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Helsinki (Helsingfors) in the mirror of imperial St Petersburg

Abstract. This essay discusses three aspects related to the likeness between Helsinki and St Petersburg. Firstly, the centre of early 19th-century Helsinki became to look like miniature St Petersburg because its architect C.L. Engel admired the neoclassical architecture in St Petersburg. Secondly, Helsinki (Helsingfors in Swedish) suited the role Bely gave it in ‘Petersburg’ novel (1916) as it had the name familiar to his readers, and in 1905 the name was more modern than St. Petersburg. Thirdly, Cold War films with Helsinki as Petrograd/Leningrad and Moscow show that the line between the factual and fictional may get lost.

Keywords: Carl Engel, Yakov Grot, Faddei Bulgarin, Elizabeth Rigby, Xavier Marmier, Louis Léouzon Le Duc, Andrei Bely, the Empire style, well-planned cities, travelogues

City names are much more than just a name: they evoke memoirs, stir up emotions and serve as symbols; to some a city name may sound forbidding, to others inviting. What did imperial St Petersburg stand for? For its first two centuries, for many men and women within a long radius it indicated opportunities. However, this began to change towards the end of the 19th century when its role was challenged by Moscow.

By the time Andrei Bely wrote his ‘Petersburg’ (1913), the city itself had become a symbol of petrified old order for him, or that was how I understood it when I read ‘Petersburg’ for the first time. I was also struck by the supporting role that the small Helsinki, or Helsingfors¹, played in it. I do not know whether Andrei Bely (Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev, 1880–1934) ever visited Helsinki / Helsingfors on his travels back and forth between Russia and Western Europe, as many of his contemporary Russians did. Neither do I know whether Bely knew that nineteenth-century visitors had observed that Helsinki / Helsingfors was in appearance somewhat like St. Petersburg.

¹ All contemporary writers cited here, including Bely, used Helsinki’s Swedish name Helsingfors (Gel’singfors). In 19th-century Finland, Swedish was the language of administration and also largely spoken in Helsinki; today it is a minority vernacular.

Moreover, in the late 20th century, during the Cold War, Helsinki played the role of sham Petrograd / Leningrad and Moscow in a handful of US movies. The fact that the small Helsinki / Helsingfors has been associated with grand St. Petersburg in such distinct contexts inspired me to write this essay.

Main body

Below, I start with a brief presentation of Finland as part of the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1917 and the role of St Petersburg therewith. I then go over to discuss why in the 19th century the modest Helsinki / Helsingfors brought the imperial St Petersburg into mind. Next, I ask what it might have been that made Helsinki / Helsingfors suitable for the role that Bely gave it in ‘Petersburg’. As a kind of epilogue, the US movies in which the modern Helsinki plays the role of Petrograd / Leningrad and Moscow, bring into question whether it will be possible to tell the factual from the fictional in the future.

Finland and imperial St Petersburg

In 1703, during the Great Northern War, Tsar Peter I founded St. Petersburg at the mouth of the River Neva to secure his conquest of the largely Finnish-speaking province of Ingria (Ingermanland) from the Kingdom of Sweden. Unlike its Swedish predecessor Nyenskans, Peter’s new town was to grow into a large metropolis. Over the course of the 18th century, St. Petersburg inherited in the northern Baltic world the role of Stockholm that suffered from stagnation².

In 1809, during the Napoleonic Wars, Sweden had to cede all its Finnish provinces to Russia and the same year Emperor Alexander I made them into a new political entity, the Grand Duchy of Finland. In 1812, the emperor made Helsinki / Helsingfors, a small seaport³, the new capital of the Grand Duchy. The sea-fortress of Sveaborg just off the town contributed to his choice. The change of the sovereign went relatively smoothly, because the existing (Swedish) laws remained in force and the administrative apparatus and the Lutheran Church were intact. The relations between the Russian emperors and their Finnish subjects also remained reasonably unproblematic for most of the 19th century, until the reign of Nicholas II⁴.

² Söderberg Johan, Jonsson Ulf & Persson Christer. *A Stagnating Metropolis: The Economy and Demography of Stockholm, 1750–1850*. Cambridge, 1991; Åström Sven-Erik, *From Stockholm to St. Petersburg: Commercial Factors in the Political Relations between England and Sweden in 1675–1700*. Helsinki, 1962, pp. 109–119.

³ Helsinki / Helsingfors was in 1550 founded at the mouth of the river Vantaa / Vanda but was in 1640 relocated to its present site. In 1810 its civilian population was about 3,500.

⁴ E.g. Kirby David. *A Concise History of Finland*. Cambridge, 2006, pp. 71–149; Schweitzer Robert Government in Finland: Russia’s borderland policy and variants of autonomy. *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire: A Comparative Study*, eds. Michael Branch, Janet M. Hartley and

The loyalty of the elite in Finland was fostered, among other benefits, by the fact that sons of nobility had access to free military education in the Finnish Cadet Corps in Hamina / Fredrikshamn and in the less prestigious Yunker School in Helsinki / Helsingfors. The Cadet Corps rendered possible an officer's career in the imperial army⁵. Similarly, daughters of the Finnish nobility were granted by empress dowager Maria Fedorovna a quota of non-paying places in the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg. This privilege was clearly appreciated, as the fourteen free places were always filled⁶. Moreover, the imperial court in St. Petersburg emerged as an alternative to the royal court in Stockholm. Daughters of the most prominent noble families in Finland could look forward to being nominated as maids-of-honour to the empress. In general, the loyalty of Finnish civil and military office holders to the emperors fostered the marriage prospects of their daughters⁷.

