Naming The Future In Translations Of Russian And East European Science Fiction

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Science fiction is the ultimate defamiliarizing verbal genre, uniquely well suited not only to imagining space exploration or embodying new trajectories for science and technology, but first and foremost to envisioning new ways of organizing social and political entities. Even works that lack encounters with sentient aliens provoke a confrontation between self and other as readers meet characters from remote times and places or alternative and very different presents. This article examines one factor among the ways SF	extsuperscript{2} creates worlds different from our own: the use of personal names to convey information about international, transnational or post-national groups and societies in the future, and the way these names have been or could be rendered in English translation.

Some works considered here predate the Second World War, but most were written during the great boom in Soviet and East European SF that began a few years after Stalin's death. The “Thaw” of the late 1950s and early 1960s restored confidence in the promise of a bright socialist future, at least temporarily and at least among members of the technical intelligentsia who formed much of SF’s readership and provided most of its authors. SF in general tends to drop the national traits that mark the modernist novel and replace them with international futures, mobilizing persistent

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1 I thank Anindita Banerjee and Sonja Fritzsche for their comments and suggestions on the draft of this article, which helped me to explore more deeply the connections of science fiction, translation, and global politics.

2 To save time and space, this article will refer to science fiction with the abbreviation “SF” (another abbreviation, “sci-fi,” is commonly used of treatments of science fiction in popular culture, whereas this article is addressing the function of works of elite literary science fiction).
tokens of nationality such as names to point out this internationalization — whether because such a society would strike the reader with its difference from today's or because the writer's (or Writers' Union's) politics required projection of such a future. Although most Russian and East European SF (like American SF of the "Golden Age") maintained a realistic narrative style, the genre did introduce changes that were otherwise more typical of underground literature of the post-Thaw period. As Brian McHale states: "Science fiction, by staging 'close encounters' between different worlds, placing them in confrontation, foregrounds their respective structures and the disparities between them. It thus obeys the same underlying principles of ontological poetics as postmodernist fiction" (60). The Cold War internationalism of Second World SF, once read in the West for a political thrill or to see how the genre worked in a different social system, reflects an official politics defined as unlike and indeed opposed to Western colonial modernity. Many of these SF works refer to the complex of capitalism, imperialism and militarism as traits of a perilous past in human history that was overcome by the historical laws properly understood, thank goodness, by socialist countries led by the USSR. Although the Thaw gave way to Brezhnev-era stagnation and SF quickly took on a darker mood, a reader today might find in Thaw-era works an alternative to dominant Western images of a world split between East and West (or North and South), as well as more optimistic pictures of the interplanetary future than that offered in later SF from any language or region.

While many literary scholars and gatekeepers have considered, and some still consider, SF a subliterary or para-literary form, during the Cold War SF gained an enhanced significance for thoughtful readers in the Soviet and East European literary and cultural polysystem (branching out from literature into the newer media of cinema and television, which will not be considered here, though acting bodies can convey the same future diversity of race and gender, the same international bouquet of accents, even when characters are not named). The genre's lower official status compared to elite fiction meant less vigilant ideological policing by literary bureaucracies,^3^
and this along with SF’s roots in adventure literature allowed writers to do more interesting things than were typical for “varnished” socialist realist prose in Eastern Europe. SF in the USSR was especially encouraged by the rhetoric of the Space Race (and associated heightened investment in science and technology education), with this literature perceived as yet another venue for competition with Western writers. Certain Anglo-American authors became available in translation, and Russian and East European works gradually began to appear in English versions. Thus, for both authors and readers, SF could also provide a place “above it all,” where fans could imagine a shared and better future or see the common warning in a fictional future tragedy or dystopia. Historical materialism dictated an optimistic vision of humanity in the obligatory socialist future, like

print runs but printed on paper of poor quality, as if they were not expected to last either artistically or physically (or maybe Soviet-era publishers did not have access to acid-free paper). The pages in my copy of Lem’s *Cyberiada* (1971 expanded edition) have darkened almost to brown in the 45 years since it was produced; without serious conservation, original copies of this book will become fragile and eventually unreadable.

On another note, most Second World SF authors emerged from scientific or technical professions and had not studied in official literary institutes; this too may have led them to greater discursive freedom in the Thaw period.

4 Socialist realism was imposed on Soviet writers following the 1934 First Congress of the Writers’ Union in the USSR and on the countries of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1940s. The “realist” element of socialist realism suited much SF – see McHale, cited above, on SF’s tendency to keep a realist style even once much elite fiction had abandoned it – but the “socialist” requirement could lead to boringly idealized or polarized black-and-white characters. Katerina Clark’s ground-breaking study *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* more subtly appreciates the purposes and achievements of the socialist realist novel, but in practice the tedious results helped attract readers to SF, where plots set in distant times and places were more engaging.

5 Anglo-American authors available in Russian translation during the later Cold War included Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, and Clifford Simak – almost all were men, and most wrote so-called “hard” (technical more than psychological) SF, excepting Bradbury.
that in Ivan Efremov’s *Andromeda Nebula* (1957), considered below, but critical discourses or negative futures that socialist censorship would otherwise have excluded could be located on faraway planets or in Western societies.

