Varvara hostage, eventually releasing her and killing himself.
Although Anvar-efendi fulfills the function of the criminal/enemy, his actions are
guided by his devotion to the Ottoman Empire and by his loyalty to his leader; in
this respect, he resembles Fandorin, with his faithful service to Russia.
Additionally, Anvar-efendi acts according to a moral code of honor—he spares
Varvara's life, succeeds in his mission to break Russia's power, and remains loyal
to his superiors. Thus the villain here not only determines the outcome of the
narrative, but emerges just as heroic as Fandorin, if not more so.

Agency likewise lies with the conspirators in *Smert' Akhillesa*, who hire a
professional killer to eliminate General Sobolev, causing Fandorin to cope with a
group of faceless adversaries. However, Fandorin discovers during the
investigation that he is engaged in a complicated game of ‘hide and seek’ with a
very devious and cunning adversary. In many ways, the killer, Akhimas, is Fandorin’s moral and polar opposite, which, perhaps, accounts for the difficulty Fandorin has in tracking him down and unraveling the clues left by the Caucasian hit man. Heta Pyrhönen posits that “ever since Poe, doubling between detective and criminal has become a recurrent pattern in the genre” (32), and Akunin suggests in Azazel’, Turetskii gambit, and Smert’ Ahillesa that the criminal is often Fandorin’s mirror image (same but reversed), simply more violent. The alternate plots depicting Akhimas, who, in many respects, is Fandorin’s double, are evidence of this plot device. Fandorin lives by the moral code of the samurai, while Akhimas is driven by vengeance. Both are professional in their respective ‘employment’; both are permanently scarred by past tragedies and dead lovers; and, once their lives intersect in Azazel’, the two are destined to meet again. This ‘converging destiny’ is emphasized in the structure of Smert’ Akhillesa, when the narrative is interrupted just over halfway through in order to describe the events of Akhimas’s life.

The dual narratives come together once again at the end, when Fandorin and Akhimas fight to the death on a superhuman scale; neither seems able to die, and helpers spring as if by magic from the sidelines. Indeed, the parallelism of the protagonist and the villain makes for a specific structure. Through the presentation of the story (siuzhet), Akunin provides momentum, excitement, and suspense as Fandorin is repeatedly outmaneuvered by Akhimas while tracking him down; yet it is Akhimas’s backstory that provides the key to the killer’s mode of life and choices. The chronological order of events (fabula) that shaped
Akhimas’s character needs to be fully revealed before the narrative’s
denouement in order for the reader to understand the assassin’s actions. This
knowledge helps the reader to sympathize with Akhimas, whose tragic
childhood and death of the woman he loved help to humanize him, eliciting a
degree of understanding from the reader. Akhimas’s final words to Fandorin are
a warning of sorts, revealing that the conspirators will not let Fandorin live and
that the sleuth should flee the country. Moreover, the final confrontation
between these two adversaries will eventually help Fandorin put his wife’s
murder behind him and allow him at last to move forward emotionally. Tellingly,
Akhimas continues to direct Fandorin’s fate from beyond the grave—or at least
until Frol, the Moscow Governor General’s assistant, arrives just in the nick of
time to prevent Fandorin and Masa from leaving Russia.

Most of Akunin’s plots have Fandorin not only facing a number of cunning
villains, but also battling with law enforcement and government officials who try
to impede his investigation. During the investigation on the Leviafan, Fandorin
and Inspector Gauche are constantly at each other’s throats, with Fandorin
outperforming and ‘outdeducing’ Gauche at every turn, which makes the
pompous French police officer extremely angry. Fandorin frequently has to
convince his superiors that he is progressing in the correct manner, even if the
investigation is uncovering evidence that higher officials would like to see
remain hidden. Additionally, Fandorin is sometimes removed from the
investigation halfway through the case, after which he works on his own to solve
the mystery. For instance, in Smert’ Akhillesa, Fandorin is actually placed under
house arrest, but manages to find a way to continue his investigation despite such an obstacle. In an acknowledgement of the current level of corruption in Russia and of the double lives led by many ‘trusted’ public officials subject to insatiable greed, various officials under whom Fandorin works are corrupt, which often leads to their downfall or suicide. For instance, in Azazel’, Brilling turns out to be Lady Ester’s trusted assistant and Fandorin is forced to kill his adored mentor (albeit by accidentally impaling him on an elm branch!); in Smert’ Akhillesa, Khurtinskii, head of the secret police, hangs himself after his secret dealings, prompted by financial greed, are discovered. Some contemporary detective narratives delve into criminals’ psyches in an attempt to make their motivations more understandable and their crimes, perhaps, pardonable. Examples include Lisbeth Salander’s attempted killing of her sadistic father in Stieg Larsson’s The Girl Who Played With Fire (2006) and DCS James Langton’s clandestine murder of the man who attacked and maimed him with a machete in Lynda La Plante’s Clean Cut (2007). Akunin does not follow this trend; he leaves no doubt that his villains fully deserve punishment, even if they sometimes escape justice.

