

Title: Moving Forward Backwards: Vladimir Sorokin's *The Blizzard* as Steampunk Narrative  
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Abstract:

Vladimir Sorokin's novel *The Blizzard* depicting one doctor's failed attempt to overcome a blizzard on his way to deliver vaccine and halt a zombie outbreak, has been interpreted by some scholars (Mark Lipovetsky) as a critique of modernity. While I agree with such reading, I propose that analyzing this novel as a representative of "steampunk" will better inform our understanding of Sorokin's intended message. The study will reveal how the key attributes of the "steampunk" genre present in this novel afford an ideal medium for the author's critique. A typical "steampunk" narrative presents a vision of the future-in-the past that contains 19<sup>th</sup> century archaisms ("steam") situated within the alternative past or future with an intent to comment on the contemporary issues ("punk") such as the relationship between humans and technology. Ultimately, steampunk as a project seeks to express anxieties towards technological progress and modernity as a whole.

In this paper I suggest that *The Blizzard* presents a characteristically steampunkish retro-futuristic image of Russia containing elements of steampunk paraphernalia such as 19<sup>th</sup> century archaisms coupled with technological innovations, and employing a typical steampunk protagonist, an upper-class modernizer who epitomizes power and progress. Additionally, I argue that if "steampunk" is defined along the lines of Jay Clayton's interpretation as "Postmodern Romanticism"—a steampunkish fusion between 19<sup>th</sup> and late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries discourses that both embody a counter-Enlightenment rhetoric—the main conflict of the story between the blizzard and the protagonist if read through the lens of such Romantic-Postmodern amalgam grants a finer insight on the author's representation of modernity (Clayton). Thus, interpreting *The Blizzard* as a steampunk narrative sheds more light on how Sorokin problematizes and critiques modernity in this novel.

Works Cited

Clayton, Jay. *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Popular Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.