This article examines the relationship between the hero and the villains in Boris Akunin’s crime fiction novels, with particular focus on *Turkish Gambit* and *State Counsellor*. Taking Karl P. Wenterdorf’s article “Mirror-Images in Great Expectations” as a theoretical basis, I argue that the villains in *Turkish Gambit* and *State Counsellor* are doubles if not mirror-images of the main character. This theoretical perspective allows for the role evaluation of other characters in Boris Akunin’s novels: women, servants, superiors, and so on.

Boris Akunin and his Hero

Boris Akunin is one of the most popular writers in Russia today. Moreover, he is one of the few brand-writers. Beside a series of detective novels, Akunin has written movie scripts, has started fan web-sites, and has a page in LiveJournal. Recently, Akunin also became very active in Russian politics.

So far, Akunin has written fourteen books in his most successful series on Erast Fandorin’s adventures, three novels about a nun turned detective, and several children’s books. He has created a new series of detective novels he calls ‘roman-kino’. This is a hybrid genre, situated between the novel and the comic. There have been eight books in the series or ‘фильмав’ (genitive singular of the word ‘фільм’), used to coin a non-standard word with a new suffix: ‘фільмав’) to date. Besides using the nom-de-plum of Boris Akunin, the man behind this writing persona has written several novels under the name of Anna Borisova and Anatoly Brusnikin. Finally, he has written several non-fiction works under his own name of Grigori Chartishvili. Of his entire fictional production, only the series based on Erast Fandorin’s adventures has been successful commercially and in popularity.

The Erast Fandorin series of novels brought to the Russian readers and, later, the viewers, a new type of hero. This hero replaced the previous wave of post-Soviet screen and literary heroes who were ex-cops (*Antikiller*), killers-
for-hire (Brat/Brother), supernatural warriors (Night Watch) and various kinds of detectives, special ops officers, spies and secret agents (in TV series).

The new hero, Erast Fandorin, is a fictional detective, created by Akunin in the series of novels entitled Adventures of Erast Fandorin. There are thirteen novels and one collection of short stories in the series, with events set between 1866 and 1914.

In the course of these novels, Fandorin’s fictional biography evolves: he moves up the ranks of the police department, takes part in various investigations, has numerous adventures, escapes death many times, wins in every single gamble, is loved by many women and is hated by many men. In the course of his adventures, Fandorin encounters various types and personalities. Some of them can be classified as villains or even as anti-heroes. The degree of uncertainty in this classification is present due to the mutability of lines between good and evil in Akunin’s works and due to the villains being very strong characters and not necessarily evil through and through. The problem of representation of the hero and the villains in Turkish Gambit and State Counsellor is further complicated in the movie adaptations. The 'visibility' and 'tangibility' of the characters on screen makes the characteristics provided by the author stand out more conspicuously, while a further layer of attributes and even inferences is given to characters by the actors who play them.

Turkish Gambit is set during the Russo-Turkish war of 1876-78. The main plot of the novel and the movie is the crime of treason. Fandorin is assigned to investigate this case and to find the main perpetrator, a mysterious Anvar Efendi.

State Counsellor is set in Moscow in 1891. At the centre of the novel and the movie are the violent actions of a terrorist group and its leader, Green. The Royal court does not trust the ageing and ailing Moscow Governor-General to investigate this violence and to uncover the terrorists and sends Prince Pozharsky, a star detective from the capital, to lead the investigation.

Thus, there are three main villains in Turkish Gambit and State Counsellor. They are all very strong types: interesting and exciting, they are romantic at times and mirror the main character, detective Fandorin, in many ways.

Fandorin and his evil twins

As a result, in the plot of both Turkish Gambit and State Counsellor, Fandorin is confused with the villain and the villain is mistaken for Fandorin. In Turkish Gambit, Fandorin’s adventures at the Russian camp begin with him being under arrest on suspicion of being the enemy. The officer who arrests Fandorin justifies his actions as following: “I have reason to believe that he is our keenly anticipated visitor Anvar-Efendi. Everything fits perfectly, Your

---

4. Film information in English: www.imdb.com/title/tt0118767/
5. Film information in English: www.imdb.com/title/tt0403358/
6. For the purposes of this article and my research on the subject, I am using the concepts of good/evil according to the definition provided in Philosophical Dictionary (Moscow: Political Literature Publishing, 1991), where evil is defined as a “shadow of good... a necessary condition to the harmony of the whole. Good is defined as a socially conditioned and historically mutable concept that needs to be analysed in its interrelation with the evil and their mutual transference.”