Fact and Fiction in the Romantic Historical Novel

DAN UNGURIANU

The historical novel, by definition, combines fiction and history. While the fictional chronotope is ultimately self- contained, the historical one is open to outside verification, since it invokes phenomena belonging to real space and time. Such dichotomy has on occasion prompted doubts concerning the "legitimacy" of historical fiction, which has sometimes been labeled as a contradictory or even "mongrel" genre. Summarizing early attacks against the historical novel, Osip Senkovskii, a prominent journalist of the age of Pushkin and Gogol, points to a cognitive anxiety that afflicts the reader: "The reader, being constantly disturbed by uncertainty in this mixture of truth and fiction, wants at every step to believe the author's words and yet at every step is afraid to be deceived, and, upon reading the novel ... does not know what to think of his impressions."[1] However, it is precisely this tension between fact and fiction, the "empirical" and "aesthetic" planes, that creates the peculiar dynamics of the historical novel (and other genres of "documentary literature"), endowing it with a unique and important dimension.[2]

This article will treat the relationship between fact and fiction in the Russian historical novel of the 1830s and 1840s. As the subject is very broad, it seems necessary to mention some aspects that will remain outside the scope of the current study. The issue of history and fiction has received much attention in recent theoretical writings. Over the last three decades, with the publication of works by W. B. Gallie, Arthur Danto, and especially Hayden White, there emerged an influential school of thought that views historiography from the standpoint of narrative theory. Proponents of this school deem historical narratives similar in essence to fictional ones since they are informed by identical rhetorical devices and categories of emplotment. I will leave these problems aside; neither will I address heated debates about historiography during the Romantic period in Russia (for example, in connection with the histories of Karamzin and Polevoi). I will take as the point of departure the

[1]O. I. Senkovskii (Baron Brambeus), *Sobranie sochinenii*, 9 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1858–59), 8:44–45. This and further translations from Russian are mine.

[2]See L. M. Ginzburg, *O literaturnom gerое* (Leningrad, 1979), 7.

The Russian Review 57 (July 1998): 380–93

writers' "dialogue" not with historiography, but rather with factography, examining how novelists utilized in their works established historical facts. I will avoid such "gray areas" of unreliable or disputed historical evidence as the beginnings of Rus', or the role of Boris Godunov in the death of Tsarevich Dmitrii. And I will not use postmodernist approaches à la Barthes, when "facts" are deprived of reality beyond their linguistic expression, which makes the problem of fact and fiction somewhat irrelevant. Instead, I will concentrate on those historical facts that the writers in question themselves considered solid and conclusive.

Among the numerous practitioners of the genre were authors belonging to all segments of the Russian literary spectrum: Pushkin, Gogol, Zagoskin, Bulgarin, Nikolai Polevoi, Lazhechnikov, Vel'tman, Masal'skii, Ol'ga Shishkina, Rafail Zotov, and many others, all the way down to a number of anonymous hacks.[3] Foreign influences were also rather heterogeneous and included such writers as Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, Prosper Mérimée, and Alessandro Manzoni. As a result, Russian historical novels of the period are quite diverse in many respects.

Along with all differences, however, there are important underlying similarities, which can be explained through cardinal features of Romanticism and allow us to discern the general poetics of the Romantic historical novel. The term "Romantic" can be both very broad and very narrow and, despite a certain consensus reached over the recent decades, remains elusive. By applying this term to a large group of works, I do not mean that each aspect of a given novel is necessarily Romantic, or that a given author should be described as a full-fledged Romantic.[4] However, we can speak of a distinctive Romantic paradigm in regard to the mode of interaction between fact and fiction which lies at the foundation of the historical novel as a genre. This paradigm emerges as a corollary to the basic binary oppositions of Romanticism: 1) The binary picture of the world (Romantic *dvoemirie*) with the contradiction between objective and subjective truths and the ensuing Romantic irony; 2) A related opposition between history of fact and history of legend and lore.

Examining the ways in which novelists of the period deal with historical facts, we can discover a crucial common feature. On one hand, the writers strive to create a world of historical verisimilitude, convincing the reader that their rendering of the past is accurate. They tend to show off their historical and antiquarian erudition, often describe in prefaces how meticulous their preparation was, and on many occasions supply their novels with

[3]For an overview of the novels of the period see A. M. Skabichevskii, "Nash istoricheskii roman v ego proshlom i nastoiashchem," in his *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (St. Petersburg, 1890), 2:653–792; A. Pinchuk, "Russkii istoricheskii roman," *Filologicheskie zapiski*, 1913, no. 1–6, and 1914, no. 1–3; I. P. Shcheblykin, "Russkii istoricheskii roman 30-kh godov XIX veka," *Problemy zhanrovogo razvitiia v russkoi literature XIX veka* (Riazan', 1972), 3–232; and, especially, Mark Al'tshuller's erudite and insightful *Epokha Val'tera Skotta v Rossii: Istoricheskii roman 1830-kh godov* (St. Petersburg, 1996).