The resolution: justice restored and paradise regained?

The criminal is the driving force for much of the action in a detective novel, yet s/he is not recognized and revealed as such until the end of the narrative. Though the resolution may come as a surprise or even a shock, it usually is the culmination of a series of “carefully prepared hints, suggestions,
and implications” that reveal a secret most readers may have suspected all along (Rzepka 11). W. H. Auden sees in the ending the restoration of the “Great Good Place” and society’s return to its state before the crime. In this kind of “healing act,” the evil has been eradicated and the community can start to come to terms with what has happened. Since the genre is “committed to an act of recovery, moving forward in order to move back” (Porter 29), the denouement is the point in the narrative when the results of the investigation are explained and temporal-logical gaps filled in.

It is at this juncture that the detective is able to reestablish the sequence and causality of the crime, and often retells the crime and its subsequent events, or as one critic phrases it, “out of the nouveau roman of the offered evidence he [the detective] constructs a traditional readable novel that ends up telling the story of the crime” (Porter 30). Moreover, this is frequently when the detective explains his deductive reasoning and reveals how he came to the solution. It is also the moment when the criminal, often in front of the other suspects, confesses and explains the motivation behind the crime. The resolution is frequently a reversal or a moment of illumination, when the detective and reader realize that they have been viewing the case in the wrong way, and all the pieces finally fall into place. The ‘shock’ of many endings is often a thrilling moment for the reader. Agatha Christie was one of the first authors to employ a surprise ending that not only shocked, but also angered some readers, who felt betrayed. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) is one of Christie’s most controversial novels because the startling twist of the ending reveals the narrator as the
murderer. Readers felt indignant not only because Christie violated the
unwritten rules of ‘fair play’ standard for the detective genre at the time, but also
because in most genres of fiction the narrator functions as the trustworthy guide
in the created world of the text.

Marty Roth writes that “detective fiction ends with the embodiment of the
criminal as a graspable object” (162); therefore, once the criminal is in the
detective's hands or has been unmasked, the story is basically over. Fandorin's
investigations often result in such a resolution, a point at which Fandorin reveals
the villain's identity, and explains the perpetrator's motivation for committing
the crime—an element necessary for the fulfillment of readers’ genre
expectations. At this juncture, Akunin's criminals either provide a full confession
(Lady Ester, Anvar-efendi, and Marie Sanfon) and/or reveal a crucial piece of
information that had been missing: for instance, Akhimas tells Fandroin how he
killed Sobolev—with a poison extracted from an Amazonian fern—and that a
secret government tribunal sentenced the general to death. After all
explanations are over, the narrative usually ends or leads to a brief epilogue,
since there is nothing left for the detective to do once the case is solved. Azazel'
concludes with a summary of what happened to Lady Ester’s cult of ‘orphans’
after the Moscow headquarters was destroyed; Turetskii gambit reviews the
results of Anvar-efendi’s suicide and the consequences of the Treaty of San
Stefano for Europe, then closes with Fandorin and Varvara's parting on a railway
platform. The detective is embarking on a journey to Japan, where he will take
up a diplomatic post and Varvara is returning to Russia with Petia, her fiancé.
Smert’ Akhillesa similarly concludes on a railway platform, where Fandorin is stopped at the last minute from (reluctantly) leaving Russia. And Leviafan finishes with the defeat of Marie Sanfon.

Yet in analyzing what the conclusions of Akunin’s novels reveal about the world, it is noteworthy that some of the endings differ from those of the classical detective story, where everything is resolved and justice triumphs. Instead, Akunin’s detective protagonist often experiences a loss or defeat, and the villain is not always punished. Lady Ester is blown up by a bomb, but her body is never found (she may perhaps return to hatch another conspiracy); Anvar-efendi’s gambit pays off, though he loses his life in the process; Marie Sanfon’s fate remains unclear, but given her pregnancy and presumed plea of temporary insanity, she will likely face a short prison sentence; and, though Fandorin kills Akhimas, the government conspirators who drive the plot of Smert’ Akhillesa remain at large to meddle in politics at some future point. Akunin’s endings in many ways resemble the realities of modern life, where justice no longer fits into a clear and precisely defined framework and frequently is simply unattainable. In this way, Akunin’s resolutions are more in line with contemporary detective fiction, where evil is not always eradicated, the criminal is not always punished, and the community does not experience a reassuring sense of security. Yet the

