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Narrating Russia: History, Class, and Cultural Identity in Amor Towles's *A Gentleman in Moscow*

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Written by the American author, Amor Towles, *A Gentleman in Moscow* is an acclaimed novel. This is a novel with a strong and pervading historical context of Russia during the initial decades of the 20th Century. At the same time, it is a story of Count Rostov, belonging to the Russian aristocracy, relegated from his aristocratic life to confinement in the Metropol Hotel of Moscow.

Narration

The narrator in *A Gentleman in Moscow* uses a third-person perspective which follows the Count's thoughts through the majority of the story. The story receives guidance from an all-encompassing omniscient narrator who watches events differently from the Count's perspective. The protagonist first makes a backstory appearance through footnotes before roles shift to the "Addendums" until settling in the "1930" and "1938" and "1946" historical introductions. The omniscient third-person narrator tells the story about Count Rostov who functions as the principal character of *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Through consecutive chapters the novel tracks the Count from his court sentencing until he becomes confined to house arrest until the end of the book's period.

When speaking about the Count the narrator uses an elegant writing style that shares many stylistic features with Rostov. The third-person narrative choice made by Towles represents an excellent literary element in his novel. The narrator's detached perspective provides wider range and flexibility to the novel rather than having Rostov recount his tale himself through his charming person. Through the deployment of a third-person narrative perspective in his novel the author enables readers to gain insights into various perspectives presented by different characters, creating an extensive reading experience. The novel reveals Anna's anger during weeks following the Count's first encounter with her by sharing her perspective on the underserved blouse-treatment he gave her before he departed. Sometimes, the author becomes intrusive within the third person narration. For example, when presenting an intimate scene of the union of Anna Urbanova and the Count, the author creates a mystery as well as gives an explanation about it when he says:

What is this!

> When we last left this pair in 1923, did not Anna Urbanova dismiss the Count with a definitive instruction to "draw the curtains"? And when he closed the door behind him with a click, did he not assume the aspect of a ghost before drifting forlornly to the roof? And now, as she slips beneath the bedcovers, this once haughty figure offers a smile suggestive of patience, tenderness, even gratitude—traits that are mirrored almost exactly in the smile of her former adversary as he hangs the white jacket of the Boyarsky on the back of a chair and begins to unbutton his shirt!
>
> What possibly could have happened to reunite these contrary souls? What twisting path could have led them to suite 311 and back into each other's arms? (191)

The surprise element at Anna's unexpected return to the hotel in this moment is followed by an explanation by the author.

The Addendum of Book Four shows Andrey going through a day that reveals his son perished in the Battle of Berlin though he continues to be cheerful and positive. Through these unique narrative shifts the author offers readers deeper knowledge about his additional characters while momentarily taking the plot outside Hotel Metropol's walls. Footnotes throughout the text add historic context which heightens the novel's real-life impact about Russia's suffering people.

Through the narrator's God-like perspective some events from the future can occasionally be disclosed to readers. Through Count Rostov's gift-opening experience the narrator shatters the created atmosphere of coziness by showing readers how Rostov will prepare to commit suicide from Metropol's rooftop in future years. The narrator plainly alerts readers to significant details in a footnote where he introduces a seemingly trivial character named Count Vronsky who will later figure prominently in the story.

The narrative playfulness becomes apparent through the extensive footnote about Russian literature the narrator provides. Russian literature can be a bit difficult to follow because authors repeat characters under multiple names while constantly adding new names from limited Russian naming standard (Anna, Andrey, Alexander) and they introduce unnecessary characters. The writer has performed the initial two offenses in his own tale before delivering an extended account about Prince Nikolai Petrov who remains absent from the forthcoming novel. Through his direct interaction with the audience the narrator acts as if readers are intellectually capable enough to understand his scattered explanations and humorous elements. The narrator withholds specific connections from readers so they can experience the fulfilment of realizing the relationship themselves. Near the end of the story, we discover the new Metropol assistant manager is actually the Bishop through his expression which resembles "an ecclesiast." The Chief Administrator of the Kremlin gains insight about the escaping Count through the peculiar scar on his head which establishes this personage as Osip. The reader needs to stay alert because the book is designed as a puzzle and these narrative clues suggest they should exercise caution when deciphering its meaning.