As in higher status literary genres, transnational dialogue among readers and writers of SF has taken place largely through translation. Of course, translation is always a crucial element of world-building, as SF brings characters and whole peoples into contact with others who speak different and sometimes entirely unfamiliar languages. Translation of “brotherly” socialist SF from and into various East European languages created a largely shared tradition for readers in the Second World, the bloc of communist countries largely (but not only) in Eastern Europe and Eurasia that officially stood against First World capitalism and imperialism. The Khrushchev-era Thaw coincided with the height of the space race; the ethics

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6 Efremov’s novel creates narrative interest through the human struggle against hostile environments throughout the universe, as well as subplots of romance and professional activities, rather than (for the most part) human villains. For a study of dystopias that includes some works of Russian and Eastern European science fiction, see Gottlieb.

7 Fantasy, on the other hand, was not supported by translation during the Cold War; reading it required that a reader know English, French, or other foreign languages (the work of Ray Bradbury was something of an exception, but it was still presented as *fantastika*, fitting into the genre of SF).

8 This reader has noted, for instance, that although Lem is not widely available online in the original Polish, as protected by copyright, Russian translations are easy to find online, a legacy of Soviet indifference to copyright in translation practice. Indeed, fans of SF were just the ones who knew how to make web pages as the Internet emerged in the 1990s. This article focuses mainly on Russian-language sources because of their greater presence in English translation; Čapek and Lem were both widely available in Russian translation and beloved by Soviet readers of SF. Space will not allow consideration here of how national or linguistic distinctions functioned in the international SF market of the Second World.

9 Eastern Europe may be seen in general as an invented concept (Wolff), but during the Cold War it clearly meant the part of East Central Europe under Soviet sway (plus Yugoslavia, a socialist country that was one of the founders of the non-aligned movement). Thus Greece and Finland, located farther east than many East European
and politics of interactions with “otherness” that shaped Soviet and communist discourse, especially with regard to the Third World, also shaped many of the works of SF studied in this article. That regional tradition interacted with Anglo-American SF and others by way of translation as well – for example, Second World SF impacted Latin American literature by way of translation into Spanish. At the same time, translations of these works of SF into English from Czech, Polish, Russian and other languages have often been treated as if they simply happened, without consideration of the particular issues that might arise in translating SF. I note that the recent anthology *Science Fiction Criticism*, edited by Rob Latham, does not include the term “translation” in its index. Even though translation studies may be couched in terms taken from works of science fiction, scholars of SF have usually approached translation as an issue of communication between different species rather than among different works, authors, and linguistic or national bodies of literature.

Brian James Baer has described the relatively high status of and significant state support for translation in the USSR (115-32), but the situation for translators was not as favorable in the US, at least, where Cold War era translations of SF ranged from stiff versions produced by unidentified translators at Progress Publishers in Moscow to the same versions reprinted by US publishers (or more recently by Freedonia Books) to poor-quality versions full of errors and clearly done in haste to versions like the translation of Lem’s *Solaris* made from the French rather than directly from the Polish to quite decent versions such as those in the series of Soviet SF published by Collier/Macmillan, nicely bound and priced for libraries or serious fans. Many books in the Macmillan series had introductions by beloved US SF author Theodore Sturgeon and featured druggy images on the covers, as if to suggest that reading “the Best of Soviet SF” would give the reader insight into a different tradition with evidence of a different

countries, did not count as part of Eastern Europe: the concept was more political than geographical.

10 In the title of Bellos’ *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, the fish in question is the Babelfish, introduced in Douglas Adams’ 1979 *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*.
society, but might also take that reader on a kind of trip. At the same time, these higher quality translations could include peculiar editorial changes or deletions; the last page of the Strugatskys' novella “Escape Attempt” is omitted in the English translation, leaving a more mysterious ending less bound to specifics of the Second World War. At the same time, several of the best translators of prose from Russian into English (Mirra Ginsburg, Antonina Bouis, Andrew Bromfield) translated significant amounts of SF over the course of their careers – perhaps reflecting personal interest as well as the imperative of making a living at the work. Translation along this vector is a topic worth exploring.

This article is part of a larger project studying translations of Russian and East European SF into English. To address a manageable part of a very broad topic, I focus here on names and the effects of their translation across languages. Most of the works taken as examples date from before and during the Cold War, but they remain interesting and are now read for different reasons in a new social and political context, where the function of names emerges even more clearly. The use and kinds of names may be roughly divided into three varieties of text: 1) SF depicting an alternative present, 2) SF depicting a relatively near future (100–300 or so years from the present of the writer), and 3) SF depicting a distant future (thousands of years or more in the future). Some names may be transferred into the new linguistic setting of a translation almost without alteration, their national “identity” preserved though with possible differences in cultural or historical associations. Other names must be significantly transformed in translation in order to work as intended in the new context. Examples are drawn here from translations of works by outstanding twentieth-century authors from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia: Karel Čapek, Stanislaw Lem, Aleksandr Bogdanov, Evgeny Zamyatin, A. N. Tolstoy, Ivan Efremov, Olga Larionova, and Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, with passing reference to a few other writers as well. These authors were chosen because they are available in English translation, but that availability also reflects their status as important authors. The study assumes that when read outside of a single national tradition, SF is by necessity a transnational genre, though an Anglophone reader may be able to interpret the tacit messages of names differently.
Background: Socialism in Space

Leigh Grossman has pointed out that lip service to "socialism in space" usually sufficed to satisfy Soviet or East European censors, and this gave SF writers in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe greater freedom to explore interesting issues outside the stultifying constraints of socialist realism (Forrester 108). There certainly was some tedious socialist realist SF, just as there was a great deal of inferior pulp in the Anglo-American tradition, but, like the best Western SF, and even more characteristically, good Second World SF takes on weighty philosophical issues and participates in long traditions of depicting utopia and anti-utopia. It is telling that Darko Suvin, a founding scholar of science fiction history and theory, is an émigré from former Yugoslavia; as SF scholarship developed, Eastern European writers and readers were already more used to taking SF seriously as a venue for big questions, a genre of serious literature.