[4]For a summary of debates surrounding the notion of Russian Romanticism see Lauren G. Leighton, "On a Discrimination of Russian Romanticism," in his *Russian Romanticism: Two Essays* (The Hague, 1975), 1–40; and Iu. V. Mann, *Dinamika russkogo romantizma* (Moscow, 1995).

quasi-academic notes.[5] The novelists also try to be as accurate as possible in reconstructing customs, *mores*, and material realia of the past. On the other hand, the writers feel at liberty to alter or suppress established evidence pertaining to historical events and their chronology, although they leave overt or thinly disguised self-refutations and disclaimers. As a result, the novels are permeated with a contradictory drive on the part of their authors, who both validate and invalidate the historical trustworthiness of their creations.

Rather frequent are open disclaimers, when—in a foreword, afterword, or notes—writers confess to their transgressions against history and outline how things were in reality. This device is employed extensively already by the father of the historical novel, Sir Walter Scott, who pedantically points to anachronisms and other licenses against history in his novels.[6] For instance, Scott supplies *Rob Roy* (1818) with a lengthy historical introduction which reveals that the actual Rob Roy was less noble and romantic than his fictional counterpart. Moreover, his role in the rebellion was not as significant as that portrayed in the novel.

An overt disclaimer is found in the very first Russian historical novel, *Iurii Miloslavskii* (1829) by Mikhail Zagoskin. *Miloslavskii*'s plot revolves around the protagonist's unfortunate oath of allegiance to Polish Crown Prince Wladyslaw. At the beginning of the novel, Iurii sets out for Nizhnii Novgorod with the important mission of informing the city's residents that the Muscovites have recognized Wladyslaw as their tsar. According to an explicit indication in the opening chapter, this happened in April of 1612. However, as Zagoskin himself concedes in an endnote, Moscow had sworn allegiance to Wladyslaw back in 1610; therefore, by 1612 this was known throughout Russia and Iurii's alleged mission could not have taken place in reality. Zagoskin adds: "The author confesses to these anachronisms."[7] A similar disclaimer is found in Zagoskin's second novel, *Roslavlev* (1831), where the anachronism concerns the participation of the "Silent Officer" (Captain Figner) in the siege of Danzig.[8] Zagoskin's literary foe, Faddei Bulgarin, also acknowledges in the introduction to *Mazepa* (1833)—in a more general way—his sins against chronology: "The exact chronological order of the events was not followed."[9] Another prominent novelist of the time, Ivan Lazhechnikov, points out in a note to *The Last Page* (1833) that an attempt to stop the Swedes from fleeing a battle at Hummelshof was made not by the novel's heroes, the Trautfetter brothers, but by a different officer.[10] Similar confessions abound in the works of the period and, although relatively "minor" deviations from history may be involved, they are of the utmost importance since the overall integrity of the novel's historical back-

[5]The most heavily annotated novel is Bulgarin's *Dimitrii the Impostor* (1830), the four volumes of which contain 218 endnotes.

[6]See David Brown, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London, 1979), 173–14; A. A. Dolinin, *Istoriia, odetaia v roman: Val'ter Skott i ego chitateli* (Moscow, 1988), 200–204; and Al'tshuller, *Epokha Val'tera Skotta v Rossii*, 12–16.

[7]M. N. Zagoskin, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1987), 1:283.

[8]Ibid., 288.

[9]F. V. Bulgarin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1990), 369.

[10]*Poslednii novik*, in Lazhechnikov, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1968), 1:295.

ground becomes compromised.

Alongside open disclaimers, writers can leave more oblique self- effacing leads, often in the form of inviting the reader to consult histories and primary sources. For example, in the introduction to *An Oath at the Holy Sepulcher* (1832) Nikolai Polevoi provides an imaginary dialogue between the reader and the author, which ends in suggestive marks of omission:

> **Reader:** Should we believe everything you will tell us? You speak of a true story, but, perhaps, all this will turn out to be fiction?
>
> **Author:** What is the problem? Check me...[11]

And if we do check the factual accuracy of Polevoi's novel, we will discover significant deviations from history.

An Oath deals with the dynastic feud in Muscovy, in the course of which Grand Duke Vasilii Vasil'evich (Temnyi) was challenged by his uncle Iurii and Iurii's sons, Vasilii Kosoi and Dmitrii Shemiaka. Polevoi's interpretation of the events is sharply polemical in regard to Karamzin's *History of the Russian State.* Karamzin, while speaking of the treachery and cruelty of all participants, ultimately asserts that historical/Providential truth was behind Vasilii Temnyi's cause. In Karamzin's view, the victory of Temnyi was a step toward consolidation of the Russian state because it prevented a relapse into the chaos of the appanage period. Polevoi, on the contrary, sides with Dmitrii Shemiaka, whom he portrays as the epitome of chivalry and magnanimity. One of Polevoi's central arguments in favor of Shemiaka is that after the death of his father, who was at the time the grand duke, Shemiaka refused to recognize his own brother Vasilii Kosoi as the heir and took an oath of allegiance to the previously overthrown cousin Vasilii Vasil'evich.