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72 It is also important to point out that in an era when xenophobia is again on the rise across the globe—and Russia is no exception to this phenomenon—many of Akunin’s villains are foreigners: Lady Ester is British; Anvar-efendi is Turkish; Marie Sanfon is Belgian; Akhimas, who was born and raised in the Caucasus, has a German father and a mother from the Caucasus; and the evil Dr. Lind in Koronatsiia (Coronation) is British.
detective hero is usually able to return in the next installment to continue his (at times seemingly hopeless) fight against crime.

**Conclusion**

In discussing detective fiction, Franco Moretti argues that between the beginning and end of the narration is a long wait; and “the fabula narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration” (*Signs* 148). Moretti posits that, in this sense, detective stories are “anti-literary” (148) and view narration as deviation, moving in a circular vector back to the start. And yet, he claims, this deviation is extremely important because “a solution without a mystery, a fabula without a sjuzet [sic], would be of no interest” (148). The reader is propelled along through a cleverly plotted series of twists and turns in order to reach the conclusion. Typically closure entails the identification of the criminal, followed by a valid commentary on the world. The question posed at the beginning of the narrative has to be answered satisfactorily at the end; otherwise the reader feels betrayed that s/he has not received what s/he ‘contracted for’ at the outset.

As a popular genre, the detective story unfolds an exciting chain of events that entertain its audience. At the same time, however, it differs little from ‘serious fiction’ inasmuch as it tackles issues of morality, human nature, and the age in which we live. The genre questions norms of good and evil, and examines human behavior and its complexities in an effort to make sense of why we do the things we do. Mikhail Bakhtin wrote that through laughter, the rogue, clown, and
buffoon help to remove the masks worn by society, laying bare the truth hidden behind them. In the same way, the solution of the detective narrative tears off the veils hiding the dark aspects of society that many prefer to ignore, in an attempt to expose those murky areas. The detective genre, by no longer always vouchsafing a comforting solution, has begun to engage current issues and, sometimes even provokes a public conversation about those pressing concerns. Stieg Larsson’s Millennium series highlights such ‘uncomfortable’ social issues as violence against women, Sweden’s Nazi past, and government conspiracies. Akunin engages government corruption, questions of patriotism, the moral duty of citizens, and lessons history can provide for the current Russian state. In short, on one level the readers of detective novels encounter an exciting and well-plotted narrative of suspense; yet, on a higher level, they are also forced to think about moral behavior and personal responsibility in an increasingly violent and alien modern world.
Conclusion

The test of history: the legacy of Akunin’s genre project

“Я должен написать еще две книги про Эраста Фандорина. И с удовольствием это сделаю. Но вообще-то детективный жанр мне поднадоел.”73
Interview with Boris Akunin74

“We do not expect popular literature to be great literature, but fiction which provides excitement, mystery and humour also ministers to essential human needs.”

P.D. James, Taking About Detective Fiction

“...popular literature expresses and reflects the aesthetic and social values of its readers.”

Peter Swirski, From Lowbrow to Nobrow

The Akunin phenomenon

My study has analyzed the phenomenon of Akunin’s series within the context of Russia’s detective fiction and post-Soviet market conditions. It has contextualized Akunin’s works in both classical and contemporary detective fiction to gauge what departures from other examples of the genre make Akunin’s oeuvre distinctive and probably account for the author’s popularity. Akunin uses a traditional and popular genre to reengage the Russian past by tapping into a post-Soviet Russian society haunted by the turbulent Yeltsin

73 “I need to write two more books about Erast Fandorin. And I’ll happily do so. But in general, I’m tired of the detective genre.”
years—a society that is nostalgic for an idealized past and that yearns to escape everyday reality. To achieve his aims, Akunin relies on a familiar and predictable genre that ends with moral judgments and legal consequences, providing a sense of stability absent from modern Russian social and political structures.

My study has also addressed serialization and the role of ‘zlobodnevnye voprosy’ ('current issues') in historical fiction: a popular serial hero will keep readers coming back for subsequent installments and discussions of current affairs if the author makes the subject matter relevant to contemporary readers.

In explaining the widespread appeal of Akunin’s novels, I have argued that it derives in part from a unique combination of factors: an engagement with the past, the familiarity of a popular genre (yet ‘raised’ to the level of ‘literature’), tension-filled plots, and, perhaps most significantly, the sui generis protagonist, Fandorin, who has become the object of a veritable cult.