Suvin's ground-breaking 1979 study *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* brought a number of the most important Russian and East European SF authors into the scholarly conversation from the start. It also influentially advanced the idea that a work of speculative fiction requires a *novum*, a strange new element, around which the nature of society or the world depicted changes, making it feel both different and distant (44, ff.). Suvin suggests that this works best with only one *novum* per work, but that *novum* itself will often result in a whole train of consequent changes, underlining

11 István Csicsery-Ronay argues that specifically East European (not Russian) SF is an exception, since most notable bodies of SF have arisen in a context of European (or other) imperialism: "Some core elements of the genre appear in every science-fiction culture, but there are significant differences at the margins" (131).

12 While Western SF dystopias, ironically, often descend from Zamyatin's *We* (first published in English translation in 1924 and acknowledged as an inspiration for *Brave New World* and *1984*), Russian and East European dystopias more often reach for one of Zamyatin's own pre-texts, the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. 
the desired cognitive estrangement. The international future suggested by names in SF deepens this estrangement for the reader, as it tacitly conveys the changes that have come alongside the work’s own novum.

Personal names are at once conservative – especially last names, or the Russian patronymic – and responsive to trends, as the US media enjoy reporting. The names in alternative present SF generally work to show differences of (say) Martian society from familiar societies on Earth, though they may also do more than that. For the near future especially, though in more distant futures as well, names with particular national associations can be used to suggest a different social organization without describing it explicitly, since the reader has experiences and expectations of what first and last names convey. Suggesting that in a mere 100 years the world will be united as a single political unit, and/or that the scientific meritocracy in narratives of space exploration will come to include a wider variety of national backgrounds, may be taken as proof of “socialism in space” or else merely as a hopeful vision of a more united and harmonious human future. In more distant futures, characters’ names may cease to evoke any recognizable nationality and may even change from names to numbers, signifying huge changes in personal life and social organization. Invented

13 One might suggest the Formalist term “defamiliarization” as a synonym for cognitive estrangement.

14 Of course, the tradition reflected in names may be proud and local or may reflect the imposition of naming conventions by political powers. German-based last names were assigned to Jews living in the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Central Asian names were Russified in the Soviet period: Russian-style patronymics (usually ending in -ovich or -ovna) were added in passports and other personal documents, and last names were created ending in -ov or -ova (as with the prominent Soviet author Chingiz Aitmatov, or the famous Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, who took her Tatar great-grandmother’s last name as her pen name). For an Anglophone reader, the result sounds Russian, all the more because some Russian names have Turkish- or Islamic-sounding origins (e.g. Rachmaninoff).

15 Alternative presents may work the same way, though if they involve other planets they must offer names that differ from those on Earth – or, sometimes, that reflect the pseudo-history of connections with Earth posited in the work, as in A. N. Tolstoy’s Aelita.
names work in many ways like any neologisms: either they suggest something based on the reader’s existing knowledge, or their unfamiliarity conveys additional strangeness.

Cold War-era translations from Czech, Polish or Russian into English crossed a linguistic boundary, though not the most difficult kind: Polish, Russian and English are all Indo-European languages, and they share a great deal of cultural and lexical information, particularly in the international terminology of science. Translation also crossed a political boundary, and translations originally made in the Cold War, even of literary works, were often sold for their important and revealing anthropological or even politological contents. On the one hand, a reader could see “how they do it” in contrast to Western SF authors; on the other hand, the work could be read for signs of critical or even dissident statements, as many Anglophone readers assumed (and correctly, to a varying extent) that writers in communist countries could not risk openly speaking truth to power. It is worth noting that a brighter future fit not only obligatory socialist ideology about historical laws but likewise the idea that science would continue to improve the conditions of human life, leading to more reasonable people – at least among scientists. (The “mad scientist” type of SF was not especially popular in the socialist period, unless the mad scientist was a Western character associated with decadent capitalism, as in Aleksandr Belyaev’s story and then novella “Professor Dowell’s Head,” written before the Second World War.)