In the novel, Polevoi describes Shemiaka's role in this episode as pivotal. After Iurii's death, he stands on the Kremlin's Red Porch and proclaims Vasilii Vasil'evich Grand Duke, depriving the ambitious Kosoi of the crown. Everybody is moved by Shemiaka's selfless decision except for his infuriated brother, who arrived too late to claim the throne. "O Providence!" Polevoi exclaims. "What is the man before you! Had Kosoi arrived several hours earlier, had he moved military detachments of which he was the supreme chief, then, perhaps, his supporters and force could have gained him the crown of the Grand Duke."[12]

Historians offer conflicting explanations for Shemiaka's decision, but, the issue of interpretation aside, one should note factual distortions in Polevoi's story. In reality, at the time of his father's death Shemiaka was not in Moscow, and he received his brother's claim to the throne in a letter. Therefore, he could not solemnly declare Vasilii Vasil'evich as the new Grand Duke from the steps of the Red Porch. Likewise, Kosoi was not late by several hours, but, being in Moscow, assumed the title, and ruled for about a month until he was forced to flee. This information can be found in Karamzin and the chronicles. Moreover,

[11] *Kliatva pri grobe Gospodnem*, in N. A. Polevoi, *Izbrannaia istoricheskaia proza* (Moscow, 1990), 300.

[12] Ibid., 578.

the fifth volume of Polevoi's own *History of the Russian Nation* dealing with the feud was published in 1833, and *An Oath* in 1832, which means that Polevoi worked on both pieces almost simultaneously. In his *History*, while advocating the same general concept of the events, Polevoi does not alter established facts. However, he deliberately changes them in the novel and challenges the reader to verify them.

On some occasions we encounter a combination of open and hidden disclaimers. In the prologue to *The Infidel* (1838) Lazhechnikov lists beforehand several intentional anachronisms and also invites readers to check the rest of the novel for historical accuracy. If readers follow his advice, they will learn that even what is claimed by the author to be reliable historical evidence may be contaminated by deliberate fiction. *The Infidel* tells of the lofty and noble European physician Anton, who came to Russia during the reign of Ivan III and perished because of a conflict with a Tatar khan residing in Moscow. At the end of the novel, Lazhechnikov quotes "the truthful lines of history"—an excerpt from the chronicles pertaining to the incident:

> The German doctor Anton came (in 1485) to the Grand Duke. He was held in great honor by the Grand Duke. He treated Karakacha, son of Prince Dan'iar, whom he poisoned with a deadly potion for an insult. The Grand Duke gave him away to the "Tatars." ... They brought him under the bridge on the Moscow River in the winter and slaughtered him with a knife like a sheep.[13]

The actual chronicle, however, relates that

> the Grand Duke gave him away to the son of Karakucha, who, having tortured him, wanted to let him go for ransom. The Grand Duke did not allow it, but ordered him killed. And they brought him under the bridge on the Moscow River in the winter and slaughtered him with a knife like a sheep.[14]

Lazhechnikov changes the chronicle in two substantial instances. First, while according to the chronicle Karakucha had an adult son, Lazhechnikov makes the khan young in order to enhance the love plot: in *The Infidel* both the Tatar and Anton are young men and rivals in love, so the death of Anton's patient can look like a murder motivated by jealousy. Second, in the novel the grand duke pardons Anton, but it is too no avail, since the savage Tatars hurried to kill him. In the chronicle it is the other way around: the Tatars are willing to settle for money, but the grand duke orders the doctor killed anyhow. Thus, Lazhechnikov creates the dramatic situation of the failed rescue, and also underscores the conflict between enlightenment and barbarity, which is pivotal for the novel: the blame for Anton's death falls not on the great autocrat with a vision of new Russia, but rather on the Tatars, who embody the dark Asian element of Russian heritage. So we are dealing with considerably altered facts presented as hard evidence. Yet, pointing to his source by the year in the chronicle, the writer leaves behind "self-incriminating" clues.

[13] *Basurman*, in Lazhechnikov, *Sochineniia* 2:634.

[14] Ibid., 682 (commentary by N. G. Il'inskaia).

Aside from exposing factual inaccuracies, novelists further erode the overall historical verisimilitude of their creations by delimiting properly historical passages from fictional ones. This is in part achieved by the use of notes. To quote the words of Bulgarin from *Dimitrii the Impostor* (1830): "From the attached notes the readers will see where history speaks and where fiction is placed."[15] By implication, the annotated portion of the text is historically reliable, whereas what lies outside of it is not. A graphic separation between history and fiction is also found in instances where cues taken from historical sources are italicized so that we can actually see what is historically accurate and what represents the author's invention. Some writers delimit strictly historical and predominantly fictional portions of their works by placing historical information in markedly different "capsules" inserted into the text of the fictional action (Zagoskin and Zotov frequently use this technique). The transition from one mode of narration to another can be stressed, as in Zagoskin's *The Russians at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century* (1848), where the author says that, having fulfilled the "important duty of an historian," he returns—with relief—to his fictional plot and to the role of a "humble story-teller."[16] The very juxtaposition of clearly historical and clearly fictional chapters, again, undermines historical verisimilitude of the properly novelistic part of the text.