A light-hearted tone in the novel helps readers endure the dark factual backdrop of Stalin's Russia during the 1930s along with the widespread Russian famine. Through its use

of comedy, the story creates sudden shifts with the poignant tragic storylines that magnify the horrors of Stalinist Russia. Mishka's moment of complete breakdown becomes incredibly humorous when he charges angrily into his editor's office where he calls the man "the ferret" to accuse him of bathing with Stalin. Right after that mention readers discover that Mishka faces catastrophic results when he ends up boarding a train to Siberia. The novel tells readers that Nina will never come back from her journey into the Russian east. Through this sudden disappearance of two leading characters the author wanted the readers to experience emotional distress. When the author inserts humorous anecdotes before describing tragic events their impact becomes intensified.

Throughout the narrative of *A Gentleman in Moscow* the story continues forward chronologically but the narrator occasionally stops to expand upon different time periods in a character's life story. The narrator pauses during key moments to highlight his casual diversions which occur when Anna Urbanova unexpectedly returns to the Metropol Hotel after an extended absence.

A Gentleman in Moscow establishes its contemplation of novelistic construction throughout the narrative which leads readers to make parallels between its structure and the Russian literary tradition. Grand universal ideas about love and human nature and loss form the core foundation of *A Gentleman in Moscow* as the novel follows traditions established by great writers like Tolstoy and Chekhov. The novel also shares some similarities with *The Count of Monte Cristo*, an 1845 novel by Alexandre Dumas.

In addition to other viewpoints the novel demonstrates greater understanding and support for the Count's actual political philosophy than anything else. The way the Count expresses his life philosophy combines humour with deep intellectual understanding to deliver its most engaging and far-reaching message to readers. The author's experience working as an investment firm employee together with his international travel likely shaped his writing since he presumably observed capitalism and Western democracy at their best.

Through language and narrative technique selection Amor Towles delivers *A Gentlemen in Moscow* as a powerful and emotionally gripping story. The literary work of Amor Towles defines itself through lyrical prose, sophisticated but accessible, together with detailed descriptions along with elegant style.

The things both successful characters overcome and the way time continues forward run throughout the story as Towles seamlessly shifts between revealing their internal thoughts and showing their actions. The author of this omniscient narration speaks with just a couple notes above the main character's tones while sharing his well-constructed wit and ostentatious dramatic flair. The count's dry humour provides cohesion between his wise teachings and prevents his messages from coming across as preachy although he maintains silent authority in unfavourable surroundings.

The current classless society embraces a combination of aristocratic evils such as oppression and racism along with snobbery yet discards their redeeming values. Through *A Gentleman in Moscow* readers can find a charming reminder about the true greatness of

authentic social behaviour. A civilized life has nothing to do with financial status because it bases itself on enduring moral principles.

Developing glibness stands as the central difficulty that the novel needs to handle effectively. A light comedy set in the midst of two world wars along with Stalinist atrocities could have felt distasteful similar to "Hogan's Heroes" with hotel services. The author solves this potential issue by using ironic understatement which continues through his historical descriptions in the footnotes. This writing technique enables him to tell his heartwarming tale by using Russian ironic understatement to recognize the massive suffering that surrounds the narrative without direct political condemnation.

The writer Amor Towles demonstrates his use of light ironic prose to reveal the harsh political oppression faced by Soviet society in *A Gentleman in Moscow*. The author Towles prevents Count Alexander Rostov from subscribing to a tragic mold by crafting his character as someone who handles his historical circumstances professionally. Throughout the novel the Count shows quiet resistance through his behaviour while the combination of time jumps and class conflict analysis in the story reveals the competition between governmental authority and personal dignity.

The novel displays its subversive approach through ironic techniques that challenge Soviet authority. Under house arrest and having lost his riches the Count maintains his polished behaviour patterns and his sophisticated sense of humour. His poise together with intelligent commentary enables him to make gentle gestures that undermine bureaucratic stupidity while escaping open confrontation. Through his tenuous acts of peaceful rebellion, he shows how the Soviet Republic maintains bodily control yet fails to dominate his mental independence or personality, displaying this in the unfolding irony when he accepts employment as a restaurant waiting staff at Metropol restaurant.