For an example in English, note the resonant name of Google: the word sounds like “googol,” a mathematical term for 100 to the 100th power (an unimaginably huge number), as well as suggesting “goggle,” an eye protector but also a verb for when a person’s eyes open extremely wide in order to see something striking, and also the old song “Barney Google” (“with the goo-goooogley eyes” – the primarily silly meaning tied again to eyes). Thus the word “google” suggests a huge number that you nonetheless get to see, that is enough to make your eyes bug out. The choice of name here is extremely effective in conveying the search engine’s ambitions.
Naming the Alternative Present

Naming plays a notable role in a work that begins in the present or recent past before covering about fifty years, yet seeming to remain in the author’s present: Karel Čapek’s War with the Newts (Válka s mloki, 1936). Čapek devotes considerable attention to the behavior of various nationalities, offering stereotypical scientists, politicians and others (for instance, the aristocratic British scientists who are unimpressed by a talking newt because his knowledge of the world reflects the contents of the evening newspaper his lower class keeper has taught him to read) and amusing parodic transformations of some famous names (the name of one Soviet figure, Molokov, resembles the Czech word for newt or salamander, mlok, but also clearly recalls the Soviet politician Viacheslav Molotov, best known for his cocktail; the newts supposedly wind up worshiping a statue of Moloch, a deity named in the Bible but again one whose name recalls mlok). The novel’s initial action seems to emerge from a humorous misreading of the Czech Captain Vantoch as a Dutchman named Van Toch (the idea of a Czech sea captain is amusing in itself, since the country has only land borders and no coastline ... at least not until much later in the book). In this alternative present, now readable as a climate change novel, the world is not international but distressingly divided into various nationalities, and this leads it toward doom.

One pre-Revolutionary work of Russian SF, Alexander Bogdanov’s 1908 novel Red Star (Красная звезда), introduces properly estranging names for its Martian characters. Aside from Leonid, our hero; Anna, his partner as the novel opens; Ibragimov, a comrade from the revolutionary struggle; and Werner, Leonid’s doctor, the Martian names with their frequent doubled consonants sound Finnish: Netti, Menni, Eno, Sterni — indeed, Leonid’s lover, Netti, gives him a Martian-style nickname, Lenni. This underlines the setting’s strangeness but also enhances Bogdanov’s description of the Martians’ relative lack of gendered traits. The Martian language does not reflect gender, and male and female Martians themselves all look similar, so much that Leonid is sure Netti is a young man (as she originally lets him believe) until she tells him otherwise. The Finnish language
does not express grammatical gender either, so names with a Finnish sound work well to convey this trait of imagined Martian: the easiest way to imagine a language without grammatical gender is to pick one you already know (Finland was part of Russian Empire until 1917, and an early scene in the novel is set on a lake in Finland: the etheroneph to Mars takes off from there).

The “Red Count” Aleksey N. Tolstoy’s take on Mars, *Aelita* (Аэлита, 1923), includes Martian names and toponyms reminiscent of the Aztec language. For instance, the Martians call the Earth Taltsetl (Tolstoy 66). Others Martian names are not quasi-Aztec: the earthling hero ponders the etymology of Aelita’s name “the first part, ae,... meant ‘Seen for the last time,’ and ... lita ... means ‘starlight’” (69). Aelita eventually explains that the Martians and their civilization have indeed descended from Earth people who spoke a language very like Aztec – so the effect on the reader’s view of Martian society might be called exoticizing rather than defamiliarizing. Unlike Bogdanov’s, Tolstoy’s characters are highly differentiated by sex, and Martian society is far from being an exemplar of socialism, indeed the earthling visitors attempt to foment a socialist revolution there.

Naming the Near Future

The near-future works of SF examined here, like some alternative present works, most often use recognizable names with ethnic, national or cultural associations. Think of Winston in George Orwell’s *1984*: his name has strong associations of time and place for an Englishman (and would have rather different ones if the character had been born and named in the US). Soviet as well as post-Soviet fiction may do similar things with Vilen, Vladlen, Ninel’ and the like, names that celebrate Vladimir Lenin and would during the Thaw period have pointed to people in their thirties and forties. Recognizable names also convey gender, and in many works of near-future SF the presence of women on spaceship crews or planetary parties implicitly defines a change in gender roles. When characters in SF
display an international mix of names, as noted above, this implies both
an international or transnational scientific or exploratory meritocracy and
a future in which more human groups may participate on an equal foot­
ing – a progressive political approach as well as an expression of faith in
scientific progress.

Karel Čapek's play, *R.U.R.*, was written in 1920, first published in 1921,
and set in and around the year 2000. Ivan Klíma points out that the variety
of ethnic and professionally suggestive names of the humans makes them
representative of all humanity, no doubt taken as meaning all of Europe at
that point in history (xx). Harry Domin's last name is redolent of dominion
and domination; Fabry echoes “fabricate,” and Dr. Gall recalls the physi­
cian, Galen. Dr. Hallemeier is a hall-owner too, and Busman a business­
man concerned mostly with financial matters. Helena Glory has the same
name as the woman whose face launched a thousand ships, and her nurse
Nana fulfills a kind of archaic maternal function. Some fun is had with the
robots' names too; in the first scene, Domin's “female” secretary is named
Sulla, showing that the humans in the robot factory do not actually know
history well (Helena points out that the historical Sulla was a man; since
the robots do not reproduce sexually, it remains a question whether they
have sex or only gender).

In Stanisław Lem's *Tales of Pirx the Pilot* (*Opowieści o pilocie Pirxie*,
1968), the hero, Pirx's schoolmates sound mostly northern European; they
include Siga, Boerst, Payartz, Yerkes, Brendan, Natters, and others. Once in
space, Pirx encounters many Russian names, but also a number of English,
German, French, and Scandinavians (Momssen, late captain of the ill-fated
Coriolanus in the final story, “Terminus”). In the story “The Conditioned
Reflex,” ethnic belonging is overlaid on two Canadian characters who perish
on the Moon: one has a clearly French name (Challiers) while the other may
be English (Savage), representing the two best-known groups in Canadian
society. The name of the hero, *Pirx*, suggests no definite nationality, unlike
Lem's more adult space hero, Ijon Tichy, who sounds more Polish.