In addition to their role in the ploy of validation and invalidation, notes in historical novels are also among the elements that disrupt the flow of narration and, therefore, the illusion of reality in the narrative. A similar effect is produced by other components of the frame frequently present in the Romantic historical novel: subtitles with genre definition, introductions, afterwords, and epigraphs (see Appendix). The presence of a subtitle—usually "historical novel"—might seem relatively unimportant, but it is the first sign that warns the readers that they are being offered historical *fiction*. In many cases the writer continues to refer to the genre of the work in the text itself, speaking of "my novel" or "our novel." Even if the writer comes up with a new genre definition, it still underscores fictionality. Most inventive in this regard is Aleksandr Vel'tman. His *Koshchei the Immortal* (1833), which in many ways parodies contemporary novels, is subtitled "An epic song [*bylina*] of the old time," yet in the text, Vel'tman assigns to his work a variety of labels, some of which are mutually exclusive: "My long speech, word, song, tale, legend, history, true story, fiction, poem, novel."[17]

The impression of artificiality is often enhanced by the presence of an introduction and/or afterword elaborating on the the author's choice of subject and his artistic principles. Chapter epigraphs, which were used widely following the example of Scott, play a similar role, as they portray the action in the reflected light of other literary works. In the main text of the novel, the feeling of literariness is frequently enhanced by a strong authorial presence (see Appendix). On many occasions the author intervenes with all sorts of remarks, digressions, and addresses to readers. These can be simple connectors such as: "the readers probably remember ..."; "now let us go back to the heroes of our novel ..."; "using the right of the

[15]F. V. Bulgarin, *Dimitrii Samozvanets*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830), 1:vii–viii.

[16]*Russkie v nachale os'mnadtsatogo stoletiia*, in Zagoskin, *Sochineniia* 2:616.

[17]*Koshchei Bessmertnyi*, in A. F. Vel'tman, *Romany* (Moscow, 1985), 87.

narrator, I will ..."; and so on. The writers may also raise various aesthetic issues, invoke literary models, or refer to other arts. In short, the author acts very much like a *puppenmeister* who constantly interrupts his own show in order to address the audience in person.[18]

It should be noted that even in extreme cases of authorial interference, with the exception, perhaps, of Vel'tman's *Koshchei*, we can not speak of auto-meta-description (*avtometaopisanie*, to use Roman Timenchik's term). The primary goal of such interference is not to actualize the process of narration, but to demonstrate the conditional nature (*uslovnost'*) of the action. Readers are constantly reminded that the unfolding performance is the fruit of the author's imagination, that it is fiction, fabrication, make-believe. Needless to say, any educated reader understands that a historical novel is not purely history and contains fiction. What is important here is the writer's contradictory intent (*ustanovka*): to create the mirage of history redivivus and to dispel it at the same time. This stands in sharp contrast to the intent of Realistic historical novels, starting with Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in which the authors strive to impose the illusion of unconditional reality, or *uslovnost' bezuslovnosti.*

How can one explain this complex of deliberate modification of historical facts with divergent drives for self-validation and self-invalidation? Deviations from history can be motivated by a number of reasons, the most simple of which is the writer's desire to be entertaining. However, this alone is insufficient since many historical novels were conceived as rather serious works. Therefore, we should examine the higher goals of the historical novel of the period.

As Russian and European writers stated on numerous occasions, their purpose was to portray not simply a series of events in the past but the entire epoch, or, rather, the epoch's spirit—*dukh epokhi*, *Zeitgeist.* This implies a dichotomy of the essential and accidental, which is very much in accordance with the Romantic neoplatonic concept of the binary world or *dvoemirie.* The realm of historical facts corresponds to this imperfect world, while the epoch's spirit belongs to the sphere of the ideal other world. Each world has its own truth, which are sometimes even labeled by different terms. For example, Alfred de Vigny in the introduction to his famous historical novel *Cinq-Mars*, entitled "Reflections on Truth in Art," distinguishes between *le vraie* (the True) and *la vérité* (the Truth).[19] The first step toward the Truth is through the examination of the True, of historical evidence, but the goal is always to reach the higher Truth.

Historical evidence, in turn, is also divided into hierarchical categories. Realia of bygone epochs, customs and costumes, are more important than events because they are more general and essential. As to the events, they belong to the realm of the happenstance

[18]See Dolinin, *Istoriia, odetaia v roman*, 190; and B. G. Reizov, *Frantsuzskii istoricheskii roman v epokhu romantizma* (Leningrad, 1958), 545–46.

