

Benjamin is called “the Third” because, as the preface to the novella says, there were two earlier explorers named Benjamin. But his name is also an allusion to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. Although Abramovitsh “did not necessarily approve of Disraeli’s ideas . . . he regarded Benjamin Disraeli—as did everyone else—as the exponent of British imperialist mobility. As such, Disraeli provided him with an ideal against which to measure his own Benjamin.” (p. 81)

In the description of the bathhouse in Chapter One, “Abramovitsh is delineating the different ‘institutions’ of Tuneyadevke in their hierarchical order as a caricature of the British parliamentary system. Starting with a Hyde Park kind of popular gathering, it goes up to the Lower House of Parliament...; then it moves up to a Cabinet . . . and then it moves up to the House of Lords, the Upper House.” In this chapter, the upper house is the top step of the steam bath, and, like the Lower House of Parliament, the lower step stays up all night discussing political affairs without getting paid. (p. 51)

—Quotes from Dan Miron and Anita Norich’s “The Politics of Benjamin III”