The elite in early 19th-century Finland were as prone to maintain social hierarchies as their counterparts in Russia's Baltic provinces and Russia itself. However, in Finland (and Sweden), the nobility had long since lost its monopoly to the noble land. Hence, the status of Finnish nobility was not based on the land ownership but rather on high-ranking civil and military offices. Therefore, what counted in the first instance, was a man's official rank (*rang, chin*) and his social estate (*stånd, soslovie*). A woman's position was determined by the rank and the social estate of her father or husband⁸. In 1722, Peter the Great had copied the formula of Swedish Table of Ranks for Russia;⁹ thus, the Table of Ranks applied in 19th-century Finland was an amalgam of the Swedish and Russian ones. Each rank had its distinctive uniform. In the

Antoni Mączak. London, 1995, pp. 91–109. Kalleinen K. Sviashchennye uzy biurokratii – vyshee chinovnichestvo Finliandii i Rossiia 1809–1898 gg. [Holy ties of beaurocracy – senior officialism of Finland and Russia 1809–1898]. *Dva lika Rossii. Sbornik statei. Pod redaktstsiei prof. Timo Vakhivainena* [Two images of Russia: Collection of articles. Ed. Prof. Timo Vahivainen]. St-Petersburg, 2007, pp. 27–45.

⁵ Screen J.E.O. The military relationship between Finland and Russia, 1809–1917, *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire*, pp. 259–270; Screen J.E.O. The Helsinki Yunker School, 1846–1879: A case study of the officer training in the Russian Army. *Studia Historica* 22. Helsinki, 1986, pp. 11–34; Engman M. Officers and Artisans: Finns in Russia. *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire*, pp. 241–258.

⁶ Löfving E. Finländska flickor i jungfrustiftet Smolna i Petersburg. *Historiska och Litteraturhistoriska Studier*, 1988, vol. 63, pp. 277–306.

⁷ Ilmakunnas J. Career at court: Noblewomen in service of Swedish and Russian royals, c. 1750–1850, *Women's History Magazine* 2013, vol. 72, no. 2, pp. 4–11; Rahikainen Marjatta. The fading of the ancient régime mentality: Young upper-class women in imperial St. Petersburg and Helsinki (Helsingfors). *Scandinavian Journal of History* 2015, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 25–47.

⁸ Upton A. Epilogue. *Finland and Poland in the Russian Empire*, pp. 283–87; Wirilander K. *Herrskapsfolk: Ståndspersoner i Finland 1721–1870*. Stockholm, 1982, ss. 18–22, 98–99, 108–113, 140–162.

⁹ Peterson C. *Peter the Great's Administrative and Judicial Reforms: Swedish Antecedents and the Process of Reception*, Stockholm, 1979, pp. 106–113.

1830s, during the reign of Nicholas I, half the population in St. Petersburg was dressed in uniforms, as the German gentleman J.G. Kohl remarked, and men in civilian dresses always remained second to men in uniforms. The same held true in Helsinki / Helsingfors.¹⁰

Migration from Finland to St Petersburg was commonplace. Contemporary experience in Finland was that all luxury and all new consumer goods originated in St. Petersburg. The members of the elite were attracted by the high society attached to the imperial court; craftsmen, café keepers and restaurateurs were inspired by the opportunities to be trained in up-market products and services; country girls liked the demand for domestic servants and Finnish beggars were driven by the almsgiving tradition of Orthodox Russians. Labour migration from Finland to St. Petersburg included all kinds of people, including children. Finnish citizens were judicially personally free (there was never any serfdom in Sweden and Finland); thus, those who had no right to own serfs could employ them. Moreover, thousands of Finns settled in St Petersburg as owners of shops and apartments.¹¹ The cosmopolitan character of the population favoured cross-marriages over religious lines and certain linguistic lines, although not across the social lines. Exogamy was relatively common among German, Swedish and Finnish speaking populations. Swedish-speaking Finns in St. Petersburg were on average higher in the social hierarchy than Finnish-speaking ones, and this was mirrored in the marriage market.¹²

Despite several parallels, with time the differences between Finnish and Russian societies became more and more apparent. In Finland, the old elite of high-ranking noble office holders had long collaborated closely with wealthy merchants and manufacturers on profitable investments in trades and industries. Through this business collaboration, the Finnish nobility gradually adopted the mentality and lifestyle of educated bourgeois upper classes. Over a 15-year period, starting in the 1860s, the Finnish *Lantdag* (the Estates Assembly, or Diet) completely reversed the economic policy and created institutional preconditions for laissez-faire industrial capitalism.

¹⁰ Kohl J.G. *Russia and Russians in 1842*, vol. I, Petersburg, London, 1842, pp. 70–73; L. Léouzon Le Duc, *La Finlande : Son Histoire primitive, sa Mythologie, sa Poésie épique*, II, Paris, 1845, pp. 441–442.

¹¹ Engman M. Migration from Finland to Russia during the 19th century. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1978, vol. 3, pp. 155–177; Engman M. *Peterburgska vägar*, Helsingfors, 1995; Kimmo Katajala. Eastern Finland and St. Petersburg 1809–1917: Restructuring of infrastructure and rural economy in the concentric circles around a metropolis. *The East-West Interface in the European North*, eds. M. Dahlström, H. Eskelinen and U. Wiberg, Uppsala, 1995, pp. 11–27. For the trafficking of children, see Marjatta Rahikainen, Historical and present-day child labour: Is there a gap or a bridge between them? *Continuity and Change*, 2001, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 137–156; Ransel D. *Mothers of Misery: Child Abandonment in Russia*, Princeton, 1988, pp. 219–230.

¹² Busch M. *Deutsche in St. Petersburg 1865–1914: Identität und Integration*, Düsseldorf, 1995, pp. 26–28; Engman M. *The Finns in St. Petersburg*.

Thus, the conflicting interests of the four estates¹³ of the *Lantdag* did not rule out their converging interests in the name of economic modernisation¹⁴. The ruling classes in Finland and the nobility in the Baltic provinces adapted to the emerging global capitalism more expediently than the nobility in Russia proper, yet none of the landed elites were spared of bloodshed when the remnants of the old order were destroyed¹⁵.

19th-century Helsinki / Helsingfors as a miniature St. Petersburg

In July 1838, Faddei V. Bulgarin, the Russian writer and editor of the journal ‘Severnaya Pchela’ was taken in Tallinn / Reval on board of the small steamship *Storfursten* (‘The Grand Duke’) that sailed along the line St Petersburg–Tallinn / Reval–Helsinki / Helsingfors–Turku / Åbo–Stockholm. After the ship had rounded the sea-fortress of Sveaborg, the centre of Helsinki / Helsingfors came into sight. Bulgarin was surprised: Could this town be in Finland? Why, this is part of Petersburg!