Finally, I have examined the values embodied in Fandorin and their relevance to modern Russian society so as to determine why Fandorin has become such a compelling literary hero and ‘celebrity’ in his own right. Tellingly, Fandorin is not only a hero for contemporary Russia, but also for the late nineteenth century; his moral qualities capture the spirit of two ages that are outwardly different, but inwardly remarkable alike.
Akunin's appeal: mixing history, heroics, and action

The collapse of the Soviet Union heralded a turbulent decade characterized by economic collapse, social upheaval, government corruption, rapid inflation, and loss of a superpower status. As Russians struggled to come to terms with the new reality, reappraisals of the country's glorified imperial past became a national imperative. Prompted by his own interest in history and the desire among Russians for social and political security, Akunin set his Fandorin novels in an era widely perceived as a time when Russia was powerful, its economy was strong, and social order prevailed. His period of choice—the late nineteenth century (starting circa 1876)—not only plays to the nostalgia many Russians have for this seemingly prosperous age, but also evokes associations with the Golden Age of detective fiction. That period was dominated by such famous and beloved amateur private investigators as Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, Émile Gaboriou's Monsieur Lecoq, and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Akunin's Fandorin series relies on readers’ recollection of these iconic fictional detectives and the defining features of their sleuthing procedures (methodical, deductive, and scientifically oriented) to recreate an earlier age after which many readers hanker. Akunin manages to depict a convincing picture of late nineteenth-century Russia in the first four Fandorin novels. He establishes a credible temporal setting, complete with historical details, period clothing, linguistic markers, and cultural and political references.

A famous literary detective is usually associated with a specific time and place; Dupin is coupled with Paris, Holmes with a foggy and sinister London, and
Miss Marple with a conservative and rural England. By contrast, Fandorin is not exclusively tied to Moscow. Instead, Akunin relies on various genres within detective fiction to diversify setting: the crimes in the series occur in Moscow, in Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey during the Russo-Turkish war, and on a luxury liner sailing from France to the Orient [sic]. These choices allow Fandorin to travel, bringing him into contact with a wide array of individuals, ideologies, and philosophies. Fandorin's adventures give Akunin the opportunity not only to engage with current issues and comment on Russian society today, but also to purvey ‘exotic locales.’

In order for a popular detective series to be successful and remain popular over time, a charismatic hero must stand at its core, a protagonist who captures readers’ attention and incites them to keep reading subsequent installments. In Fandorin, Akunin has crafted a literary protagonist unique in Russian literature. He is a new kind of hero for a post-Soviet Russia that requires a moral and upstanding individual, one whom readers will strive to emulate. Unlike many of the fictional characters depicted in Akunin’s Fandorin series or real-life figures in the Russian government today, Akunin's detective protagonist has strong moral values, works as a law enforcement official, and stands out as a law-abiding citizen. Fandorin’s intelligence, deductive skills, integrity, and

75 In a parallel with contemporary Moscow, the nineteenth-century ‘first’ Russian capital in Akunin’s Fandorin series is populated with people from all across the Russian Empire who have flocked to the golden-domed city to find work, more security, and a better standard of living. Fandorin represents the ‘new Muscovite’ middle class—a group whose experiences and travels not only shape the individual, but also contribute to the varied aspects of Moscow’s rich cultural life.
physical prowess set him apart from those driven by rampant greed, corruption, and unprofessionalism. He lives to serve and protect Russia, yet he does so according to his own strict moral code—an internal barometer that is not based solely on Russian values, but also on his experiences in the East. In a sense, Akunin has it both ways, for his detective hero incarnates the best values and qualities of two radically different worlds.

Fandorin’s popularity rests on a remarkable set of traits quite apart from his impeccable morality: intellectual skills, formidable intuition, athletic prowess, good luck and good looks, all enhanced by a mysterious past. In short, he personifies a figure whose existence is improbable in today’s world. Asked in a 2011 interview to account for his hero’s phenomenal popularity, Akunin responded as follows:

I think the reason lies in that Erast Fandorin has many qualities that are sadly lacking in our people. Opposites, as we know, attract. Fandorin is reserved, cold-blooded, scrupulous, and does not consider the authorities to be something sacred. It seems that, deep down, my readers want to be like him. (Tveritina)

By understanding the needs of his readers and the *Zeitgeist* of the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, Akunin limned a hero whose qualities met the requirements of those times. Indeed, his fictional protagonist could compete with the likes of folk heroes (*bogatyri*), historical figures, literary protagonists, comic book figures, and child heroes for the title of ‘hero of our time.’ Yet
whether Fandorin will stand the test of time and secure a place among such exalted figures is a question that only the future can answer.