[19]Victor Cousin, a French popularizer of German philosophy who influenced de Vigny, uses other terms to distinguish between the two truths: *le réel* and *le vrai* (Reizov, *Frantsuzskii istoricheskii roman*, 162–65). A similar opposition is present in Pushkin's poem "Geroi" (1830), where it is described as a conflict between "low truths" and the "elevating deceit." Although Pushkin was critical of *Cinq-Mars*, it is possible that de Vigny's "Réflexions" served as a source for "Geroi," which also dwells on truth in history and truth in art.

and should be treated as imperfect incarnations of the idea. Therefore, factual accuracy is irrelevant if the spirit behind the facts is portrayed correctly. The young Belinskii formulated this approach in 1835, defending the artist's right to poetic license: "In the higher meaning of the word," historical truth "consists not in the accurate rendering of facts, but in the accurate portrayal of the development of human spirit during this or that epoch."[20] Echoing this widespread view, Lazhechnikov in *The Infidel* outlines the difference between a historian and a historical novelist, who "must follow the poetry of history and not its chronology. He should not be the slave of data: he must be faithful only to the character of the epoch and to its mover, whom he undertook to portray. It is not his task to sort out all the melee, to recount laboriously all the links in this epoch and in the life of this mover: that is what historians and biographers are for."[21] Moreover, in order for their main *idea* to be revealed, both historical events and historical personalities should be purged of everything "accidental." The Muse, according to de Vigny, reshapes a historical character's experiences "into conformity with the strongest idea of vice or virtue which can be conceived of him—filling the gaps, veiling the incongruities of his life, and giving him that perfect unity of conduct which we like to see represented even in evil."[22] De Vigny goes so far as to proclaim that "the names of the characters have nothing to do with the matter. The idea is everything; the proper name is only the example and the proof of the idea."[23]

In accordance with this approach, writers bend and retouch recalcitrant evidence to get rid of "incongruities" and attain the higher Truth. Thus, in *An Oath* Polevoi turns the brutal medieval warlord Shemiaka into a noble loner, prince-exile, prince-rebel, who refuses to follow the savage ways of his time and also resists the onslaught of gray Muscovite autocracy. Similarly, in *The Ice Palace* (1835) Lazhechnikov idealizes the cunning and ruthless courtier Volynskii, whom he depicts as a selfless patriot fighting against the tyranny of Biron. In order to highlight the tragedy of Volynskii's fall, Lazhechnikov transforms this mature man of fifty-one into a young, passionate lover who is also an astounding physical specimen.

The writer can be convinced of the truthfulness of his vision; however, he knows all too well that in his search for higher meaning he has deliberately altered historical facts. Can he be sure of his interpretation's accuracy? And how reliable is the method of this interpretation? This brings us to the issue of self-effacing leads and Romantic irony.

A prominent feature of Romanticism is that the outside world is seen as a text, somebody else's (ultimately, the Creator's) encoded message, a language. History is a part of this larger text of the universe, full of "symbols" or "hieroglyphs" which are to be deciphered.[24] The "textual" line of reasoning is most relevant for the historical novel since in many cases novelists deal with texts in the proper sense of the word—with historical sources.

[20]V. G. Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1953-59), 1:134.

[21]Lazhechnikov, *Sochineniia* 2:302–3.

[22]De Vigny, *Cinq-Mars* (New York, 1923), xvi.

[23]Ibid., xviii.

[24]See, for example, V. F. Odoevskii, *Russkie nochi* (Leningrad, 1975), 7; and Bestuzhev-Marlinskii, *Sochineniia*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1981), 2:465.

But these texts, as Polevoi states emphatically in *An Oath*, will remain dead and dry, unless they are revived with artistic imagination. "Only you, the fire of imagination, only you, Poetry, inextinguishable light of the heart's truth! can revive for us past life in its full bloom, can envelope dry bones with strength, can restore passions to decayed hearts, make them pulse with long-decayed blood!"[25]

On a number of occasions novelists demonstrate this technique of "artificial respiration" for their readers. Polevoi in *An Oath* presents a novelistic rendering of a military campaign and then quotes the passage from a chronicle which served as a basis for this rendering.[26] Lazhechnikov in *The Infidel* goes even further, providing in the epilogue a short excerpt from the annals that gave birth to his novel. As we discussed earlier, Lazhechnnikov alters this excerpt. But the chronicler's words about the Tatars slaughtering a German physician "like a sheep" on the frozen Moscow River are sufficient to spark the imagination of the writer, who expands a terse account of this obscure incident into the full-length novel. Of course, the most striking example of reviving "dead letters" is found outside of Russian literature, in Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1832). According to the narrator, the entire novel is based upon a single word—the mysterious Greek inscription "ΑΗΑΓΗ" (Fate), which he allegedly saw some time ago on the walls of the cathedral and which has since been obliterated.

