

Essay:

THE ABDUCTION OF ANNA PETROVNA BULYGIN IN 1808: FEMALE AGENCY AND THE RUSSIAN COLONIAL GAZE IN EARLY TO MID-19TH CENTURY POPULAR CULTURE¹

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Abstract This article analyzes a chapter from Charles Ellms's book "The Tragedy of the Seas" (1848). The chapter recounts the historical events around a schooner belonging to the Russian American Company, which was shipwrecked close to the Olympic Peninsula in 1808. After the disaster, the ship's crew, and Anna Petrovna Bulygin, the captain's wife, were taken hostage by indigenous people. The article examines Anna Petrovna Bulygin's female agency within Ellms's narrative, arguing that it is exceptional within the genre of maritime frontier adventures, as well as early 19th century Russian culture. Importantly, a focus on her agency offers interesting insights into the Russian colonial gaze on the indigenous peoples of America.

In 1841, American readers were introduced to the sensational, and ultimately tragic story of Anna Petrovna Bulygin,² the eighteen-year-old Russian woman and wife of a navigator employed by the Russian American Company, in Charles Ellms's book "The Tragedy of the Seas; or, Sorrow on the Ocean, Lake, and River, from Shipwreck, Plague, Fire and Famine."³ The chapter, titled "The fights and adventures of the Russian American Company's ship *The St. Nikolai* during a sojourn of a year spent among the hostile Natives of the North West Coast of America; November 1808," recounts the historical events of the shipwrecking of the Russian schooner (*Sv. Nikolai*),⁴ and Anna Petrovna's abduction and subsequent enslavement by members of the indigenous population. The story is told from the perspective of its supercargo (as the representative in charge of the ship's cargo was called).

The historian Kenneth N. Owens,⁵ who thoroughly researched the story of the *Sv. Nikolai*, comparing it to other sources relating its fate, discovered that the real Anna Petrovna was one of the first European women to live in what is today Alaska. Moreover, she was very likely the

¹ The research for this article was conducted within the framework of the project "Rivals of the Past, Children of the Future: Localizing Russia within US National Identity Formations from a Historical Perspective" (V 741) funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF); Original source: Charles Ellms, *The Tragedy of the Seas; or Sorrow on the Ocean, Lake, and River, from Shipwreck, Plague, Fire and Famine* [Chapter], in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2023, URL: <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-78442>>.

² I have transliterated the name "Bulygin" in accordance with the Library of Congress style. Accordingly, my transliteration deviates from Ellms's text, which transliterates the name "Bulugin."

³ Anonymous supercargo, *The fights and adventures of the Russian American Company's ship the St. Nikolai during a sojourn of a year spent among the hostile Natives of the North- West Coast of America; November 1808*, in: Charles Ellms (ed.), *The tragedy of the seas; or, Sorrow on the ocean, lake, and river, from shipwreck, plague, fire and famine* published, Philadelphia 1841, p. 361–375.

⁴ I have transliterated the ship's name as *Sv. Nikolai* rather than the English *St. Nicholas*. This deviates from the practice in Ellms's book, which mixes Russian and English: *St. Nikolai*.

⁵ Kenneth N. Owens / Alton S. Donnelly, *The Wreck of the Sv. Nikolai*, Lincoln 1985.

first white woman ever to set foot on the territory of Oregon Country. What seems particularly interesting about her in the context of early 19th-century frontier literature, however, is not simply that she appears in the story, but the role that Ellms presents her in. Not only is Anna Petrovna represented as an autonomous individual, but her ideas and actions significantly influence the fates of all the other people involved in the event. And while such autonomy and agency might not surprise us in our contemporary context, they are nearly unprecedented in early 19th-century storytelling about historical events. The unusual publication history of the stories suggests that it was Anna Petrovna's exceptional female autonomy and agency that contributed to Ellms's decision to include in his anthology a version almost unchanged from its Russian original. What is further remarkable is that Anna Petrovna's decisions and actions reflect rather positively on the indigenous communities, in particular the Quileute, and the Makah.