In Lem's famous novel *Solaris* (*Solaris*, 1961), the main characters are
Kris Kelvin (a presumably English last name that resonates with science,
given its use for conveying temperatures in space, though it was in honor
of someone whose name was not Kelvin, but William Thomson, Lord
Kelvin), Snaut (Scandinavian?) and Sartorjusz (Polish, meaning “tailor”). Gibarian (Armenian) is dead when Kelvin arrives; Kelvin's late companion, Harey, or Rheya, in the first English translation, is given no last name, and her first name suggests no commonly known national origin (though in the 1970 translation the resemblance of Rheya to the Greek goddess Rhea might suggest general idealized femininity more than specific national belonging). Taken together, these names suggest an international cast of characters, all European, brought together by fortuities of scientific education and career choices.

The series of names of scholars and explorers in Lem's presentation of Solaristic science suggests both a broad, worldwide meritocracy and a widening community of science, gradually joined by members of different nations and ethnic groups. The list starts off with a range of English, German, French and other European names (Ottenskjöld, Shannahan, Civito-Vitta), with Polish and Russian names added to the mix, and ends with Phaelenga, Kho-En-Min, Ngyalla, and Kavakadze, showing that participation in the debate over Solaris has spread to a broader variety of scholars and theorists. This inclusion of non-Western scientists in the project, perhaps parallel to the expansion of the scientific community in the twentieth century, adds verisimilitude to what is in any case a persuasive display of pseudoscience.

Another more distinctly translational point in Solaris is the change in names in the first English edition, due probably to the 1970 translation being made from a French version. Kelvin's ocean-generated love interest, based on a partner who committed suicide after the couple broke up, is named Harey in the original work, but the name is changed to Rhéa in the French, perhaps because “Harey” would be difficult to pronounce in French, and that change remains in “Rheya” in the translation by Kilmartin and Cox. Another significant change is the surname of Kelvin's colleague on the Solaris research station, Snaut. A French reader seeing that name would pronounce it as “sno,” and the English version renders it as “snow,” an Anglo name, whereas Snaut looks more Germanic or Scandinavian. Early in the novel, Snaut tells Kelvin, “You can call me Ratface, everyone does” (Lem 9); this makes sense if his name is pronounced “snout” but much less if his name is “snow.” These names are restored to their original
forms in Bill Johnson's recent re-translation of *Solaris*, available in the US market only as a Kindle book.

Arkady and Boris Strugatskys' collection of connected stories, *Noon: 22nd Century* (Полдень: 22-ой век, 1961) sets up their universe, known to fans as the Noon Universe. The stories begin on Mars with four characters, three of them Russian speakers of different backgrounds (Novago, Mandel, and Opanasenko) and the fourth a Canadian (Humphrey). The school in which several of the stories are set features many Russian names but also Nguyen Phu Dat (Vietnamese and, moreover, with the elements of his name in the correct order) and Gurgenidze (Georgian). In the school's lobby, a big bronze bust of rocketry pioneer, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, reminds the reader that we are in Russian/Soviet territory, as does a huge statue of Lenin in a later story (88). In another story we meet Walter Seronian (Anglo?-Armenian). The preponderance of Russians remains through the collection (and indeed in most of the Strugatskys' work – generally set, when on earth, in Russian spaces), but there are usually a few characters from somewhere else. Once out in space, August Bader speaks Russian, but he throws in an "aber" ("but") now and then to remind us of his German background. Giving Bader this verbal tic recalls David Bellos' suggestion that little tokens of foreignness often suffice to create an atmosphere, and that readers may particularly enjoy them:17 the "aber" confirms Bader's Germanness (along with his pomposity, tendency to repeat himself, and love of taxonomy) and makes the reader feel good for having read and recognized a bit of real German. Bellos goes on to note that "selective, or 'decorative,' foreignism is available only in translation between languages with an established relationship" (49), and, indeed, here and there we see the Strugatskys introduce a word or a few words of English, French or German, but usually not of other languages, which their readers could not be expected to know even if the Strugatskys themselves did.

17 "Retention of the original expression in narrowly delimited and self-explanatory speech situations such as greetings and exclamations provides readers with something they might well want to glean from reading a translated work: the vague impression of having read a novel in French. When reading French was an important mark of cultural distinction, this could be a very satisfying feeling indeed" (Bellos 49).
Other languages as a whole do feature in the Strugatskys' near-future SF narratives; at one point in their novel, Far Rainbow (Далекая Радуга, 1963), Mark Falkenstein speaks Japanese to Leonid Gorbovsky so that Mikhail Sidorov won't understand what he's saying; Gorbovsky tells him not to bother because Sidorov, though his name makes clear that he is ethnically Russian, knows Japanese. In the novella "Escape Attempt," the three characters from Earth (Anton, Vadim and Saul - all native Russian speakers, though the first two lack last names), after setting up an apparatus to translate as they interrogate a local from the newly named planet of Saula, speak to each other in English when they do not want this local to understand them. African characters in Noon: 22nd Century include Professor Lomba and Tora-Hunter Mboga, "a pigmy from the Congo" and a doctor doing fundamental work in prophylactic medicine for humans voyaging to strange planets. These characters add to the racial and ethnic variety of this future, as described above, but the African characters do not say anything in Igbo or Swahili, which few Russophone readers would have recognized in any case.

