

A Study on the Development Process of Russian Skaz

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Abstract—As a kind of literary style, *skaz* generation of Russian *skaz*, development and stability weren't accomplished in an action. The layout and plot of the text are stringed together by narrator. This structural pattern was first skillfully used by Russian writers. It has passed a history of about 200 years. This paper takes the development process of *skaz* in Russian literature as research object and analyzes the four stages in the development of *skaz* according to the time order. In addition, the author also analyzes the overall expression form, language features and related important writers and their works.

Keywords—*skaz*; narrator; colloquial features

I. INTRODUCTION

From the earliest writings translated into Russian literature in a unique style, the story inside has always been engaged in multi-angle dialogues: local and foreign, past and present, tradition and pioneer. The infiltration, impact and integration of many factors make Russian *skazs* evolve and maintain vitality. From the initial imitation, it gradually became a literary style with unique national mark. As a kind of literary style, *skaz's* generation, development and stability weren't accomplished in an action. The layout and plot of the text are stringed together by narrator. This narrative mode first appeared in the story collection of Italy in the 13th Century, ran through the Europe in the 15th Century and reached the first climax in the Renaissance in Italy in the 16th Century. At this point, some *skaz* literature began to be collected into a book. Boccaccio's *Decameron* is the representative of story fiction in that period. The scholars at that time called this style as "novella" which means news. Later it referred to oral tales and unusual and meaningful jokes with definite scenes. "Narrative" and "authentic" are basic features of this style in the primary. Later this literary style has been accepted and used by many writers, which greatly enriches the artistry of story style.

II. THE EMERGENCE AND FIRST PROSPERITY OF SKAZ IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

In Russia, "Song of Warrior" (былины) can be regarded as the initial form of story style. These epic Russian folks passed down historical figures and heroes by word of mouth from generations. The historic songs aren't converted into written text, but it has become an important carrier in historical memory and national heritage of Slavdom. At the same time, as the source of Russian literature, plots and characters in the historic songs have become creation

materials of later writers. For example, Pushkin's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Nekrasov's *Who Can Live a Good Life in Russia*, a series of folk tales written by Tolstoy was all drawn from this. In Russia, *skaz* originally were not native. They appeared in translation works in the 17th Century. Under the influence of foreign literature, this creation technique with distinctive characteristics was gradually borrowed into Russian original literary works. One of the most representative masterpieces is *Story of Carpe Soutouroff* and *Fedor Skobeyev's Story*.

The first prosperity of Russian *skaz* appeared in the period from 1820s to 40s. First were a large number of translations of Zhukovskiy, then *skaz* literature created by Somov and Aotouyefusiji, and until the famous *Belkin Stories* came out. In Pushkin, the narrative is no longer a single view of the exposition, but of two parallel perspectives, the perspective of author and the perspective of narrator, at the same time. Writers can choose one for use. At the start of *Belkin Stories*, Pushkin first introduced the narrator, a respectable sir and old friend of Mr. Ivan Petrovic, in the *Preface*. He stated "all stories written in the book are real characters and real incidents, and are heard from others". The later five novels are all started by this narrator. Among them, the multi-perspective narrative way in *The Stage Agent* is still talked about by later generations. It continued the excellence of Karamsin's *Poor Elisa* and created the pioneer of the naturalists in the 40s. The *skaz* literatures in the period of Pushkin strictly should be called as narration, and mainly followed popular ways of creation in Europe at that time. "It is with strict conception, exquisite form, rounded skills and smooth narrative", and with no distinct Russian characteristics. Nevertheless, a series of works with skillful techniques in this period have laid a solid foundation for the rapid development of the later *skaz* literatures.

III. THE SKAZ LITERATURE IN THE MAINSTREAM PERIOD OF CRITICAL REALISM IN THE 19TH CENTURY

In the 19th Century, the critical realism Russian literary creation entered the era of grand narrative. Even so, the story fiction still occupies a space. This literary style relies on narrator to support the entire text structure, which often can be seen in works of great writers. In Gogol's *Petersburg Tales*, the starts of the most independent stories are arranged a narrator with the person of "I". In the narrative, all kinds of life styles in Petersburg in the first half of 19th Century were presented gradually. In Herzen's *The Past and Thoughts*, the mission of "I" was for clearing and accountability. In Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches*, the narrator appeared as

a melancholy young aristocrat. In seemingly dull narration, the narrator described the picturesque scenery of Russia.