The Romantics find it possible to revive the dead text of history only through imagination, on which they understandably place great value. Yet while imagination is an extremely subjective category, the Truth itself, the idea, the spirit that historical novelists are seeking, is believed to be *objective*.[27] Hence Romantic novelists are plagued by a tormenting contradiction: the Truth can be attained only through subjectivity, but as the Truth itself is objective, there is no guarantee that what has been attained through the subjective search is the Truth, since somebody else's search can yield different results. Therefore, as Herzen keenly observes, Romanticism both deified subjectivity and cursed it at the same time.[28] From the passionate subjective upsurge toward the ideal and the understanding that the ideal is unattainable springs Romantic irony.

An example of this irony can be seen in the constant oscillation between self-validation and invalidation found in the Romantic historical novel. The writer asserts his artistic findings as a breakthrough to the Truth, yet his vision may be entirely false; hence self-effacing leads and frequent reminders to readers that they are dealing with fiction. Romantic historical novelists understand that their insights are by no means definitive, but are just another attempt to decipher a fragment of the picture, the overall meaning of which is known only to the Creator. As de Vigny puts it, "the acts of the human race on the world's stage have doubtless a coherent unity, but the meaning of the vast tragedy enacted will be visible

[25]Polevoi, *Izbrannaia istoricheskaia proza*, 542.

[26]Ibid., 545–52.

[27]My description of Romantic contradictions and Romantic irony is largely based on the works of Lidiia Ginzburg.

[28]A. I. Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow, 1954–65), 3:32.

only to the eyes of God, until the end, which will reveal it perhaps to the last man."[29] Artistic intuition can, at best, hope to uncover just another layer that hides the mystery behind the hieroglyphs of the world. Accordingly, the Romantics strive to decipher the meaning of history by virtue of their imagination, but they also display an acute awareness that their attempts must remain tentative. As a result, historical novelists of the Romantic period create works based on the concept of *dual truth*, or if one may coin the term, *dvoepravdie*: the truth of fact and the truth of artistic imagination.

Manifestations of the above described Romantic complex vary in form and intensity from one writer to another. They are most conspicuous in such notable Romantics as Polevoi and Lazhechnikov, whose novels are permeated with poignant irony resulting from the contradiction between artistic and historical truths. In Vel'tman, the irony is largely transformed into playful parody. And it is somewhat muted among less "radical" Romantics such as Zagoskin, Masal'skii, and others. However, the concept of binary truth is ultimately shared by all historical novelists of the period from the literary opportunist Bulgarin to the great Pushkin, who for the most part "outgrew" Romanticism during his later years.

In *The Captain's Daughter* (1836) Pushkin does not engage in an overt game of self-validation. However, he employs characteristic chronological displacements.[30] And the general portrayal of history in the novel is significantly different from that found in Pushkin's own historical work, *A History of Pugachev* (1833), which was conceived as a preface to the novel in the manner of Walter Scott, but which gradually evolved into a separate monograph.[31] The Pugachev of the novel is a complex and fascinating person, "a remarkably attractive villain," to use Peter Tchaikovsky's dictum.[32] In contrast, the Pugachev of the *History* lacks any positive features. Pushkin describes him as a "a rogue, who had no other merits, except for some military expertise and unusual audacity."[33]

A similar dichotomy applies to the overall perspective on the Pugachev revolt. In the *History* Pushkin presents a picture of continuous mutual violence and animosity between the people and the nobility which constitute absolutely separate and irreconcilable camps. *The Captain's Daughter* likewise conveys the horror of the "senseless and merciless" Russian revolt. However, in the novel, the cycle of mutual animosity is broken and the wall

[29]De Vigny, *Cinq-Mars*, xi.

[30]For an excellent analysis of the novel's chronology see A. A. Dolinin, "Eshche raz o khronologii *Kapitanskoi dochki*," in *Pushkin i drugie: Sbornik statei k 60-tiletiiu prof. S. A. Fomicheva* (Novgorod, 1997), 52–59.

[31]Considerations of space do not allow me to treat here in any detail the extensive literature on the relationship between *Kapitanskaia dochka* and *Istoriia Pugacheva*. Among the conceptual works one should mention Marina Tsvetaeva's essay "Pushkin i Pugachev" (1937, reprinted in a number of editions) and Iurii Lotman's article "Ideinaia struktura 'Kapitanskoi dochki'" (1962, reprinted in several editions). The most relevant contributions in recent scholarship include Gerald E. Mikkelson, "Pushkin's History of Pugachev: The Literateur as Historian," in *New Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Russian Prose*, ed. George G. Gutsche and Lauren G. Leighton (Columbus, OH, 1982), 26–40; Paul Debreczeny, *The Other Pushkin: A Study of Alexander Pushkin's Prose Fiction* (Stanford, 1983); and Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford, 1994), 66–84.

[32]"*Kapitanskaia dochka* v kritike i literaturovedenii," in A. S. Pushkin, *Kapitanskaia dochka* (Moscow, 1984), 253.

[33]A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (*PSS*), 17 vols. (Moscow, 1937–59), 9:27.

separating the two sides is penetrated. A nobleman and a muzhik find common ground, treat each other as human beings rather than as representatives of antagonistic social classes, and thereby transcend the cruelty of the uprising.