In my paper, I will first contextualize Anna Petrovna's actions and voice within Ellms's anthology. Thereafter, I will analyze why Ellms's characterization of Anna Petrovna is unique within the context of early 19th-century popular culture more generally. I will do this by focusing on the gendered power dynamics of early 19th-century North America, where Ellms's book was published and circulated, as well as on Russian conventions that the story is based on. Following this, I will focus how Anna Petrovna's agency reflects on and supports the narrative's depictions of the Hoh, the Quileute, and the Makah. I will argue that by introducing a Russian colonial perspective to North American readers, the story subverts the views on indigenous peoples that prevailed among Ellms's contemporaries.

Contextualizing the Plot

"The fights and adventures of the Russian-American Company's ship *The St. Nikolai*," the subject of Ellms's book, is set against the background of the Russian-American company and its vessel, the actual *Sv. Nikolai*. The Russian-American Company, under the leadership of its Chief Manager Alexander Baranov, governed the territory of Russian America, the name conferred on the land claims made by the Russian Empire in North America between 1799 and 1867. This territory included much of the southeast of today's state of Alaska, as well as the Aleutian Islands, Fort Ross in California, and three forts in Hawaii. The Russian-American capital was Novo Arkhangelsk, today called Sitka. It was from there that in 1808 the *Sv. Nikolai* set out on an expedition to locate a site for establishing a permanent Russian post on the coast of Oregon Country.

Less than five weeks after it had departed from Novo Arkhangelsk, the *Sv. Nikolai* suffered shipwreck at the southwestern Olympic Peninsula, close to the mouth of the Quillayute River, on the territory that is today the Quileute Indian Reservation. The crew of twenty-two people,

including captain Nikolai Isaakovich Bulygin, his wife Anna Petrovna, and the supercargo Tarakanov, were able to save themselves. On shore, however, the party were met with hostility by the Quileute people, on whose lands they were encroaching. To escape attack by the Quileute, the party fled south into the territory of the Hoh people. The local people expressed a willingness to help the crew, while in fact leading them into a trap. This resulted in the abduction of Anna Petrovna, and one of the Kodiak Aleut women.

Ellms's narrative, which is written in the first person, from the perspective of supercargo Tarakanov, does not diverge from what we know of the historical facts. It is, in fact, the literal translation of the narrative told by the actual ship's supercargo, Timofei Tarakanov, as recorded by the Russian Navy Captain and author V. M. Golovnin, and published in 1822. The introduction to the original Russian narrative explains that Tarakanov kept a journal throughout his journey on board the *Sv. Nikolai*, during his captivity, and after his return to Novo Arkhangelsk, in 1810. Upon his return, he gave the manuscript to his superior, Chief Manager Baranov, who in turn entrusted it into the hands of Vasilii M. Golovnin, a Navy Captain and gifted writer. Golovnin was so enthusiastic about the story that he interviewed Tarakanov and other survivors of the shipwreck. He subsequently decided to transform the details of their accounts into a gripping narrative, and to publish it.

It is all the more remarkable, then, that although the story was recorded by several quills, and informed by many voices, almost all of them male, the strong voice of Anna Petrovna was preserved within the Russian narrative and the translation that followed, as well as Ellms's edited reprint.

Anna Petrovna: Female Agency

Anna Petrovna Bulygin's position in the narrative is remarkable, from any angle or perspective. Stylistically, Golovnin's original narrative and the English translation fall neatly within the literary genre of the 19th-century frontier adventure. It has a gripping story line, with the unexpected twists and turns typical of the genre, dominated by Anglo-American and British writing. Yet, although it clearly belongs to the genre of frontier adventures, the account of the *Sv. Nikolai* is unique, due to the prominent role of Anna Petrovna Bulygin in a narrative genre that is usually populated almost exclusively by male characters.