The novel repeatedly uses flashbacks which enable readers to compare the Count's aristocratic history against his current limited circumstances. His recollections of Idlehour present a perfect image of pre-revolutionary Russia that features splendour and luxury while celebrating leisure activities. Young Count Alexander's cherished memories demonstrate the tremendous gap which developed between his aristocratic inheritance and his current reduced circumstances. Often, the flashbacks reproduce dialogues as well as summarised conversations and thoughts, such as this flashback from the Count’s childhood:

> Whenever he was home for the holidays, his grandmother would inevitably call him into the library, where she liked to knit by the fireplace in a solitary chair.
>
> “Come in, my boy, and sit with me a moment.”
>
> “Certainly, Grandmother,” replied the Count, balancing himself on the edge of the fire grate. “How can I be of assistance?”
>
> “The prelate is coming for dinner on Friday night—as are the Duchess
>
> Obolensky, Count Keragin, and the Minsky-Polotovs. . . .”

> Here she would let her voice trail off without further explanation; but no further explanation was needed. The Countess was of a mind that dinner should provide one with respite from life's trials and tribulations. Thus, she could not countenance discussions of religion, politics, or personal sorrows at her table. (138)

Idlehour showcases a disappeared society defined through inherited status and elegant lifestyle. Moving the Count from his previous world into the Metropol's attic space demonstrates how drastically the Soviet regime transformed the Russian social order. The writer pairs flashbacks with current Soviet life conditions to showcase the aristocracy's pervasive sense of loss. Inside his confined space the Count discovers both value and significance which shows his capacity to adapt to new challenges. The contrast between the past and the present with two different settings intensifies the feeling of entrapment that the Count experiences, bringing it into a sharp contrast with the freedom and choices that he had in the past. On the other hand, the memories that are carried through these flashbacks also become a means of sustenance and a subconscious awareness of the power of class and family which the Count is expected to retain in himself. Similar to Plato's theory of ideal forms Idlehour manifests in the Count's mind as a perfect place that resembles how humans envision heaven and divine justice and also mirrors the idealized society before the Russian Revolution.

The Metropol Hotel as a Microcosm of Soviet Russia

Setting as Narrative Structure

With the narrative structure, Towles has skilfully used the structure and placement of the acclaimed Hotel Metropol. The hotel is situated in the Theatre Square in the centre of Moscow, ensconced in rings of Garden Ring and Boulevard Ring with a maze of criss-cross streets around it. The Theatre Square which contains the hotel symbolizes the post-Revolution Russia with the play of power, shifting allegiances, and spectacle. The overarch of power is very much implied with the placement of the hotel and with the manifest and implied structure and concept of a panopticon.

The Panopticon metaphor developed by Michel Foucault achieves its best application when studying Count Alexander Rostov's situation in *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Foucault used Panoptic theory to study societal control mechanisms in disciplinary structures which depend on observational monitoring combined with normalization procedures and power acceptance within subjects. The Metropol Hotel serves as a model of disciplinary control for the Count since each of his activities remains under constant observation with particular oversight provided by Osip and the Bishop. By always watching the Count the hotel maintains itself as his metaphorical imprisonment site.

The Count fails to receive actual surveillance throughout his days but remains compelled to conform by knowing monitoring forces exist. According to Foucault effective control emerges through internal observation rather than comprehensive surveillance because people submit to authority-generated beliefs about their observation. Rostov exemplifies

adjustment and self-control after representing nobility through freedom. Through careful discipline and his environment's influence he develops his compliance and this represents the fear Foucault expressed about how institutions shape compliant subjects.

The Count shows discipline through his daily routines of precise manners together with his measured hotel movements and eventual job as server at the establishment. Because he lives and works inside the hotel's walls it transforms into his Panopticon thus causing him to both maintain decorous actions and develop self-discipline. According to Foucault power achieves maximum effectiveness by integrating observation methods while Rostov's hotel confinement enables us to observe how power and knowledge strengthen each other by emphasizing schedules and monitoring as well as behavior modifications. The Soviet regime, through this metaphorical architecture, exercises a quiet dominance—not through brute force, but through the subtle shaping of identity and behavior.

Gregory Cowles says “Amor Towles’s elegant tale of a Russian count confined for decades to house arrest at Metropol Hotel for writing a poem that displeased the Bolsheviks” (NY Times). The Metropol Hotel established its operations in 1905 at Theatre Square inside Moscow's historical downtown core. Within twelve years of its opening the Metropol transformed into a fortified base when Tsarist army troops battled Bolshevik forces from their suites while revolutionaries exchanged gunfire from the surrounding streets. Both Bolshevik and Tsarist forces clashed about the hotel which resulted in shattered windows throughout its entire building.