**Where to now?**

The constraints of the dissertation do not allow a more extensive study of the Fandorin novels than the one I have presented. My post-doctoral plan is to transform this thesis into what will be the first monograph on Akunin’s Fandorin series. The process will entail exploring the changes that have taken place in Russia since the first Fandorin novel was published in 1998, to the release of the latest installment, in November 2012: the country has gone from defaulting on its foreign debt in 1998 and living through the failed presidency of Boris Yeltsin, to experiencing an economic boom on the back of skyrocketing commodity prices, witnessing the emergence of a nascent middle class (at least in the major cities), and contending with the meteoritic rise of Vladimir Putin and his increasingly autocratic rule. How do the Fandorin novels reflect these changes? How have Akunin’s thinking and allegiances responded to shifting political, social, and moral issues in Russia? In the early novels, Fandorin is dedicated to government service and follows the directives of his superiors, but when he is faced with a vast conspiracy of corruption in *Statskii sovetnik* (*The State Counselor* 1999), he decides to follow his conscience and leave government service — and Russia — to strike out on his own as a private investigator, returning to Russia only intermittently at the behest of the government when his detecting services are required. In part, Fandorin’s change in attitude towards
the Russian government reflects society's shift in opinion about Putin, who—initially an unknown figure, yet one who inspired confidence—has become controversial because of his increasingly repressive policies. Akunin’s trajectory of success has made him a respected member of the intellectual community, and while producing one Fandorin mystery after another he has striven to write more ‘serious literature.’ How have Akunin’s political activity and his desire to be seen as a more serious author affected the Fandorin series? How, if at all, has Akunin developed as an author? My envisioned monograph will explore these questions.

Rather than limiting himself to detective fiction, Akunin has branched out into comic books, graphic novels, theater, and film. When revising my dissertation I intend to add a chapter on the two films and the one television miniseries adapted from Akunin’s works so far: Azazel’ (2002; Dir. Aleksandr Adabash’ian); Turetskii gambit (The Turkish Gambit 2005; Dir. Dzhanik Faiziev); and Statskii sovetnik (The State Counsellor 2005; Dir. Filipp Iankovskii). How do the film adaptations, for which Akunin wrote the screenplays, enhance or diminish Akunin’s novels? In examining these works, I will employ Robert Stam’s and Linda Hutcheon’s theories of adaptation, focusing on the changes Akunin made to his narratives in bringing the bestselling novels to the screen. Of particular interest, given the centrality of Fandorin in the series, is how three different actors have realized that persona in celluloid.
“I’m ceasing to be a detective writer”

Inevitably, the time comes when a decision must be made about how to end a popular series of novels, television serials, or a movie franchise. In 1893, Conan Doyle wanted to work on other projects, so he decided to kill off Sherlock Holmes. Accordingly, in “The Final Problem” he has him plunge off the Reichenbach Falls with his arch nemesis, Dr. Moriarty. But appeals from disappointed and angry readers forced Doyle to resurrect Holmes ten years later. Agatha Christie killed off Hecule Poirot in Curtain (1975), a novel she wrote in the early 1940s, but did not publish until some thirty years later in order to stave off reader animosity and, most likely, so that she could continue to write about Poirot’s adventures while knowing how it would all end. By contrast, Harry Potter creator J.K. Rowling said from the outset that there would be seven novels and that the final chapter had already been written, thus clearly indicating that there would be a definite end to the series. In other words, the imperative to end a series is universal, but the way to do so depends on the individual author’s plans and preferences.

Akunin has stated that he will write two more books about the Russian private detective, but no more. He claims that after the completion of those two volumes he is “ceasing to be a detective writer” (“Я перестаю быть детективщиком”). Indeed, Akunin has already moved on to his next project—a history of the Russian state that is projected to consist of eight or nine volumes in which he comments on the creation and development of the Russian government from its earliest recorded history to the nineteenth century. Such an
endeavor brings the Fandorin series full circle and reconnects Akunin with Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826), whose twelve-volume *Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo* [*History of the Russian State*, 1816-26] is one of the first histories published of the country. In his first Fandorin novel, *Azazel’*, Akunin, in one of his characteristic intertextual feats, cites Karamzin’s short story *Bednaia Liza* (*Poor Liza*, 1792) via the names Erast and Liza as well as the couple’s tragic romance—both instantly recognizable to the Russian reader. In fact, in a recent post on his LiveJournal blog Akunin wrote: “I (the time has come to admit it) have always dreamed of becoming the new Karamzin” (“Я (пришло время в этом признаться) всегда мечтал стать новым Карамзиным” (20 March 2013).76