*Узкимъ проходомъ, подъ пушками Свеаборга, на разстоянии полувыстрела пистолетнаго, вошли мы въ Гельсингфорский заливъ, и тутъ снова неожиданная, прелестная картина открылась передъ нами. Ужели это городъ Финляндии, которую мы привыкли называть бедною? Да это уголокъ Петербурга! Только высокая скала, на правой стороне пристани (полуостровъ Скатудень), усеянная хижинами, остатками стариннаго Гельсингфорса, напоминаетъ мне, что я въ Финляндии. Вотъ мы уже въ гавани!*¹⁶

About the same time, the Russian philologist Yakov K. Grot¹⁷ visited for the first time Helsinki / Helsingfors, where he would live later for a good decade. His first impressions were quite like those of Bulgarin. To the learned readers of the Russian journal *Современник*, Grot described Helsinki / Helsingfors as a half-wild beauty:

Гельсингфорс красавецъ и въ томъ и въ другомъ отношеніи, но красавецъ еще развивающийся, полудикій, исполненный противоположностей и странно

¹³ Nobility, Clergy, Burghers and (land-owning) Farmers (Bonde).

¹⁴ Heikkinen Sakari. *Labour and the Market. Workers, Wages and Living Standards in Finland, 1850–1913*, Helsinki, 1997; Peltonen M. A bourgeois bureaucracy? The new mentality of the Finnish aristocracy at the beginning of the period of autonomy. *State, Culture and the Bourgeoisie*, ed. M. Peltonen, Jyväskylä, 1989, pp. 33–53; Rahikainen M. *The fading of the ancien régime mentality*.

¹⁵ Alapuro R. *State and Revolution in Finland*, Berkeley, 1988; Seymour Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia*. Dekalb, 1985; Blum J. *Russia in European Landed Elites in the 19th Century*, ed. David Spring. Baltimore & London, 1977, pp. 68–97; Whelan Heide W. *Adapting to Modernity: Family, Caste and Capitalism among the Baltic German Nobility*. Köln, Weimar & Wien, 1999.

¹⁶ Bulgarin F. *Letniaia progulka po Finliandii i Shvetsii v 1838* [Summer trip in Finland and Sweden in 1838]. Part I. St. Petersburg, 1839, pp. 87–88. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:fd2010-00003163>.

¹⁷ For Grot, see *The Philosophical Age, Almanac 38: Connecting Nations and Times: Yakov Grot, On the Bicentenary of His Birth*, St. Petersburg & Helsinki, 2012.

поражающий путешественника, особенно Петербургскаго жителя, вокруг котораго все такъ правильно, стройно, гладко. Напротивъ въ Гельсингфорсе, рядомъ съ приветливымъ искусствомъ, видишь природу мрачную и грозную.

На серыхъ, чудовищныхъ массахъ гранита высятся тамъ величавыя, яркия зданья и башни; прибывъ съ береговъ Невы, невольно припоминаешь ихъ, думаешь на мгновенье, что не разлучался съ ними; но внезапно уронишь взоръ на рядъ дикихъ скаль, убеждаешься, что перенесся въ какое-то новое царство¹⁸.

It was no accident that the architecture in Helsinki / Helsingfors appeared rather like that in St. Petersburg. The architect of the new edifices in the city centre, Carl Ludwig Engel (1778–1840), admired the neoclassical Empire-style architecture in St. Petersburg that he had visited in 1813. Engel was born and educated in his profession in Berlin, but left in 1809 for Tallinn / Reval because of the depression in the construction industry in Berlin due to the Napoleonic Wars. However, a similar depression for the same reason was eventually felt in Tallinn / Reval too, so in 1814 Engel left for Finland and was first employed as an architect in Turku / Åbo. He learned to know key persons in Finland, among them Johan Albert Ehrenström (1762–1847) who had in 1812 been appointed by Emperor Alexander I as responsible for rebuilding of Helsinki / Helsingfors after the great fire of 1808. In 1816, Engel was appointed by Alexander I as the architect of the projected new buildings¹⁹.

In the same way as Peter I and Catherine II had in the previous century been personally engaged in the planning of St. Petersburg, in the early 19th century Alexander I and Nicholas I were in person engaged not only in the planning of St. Petersburg but also of Helsinki / Helsingfors that they had visited several times. The town plans for the new capital were presented to and confirmed by the emperors. The new town plans drawn up by Ehrenström were liberal adaptations of the 17th-century baroque town plan, modernized in Empire style; and now included for the sake of fire safety broad, straight streets and lines of broadleaved trees. The designs for the official new buildings around the Senate Square, such as the edifice of the (Finnish) Senate, the main building of the university²⁰ and the university library, were presented by Engel

¹⁸ Grot Ya. 'Gel'singfors. *Sovremennik*, 1840, no. 2, 5–82, quotation 6. The offprint of Grot's 'Gel'singfors' (quotation page 2). Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fd2010-00002319>.

¹⁹ Lindberg C. and Rein G. Stadsplanering och byggnadsverksamhet. *Helsingfors stads historia III delen, första bandet*. Helsingfors, 1950, ss. 19–85 (Finnish edition: *Helsingin kaupungin historia III:1*); Sven-Erik Åström, *Samhällsplanering och regionsbildning i kejsartidens Helsingfors*. Helsingfors, 1957, pp. 42–68; Memoirs on *Helsingfors*; historical-literary essay. Chief editor and compiler of the general text: Lyudmila Kol [et al.]. Espoo, 2011, ss. 21–27.

²⁰ After the great fire of Turku / Åbo in 1827, the university was relocated to the new capital and renamed as Imperial Alexander University. Bulgarin thought that the university main building was more magnificent and majestic than the edifice of the Senate (Bulgarin, Summer trip in Finland and Sweden, p. 99.)

to the emperor who decided which one of the alternative designs would be implemented. The two emperors preferred the empire style à la St Petersburg, so the centre of the newly-built Helsinki with its light-yellowish official edifices came to resemble St. Petersburg in miniature²¹.