With all that, the novel contains potentially self-effacing references to history. Especially important is the string of allusions associated with Lizaveta Khralova, a young woman whose parents and husband were brutally executed by the rebels. She was made Pugachev's concubine and eventually murdered together with her little brother under pressure from the jealous Cossack cheiftains. But we do not learn this story from the novel, where her name is dropped once, when Shvabrin threatens Masha Mironova with Khralova's destiny. Kharlova was not a well-known figure; therefore, in order to understand Shvabrin's threat, the ideal reader had to consult historical accounts, or more specifically, Pushkin's own *History*, which was the most recent and thorough work on the subject. And if we turn to the *History*, we can also fill in the story about the fall of the Nizhne-Ozernaia Fort and the execution of the officers, which in the novel is described laconically: "The commandant and all the officers were hanged."[34] On learning the news, the protagonist/narrator Grinev is especially upset because he had met the commandant and his wife. The young wife, not called by name in this passage, is the same Lizaveta Kharlova. Grinev does not know the details of her husband's death, but in the History it is graphically portrayed. From the *History* we also learn about the horrible end of Kharlova's mother, who was "hacked to pieces," and of Kharlova's father, Colonel Elagin, an obese man, whom the rebels flayed alive and used his fat as an ointment for their wounds.[35] Once a bridge to the *History* is established, images of violence, which are softened in the novel, acquire most gruesome overtones.

Moreover, the Kharlova connection is crucial in the sense that it threatens to subvert the entire plot of the novel. The story of the colonel's daughter, Lizaveta Kharlova, can be viewed as a prototype of the story of the captain's daughter, Masha Mironova. The initial situation is virtually identical: the fathers of both young women are fortress commandants, and their sweethearts are military officers as well. The opening developments of *The Captain's Daughter* follow the Kharlova scenario, as both of Masha's parents are executed. But after this point, the novel departs drastically from the somber conclusion of Kharlova's fate, and the heroine eventually unites with the hero to live a blissful family life. Nonetheless, the tragic outcome of history looms over this novelistic happy ending, and this is the pattern of Pushkin's references to history: whenever the cruelty in the novel is mitigated, he invokes the most morbid details from *A History of Pugachev*; whenever events take a happy turn, he reminds the reader that in reality things were very different. Thus Pushkin creates the novel which in many ways contradicts his own *History*, yet at the same time leaves allusions that might subvert the fictional rendering of history. In this respect he follows the conventions of the contemporary historical novel.

In the case of Pushkin, the dichotomy of truths arguably stems not from the concept of *dvoemirie* per se but from another Romantic binary: the opposition between the historical

[34]Pushkin, *Kapitanskaia dochka*, 38.

[35]Pushkin, *PSS* 9:18-19.

memory of the educated classes and that of the common people (*narod*). Karamzin already had underscored the incongruity of these memories in his *History of the Russian State*. In the famous final chapter on Ivan the Terrible, Karamzin passes a historian's verdict on this tsar, whom he places among the world's most monstrous tyrants. However, Karamzin emphasizes that the memories of Ivan among the *narod* are positive, exclaiming: "History is less prone to forgive than the common people!"[36]

The idea of the dichotomy of historical memory gained wide currency both in Russia and Europe in the 1820s and 1830s. It is summarized by Polevoi in his *History of the Russian Nation*: "The common people have their own memory: this is indisputable, and this memory does not consult history; it selects its own heroes, shrouds them in poetical inventions, and glorifies throughout centuries."[37] And de Vigny even compares historical memory of the people reflected in legend and lore to a collectively written romance.[38]

The notion of historical legend may have metaphysical underpinnings, since popular imagination, which transforms historical facts, ultimately relates to the realm of tthe transcendental Truth. However, preoccupation with popular memory can be of a more "secular" nature as well, which is likely to be the case with Pushkin. To a considerable degree, his fascination with the national sentiment stems from the understanding that it represents a formidable historical force. An early exploration of such a force in action is found in *Boris Godunov*, where, under the strong influence of Karamzin, Pushkin for the first time extensively treats a historical theme. Subsequently, collecting materials for *A History of Pugachev*, Pushkin had a direct exposure to the phenomenon of popular memory. As he discovered during his trip to Orenburg, the *narod* retained a positive image of Pugachev regardless of all bloodshed that accompanied the rebellion.[39]

The case of Pugachev is not as paradoxical as that of Ivan the Terrible, since it involves issues of class bias. The *narod*'s fondness for Pugachev can be explained by the fact that he was one of their own and led their uprising against the upper classes. But the dichotomy of historical memory outlined by Karamzin is still present: the popular image of Pugachev, the peasants' tsar, is incompatible with the objective historical picture conscientiously portrayed by Pushkin in his *History*. There is no reason to suppose that Pushkin doubts the validity of his own findings, but he is also aware of a different perspective.