The switch to a pseudo-historical, non-fiction genre indicates that Akunin will continue to engage history to make sense of the present, and do so in a way that is accessible to the average reader. Tellingly, by undertaking a more respectable and highbrow genre, Akunin seems to be positioning himself as a ‘more serious’ writer. Since most of his popular novels are set in the historical

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76 On his LiveJournal website, Akunin explained his decision to embark on this large historical project. “I think a new Karamzin is needed precisely because historians have written ‘Russian history’ for the past two hundred years, and very few people read them except for students and those who have a deep interest in the past. When a country’s history is not told by scholars, but by an amateur-popular writer, he, in line with his profession, strives to make sure that the book makes for interesting reading—which is what Nikolai Mikhailovich [Karamzin] did.” (“Новый Карамзин, на мой взгляд, нужен затем, что уже двести лет «истории России» пишут именно что ученые историки, а их кроме студентов и людей, углубленно интересующихся прошлым, мало кто читает. Когда же историю страны рассказывает не ученый, а дильтант-беллетрист, он в силу профессии заботится о том, чтобы книгу было нескукно читать — как это делал Николай Михайлович.”) (Boris Akunin, LiveJournal, 20 March 2013. See [http://borisakunin.livejournal.com/94544.html](http://borisakunin.livejournal.com/94544.html)).
past and deal with reappraisals of history, however, it looks as though he will adopt the same approach with his more recent work on history.

In general, Akunin seems to be trying out various creative possibilities. In November 2010, he launched a blog on his Live Journal site (www.borisakunin.livejournal.com), in which he writes short posts about historical figures and events. Notably, he chooses not only Russian figures and events, but also international figures whose stories Akunin feels compelled to retell. In June 2012, his novel Aristonomiia came out, written under the name Akunin-Chkhartishvili; the work is a five-hundred-page philosophical novel about the Russian Revolution. Also in 2012, Akunin published a collection of his blog posts called Liubov’ k istorii (A Love of History 2012), a collection of feuilleton-like stories dealing with historical and everyday heroes as well as gender issues, in addition to philosophical musings. As he sets aside his celebrity detective hero and his jaunts through pre-Revolutionary Russian history, what kinds of new facts and figures will Akunin discover to offer to the Russian public? It will be interesting to watch how Akunin engages with centuries of Russian history in his attempt to draw moral lessons for the present.

The long list of accomplishments, book sales, and critical accolades over the past fifteen years leave no doubt that Grigorii Chkhartishvili, as Boris Akunin, has made an immense contribution to contemporary Russian literature and culture. His Fandorin series alone has sold more than 25 million copies in a market where piracy and illegal downloads were the norm only a few years ago. He not only has played a significant role in the revival of the Russian book
market, but also has branched out into other media, including cinema, video games, comics, and the blogosphere to reach an ever-increasing audience. He has lent his celebrity status to the struggling protest movement that is challenging Putin's policies. And now Akunin has decided to try to instill a love and knowledge of history in a people who have been denied historical truth for decades. As a strong critic of the Russian political system, Akunin, like his protagonist Fandorin, is trying to be a moral citizen in an immoral age. It remains to be seen whether he can continue to delight readers in Russia and abroad with his stylish prose and intriguing characters, but there is no doubt that he has created in Fandorin a character perceived by millions as an ideal worthy of emulation. Whatever fate Akunin has in store for Fandorin, one thing is clear—for the first post-Soviet generation the Russian sleuth represents ‘truth, justice, and the Russian way.’
Works Consulted


Appendix: Plot Summaries

Azazel': the first case

A young aristocrat shoots himself in front of numerous witnesses on 13 May 1876 in Moscow’s Alexander Gardens. As the police investigate the puzzling case, Erast Petrovich Fandorin, an impoverished, twenty-year-old clerk of aristocratic lineage, is assigned to help. The persistent sleuth discovers that Petr Kokorin, the young man who committed suicide, has inexplicitly willed his vast fortune to the mysterious and bewitching beauty Amalia Bezhetskaia. During the course of the investigation Fandorin’s main source of information and Kokorin’s close friend, Nikolai Akhtytsev, is attacked and killed by a mysterious white-eyed assassin. Fandorin is also stabbed in the attack (although his fashionable Lord Byron whalebone corset miraculously saves his life), during which the murderer cries out the mysterious name “Azazel’!