As young and planned cities, in the mid-19th century, St. Petersburg and Helsinki / Helsingfors looked in contemporary eyes modern; and in an analogous way quite different from the old European cities. Unlike present-day tourists, who are attracted by the old quarters, characterized by winding streets, narrow lanes and picturesque small houses, two centuries ago visitors in St Petersburg and Helsinki / Helsingfors were impressed by all the new: the edifices in neoclassical style, the large squares and the long horizons offered by broad and straight streets. To many Western visitors, early 19th-century St Petersburg appeared spacious, handsome, convenient, comfortable and judicious²².

Three Western travellers visited both St. Petersburg and Helsinki / Helsingfors around 1840 and described their impressions in their travelogues. In autumn 1838²³, Miss Elizabeth Rigby, an English lady, arrived in St. Petersburg by a steamship. Her first impressions of the city were dominated by the splendid views offered not only by Nevsky Prospect but also the fine palaces, churches and other admirable buildings. However, she noticed too that many of the fine buildings had never been renovated, so they made a ‘mixture of shabbiness and grandeur’²⁴. From St. Petersburg, she left for northern Estonia and in summer 1840 made a shopping and pleasure trip on board of *Furst Menschikoff* from Tallinn / Reval to the Finnish capital, together with her local friends. With the steamship connection and the city’s new spa, such trips had become fashionable among the Russian elite in St. Petersburg and the Baltic German elite in Tallinn / Reval. As in the case of St. Petersburg, Elizabeth Rigby’s first impressions at the sight of Helsingfors were most favourable, but by a closer look less so:

Helsingforst²⁵ is approached through islands of rocks, some of them only tenanted by fishermen, others massively fortified – especially that called Sweaborg, which is

²¹ Lindberg and Rein, ‘Stadsplanering och byggnadsverksamhet’, pp. 9–156; Schoolfield George C. *Helsinki of the Czars: Finland’s Capital: 1808–1918*. Drawer, Columbia, SC, 1996, pp. 3–19.

²² Kohl. *Russia and Russians*, 1842, pp. 1–8; May J.-B. *Saint-Petersbourg et la Russie en 1829*, Paris, 1830, pp. 351–352; Tarnow Fanny. *Briefe auf einer Reise nach Petersburg an Freunde geschrieben*. Berlin, 1819, ss. 22–23, 36–43.

²³ No years are given in her published travelogue, so the years given here are my guesses.

²⁴ Rigby Elizabeth [Lady Eastlake]. *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic*. Vol. I. London, 1842, pp. 45–69, quotation p. 62.

²⁵ Rigby systematically misspelled the name of the city.

the Cronstadt of this Finnish capital. Nor does the likeliness end here, for the town itself, clean and handsomely built, recalls Petersburg upon the first aspect. ...

Helsingfors ... bears no remains of any former splendour²⁶ ; its oldest houses being shabby erections of wood, which contrast most disadvantageously with those of stone which have started up since ... the peace of Friedrichsham [Fredrikshamn], in 1809²⁷.

In summer 1842, the French writer Xavier Marmier visited Stockholm, Turku / Åbo, Helsingfors and St. Petersburg. In the Russian capital, he praised the 'large and majestic streets' and the imposing appearance of the city, but was critical to the architecture: '*La plupart des edifices publics de Pétersbourg sont bâtis dans le plus mauvais goût*'²⁸. In the Finnish capital, some of the old wooden houses that the English lady had found so unsightly had already been replaced by new stone buildings, and Marmier was quite pleased. The capital of Finland was a city

*qui a vu, dans l'espace de quelques années, des centaines d'habitations surgir comme par enchantement dans son enceinte, et des édifices splendides s'élever sur un sol naguère encore aride et nu. Ses rues sont larges, longues et tirées au cordeau, ses places publiques dessinées carrément, et, d'un de ses extrémités à l'autre, Helsingfors a la symétrie des cites construites d'un seul coup par l'autorité d'un souverain ... Les enseignes des marchands et des artisans son peintes comme à Pétersbourg ... les soldats russes parquent sur la place, au son des clairons et des trompettes*²⁹.

Even so, Helsingfors did not have '*l'aspect d'une ville russe*' to such an extent as the city of Vyborg that Sweden had ceded to the Russian Empire in the Peace of Uusikapunki / Nystad in 1721. This was because of the many barracks in the city and the striking presence of the imperial army in the street scene³⁰.

The third Western traveller who wrote about both cities was the French gentleman Louis Léouzon Le Duc. He visited St Petersburg for the first time in autumn 1840 and was greatly impressed by its appearance: '*Quel ensemble de merveilles! Palais*

²⁶ There had never existed any 'former splendour'; the houses in the centre of Helsinki ; Helsingfors that had been destroyed by the great fire of 1808 had been low and built of wood. There had been but a couple of stone buildings and they were saved from the fire.

²⁷ Rigby E. [Lady Eastlake] *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic*. Vol. II. London, 1842, pp. 66–82, quotations pp. 71, 74–73.

²⁸ Marmier X. *Lettres sur la Russie, la Finlande et la Pologne*. Paris, 1851, pp. 151–153 (quotation).

²⁹ Marmier *Lettres sur la Russie, la Finlande et la Pologne*, pp. 24–33, quotations pp. 24–25.

³⁰ Marmier *Lettres sur la Russie, la Finlande et la Pologne*, p. 124.

*de pierre ou de marbre là où naguère s'entassait la boue, vaste cite ... Et tout cela est l'œuvre d'un seul siècle!*³¹

In September 1842, he arrived for the first time in Helsingfors, and his impressions were very like those of Elizabeth Rigby:

*Vu du côté de la mer, Helsingfors offre un aspect superbe. ... Une vaste place le domine, bordée de maisons neuves et blanches et prolongée par une esplanade ombragée d'une riche verdure. ... Quand on pénètre dans l'intérieur de la ville, le charme qu'on avait éprouvé en la contemplant de loin s'évanouit peu à peu. Les rues sont larges, tirées au cordeau, mais le plus souvent âpres, montueuses, et pavées, comme dans toutes les villes du Nord, de petits cailloux aigus...*³²

In Helsingfors Léouzon Le Duc was impressed by the sea-fortress of Sveaborg, the edifice of the Senate and the main building of the university. He even knew that Alexander I had introduced the tradition that the tsarevich was formally the chancellor of the university. However, although beautiful, the city was not particularly lively, except in the summer thanks to foreign, above all Russian spa guests. The similarity of the appearance of the two cities made him conclude that both the inhabitants of Helsingfors and those of St. Petersburg liked the classical Greek architecture³³.