In their attempt to cross a river to flee the attacks by the Quileute, the party is tricked by a small group of Hoh people, headed by a woman, who leads Anna Petrovna and her female Kodiak Aleut companion into captivity. When a first attempt to rescue Anna Petrovna fails, the reader gets a first account of Anna Petrovna's strong voice, albeit in the third person: "The lady told her husband that she had been humanely and kindly treated, that the other prisoners were

also alive, and now at the mouth of the river.”⁶ The capture of Anna Petrovna plays an important role within the narrative, notwithstanding its historical accuracy. Because the captain is so heartbroken about the loss of his wife, he feels incapable of further maintaining command over his crew, and hands over authority to supercargo Tarakanov, the narrator. This narrative twist legitimizes Tarakanov’s further actions, which would otherwise have lacked credibility: they violate the nautical social hierarchy, in which Navigator Bulygin occupies the superior position, and Tarakanov holds the position of an indentured dependent. Moreover, Bulygin’s emotional incapacity allows Tarakanov to shine as the hero of the story. He describes himself as clever, able, and smart, and emphasizes his own abilities by giving voice to his comrades, as well as the native *toën*.⁷

In the beginning of February 1809, one year after the *Sv. Nikolai* shipwreck, Captain Bulygin makes a second attempt to ransom his wife. Upon reaching the riverbank where she was captured, a large group of native people awaits them. Among them is the Hoh woman who had first deceived them. The Russians take this opportunity to kidnap the woman, demanding that the Russian and Aleut captives be returned to them in exchange for her. The next day, Anna Petrovna is brought to the meeting spot by the Makah *toën*, whose name is Yootramaki, and who is dressed in European style.

Upon seeing her comrades, Anna Petrovna takes the lead in the conversation:

*“She immediately told us that our female prisoner was the sister of this chief; that they were both kind people, to whom she owed the greatest obligations, and demanded that we would instantly set her at liberty. On our telling her, however, that her husband would not liberate her, unless she herself were first restored to him, she replied, to our horror and consternation, that she was very well contented to stay where she was; at the same time advising us to deliver ourselves also to her present protectors. Their chief, she said, was a candid and honorable man, well known on this coast, who would, without the least doubt, liberate, and send us on board two vessels, now lying in the Bay of St. Juan de Fuca.”*⁸

Anna Petrovna’s refusal to be ransomed is another astonishing twist in the story. Even more surprising is that the narrator dramatizes her actions, thereby emphasizing her agency and autonomy, through allowing her to speak to the reader directly. When her desperate husband, seemingly at his wit’s end, tries to force her into compliance by threatening to shoot her if she insists on staying with the native people, “the woman resolutely replied: ‘As to death, I fear it not; I will rather die than wander with you again through the forests, where we may fall at last

⁶ Ellms, p. 370.

⁷ Toën is the Russian word for native leader, often translated as chief.

⁸ Ellms, p. 373.

into the hands of some cruel tribe, whilst now I live among kind and humane people: tell my husband that I despise his threats.”⁹ The supercargo quickly concludes that her advice is reasonable, and that he is “ultimately determined to follow her advice.” The next morning, most of the men, including Tarakanov and Captain Bulygin surrender themselves to the Makah.

While the emphasis on Anna Petrovna’s kidnapping might be explained by Tarakanov’s desire to legitimize his own actions, her strong role within the plot is not as easily rationalized. If women appear in frontier-adventure narratives, they are usually voiceless. Anna Petrovna, however, not only has a strong voice, but her opinion is so highly regarded that even the first-person narrator follows her advice.

Female vs. Male Agency

The construction of different masculinities in the story – the captain, the supercargo and the *toën* Yootramaki – and their correspondence to agency also deserve comment. The captain, who is supposed to be the most responsible and capable authority figure, appears overly emotional and too attached to his wife, suggesting a kind of weakness and effeminacy. The most admirable, conventionally masculine, qualities are attached to the narrator Tarakanov, who is rational, smart, strong, and caring. While it is clear that these characters are “manly,” white Europeans, the self-evident gendered and racialized distinction is subverted through Anna Petrovna’s strong, rational, and capable character and actions, as well as, and in connection with, the positive description of the *toën* Yootramaki (to whom I will return later).