Once Fandorin recovers from the attack and returns to work, the celebrity detective Ivan Brilling is brought in from St. Petersburg to take charge of the investigation. Fandorin admires this new modern man from the capital and becomes his eager pupil, eventually pinpointing Bezhetskaia as the instigator of Kokorin’s suicide, partially because she flees Russia immediately after the attack on Akhtytsev. Brilling sends Fandorin to London to find Bezhetskaia, where, after a series of adventures that result in his near-forced
drowning in the Thames, Fandorin manages to stumble upon and unravel a
global terrorist plot—bent, he thinks, on assassinating key political figures.

Upon his return to Russia, Fandorin presents his findings to Brilling, who,
during their conversation, reveals that he is a member of the secret organization
(whose code word is ‘Azazel’”) and tries to kill Fandorin. In a daring display of
bravery, Fandorin kills Brilling (by inadvertently impaling him on an oak tree)
and reassesses the situation. Fandorin figures out that the secret organization is
actually a global conspiracy that is steadily taking over key government
positions and traces the organization to a series of orphanages established by
the British Lady Ester. Initially convinced that one of her employees is the head
of the organization, Fandorin eventually realizes that it is the noblewoman
herself who is the mastermind behind the conspiracy. During their
confrontation, Ester locks herself in a basement room with Fandorin and sets off
a time bomb. At the last moment, Ester pities the youthful Fandorin, who
confesses that he is hopelessly in love, and sets him free. Fandorin makes it out
in the nick of time as the bomb explodes, eviscerating the basement and Lady
Ester (although her body is never found, only a piece of silk from her dress,
suggesting that she may return in the future to wreck more havoc). Fandorin has
uncovered the conspiracy, destroyed its centralized power, and broken up the
network of orphanages, yet most of the organization’s members remain
unknown and free.

The ambitious Fandorin is decorated and promoted for his role in
breaking up the terrorist cabal and is reassigned to St. Petersburg. During the
course of the narrative, Fandorin meets and falls in love with the young aristocrat Elizaveta von Evert-Kolokoltseva (or Lizan’ka). The story ends with their wedding, which is attended by Muscovite socialites and important politicians. However, at the reception a package is delivered to Fandorin that turns out to be a bomb. Just after he receives the package, Fandorin happens to glance out of the window to see the delivery carriage depart, driven by the white-eyed assassin. As Fandorin races after the carriage, the bomb explodes, killing Lizan’ka. The novel ends with Fandorin wandering the streets of Moscow in a comatose state and having acquired his signature white temples. Fandorin’s youthful romanticism is gone, and he is now ready to embark on what will become a successful career as a police investigator, though he is fated to spend his life alone (until book 13).

Turetskii gambit: unmasking the enemy spy

The Russian army is advancing through Bulgaria in June 1877, steadily pushing its way towards the ultimate goal of conquering Constantinople and defeating the Ottoman Empire. After fighting for the Russian cause in Serbia and his subsequent capture by the Turks, Fandorin, who has been released from captivity, is making his way to the Russian army command with secret intelligence that the Turks are preparing to capture the small Bulgarian town of Plevna in order to slow down the Russian advance. On his way to the Russian military camp, Fandorin meets the young, progressive telegraphist Varvara Suvorova, who is clandestinely travelling to army headquarters to join her
fiancé, Petr Yablokov. After rescuing Varvara from some Bulgarians ruffians and a horde of Turkish raiders, Fandorin and Varvara encounter some Russian army scouts, and are taken to the Russian camp.

Because the Romanian army is aiding the Russians in their war, the camp is filled with a mixture of nationalities and a group of international journalists. Once Fandorin relays his intelligence to his superiors, a warning telegram is sent to military command about the attack. However, an enemy spy in the camp manages to change ‘Plevna’ to ‘Nikopol’ in the telegram. Consequently, the Russians occupy the wrong town and the Turks manage to capture Plevna.

Fandorin is tasked with discovering the identity of the Turkish spy. As the young sleuth gathers evidence and narrows down the list of suspects, he is continuously thwarted by the Turkish spy, Anvar-efendi, who is working undercover in the camp as the French journalist Charles d’Hevrais. Suspicion shifts from one suspect to another after each one is killed through Anvar-efendi’s devious plots.

Eventually, Fandorin identifies the spy just as the Russians, under the command of Major General Mikhail Sobolev, a decorated war hero, are poised to march into Constantinople, a move that would trigger a war with Britain and Austria-Hungary. This war, which was part of Anvar-efendi’s plans all along, would have plunged Russia into another major conflict that it could hardly have afforded, both in monetary and human terms, and the conflict would have relegated Russia to the status of a second-rate world power for a long time.