Early 19th-century St Petersburg and Helsinki were products of an autocratic city development, whose era came to an end in both cities about the same time in the mid-century, as they started to change into centres of trades and industries. Around the 1850s, both cities suffered from stagnation in the construction industry, but in the second half of the century it was in both cities replaced by the construction boom. In St. Petersburg, it indicated many new high-rise apartment houses³⁴. In Helsingfors, the smartest streets in the city centre became edged with new prestigious, high-rise residential blocks, whose facades created a cityscape that called to mind the palace-edged streets of St. Petersburg. In 1868, a large Orthodox Cathedral in Russian style, with gilded onion domes, was erected on the headland Katajanokka / Skatudden. Its neighbourhood was eventually filled with high-rise art-nouveau style apartment

³¹ Léouzon Louis Le Duc *La Russie contemporaine, seconde édition*. Paris, 1854, pp. 1–3 (quotation), 17 ; Louis Léouzon Le Duc. *L'Ours du nord : Russie – Esthonie – Hogland : Vingt-neuf ans sous l'Étoile polaire: Première série*. Paris, 1879, pp. 1–5, 213.

³² Léouzon Louis Le Duc *La Baltique*. Paris, 1855, pp. 447–448.

³³ Léouzon Louis Le Duc *La Finlande II*. Paris, 1845, pp. 247–251, 338–339, 387–388, 394–395, 421–426 ; Louis Léouzon Le Duc *Le Renne: Finlande – Laponie – Iles d'Åland*. Paris, 1880, pp. 3–4, 136.

³⁴ Bater J.H. *St Petersburg: Industrialization and Change*, Edward Arnold. London, 1976, pp. 17–40; Julia A. Buckler *Mapping St. Petersburg: Imperial Text and Cityscape*. Princeton & Oxford, 2005, pp. 31–60.

buildings for upper middle classes³⁵. Around 1900, the cityscape in the two capitals was noticeably different from that of 1850.

It should be said that the new groups of people that made the small city quite cosmopolitan added to the image of the 19th-century Helsingfors as miniature St. Petersburg. The new groups first included officers, marines and soldiers of the imperial Russian army that replaced the Swedish army. In the wake of the imperial army, the city also received its first Tartar and Jewish inhabitants. In 1866, Pauline Wengeroff, a Russian officer's wife in Sveaborg, complained that the Jewish community in the city consisted of 'old soldiers whose privilege to live here dated from the time of Nicholas I'³⁶. However, by the end of the imperial era, many Tartar and Jewish merchants had established themselves as respectable middle-class city dwellers.³⁷ Naturally the city life was also animated by the many Russians and Baltic Germans from St. Petersburg who settled in Helsingfors³⁸. Moreover, thanks to its location on the route connecting Stockholm and St. Petersburg, the small Helsinki/Helsingfors enjoyed visits and performances of many foreign artists, theatre groups, scholars and other voyagers who stopped there on their trips between the two metropolises.

Helsingfors (Gel'singfors) in Bely's 'Peterburg'

Even at its highest, the share of Finnish subjects of the population in St. Petersburg was negligible³⁹. Nonetheless, the 'Finns' in the vague contemporary sense must have been discernible in the streets of St. Petersburg and in the countryside around it, because they made a stereotypic literary figure. The poor 'Finnish fisherman, nature's mournful stepson' of Alexander S. Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* was familiar to many Russians. In literature, as in real life, peasants, workers and female costermongers who spoke some variant of Finnish or related Estonian, may all have been called

³⁵ Birger Brunila and Marius af Schultén, *Stadsplan och byggnadskonst. Helsingfors stads historia, IV delen, första bandet* (Finnish edition: *Helsingin kaupungin historia IV:1*), pp. 9–99; Sven-Erik Å. *Stadssamhällets omdaning. Helsingfors stads historia, IV delen, andra bandet* (Finnish edition: *Helsingin kaupungin historia IV:2*), pp. 9–57, 113–147.

³⁶ Wengeroff P. *Rememberings: The world of a Russian-Jewish woman in the 19th century*, ed. Bernan D. Cooperman, transl. by Henry Wenkart, Potomac, 2000 (German original 1913), p. 200.

³⁷ Ekholm Laura K. *Boundaries of a Urban Minority: The Helsinki Jewish community from the end of imperial Russia until the 1970s. Publications of the Department of Political and Economic Studies 11*, Helsinki, 2013, pp. 30–31; Martti G. *Minorities and the common culture. Austerity and Prosperity: Perspectives on Finnish Society*, ed. Marjatta Rahikainen, Helsinki, 1993, pp. 159–176.

³⁸ Baschmakoff Natalia and Leinonen Marja, *Russian life in Finland: A local and oral history. Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, vol. XVIII, Helsinki, 2001, pp. 20–25.

³⁹ In 1816, the five largest linguistic minorities in St Petersburg were German, French, Finnish, Swedish and Latvian; in 1848 German, Polish, Finnish, Swedish and Estonian; in 1869 German, Finnish, Polish, Yiddish and Swedish and in 1910 Polish, German, Estonian, Yiddish and Finnish. Engman, 'Officers and Artisans', Table 6.

Finns or pejoratively ‘chukhna’. In his *Nevsky Prospect*, Nikolai Gogol played with this difference: a Petersburg artist was an artist ‘in the land of Finns’, but ‘the Finnish woman’, whose head he had painted and the ‘Finnish nymphs’ in Meschchanskaya Street were ‘chukhonka’ and ‘chukhonskaya’⁴⁰.