The Bolshevik victory brought Moscow back to its status as capital after St. Petersburg's 300-year rule but Moscow lacked the required facilities to provide housing for the new government. The Bolsheviks acquired control of the Metropol while clearing away guests before turning it into their designated "Second House of the Soviets." This establishment primarily served as accommodation for state officials and hosted administrative departments throughout the developing government.

Because of his house arrest the Count faces restrictions regarding his novel's settings. The Hotel Metropol in Moscow functions as a stage for nearly all narrative developments because authorities place Count Aleksandr Ivanovich Morozov under house arrest in its sumptuous Art Nouveau setting. The Count experiences a swift yet drastic downfall when hotel staff move him from Suite 317's Theatre Square view to an attic space featuring a small window. The Count's new living space serves as an ideal example of the nobleman's evolution toward a regular 'former person'. Many years ago, this space served as the servant's quarters before managers converted it into a junk room which rests on floor six and can be reached through a utility stair.

Multiple significant room numbers appear in the story which symbolize changes in characters' fortunes while serving as the Count is not alone in experiencing these transformations. Upon her first seduction of the Count Anna stands at the peak of her public allure as a famous actress. The high status she holds in society manifests through her possession of Suite 208 which features elaborate Venetian palazzo furnishings. Her movie career's decline forces her to settle into room 428 in 1928 although this space overlooks the

noisy trolley tracks by chance it becomes the Count's site for stealing clothes from an Italian gentleman.

In spite of the initial evidence suggesting otherwise the Count discovered unexpected advantages from the reduced room size with his own explorations and using Nina's passkey.

Through his *A Gentleman in Moscow* Amor Towles constructs the Hotel Metropol as a complex symbol which demonstrates increasingly deeper meanings that transcend Count Alexander Rostov's actual prison conditions. The Count's living space at the hotel acts as his barred prison since it restricts his freedom of movement and enforces specific rules throughout his daily life. The Metropol presents a universal existential condition where everyone including Count Alexander lives under false pretences that they are free but instead exist bound by random external powers. The concept of existence in confined areas relates to existentialist theories about free will because actors remain bound to external systems but must create personal meanings from their set boundaries.

The Metropol represents modern society through the Count's confined existence because both realms maintain their perceived freedoms under political system constraints. The Count experiences a form of disciplinary power detailed by Michel Foucault through state surveillance because he seems to have freedom yet remains under the government's regulatory control just like contemporary subjects in institutions. According to existentialism Jean-Paul Sartre describes how people believe in their independence while being trapped by invisible constraints. In the same way the Count feels free inside the hotel despite its underlying constraints.

The Count's transformation from Metropol guest to waiter demonstrates how personal ability alone does not define one's freedom and privilege in the world because these elements exist as conditional constructs shaped by outside factors. His new work position brings an existential shift through which he learns that meaning emerges from building meaning in a world devoid of both purpose and attention to people. This perspective looks similar to Albert Camus' absurd stance about how existence holds no obvious truth except human-created meaning. Through his ability to adapt the Count demonstrates the Sisyphean struggle because he continues to define his own meaning despite the unpredictable nature of fate.

The dramatic difference between the Metropol and Idlehour matches the theatrical practice of menace which Harold Pinter frequently explored through seemingly ordinary spaces with hidden threats and persistent danger. As the end of his confinement morphs into meaningfulness he moves toward turning his situation into an insightful one despite the constant danger.

Towles' literary work shows that the real freedom exists not through physical movement but through intentional making of meaning and purposefulness regardless of limitations. We all live in invisible restrictions that limit our freedom because of social and political and psychological constraints but humans should find dignity by remaining resilient against these constraints. Freedom exists only in the present moment according to the Count's

narrative because he discovers his freedom while incarcerated at Idlehour represents an elusive phantom of absolute inheritance freedom.

A Gentleman in Moscow goes beyond political confinement to become an exploration of human existence combined with reflections on freedom and human endurance against unreasonable circumstances. Throughout the narrative we discover an existential contradiction which states we remain confined yet retain inner freedom to bring meaning within boundary limitations.

Through the Metropol Hotel framework in *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles the author showcases both an architectural and symbolic presentation of Soviet society during its transformative period. The hotel walls where Count Alexander Rostov is confined allows Towles to depict Soviet Russia's overall societal transformations through narrative confinement. The Count's limited movement represents the suppressive conditions that state power imposes on Russian citizens and their evolving social framework.