However, Fandorin manages to avert disaster at the last minute, saves Russia
and its army from a catastrophic move, and stays true to the moral code of serving his country. The novel ends with Varvara and Petr returning to Moscow, while Fandorin embarks on a journey to Japan, where he will take up a diplomatic post.

*Leviafan: murder on a floating Behemoth*

French Inspector Gauche boards the luxury liner *Leviafan* in the midst of a major investigation: the murder of Lord Littleby, a British aristocrat who, along with ten of his staff and servants, was killed in Paris a few weeks before the ship sailed. Working from a pivotal clue left at the scene of the crime, Gauche identifies four major suspects on board, and, having isolated them in the ship's upper-class salon and cabins, tries to figure out which one of them is the murderer. Six other people join the small group of suspects, including Fandorin, who is sailing to Japan to take up a diplomatic post after his success at solving a spy case in Bulgaria (see *Turetskii gambit*). During the course of the investigation, the murders continue to mount, while Gauche and Fandorin eliminate the suspects one by one. It is eventually revealed that the motive behind the murders concerns an Indian rajah’s treasure of precious gems and a shawl that is the key to finding the fortune. After sorting through a number of false clues, red herrings, fake identities, and contrived confessions, Fandorin takes over from Gauche, who has managed to get himself killed. Fandorin solves the mystery, and un_masks the real murderer in a nail-biting final scene,
complete with gunshots and a grandfather clock, which plays a decisive role in the denouement.

*Smert’ Akhillesa: Fandorin unravels a tangled web*

Collegiate Assessor Fandorin returns to Moscow with his devoted Japanese manservant, Masa, in tow after living abroad for six years, mostly working for the Russian diplomatic mission in Japan, to find himself immediately thrown into a mystery. Hero of the recent Russo-Turkish war and national idol General Mikhail Sobolev, who was in excellent health, has died suddenly of an apparent heart attack in his hotel armchair. But Fandorin, who knew Sobolev intimately during the Bulgarian campaign, suspects that the general did not die of natural causes. Initially skeptical about the story told by the general’s loyal circle of guards and advisors, Fandorin expresses his doubts to the police. Moscow’s Governor General Prince Vladimir Dolgorukoi puts Fandorin on the case and makes him a deputy for special assignments. In time, Fandorin discovers that Sobolev actually died in the arms of a lounge singer, information that, if leaked to the press, would do irreparable harm to Sobolev’s reputation and posthumous memory. As Fandorin reconstructs the events leading up to Sobolev’s death and interviews Vanda, the voluptuous chanteuse, he discovers an international conspiracy against Sobolev that includes German secret agents.

Just as the police think they have solved the case after the German agent Herr Knabe is mysteriously killed, Sobolev’s fiancée appears and tells Fandorin about a missing briefcase full of money that has disappeared from the general’s
hotel room. In a scenario similar to events in Russia and Europe in the 2000s, it is revealed that Sobolev is the leader of a new nationalist political movement that envisions a Russia for Russians, a united Slavic world, and a non-European path for Russia. His group has been plotting a military putsch that would oust the current regime of Alexander III and establish a new Russia.

As Fandorin goes in search of the missing briefcase, he discovers that several high-ranking officials in the police force, including the head of the secret police, have succumbed to greed and plan to steal the money. He exposes them and, with this satisfactory solution, the police think that the mystery is solved, but Fandorin is not convinced. Working unofficially, he continues to follow up on various aspects of the case. His investigation leads to the conclusion that a counter conspiracy had formed against Sobolev, and the general’s powerful opponents had ‘taken him out,’ fearing that an aggressive Russia under a Sobolev government would spark a war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, which would be catastrophic for Russia.

Eventually, Fandorin’s investigation leads him to the hotel room of Akhimas, a professional assassin who was hired by the Tsar’s brother to remove the Sobolev threat to the throne. Fandorin realizes that this tall, blond, white-eyed man is the person responsible for his wife’s death. During a dramatic fight in which Fandorin displays his newly developed ninja skills, the Russian sleuth kills Akhimas. Thus Fandorin not only removes a threat to Russia (Akhimas had killed the country’s national hero), but also finds a kind of justice in killing the man responsible for his wife’s death. Before he dies, Akhimas reveals the names
of the people behind the conspiracy and Fandorin realizes just how high up the corruption goes. Fearing for his life, Fandorin plans, with Masa, to flee Russia, a country that has betrayed him. At the last minute, however, they are stopped by Frol, Dolgorukoi’s loyal servant, who tells the duo that Moscow’s Governor General, and Fandorin’s new protector, has smoothed everything over and that Fandorin is no longer in danger of arrest.