In Far Rainbow, numerous Russian names appear alongside international ones: French Etienne Lamandois is one of a pair of dueling zero-physicists; the other is Aristode (presumably Greek). Other characters include Hassan Ali-Zadeh, Lu Fun-Chan, and Gaba (one of the zero-testers, an African who has no last name or other specific ethnic identification); again, the novel shows a future in which people from quite various backgrounds mingle and interact, keeping their national origins and original languages while able to speak Russian since it is Russian science, technology, and exploratory energy that has brought them there. Sometimes these characters come with a stereotypical feature too (Ali-Zadeh has a hooked nose, which in one scene gets punched).

The Strugatskys' Roadside Picnic (Пикник на обочине, 1971) is set presumably in Canada, given the bits of surrounding realia provided. This novel has an opposite distribution of nationalities befitting its location:

18 Arkady Strugatsky knew Japanese and over the course of his career translated numerous SF novels and stories from Japanese into Russian.
19 In translations of other works by the Strugatskys, "zero" is rendered as "null."
the names are mostly Anglo and French, with only one or two Russians. One character, Kirill Panov, is the most positive in the novel, of course, and a lasting inspiration to the main character, Redrick Schuhart. Even after Panov’s death, his scientific papers continue to appear in print, as if to underline his engagement with genuine scientific progress, unusual in a novel which tends to be cynical about its humans. Later in the novel, new characters with foreign names arrive from other countries, hoping to find success themselves as stalkers.

In almost all these cases, we are meant to perceive the national character of the names and to read the mix of identities by seeing this future society as much less nationalist, much more cosmopolitan. In socialist-era SF, again, the obligatory multiethnic starship crew can convey an adequate enough suggestion that we are reading a story from the socialist future, and if in the story the characters speak Polish or Russian but also know Western European languages — especially English, French or German — then this stresses the high level of education of this future as much as the historical and scientific importance of those Western European languages.

This use of names in near-future SF is parodied in Viktor Pelevin’s 1992 novel *OMON Ra*, itself a kind of alternative-present work positing that the Soviet space program was a big sham parallel to the deceptions and abuses of Soviet society at large. The pride some of the characters take in their careers as cosmonauts and in the space program as a whole is bitterly misplaced. Several of them have absurd or even vulgar names (Bamlag Ivanovich Urchagin, Pkhadzer Vladlenovich Pidorenko), and the doomed crew of the supposed moon mission that turns out to take place in a Moscow metro tunnel is a partial roll call of the ethnicities of the USSR: the Ukrainian, Ivan Grechko; the Baltic, Otto Plucis; Russians, Serna Anikin and Dima Matuishevich; plus our narrator, Omon Krivomazov, whose anachronistic first name refers to a type of glasnost-era riot police and whose last name “crookedly” recalls Dostoevsky’s famous Karamazov family. Some of the names of “cosmonauts” mentioned toward the end of the book are simply impossible ethnic combinations, as if they were slapped on orphans in children’s homes: Armen Vezirov, Djambul Mezelaitis, Pasiuk Drach and Zurab Pratsvania. Because of its anti-Soviet thrust, this early post-Soviet work does not fit my little taxonomy, but it shows
Pelevin’s awareness of what earlier SF authors were doing with names in more optimistic works.

Naming the Distant Future

Some SF set in the distant future uses names very unlike our own: examples are taken here Ivan Efremov’s *Andromeda Nebula* (Туманность Андромеды, 1956), Evgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (Мы, 1924), and Lem’s *Cyberiad* (Cyberiada, 1972). In order to mark the distance of a distant future, even if the work is written mostly in familiar and recognizable Polish or Russian, characters’ names may involve neologisms. Efremov’s characters on a distant future Earth choose their own names when they reach a certain age; the practice is so unlike most twentieth-century societies that Efremov pauses his narrative to explain the way it works. A few characters have taken names with recognizable ethnic associations (as, for example, the Chinese archeologist Liao Lan), but most of the characters we spend time with have names drawn from world culture and mythology – using word roots rather than words – in a sort of onomastic Esperanto. Main characters’ names include Dar Veter, Veda Kong, Mven Mass, Erg Noor, and Niza Kreet. Gender distinctions remain, as many of the women’s names end in -a, but otherwise they do not behave like Russian names, even for Dar Veter (Gift Wind), who is of Russian ethnic background and knows it, with Russian words composing his own name. Since the names come from all the world’s cultures, their aggregate conveys an internationalist message (like Esperanto, the invented language named for hope), and this means that in translation most of them may be simply transliterated, though translators’ spellings may vary.