Symbolism of the Hotel's Spaces

Each space in the Metropol Hotel carries a symbolic weight reflecting the broader societal transformation of the Soviet Russia. The confined attic space symbolizes both physical and societal exclusion because it locks the aristocracy away to must live in confinement. The ballroom with its lost status is an elegant space which the Soviet government transforms into a bureaucratic space showing their commitment to restructure both built environments and social structures in Russia. Similarly, the kitchen becomes a site for transformation and adaptation. Work as a restaurant employee serves two purposes for the Count who both survives through it yet also reflects society's shifting social order. Former social status differences fade away in this environment because workers must join forces for success. In the restaurant under the guidance of Emile and Andrey the Count discovers that modern social standings emerge from a person's talent alongside their capacity to evolve their abilities. This domain where people prepare sustenance serves as a metaphor for a societal shift through which work-based collaboration proves more vital than continental bloodlines.

Narrative Voice and Memory

A Gentleman in Moscow uses memory as a central device which guides both Count Alexander Rostov's individual development and the novel's examination of historical events. Nostalgia provides Count Alexander Rostov with a time-traveling perspective that illuminates past and present differences which show how individuals experience history. Through his use of humour and irony the author subtly expresses criticism about Soviet bureaucracy without openly attacking it. In his storytelling Towles maintains an excellent mix of poetry with comedic touch and intellectual resonance to present history as an agent that shapes individual identities.

The comparison between his past and current situation demonstrates that history impacts individuals as much as it affects national politics. The process of revolution transforms countries yet people perceive these national shifts by recalling their personal past. Through his recollections The Count demonstrates the elegant times which Soviet rule

destroyed forever. He remains unresentful about his historical memories and still upholds his identity through the shifting social dynamics.

History as an Active Force

The historical context emerges in *A Gentleman in Moscow* as an active living element which construes personal identity in every moment. The Count's house arrest represents how Soviet rule restricted the freedom of Russian people during this period. The political revolution controls how people live their lives but his inner strength shows the power of human determination. The context is presented largely through the experiences of Rostov, Mishka, Anna, the Prince, Nina and others.

The novel portrays political transformation through memory and humorous techniques to illustrate that identifying oneself occurs through personal interaction with the past. The Count makes an active transformation instead of remaining passive with his memories.

Tone in *A Gentleman in Moscow*

The author wrote this novel using complex prose that remains easy to understand which enables readers of diverse backgrounds to enjoy it. Vivid images and detailed sensory elements make the Metropol Hotel setting more real while its authentic dialogues correctly portray characters' specific conversations.

Towles' novel delivers sophistication in its essence. The literary style glides through the pages as the characters remain interesting while the hotel lobby showcases opulence which contrasts with the external distress. Reality only occasionally seeps through. Through his aristocratic manner Rostov successfully provides a refined interpretation of the monotonous hotel atmosphere.

The wine connoisseur shows profound dismay about the lack of wine appreciation by these revolutionaries because he understands the implications for his societal position. One such passage from the novel reads:

> The Count now understood his place in the passage of time. . . . For years now, with a bit of a smile, the Count had remarked that this or that was behind him — like his days of poetry or travel or romance. …. But looking at the bottle in his hand, the Count was struck by the realization that, in fact, it was all behind him. Because the Bolsheviks, who were so intent upon recasting the future from a mold of their own making, would not rest until every last vestige of his Russia had been uprooted, shattered, or erased. (146)

At his melancholic state Rostov observes the wine bottles before selecting one which carries no label yet bears an engraved symbol on its glass surface. A bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape stands as one of the highest quality wines and most expensive drinks but under the new rules will lose its value and result in the same price as regular wine bottles. A toast to the ways of old Russia, perhaps.

Through his exploration of this emerging Russia Count Rostov leads his audience along his journey as he adapts to the changing environment. We adore Count Rostov because of his detailed explanations alongside his profound musings and sentimental memories while the novel's language, prose, and poetry make each page a delightful reading experience.

The narrator selected descriptive words which maintained both elegance and comical tone and loving appeal. Through his vivid depictions the narrator successfully brought these employees to life so we could meet them – starting with the seamstress who had a lazy eye and followed by the maître d' who attentively served guests and the irritable chef and the regular barber who cuts the Count's hair and finishes with the unsuccessful waiter who remind the readers of both chess pieces and members of the clergy.