However, around the mid-19th century, the reading public in St. Petersburg was kept informed about the Finnish society and what was going on in its capital. Yakov K. Grot who at that time lived in Helsingfors⁴¹, wrote several articles about Finland and its capital in *Sovremennik*, whose editor was his friend Petr Alexandrovich Pletnev. Another contributor to *Sovremennik* was the journalist Aleksandra Ishimova who wrote about Helsingfors and the Finnish culture in her own journals *Zvezdochka* and *Luchi*⁴². Faddei Venedictovich Bulgarin wrote about Finnish issues in his periodical *Severnaya pchela*⁴³. Grot and Pletnev considered Bulgarin a mediocre writer⁴⁴, and most likely they also knew that he acted as a police informer⁴⁵. In any case, *Severnaya pchela* was widely read in St Petersburg; Nikolai Gogol made use of this fact in his Petersburg tales⁴⁶. In short, in St. Petersburg many Russians probably had an idea of the real Helsingfors. Half a century later, by the time Andrei Bely wrote *Petersburg*, it may have become sufficiently nebulous for his purposes.

Therefore, it is interesting to notice that in Bely’s *Petersburg*⁴⁷ there was actually nothing in the fictional Helsingfors that might not have existed around 1905 in the

⁴⁰ *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*. Translated and annotated by Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky. London, 2003, 252, 261, 269; N.V. Gogol, Collection of works: in 8 vol. Vol 3. Moscow, 1984, p. 12, 22, 30, 320.

⁴¹ Grot lived in Helsinki ; Helsingfors from 1840 to 1853. He was professor of the Russian language, history and literature at the Imperial Alexander University (University of Helsinki). See *Memoirs of Helsingfors*, pp. 36–42.

⁴² Nathanaëlle Minard-Törmänen. An imperial idyll: Finland in Russian travelogues (1810–1860). *Bidrag till kännedom av Finlands natur och folk 199*. Helsingfors, 2016, pp. 175–176; Priymak N.I. Finland in the 1840–50s in the notes of Russian travellers. *Helsingfors – St. Petersburg: Pages of history: second half of 19th – early 20th century*, eds T. Vihavainen & S.G. Kashchenko. St. Petersburg, 2012, pp. 55–68.

⁴³ *Severnaya Pchela*, 1840, no. 160, 161, 166, 167.

⁴⁴ *Correspondence of Y. K. Grot with P. A. Pletnev*, ed. K. Y. Grot, St. Petersburg, 1896.

⁴⁵ See Schleifman N. A Russian daily newspaper and its readership: *Severnaya Pchela*, 1825–1840. *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 1987, vol. 28, pp. 127–144.

⁴⁶ In ‘Nevsky Prospect’, ‘The Diary of a Madman’ and ‘The Nose’, Gogol’s shady figures either read Bulgarin’s ‘Pchela’ or suggest a little article in it. *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*, 268, 277, 282, 313, 432 n7; Gogol, *Collection of Works*, 28, 38, 52, 167, 320.

⁴⁷ I have made use of the following editions and their respective editors’ and/or translators’ comments: Andrei Bely, Petersburg. Translated, annotated, and introduced by Robert A. Maguire and John E. Malmstad, Hassocks, 1978 (transl. from the Berlin 1922 edition); Andrei Bely *Petersburg: A Novel in Eight Chapters with a Prologue and an Epilogue*, translated by David McDuff., London, 1995 (transl. from the Moscow 1981; Petrograd 1916 edition). Russian editions: Andrey Bely *Petersburg: A Novel in Eight Chapters with a Prologue and an Epilogue – Petersburg: A*

real Helsinki/Helsingfors. The same holds true about all the details in which *Petersburg* related to Finland and the Finnish. St Petersburg could show ‘how from the Finnish marshes the city would show the site of its mad life and settlement by a big red spot’, as the 1916 edition stated it, and the Bronze Horseman still stands on a Finnish⁴⁸ granite⁴⁹. Senator Apollon Apollonovich had once thought that ‘on retiring from government service’ he would ‘settle at his dacha in Finland’ (which he seemed to have done in the end).⁵⁰ In life, well-to-do Petersburgers had fine wooden dachas on the Karelian Isthmus, on both sides of the border, well served by the railway line connecting St. Petersburg with Vyborg and Helsingfors⁵¹. Moreover, the Finnish knife, known by Russians as ‘finka’, that Alexandr Ivanovich wanted to buy for murderous purposes⁵², was a basic tool among Finnish peasants and workers.

“Do you remember Helsingfors and the outings by rowing...”, Zoya Zakharovna asks Alexandr Ivanovich in Bely’s *Petersburg*⁵³. In real Helsingfors, such outings in small boats were quite popular among working classes and people of humble origins. They lived north of the ‘long bridge’ that separated the better people from the menial classes, same as bridges did in Petersburg. In this working-class district, there were parallel streets called ‘lines’⁵⁴. In small Helsingfors there were only five ‘lines’, whereas Alexandr Ivanovich lived on the Seventeenth line of Vasilievsky Island⁵⁵.

Novel by Andrei Bely. Introduction by Georgette Donchin, Letchworth, 1967 (The Petrograd 1916 edition); Andrey Bely *Petersburg: Novel in Eight Chapters with a Prologue and an Epilogue.* St. Petersburg, 1999 (The Moscow 1981/Petrograd 1916 edition); *Petersburg: A Novel in Eight Chapters with a Prologue and an Epilogue.* Moscow, 2007; *Petersburg: [A Novel in Eight Chapters with a Prologue and an Epilogue].* Moscow, 2011.

⁴⁸ In fact, the granite came from Karelia (which was not part of Finland at the time of Catherine II), as a German travel guide informed correctly. K Bædeker, *St. Petersburg und Umgebungen: Handbuch für Reisende*, Leipzig, 1901, pp. 23–24.

⁴⁹ Bely 1978/1922, p. 64; Bely 1995/1981/1916, pp. 55, 126; Bely 1967/1916, pp. 47, 224; Bely 1999/1981/1916, pp. 110, 200; Bely 2007, p. 55; Bely 2011, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Bely 1978/1922, pp. 139, 290, 354; Bely 1995/1981/1916, pp. 268, 573; Bely 1967/1916, p. 224; Bely 1999/1981/1916, pp. 376, 755; Bely 2007, p. 251, Bely 2011, p. 227.