Given that the practice of voluntary hostages was common in Europe, until at least the 18th century, and that this practice was further continued within colonial contexts,¹⁰ Anna Petrovna’s decision would not have been extraordinary, if she hadn’t been a woman. Moreover, hostages were frequently offered in situations of maritime trade, especially where there were language barriers,¹¹ as insurance of a peaceful process or “as surety for the execution of a promise or treaty, or as a symbol of submission on the part of the vanquished.”¹² In view of Anna Petrovna’s noble Russian background, the concept of voluntary hostage would have been familiar to her. Moreover, given the environment and the lack of equipment of the Russian crew, lack of knowledge about their surroundings, etc., the choice is more than logical. Nevertheless, in this particular historical context, her gender and social status render her deeds exceptional. Within 19th-century popular culture more generally, and within Ellms’s collection

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Irène Herrmann / Daniel Palmieri, A Haunting Figure: The Hostage through the Ages, in: *International Review of the Red Cross* 87, no. 857 (March 2005), p. 135–148.

¹¹ David Iglar, Captive-Taking and Conventions of Encounters on the Northwest Coast, 1789–1810, in: *Southern California Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (April 1, 2009), p. 3–25.

¹² Herrmann and Palmieri, p. 137

of international frontier adventures, Anna Petrovna's voice and agency as a female literary figure is indeed noteworthy.

Exceptional Female Agency in a Sea of Female Impuissance

It is worth mentioning that the *Sv. Nikolai* is not only the one story about Russian seafaring, but also the only story about Russian America and Oregon Country in the anthology. Most important, it is only one out of two stories in the entire anthology that pictures women as protagonists. While women do appear on board ships, and play a role in the stories, they are generally not protagonists, but rather props, emphasizing the severity of the situation of shipwreck and other catastrophes. Female seafaring people are usually described as “[w]ives clinging to husbands, [...] and women, who were without protectors, seeking aid from the arm of the stranger,”¹³ and as silent victims, without voice, volition or agency, such as the wife of a captain, who is eaten by indigenous cannibals.¹⁴ If women are shown to engage in activities, rather than as silent witnesses, they have most likely gone mad, due to the sheer horrors they must endure,¹⁵ or they are nameless Samaritans.¹⁶

In the almost 450 pages of Ellms's anthology, the only capable woman other than Anna Petrovna is Miss Grace Horsely Darling, the young daughter of the owner of a lighthouse on a small island off the rocky coast of Northumberland, who comes to the rescue of a crew of sailors.¹⁷ In Grace Horsely's case, the narrator makes sure to emphasize that “[t]his perilous achievement stands unexampled in the feats of female fortitude.”¹⁸ In order to highlight the exceptional character of her case and reaffirm her femininity (which might otherwise be tainted or called into question by her heroic deeds that require significant “manpower” –rescuing grown men from the wild waters surely takes prodigious physical strength), the narrator stresses how noble and fair, how petite and delicate, Grace Horsely is. Even more, she is described as pure and selfless as an angel. In contrast to the idealized, almost otherworldly Grace Darling, who only lives for the benefit of others, Anna Petrovna appears immune to such glorification. Rather,

¹³ A detailed Journal of the Proceedings on Board of the STEAMPACKET HOME, which sprung a-leak off Cape Hatteras; with a melancholy Account of her Subsequent Loss on Ocracoke Island, off the Coast of North Carolina, in: Charles Ellms (ed.), *The tragedy of the seas*, p. 71; similar depictions can be found in: *The Loss of the Royal Charlotte on the Coral Rocks of Frederick's Reef*, in: *ibid.*, p. 281f.

¹⁴ An affecting Narrative of the Loss of the Charles Eaton, on the Great Barrier Reef of New Holland, and the Massacre of nearly all the Ship's Company by the Natives, in: Charles Ellms (ed.), *The tragedy of the seas*, p. 13–40.

¹⁵ The Famine on Board of the SHIP FRANCES MARY, which foundered in the Atlantic Ocean, in: Charles Ellms (ed.), *The tragedy of the seas*, p. 194f.

¹⁶ The Pamperos of the Rio de la Plata, in: Charles Ellms (ed.), *The tragedy of the seas*, p. 109–115.

¹⁷ The History of Bamborough Castle, on the North-Eastern Coast of England; with the HEROISM OF GRACE DARLING, of the Longstone Light-House, in rescuing the shipwrecked Company of the FORFARSHIRE STEAM-PACKET, in: Charles Ellms (ed.), *The tragedy of the seas*, p. 199–210.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

her agency and decisiveness seem to derive from her astute, timely assessment of the situation, rather than female devotion to her husband and the other members of the ship's crew. Her virtues are self-preservation, rather than self-sacrifice.