The book contains numerous dramatic as well as humorous moments, for example, in Book Two, 1923, "An Appointment":

"…it is our friends who should overestimate our capacities…. Why, they should practically imagine us leaping through a window in the nick of time with the works of Shakespeare in one hand and a pistol in the other!" (136)

Throughout its pages *A Gentleman in Moscow* references classic Russian literature yet the book shares more stylistic elements with P.G. Wodehouse's work rather than the weighty works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Social realism disappears entirely as antique pistols hide behind secret panels while wild geese race through hotel corridors causing characters to enter and exit wardrobes at a rate comparable to a bedroom farce's actors. The novel becomes concentrated through an urgent narrative momentum in its fifth and final part as it pulls together all its scattered narrative threads, displaying elements of realistic historical fiction as well as a joyful narrative.

Structure in *A Gentleman in Moscow*

Many incidents in the novel create an illusion of chaos yet its precise structural organization refutes this chaotic impression. *A Gentleman in Moscow* consists of a perfectly structured narrative through which all plot elements are arranged with purposeful precision.

All narrative elements within the novel demonstrate deliberate organization including the chapter addition of letter 'a' as well as a structurally enforced time progression throughout the text. Perceptive readers will observe that the dates throughout the novel advance in a stepwise order. Beginning from June 21st 1922 the book's chronological progression relies on a doubling pattern which advances through one day followed by two days and then progresses to five days before switching to ten days and shifts to three weeks then six weeks continuing in this manner until sixteen years have elapsed by the middle of the narrative. The time progression in the second section of the story functions through a halving sequence as it progresses forward from eight years to four years to two years until the Count's departure from the Hotel Metropol.

In the initial part of the tale seemingly purposeless scattered details eventually reveal their important role during the narrative conclusion. For example, the moustache-snipping

incident with the angry man in the barber's leads to the Count's friendship with Nina which, later, leads to his adoption of Sofia.

Towles creates artistic transformations in various formal elements throughout his book. The narrative structure of *A Gentleman in Moscow* unfolds as a horizontal diamond through two distinct geometrical approaches and through its chapter titles starting with each letter of the alphabet. According to Towles the story starts unfolding through its revolving doors when the Count enters the hotel.

The book follows a distinctive arrangement which seems odd. The story progresses through chapters that multiply the time period by two starting from the Count's wall-to-wall house arrest lasting through one day up to two days and then five days and going until ten days and reaching three weeks before progressing to six weeks and eventually three months. After six months of confinement the narrative jumps to one year and then advances to two years and continues to four years and later eight years before reaching sixteen years of arrest. A point of halving principal marks the eighth year before the Count escapes at the beginning of the second half while the time decreases rapidly through four years until two years then one year followed by six months and three months and six weeks then three weeks and ten days followed by five days then two days then one day ending at the revolving door.

The accordion structure works for the plot because the story first shows tight narration of prison life followed by wide jumps through periods defined by work stages and parental duties and social changes before returning to micro-level details in the final section.

Throughout the story various objects reappear to gain weight in meaning while the narrative unfolds. Following Montaigne's Essays prove too difficult for the Count to read but the large book becomes a practical container for gold coins. When Sofia uses Helena's egret scissors to cut her hair and transform it into a male look the 'Fountain of Youth' hair dye regains its meaning as the solution from the Count's early barbershop experience. On one of their early explorations with the Count the silver summoner revealed itself to Nina and the Count and became crucial when Sofia used it to connect with her mother during their final meeting with Count Rostov. Through this technique the author demonstrates how everything holds its place in a meaningful web of connections between events and objects which rules out insignificance.

Towles is successful in presenting a counter history vis a vis the official history of the times, something the New Historicists would applaud. "new historicists linked anecdotes to the disruption of history as usual, not to its practice: the undisciplined anecdote appealed to those of us who wanted to interrupt the Big Stories" (Gallaher and Greenblatt 51). Towles has meticulously controlled the narrative of the novel, not letting the overwhelming historical context overpower the story; he has not allowed the constraints of the Metropol Hotel and the entrapment of the Count to make the narrative seem blinkered or dimunitive; he has enlivened a linear narrative with flashbacks and nostalgia; he has also skimmed over things as well as magnified situations with details and dialogue wherever needed. There is a control of distance with the protagonist even though the story is about and largely from the perspective

of Count Rostov. Things and people make their entrances and are given space by Towles, knitting a narrative that is resplendent and appealing.

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