20 The names are spelled here as in the Progress Publishers translation by George Hanna; a more recent translation by “Maria K” is not better enough to have superseded this older one.
for Dar Veter, and so on). Some linguistic features in Efremov’s novel pose more of a challenge to the translator: characters all use the formal second-person pronoun “вы” to address one another, expressing respect for the individual even if speakers are family members or close friends. This will strike a defamiliarizing note for the Russian reader, though the difference disappears in translation into English, where the informal second-person pronoun, “thou,” is most often encountered today, if at all, in prayers or in Shakespeare (making it seem more like a formal form, unusual and stylistically elevated). We are evidently meant to feel a bit of distance from the characters; the narrative continues to refer to them by both names, and they do not acquire affectionate nicknames, suggesting that in some fundamental way they are not people just like us. If transliterated, the names in *Andromeda Nebula* are (for the most part) just as unfamiliar to the translation’s reader – just as defamiliarizing – as in the original. Interestingly, the Chinese or Japanese names retain their ethnic character for an Anglophone reader, whereas we must be reminded by the narrative of Dar Veter’s Russian genes, and the narrative repeats that Mven Mass is of African heritage more than seems necessary for the reader.

In Zamyatin’s ground-breaking 1920 dystopian novel, *We*, the characters are named with a combination of numbers and alphabetical letters that actually manages to convey a great deal about each (“R” is the Russian first-person pronoun, “Я,” backwards; “I” is the first-person pronoun in English, which Zamyatin knew well, and in lower case also the symbol for irrational numbers, etc.). The same tactic is picked up by later dystopias such as the 1971 film, *THX-1138*, George Lucas’ directorial debut, set in the twenty-fifth century. Among other things, names in *We* reflect gender: vowels are for women, consonants for men. The idea of being named with a number is a cognitive novelty for readers today, though we carry all kinds of numbers as parts of our identity (address, telephone number, birth date, license plate, social security ... ). When D-503 feels affectionate about another character, he leaves off the number and just writes the letter. In translation, these alphanumeric names can be left more or less as they are in the original Russian, though existing English translations lose the distinction between Russian and Latin letters, both used for names in the original work. Indeed, it is more plausible that a large city could have
unique names for every citizen using this system if multiple alphabets were used, providing more letters. In particular, the Latin “D” is not as close as Cyrillic “Д” to the Greek letter delta, used in physics equations to symbolize change and so most appropriate to D-503’s transformations over the course of the work and suggestive of how we should read him. The next person to translate this novel might want to introduce a few Greek letters, including the delta, so that the resulting layers of meaning will be apparent to the reader rather than needing explanation by a professor.

Other works of SF set in the distant future use names that convey meaning and do need to be translated, but that may be not at all familiar as names. Lem’s Cyberiad (Cyberiada, 1965/1972) is set some indeterminate number of centuries, or more likely millennia, in the future. The wonderfully inventive and amusing names feel like something out of Rabelais or Monty Python. Some are very similar to the versions given in Michael Kandel’s brilliant translation of the book, on the right below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polish (Lem):</th>
<th>English (Kandel):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferrycy</td>
<td>Ferrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristala</td>
<td>Chrystal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elektrybalt</td>
<td>Electronic Bard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harboryzeusz Cybr</td>
<td>Harborizian Cybr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerebron Emtedrata</td>
<td>Cerebron of Umptor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baleryon</td>
<td>Balerion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other names are somewhat adjusted: Staloocy – Steelpips, Genialon – Genius, Eksyliusz – Excelsius.

And some of the names are somewhat or completely different, as needed to preserve and convey the humor:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polish (Lem):</th>
<th>English (Kandel):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potworyk</td>
<td>King Atrocutus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megieryk</td>
<td>King Fericutus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantarkryk</td>
<td>Prince Pantagoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardzolimus Stuoki</td>
<td>Bartholocaust the Wall-Eyed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 Lem complimented him on the job he did as a translator; Lem’s letters to Kandel are now available as Selected Letters to Michael Kandel.
One interlinguistic joke has Król Okrucjusz (from okrutny, "harsh, unreasonably severe") become King Krool in Kandel’s translation; since the Polish word for king already sounds like “cruel,” this packs the meaning into a single syllable, perhaps adding visual associations of drool. The realm of Metery, Hetery, Etery et Caetery becomes Eenica, Meenica, Minica and Moaca, and so on. Kandel describes Lem telling him to do as he liked in translating the entire work, including the names, since humor and wordplay are essential elements of the book and famously tricky to translate.

The exception to the practices of name translation in Cyberiad is in the names of the two heroes, robot-constructors Trurl and Klapaucius (originally Klapaucusz). The names have no meaning in Polish, and they remain unchanged (and challenging for readers to pronounce) in Kandel’s English version. This may underline that Trurl and Klapaucius are demiurges of a kind, capable of creating intelligent life, and thus not amenable to interpretation by readers who possessed less “Perpetual Omniscience.” The wonderful illustrations by artist Daniel Mróz, provided in the English version as well, show Trurl (Figure 3) and then Klapaucius (Figure 4), each sitting alone with his own name, and this may be another reason for leaving the names unchanged or barely changed.

However, the names are not written so that they face the reader, labeling the images. Instead they face Trurl and Klapaucius themselves, as if the characters are pictured as they engage in exploring their own identities, understanding who they are and what that means (the names become fully legible to the reader if the book is inverted. This too may convey some kind of message about how we are meant to approach Lem’s Cyberiad).