Female Agency in the Historical Context

Such strong, independent agency reads curiously against the historical background of gender relations in Czarist Russia. In the early 19th century, it was rare, though not completely unheard of, for Russian women to follow their husbands to North America. While his predecessors had occasionally brought their wives along,¹⁹ Chief Manager Baranov had left his Russian wife and family behind and taken an Indigenous woman as his new wife.²⁰ The eighteen-year-old Anna Petrovna was probably the only white woman among a rather rough-and-tumble bunch of Russian seafaring men, who were for the most part illiterate indentured sailors and fur hunters.²¹ Given her social status as part of the Russian nobility, she had little in common with the company she found herself among, and it is unclear whether she was able to communicate in Russian with the Aleut women accompanying the group.

Although women's position in Russian society was starting to improve slightly during the 18th century, due to legal reforms initiated by Peter I, as well as the widespread influence of Enlightenment ideas within the social elite, their status was still inferior in all spheres of life. In her comprehensive chronology of the status of women in Russian society from 1700 to 2000, historian Barbara Alpern²² argues that patriarchy strongly structured the social hierarchy of the time. Marital law forced women to submit fully to their husbands and obey their commands without resistance. Indeed, married women held no independent civil status apart from their husbands.

As part of the crew of the *Sv. Nikolai*, Anna Petrovna's status was determined by her husband's. This meant that she was most likely protected from any sexual advances and violence from her comrades. Nevertheless, Russian social custom did not guarantee her a favorable position among the crew; rather the contrary. Thus, it is all the more curious that the members of the crew, including her husband, valued her opinions so highly and trusted her favorable assessment of the indigenous population.

¹⁹ Douglas Deur / Thomas Thornton / Rachel Lahoff / Jamie Hebert, *Yakutat Tlingit and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve: An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment*, Anthropology Faculty Publications and Presentations 2015. <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/anth_fac/99> (7.6.2022), p. 13

²⁰ For details about Baranov, see: Andrei Val'terovich Grin'ev, *Russian Colonization of Alaska: Baranov's Era, 1799–1818*, translated by Richard L. Bland, Lincoln 2020.

²¹ For the situation of women in Russian America see Gwenn A. Miller, *Kodiak Kreol: Communities of Empire in Early Russian America*, Kodiak Kreol, Ithaca/London 2010.

²² Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000*, Cambridge 2004, p. 13.

The Russian Colonial Gaze meets American Readers

It is interesting that the favorable depiction of the indigenous communities of North America, like Anna Petrovna Bulygin's agency, survived a translation from Russian to English, as well as the story's transferal from the medium of political writing to popular culture. As mentioned above, Ellms's chapter is the literal translation of the narrative told by the ship's supercargo, Timofei Tarakanov, as recorded by the Russian Navy Captain V. M. Golovnin and published in 1822. The Bostonian Ellms did not translate or write this text himself; rather, he incorporated an earlier published English translation into his anthology. The original translation by someone with the initials Y.Z., was published under the title "Narrative of the Adventures of the Crew of the Russian-American Company's Ship *St. Nicolai*, Wrecked on the North-West Coast of America" in the *Asiatic Journal*, vol. 18, nr. 105 from 1824, a publication of the East-India Company, based in London.²³ Ellms transferred the text from the genre of political, economic, and colonial development, which targeted a British readership, into the realm of American popular culture, thereby introducing the text to a wide American readership.

It is worth noting again that the original story remained almost unchanged when translated from Russian into English and imported from Russia via Britain to US-America. Accordingly, Ellms's text presented the US-American readership with a Russian colonial perspective that differed in some key respects from the hegemonic US-American perspective. The depiction of the Makah (through Anna Petrovna's eyes), unusually favorable for American discourses, can be read as translation of the Russian colonial gaze into US-American literature. The Russian view on indigenous peoples of North America was influenced by their wish to expand the fur hunt and trade, and general transpacific commerce. To do so, the Russians depended in large part on collaboration with indigenous peoples.