⁵¹ Baschmakoff and Leinonen, *Russian Life in Finland*, pp. 25–31; Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710–2000*, Ithaca & London, 2003, pp. 58–71, 112 (Russian edition *Dachniki*, 2008); Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Dacha album Chukokkala as a cultural game. The Dacha Kingdom: Summer Dwellers and Dwellings in the Baltic Area*, eds. Natalia Baschmakoff and Mari Ristolainen, Aleksanteri Series 3/2009, Helsinki, 2009, pp. 99–108.

⁵² Bely 1978/1922, p. 216; Bely 1995/1981/1916, p. 424; Bely 1967/1916, p. 354; Bely 1999/1981/1916, p. 567; Bely 2007, p. 393; Bely 2011, p. 355.

⁵³ My translation supported by the Finnish translation by Esa Adrian (1963). Cf. Белый/Bely 1967/1916, p. 310; Bely 1999/1981/1916, p. 503; Bely 2007, p. 344; Bely 2011, p. 312. The English translations (Bely 1978/1922, p. 190; Bely 1995/1981/1916, p. 372) rather suggest tourist excursions in the archipelago. For these, see K Bædeker, *Russland: Handbuch für Reisende.* Leipzig, 1901, p. 197.

⁵⁴ Åström, *Stadsomvandling*, pp. 99, 217–218.

⁵⁵ Bely 1978/1922, p. 12; Bely 1995/1981/1916, pp. 17–18; Bely 1999/1981/1916, p. 64.

In Bely's fictional St Petersburg, a shady character (Shishnarfiyev), who claimed to live in Helsingfors, reminded Alexandr Ivanovich that they had met there in a coffee house⁵⁶. In real Helsingfors such characters with a reasonably middle-class appearance may have visited coffee houses in the city centre. There, the better cafés included Fazer⁵⁷, whose owner was Karl Fazer, son of a Swiss immigrant, who had been trained as a confectioner in St. Petersburg (as were his competitors). In return, he employed Russians in his chocolate factory in Helsingfors, both before and after the October Revolution of 1917, whereas his brother Edward was an organiser of the first Paris tour of Ballets Russes in 1908⁵⁸.

In Helsingfors, Alexandr Ivanovich had met 'a certain person':

Aleksander Ivanovich had been in Helsingfors after escaping from his place of exile. There he had met *a certain person*.

But why Helsingfors?⁵⁹

Indeed, why Helsingfors? 'The Finnish theme'⁶⁰ in Bely's *Petersburg* did not concern its editors. Nonetheless, L. K. Dolgoplov and his follower David McDuff offer real-life background information about to Aleksander Ivanovich's hallucinations that had begun in Helsingfors. In his letter to Aleksandr A. Blok in 1911, Bely wrote about their friend's mental illness: "... all that you write to me in veiled hints is more than familiar: ... the motor car, the Tartars, the Japanese visitors, and – Finland, or 'something' that is in Finland, also – Helsingfors, Azev, the revolution – it is all the same gamut of emotions ..."⁶¹

In reality, the real Helsinki / Helsingfors was not particularly revolutionary or conspiratorial, rather the contrary. The great strike of 1905 in St. Petersburg, the importance of which was underlined by Bely in several references to the year of 1905⁶²,

⁵⁶ Bely 1978/1922, pp. 203–207; Bely 1995/1981/1916, pp. 398–408; Bely 1967/1916, pp. 331–340; Bely 1999/1981/1916, pp. 534–547; Bely 2007, pp. 368–378, Bely 2011, pp. 331–342.

⁵⁷ K Bædeker *Russland: Handbuch für Reisende*, Leipzig: Verlag von Karl Bædeker, Fünfte Auflage, 1901, p. 191.

⁵⁸ Karl Fazer was trained with confiseur G. Berrin in St. Petersburg, where his sister also lived. In Fazer's chocolate factory, the master of chocolates and marmalade sweets (jelly fruits) were Russians; in 1905 two thirds of employees had Russian names. *Hoving Viktor Karl Fazer 1891–1951*, Helsingfors, 1951, pp. 19–42; Natalia Baschmakoff and Marja Leinonen, Russian life in Finland: A local and oral history. *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, vol. XVIII, Helsinki: Institute for Russian and East European Studies, 2001, pp. 102–119.

⁵⁹ The quotation is from Bely 1978/1922, p. 60; cf. Bely 1995/1981/1916, pp. 112, 116–117; Bely 1967/1916, pp. 95, 98–99; Bely 1999/1981/1916, pp. 183, 189; Bely 2007, pp. 108, 112–113, Bely 2011, pp. 99, 102–103.

⁶⁰ The phrase is from Bely 1978/1922, p. 348.

⁶¹ Quoted by L. K. Dolgoplov. Bely 1999/1981/1916, p. 837. The English translation is by McDuff, in Bely 1995/1981/1916, p. 595.

⁶² Bely 1978/1922, pp. 32, 37, 52, 76, 150, 241; Bely 1995/1981/1916, pp. 58, 67, 96, 146, 292, 481; Bely 1999/1981/1916, pp. 114, 125, 161, 224, 404, 636.

quickly spread to the Finnish capital, but this was rather an exception. The main reason why in real life Russian revolutionaries, provocateurs and conspirators met in Helsinki / Helsingfors or some other Finnish city (Bolsheviks liked Tampere / Tammerfors) was that the Russian secret police was not effective in Finland. Bely must have known this, because he made Aleksandr Ivanovich who had escaped from his place of exile, advocated openly in a coffee house in Helsingfors about the necessity to destroy the culture, despite a Russian police agent sitting at the next table⁶³.

I would think that Helsingfors served Bely's purposes because as a name it was familiar to all his readers but the real city was not too well known, which left him free hands. However, because his fictional Helsingfors appears so real, it may be that there his hallucinatory characters moved around in a clear-headed city. This was not the case with his fictional St. Petersburg.

Robert Maguire and John Malmstad, the editors of the English translation of the 1922 edition of *Petersburg*, consider Bely's St Petersburg to have been a modern metropolis. They reason as follows:

“Bely manages to convey a sense of the actual physical presence of the city, making it so vivid and ‘real’ that sometimes we almost think we are reading a gloss on Baedeker. (At the same time, we understand that Petersburg represents the modern city generally)”⁶⁴.