Refusing to fictionalize Pugachev in history, Pushkin releases the legendary, fairy-tale potential of Pugachev in the novel. Yet in *The Captain's Daughter* Pushkin leaves allusions to the grim reality depicted in the *History*, which he could not ignore or forget, while presenting the readers with the compelling fictional image of the "peasants' tsar." Ultimately, readers are dealing with the same Romantic contradiction between the two truths, or to use the words of the Poet from Pushkin's "Hero" (1830), between "low truths" and "elevating deceit."

[36]N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, 12 vols. (1842–44; reprint ed. Moscow, 1989), 9:278–80.
[37]Polevoi, *Istoriia russkogo naroda*, 6 vols. (Moscow, 1829–33), 5:74.
[38]De Vigny, *Cinq-Mars*, xiv–xv.
[39]Pushkin, *PSS* 9:373.

The relationship between fact and fiction in the historical novel of the 1830s and 1840s is largely shaped by Romantic binary oppositions. The dichotomy of truth found in the novel of the period is peculiar to the poetics of Romanticism and sharply differentiates it from the historical novel of subsequent epochs.[40] This may explain the waning popularity of the genre in the 1840s, when Romanticism was being replaced by the Natural School and nascent Realism. The last novel written according to the Romantic paradigm was Count A. K. Tolstoi's *Prince Serebrianyi*, conceived in the 1840s but published only in 1862, during the heyday of Realism. It is not surprising, therefore, that Saltykov-Shchedrin jeered this fine work as a blatant anachronism.

Equally indicative is the negative reaction to the first Realistic historical novel, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, from Prince P. A. Viazemskii, whose taste was formed during the Romantic period. Viazemskii cites *The Captain's Daughter* as an exemplary work of historical fiction and complains that, while reading Tolstoy, "it is difficult to decide or even to guess where history ends and where the novel begins, and vice versa."[41] Judgmental issues aside, Viazemskii perceptively discerned the peculiarity of *War and Peace*: being based on the monistic outlook of Realism, Tolstoy's work lacks completely the opposition between artistic and factual truths, which was at the core of the Romantic historical novel.

[40]In other words, the approach to the historical novel should be historical in the sense that the genre should be viewed in the contemporary context. It is difficult, therefore, to agree with the main premise of Wachtel's *Obsession with History*. Although he emphasizes that he is not concerned with the Russian historical novel per se and uses examples from various genres, he deals with the same problems that face a student of the historical novel. Wachtel comes to the conclusion that there exists "a specifically Russian literary tradition of intergeneric dialogue on historical themes" and that the core of this tradition "remains remarkably constant" over the last two centuries (p. 219). One can indeed speak of a dialogical relationship between history and literature during the Romantic period, but the nature of this relationship changes drastically during the subsequent epochs. Moreover, the "dialogue" of the Romantic period emerges not from some Russian peculiarities, but from the general poetics of Romanticism.

[41]P. A. Viazemskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 12 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1878–96), 7:196.

APPENDIX: Elements of Literary Frame and Indications of Literariness

Title	Subtitle/ Genre definition	Foreword/ Afterword	Epigraphs	Notes	Authorial presence
Bulgarin, F. V. *Mazepa*	√	√	√	√	
Bulgarin, F. V. *Dmitrii Samozvanets*	√	√	√ To volumes	√	
Lazhechnikov, I.I. *Poslednii novik*	In the text: "My novel"	√	√	√	√
Lazhechnikov, I. I. *Ledianoi dom*	In the text: "Our novel"		√	√	√
Lazhechnikov, I. I. *Basurman*	In the text: "novel"	√	√	√	√
Masal'skii, K. P. *Strel'tsy*	√	√	√	√	√
Polevoi, N. A. *Ioann Tsimiskhii*	√ "A true story (*byl'*)" The collection title: "Byzantine legends."	√	√		√
Polevoi, N. A. *Kliatva*	√ "A Russian true story (*Russkaia byl'*)"	√	√		√
Pushkin, A. S. *Kapitanskaia dochka*		√	√		
Vel'tman, A. F. *Koshchei bessmertnyi*	√ "An epic song (*bylina*) of yore"			√	√
Vel'tman, A. F. *Svetoslavich*	√ "A miracle (*divo*) of The times of ..."			√	√
Vel'tman, A. F. *Raina*					
Zagoskin, M. N. *Roslavlev*	In the Introduction "Historical Novel"	√			√
Zagoskin, M. N. *Askol'dova mogila*	√ "A tale of the times"	√		√	√
Zagoskin, M. N. *Brynskii les*	√	√			√
Zagoskin, M. N. *Russkie v nach. XVIII stoletiia*	√ "A story of the times of ..."	√			√
Zagoskin, M. N. *Miroshev*	√ "A Russian true story (*byl'*) of the times ..."			√	√
Zagoskin, M. N. Iurii *Miloslavskii*	√	√		√	√

The default entry for the "Subtitle/Genre definition" rubric is "Historical novel"