Arguably, the lack of detail around the Bulygins' untimely demise needs to be viewed as further evidence of the Russian colonial gaze. The story mentions that Anna Petrovna and her husband both die in captivity, but their deaths are told rather briefly and unsentimentally. Moreover, it is emphasized that, for a time, they lived quite comfortably within their captivity, though they were forced to move and to change masters frequently, during the months leading up to their deaths in 1809 and 1810. The narrator further emphasizes that some of Anna Petrovna's masters were kind, and that only the last owner was cruel. This narrative choice further supports the argument that it was Anna Petrovna's agency, her decisions and actions, which were significant, not her female physique and victimhood. Through her assessment of

²³ Golovnin published the narrative first in serial form in 1822, and as part of a book in 1853. After his death, his son published included it in his collected essays: Golovnin V.M. *Sochinenija i perevody Vasilija Mihajlovicha Golovnina Mesto izdanija: S-Pb. Izdatel'stvo: Tipografija Morskogo Ministerstva, God izdanija 1864*. Already in 1822, however, the *St. Peterburgische Zeitung* printed a German translation (vol. 10, p. 22–52). The first English translation appeared in the *Asiatic Journal* 18 (1824), p. 245–253.

the situation, the indigenous population and her subsequent actions, the narrator ends up in the captivity, or rather in the company of the *toën* Yootramaki, who treated him “like a friend.”

The narrator Tarakanov’s depiction of the Makah people, and especially of Yootramaki, varies, alternating between surprisingly amicable appreciation and patronizing condescension. Although he views the native peoples as inferior to Russians, and possibly to Europeans and Americans, using racist terms such as “savage”, and on occasion even “barbarian,” throughout the text to characterize their ‘uncivilized’ deeds, he also emphasizes the intelligence of indigenous communities in matters of warfare. In the case of Yootramaki, the Makah *toën*, he describes his honesty, kindness, and great humanity. He emphasizes Yootramaki’s superior qualities, however, by highlighting his European dress, and suggesting that he had likely had contact with other Europeans prior to his encounter with the Russians.

Ellms’s story differs significantly from the Russian original in the editorial decision to leave out the details of the shipwreck, but not the meticulous description of the attacks by the Quileute and Hoh, whose territory the castaways had invaded. Indeed, the ferocity with which the Quileute and Hoh attacked them is emphasized through a woodblock print crafted by Ellms himself, which shows them attacking the Russians with long spears. Such fine prints were very rarely included in the popular literature of the time. Accordingly, the illustration must have constituted a sensation in itself, further popularizing the unusual story of Anna Petrovna Bulygin’s capture. The state-of-the-art innovation that the print represented, however, while demonstrating Ellms’s craftsmanship and amplifying the text’s appeal, stands in stark contrast to the emphasis on the military sophistication of the various indigenous peoples through the narrative. The visual depicts the Quileute and Hoh as almost naked, which is not only historically inaccurate, since the season of November would have demanded warmer clothes, but also symbolically divergent from the narrative description. While the depiction does convey the drama of the scene, the native costume in the image does not resemble any known Quileute and Hoh style. Rather, it conveys ideas of barbarity, backwardness, and lack of civilization, in contrast to the Russians’ costume, which shows sophisticated overcoats, trousers, sables, and muskets.

While the illustration and the description of the attacks by Native people offer Ellms’s American audience a sensational spectacle, the Quileute and Hoh, as well as the Makah, are not unambiguously described as wild “savages” in need of civilizing by the ‘superior’ colonizers. Rather, their descriptions vary in perspective between one that is condescending and exoticizing, and one that honors their skills and generosity. What is particularly interesting is that the account describes several instances of solidarity and collaboration among the different native groups in their attacks on the European invaders.