In my reading, in *Petersburg* Bely's characters move around in an unreal, dusky city. Its landmarks were those of Bædeker's ‘Handbook for Voyagers’, because this is what they probably were, more or less. As Bely wrote to Blok, “in Petersburg I am a tourist, an observer, not an inhabitant...”⁶⁵. Bely was not a Petersburger, but many of his readers were. He created a shadowlike St. Petersburg because it suited his purposes but also because he had no choice.

As I see it, Bely's fictional St. Petersburg represents the old order, not a modern city as understood in 1905. The provocateurs live on the old Petrine side of St Petersburg, as Bely many times reminds the reader, whereas the senator and his son live in a private palace of an indefinite imperial style and are served by a lackey with a gold braid. In Bely's fictional St. Petersburg, the distant motor-car roulade, electric lights and coffee houses along Nevsky Prospect were about the only signs of an up-to-date urban world. In the 1916 edition of *Petersburg*, Bely even made a gag about this: he first mentions ‘the rumble of yellow-and-red tramcars’, but soon corrects the slip of his pen: “now tramcars were not yet running in the city: this was 1905”.⁶⁶ St Peters-

⁶³ See note 56.

⁶⁴ Translators' introduction. *Bely* 1978/1922, pp. XIII–XIV.

⁶⁵ ‘In Petersburg I am a tourist, an observer, not a resident...’ Quoted by Dolgoplov. *Bely* 1999/1981/1916, p. 790.

⁶⁶ *Bely* 1995/1981/1916, pp. 12–13, 14; *Bely* 1999/1981/1916, pp. 58, 60.

burg had first electric tramways only in 1907,⁶⁷ whereas in Helsinki / Helsingfors all tramway lines were electric in 1901. At the time Bely wrote *Petersburg*, the small Finnish capital may have been more modern than the large Russian capital. Perhaps this was why Bely chose to place Helsingfors in the mirror of Petersburg.

Epilogue: Cold-War Helsinki as sham Petrograd/Leningrad and Moscow

Entertainment is a serious business and at unsecure times is politically delicate. This was learned by opera composers and librettists of the old days and soon enough by 20th-century movie makers. As early as summer 1919, Russian the film makers, who had emigrated after the October Revolution of 1917, filmed in Helsinki / Helsingfors and on the Finnish side of the Karelian Isthmus a movie called ‘Beneath the yoke of Bolshevism’⁶⁸, which was released in the Finnish capital in October 1919⁶⁹.

After the Second World War, films became big business. However, during the Cold War, many films were politically inflammable⁷⁰. Several movie makers in the United States would have needed scenes from Russia / Soviet Union but were not welcome there. Therefore, they went to Finland as it was on good terms with its eastern neighbour. Outi Heiskanen has calculated that between 1964 and 1997, a dozen US movies were partly filmed in Finland. In the following I refer only to those that are of interest here⁷¹.

In ‘*The Kremlin Letter*’ (1970, directed by John Huston) wintery Helsinki played the role of Moscow and a bit of Leningrad too. The movie included many scenes of Helsinki, shoots e.g. on the streets around the Senate Square and at the Art Museum Ateneum. At Katajanokka / Skatudden, a real prison played the role of the Russian one, and a real Russian restaurant was used in the role of a glass and mirror workshop in Russia; a tram-stop and the facade of a bank office got Cyrillic texts, while the face of Lenin decorated a gable wall. In the sea-fortress of Sveaborg (now called Suomenlinna), a Russian market square was staged with samovars on sale. The airport of Helsinki played the role of Moscow airport, so a large sign *Москва*, with a Hammer and Sickle, welcomed those who happened to land there during the filming.

⁶⁷ From horse-drawn street car to tram: from the history of St. Petersburg transport. Ed. E. Shapilov [et al.] St. Petersburg&Moscow, 1994, p. 39.

⁶⁸ My translation of the Finnish title of the movie.

⁶⁹ Heiskanen Outi. *Tehtävä Suomessa: Kotimaamme ulkomaisissa elokuvissa*. Helsinki, 2008, pp. 23, 24.

⁷⁰ E.g. Kozovoi Andrei Andrei. ‘This film is harmful’: Resizing America for the Soviet Screen. *Winter Kept Us Warm: Cold War Interactions Reconsidered*, eds. Sari Autio-Saraso and Brendan Humphreys. Aleksanteri Cold War Series 1/2010, Helsinki, 2010, pp. 137–153.

⁷¹ Heiskanen Outi. *Tehtävä Suomessa*, pp. 77–187. The facts below are taken from her work and from the list (in Finnish, accessed on 28 Dec. 2016) compiled by the National Audiovisual Institute in Helsinki, Finland.

It went like this with the later films. In *Telefon* (1977, directed by Don Siegel), Helsinki was again Moscow and Leningrad. We can see glimpses of the sea-fortress, streets at Katajanokka, the Russian-style Orthodox Cathedral and the 19th-century quarters around the Senate Square. The House of (non-noble) Estates built in 1890 played the role of KGB Headquarters, and the movie makers erected in its neighbourhood a sham telephone kiosk reading *ТЕЛЕФОН*. In *Reds* (1981, directed by Warren Beatty), Helsinki played the role of revolutionary Petrograd: The Senate Square was the scene of the October Revolution, and the revolutionaries storm into the ‘Winter Palace’, in reality – into the edifice of the Senate, designed by Engel. In *Gorky Park* (1983, directed by Michael Apted) Helsinki played the role of Moscow; the tower of the Finnish National Museum, with a big red star shining at its top, played the role of a Kremlin tower.

In *White Nights* (1985, directed by Taylor Hackford), the US movie makers applied a new trick. Until then, the scenes shot in Helsinki had a limited perspective, due to necessity, whereas real Leningrad and Moscow were large cities. Taylor Hackford had in Stockholm learned about Finnish document-film makers who were on their way to Leningrad. He made a deal with them about using their material. Thus, in the final, the film scenes shot in Helsinki seamlessly continued into the scenes shot in Leningrad. With proficient stage-making, cutting and editing, the trick was made so skilfully that only we *know* that it is a trick, and therefore can differentiate between the factual and fictional. Can future historians, if there are any, see where factual merges into fictional?

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