More on Names: Conveying Gender in SF

Since personal names frequently reflect the gender of the person named, cognitive estrangement in a work of SF may be enhanced by conveying a character’s gender without having to use the words “man” or “woman.” In other words, names can help make clear that gender roles in the future will
Figure 3. Trurl. Reproduced with permission from/Copyright © Daniel Mróz, 1972.
Figure 4. Klapaucjusz. Reproduced with permission from/ Copyright © Daniel Mróz, 1972.
be different – generally meaning that the women of future societies will participate as full equals in space exploration and in professional life in general. One example comes from Olga Larionova’s 1969 story, “Обвинение” (“The Accusation,” translated by Mirra Ginsburg as “Temira”):²²

Реджи (говорит): “Я был на Нии-Нaa, когда там разыскивали группу Абакумовой. Все перемерзли. Никого не удалось отходить.” (Larionova 9)

Reggie (says), “I was on [the asteroid] Nii-Naa, when they were looking for Abakumova’s group. They all froze to death. We didn’t manage to bring any of them back.” (9)

The small party of Earthlings in “The Accusation” is all men (one with a French name, one English or maybe Scottish, and one who sounds Germanic or Scandinavian, plus our narrator, whose name is not given, so we can guess whatever we like though the language reveals his masculine gender). However, the passing mention of (necessarily female) Abakumova’s group shows that in this future, women 1) can lead exploratory parties in space and 2) may pay the ultimate price, as Abakumova freezes to death on Nii-Naa with her group. The message is not conveyed as clearly in translation; would the reader in a language with less gender marking than Russian know that Abakumova is a woman’s name or that (in a more famous example) Aleksey Karenin’s wife has the last name Karenina? This detail could be made clearer in translation with a slight expansion from “Abakumova’s party” into “Abakumova and her party.”²³

Despite the effort not to show gender through the Martian names in Bogdanov’s Red Star, it is telling that the one Martian woman whose name seems most feminine, Netti’s mother, Nella (Нэлла), works as a


²³ Although Larionova, one of the few women SF authors from the Soviet period who is available in (a few) English translations, would seem to be no feminist, she supplies this detail in her story – and it is telling that the story was selected and the translation made by another woman, Mirra Ginsburg.
care-giver – a surrogate mother – in a children’s colony. In his introduction to the English translation, Richard Stites notes, “Equality expressed itself on Mars in many ways: the absence of gender in names, unisex clothing, and the businesslike intercourse among people, free of superfluous greetings and empty politeness – reminiscent of the Russian nihilists of the 1860s” (Bogdanov 8). Stites does not dwell further on the emphasized gender equality in Bogdanov’s depiction of Martian society, and indeed that equality is undercut by more stereotypical elements in the depiction of Martian women, especially in Eno’s change from a merry boy into a sad and droopy woman once Leonid has learned that she too is a woman and in the fact that he has sexual relations with two-thirds of the women on Mars who are important enough as characters to have names. As in Efremov’s effort to depict the gender and racial equality of Earth’s future in *Andromeda Nebula*, it is one thing to want to show equality, another to feel comfortable with, or even be able to imagine, approaches that would actually do it. Efremov may indeed have intended to show that women in this largely ideal socialist future would not lose their precious femininity, as the Nihilist women that Stites mentions often did in polemical portrayals from nineteenth-century fiction and publicistic prose.

Although pre-Revolutionary, early Soviet, or Cold War era Russian and Soviet SF is now many decades old, it may still speak to a reader today as a history of ways to imagine the future, suggesting different ways of being in a community and often offering an optimistic picture of possible futures. The names in these works serve as visible signs of ethno-national (and sometimes racial) or gender categories, alongside the *novum* of new technologies or practices expressed in new or repurposed words. We can read the names from our present position to perceive a more truly internationalized world in the future (or not). A reader from Canada or the United States, it is true, may take the typical ethnic and national mixing of names in a larger community (schools, training programs, crews of spaceships), and especially in settings or groups like the ones depicted in the works discussed here, as simply typical of an integrated society and may not have the same response to a smorgasbord of nationally marked names unless the author’s helpful comments (for example, identifying Professor Lomba as a pigmy from the Congo) make national origin explicit instead.
of implicitly suggesting the variety of components in a “melting pot.” For
names that convey national origins among the people of the former USSR,
strangeness may be perceived in translation without any more specific iden-
tification; how many Anglophone readers know that -idze or -shvili means
a Georgian name, that -ian ends Armenian last names, that -enko is typical
of Ukrainian surnames, or that many Latvian surnames end with an -s?

One challenge for the translator is to bring across as much of this
information as possible. Using names to show internationalism, transna-
tionalism or post-nationalism in a text works because we are used to reading
names for signs of ethnic and national belonging, and in most cases the
same tactics can work in translation. Readers from different backgrounds
will have different abilities to read and interpret the names, but even seeing
that characters in a text are not all named in the same way suggests that
there may be important variation among them. Socialist internationalism
can map nicely onto Western liberal ideals of social fairness and access to
professional advancement, though of course not all Western SF strives to
express those ideals. As this element of depicting the future seems common
to much SF of the Cold War period, it might be tempting to see in it
Second World anxieties of being excluded from the whole world or (more
negatively) ambitions to rope the whole world and all its inhabitants onto
one side of the Cold War opposition. Readers of English should be able to
read the signs, however, even if they identify different implications.

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