Owens, the aforementioned historian who retranslated and commented on the Russian original text in 1985, identifies the Makah *toën*, Yootramaki, or Yutramaki, so favorably described both by Tarakanov and by Ellms in his translation, as the historical figure “Machee Ulatilla or Utillah.”²⁴ According to Owens, Yootramaki (Utillah) was probably the descendent of an Irish explorer and a Makah woman. Tarakanov, like other seafaring men,²⁵ had Yootramaki (Utillah) to thank for his eventual release from captivity and his return home. He was certainly an exceptional figure among his contemporaries, not only due to his features – which were very likely exaggerated by Tarakanov’s racializing, colonial gaze – but also through his good will towards the captured Europeans, and his command of the English language. In any case, Ellms’s account has it that Yootramaki (Utillah) handed over Tarakanov and the remainder of the crew of the *Sv. Nikolai* to Captain Brown of the American brig, *The Lydia*, as promised, in May 1810.

Popular Culture as Cultural Memory

The printing history of Ellms’s story of the crew of the *Sv. Nikolai* is likewise interesting. Owens commented not only on the Russian original, but also on the 1824 translation, which is the basis of Ellms’s account, calling it “loose [and] omitting much significant detail.”²⁶ He further states that “this version fortunately gained no scholarly notice.”²⁷ This sentiment, however, might have originated rather in Owens’s desire to promote the uniqueness of his own work.²⁸ Although Ellms’s book, based on Y.Z.’s translation, leaves out some details of the original narrative, it is an accurate translation, overall.²⁹ The parts omitted are the short description of what happened before the shipwreck, the trade with native people, and the description of the shipwreck – which is also condensed, but otherwise accurate.³⁰

Owens’s dismissal of the first English translation did not follow up on its distribution via Ellms’s “The Tragedy of the Seas.” Ellms’s book, however, deserves some attention beyond the fact that it introduced the story of the shipwrecked *Sv. Nikolai* and Anna Bulygin to a broad

²⁴ Owens, p. 22.

²⁵ For example, John Rodgers Jewett, *Narrative of the adventures and sufferings of John R. Jewett; only survivor of the crew of the ship Boston, during a captivity of nearly three years among the savages of Nootka sound: with an account of the manners, mode of living, and religious opinions of the natives*, Middletown 1815, p. 153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ C. L. Andrews published another English summary, based on Golovnin’s 1853 edition, in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* 13 (1922), p. 27–31. The most recent English version was published as part of Hector Chevigny’s popular volume, *Russian America: The Great Alaskan Venture*, New York 1965, reprint 1973.

²⁹ Owens also gives the wrong date for publication, stating it was published in 1826, when in fact it was published in 1824.

³⁰ The only discrepancy I could find was that while Owens writes that the native attackers hurled stones at the Russians (Owens, p. 45), in Ellms’s text it is the Russians (Ellms, p. 362) who threw them. He also leaves out the passage in which Anna Petrovna warns the Russians that the native people are attacking (Owens, p. 45).

American audience. Ellms was a trailblazer in the field of industrialized book printing, producing unprecedented masterpieces of popular literature in what was, for that time, rapid circulation.³¹ When Ellms published his anthologies between 1836 and 1842, the genre of maritime frontier adventures, pirate stories, and shipwrecks and seafaring was extremely popular. For many Americans, most of them living in rural areas and small towns far away from the sea, these stories were a great diversion from the monotony of hard labor on farms or in factories, and their lives in close-knit communities with little opportunity for adventure. Moreover, like the stories about the western frontier, Ellms's stories of the sea must have provided an imaginative escape from social pressures. Furthermore, Ellms provided them with 121 astonishing illustrations, produced from woodcut engravings. The price of the book was \$1, and the 9,000 copies were sold by "nineteen firms in twelve different cities."³² They surely popularized, and, indeed, preserved, the memory of Anna Petrovna Bulygin, her comrades, and the worthy and honorable Makah, *toën* Yootramaki, for many generations of Americans, and beyond; though it is perhaps only now that we can fully appreciate the valor and agency of Anna Petrovna herself in these events.

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Charles Ellms, The Tragedy of the Seas; or Sorrow on the Ocean, Lke, and Rver, From Shipwreck, Plague, Fre and Famine [Chapter], in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2023, URL: <<https://www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-78442>>.

³¹ Michael Winship, Pirates, Shipwrecks, and Comic Almanacs: Charles Ellms Packages Books in Nineteenth-Century America, in: Printing History 9 (2011): p. 3–16, here p. 3.

³² Ibid., p. 15.