In Russian literature, Leskov's works played a decisive role in the development and maturity of skaz literature. If Pushkin, Gogol and Turgenev have used one technique to express and one plot to pave, then Leskov tended to use "tone and atmosphere" to create the story text style. And the narrator in the story led the development direction of plot, having an equal footing with the author or beyond the author. To explore a nation's reality, the most effective way is to let the people speak. Obviously, Leskov was clearly aware of this truth, so he inserted folk slang, proverbs and sayings through narrator and used various languages carrying strong regional styles in his works. Because of the oral narrative characteristics of story style, Leskov could introduce different styles of words in the creation. For example, we can hear folk storyteller singing warrior songs or historical songs in *Left-hander*, and memories, folk stories, diaries, letters and jokes from the mouth of narrator in *Lobby Priest*. These works with distinctive story style enables the elite literature high above to closely connect with lower classes. Literature is no longer separated with people.

It is important to point out that the works listed here are not all skaz literature in the strict sense. A considerable part should belong to the narrative category. There are many similarities between story and narration. The most important is that the text structure of the two is built up by the narrator. But the story style in the strict sense emphasizes the colloquial feature of the discourse, while the narrative style does not have relevant requirements. In 1920s, before Eikhensbaum first put forward the definite concept of the story style, critics often mixed them in research. And most of the writers in the creation highlighted the existence way of narrator rather than narrative features. The writers and readers of upper class together constructed the main body of Russian literature of this era and defined the literary features of elite works, which made it difficult to create with a pure colloquial feature in critical realism literature in 19th Century. Therefore, it is difficult to find a skaz literature of this period in a strict sense. If use the strict standard of pure colloquial feature to define the critical realism that story fiction in the mainstream of 19th Century, it seems that only Leskov's literary creation can be incorporated into this scope. Secondly, it is a gradual process for an exotic style really being accepted and established in the national literature. Therefore, in this research, the author expands the research scope of skaz literature to discuss the narrative works relying on narrator to support the whole text structure. The relatively generalized definition will help us to include more works into the research field.

IV. SKAZ LITERATURE AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Although the skaz literatures have made considerable progress in the 19th Century, it was still the world of long novels. The real exploration and revolution occurred in the multicultural context at the turn of the 20th Century. Ever since Chekhov, the grand narrative was no longer popular. Writers began to observe subtle commonplace. Flexible short

stories and features started to become the mainstream. Long works was temporarily suspended. Even the most influential realist writers, such as Golgi, Bunin, etc., have never had a long novel of real significance. The essence of the turn came from the explosion of thought in a short period of time and broke through the original world outlook and philosophy structure of the writers. Among critical realism literature in the 19th Century, writers of grand narrative had an overall vision of life, society and the world. Tolstoy maximized this style. In this period, Russian literature has just gone through the short literary stagnation of 1880s. During the following ten years, the influx of a large number of foreign cultures and ideas once again brought Russia into a new cultural context. The thirty years at the turn of two centuries became the timer carrier of concentrated outbreak Russian cultural thoughts.

In the absence of a complete vision of the world, writers tend to use relatively short and rhythmic poetry to express scattered and sporadic emotions, which were the transformation of collective creation under the characteristics of the times. Since 1840s, prose creation has been started in Russian literature. However, poetry become main "voice drum" of writers of various schools in the thirty years at the turn of 20th Century. Prose was squeezed obviously. In the contemporary Russian literature review in 1907, Balmont wrote "almost all her (literature) fresh things are embraced by poets. Except for two or three prosers' works, most of works are twice-told and coarse, because of its old tune ... there is no fresh air that make us wonder". This view about prose at the turn of 20th century is very clear. It points out writers quietly leave from the garden of prose, thereupon Брюсов called upon the young generation: "please write prose! Please...There are still many shortages in Russian prose".

Under the appeal of older writers, a group of young writers turn their attention to prose at the same time. During this period, the prose writers usually wear two hats. They were a poet and essayist. "At the beginning of the century, these distinctive famous poets also are extraordinary talented essayists, such as Иван Алексеевич Бунин, Zinaida Gippius, Н. Гиппиус, Валерий Яковлевич Брюсов, Сологуб Федор Кузьмич, Nicholai Stepanovich Gumilev and Кузмин Михаил Алексеевич. At this time there were two types of prose, long novel and skaz literature. Fundamentally speaking, the short essay of this period was not a trend of fashion style. The essence of skaz literature is attention on unusual things and exotic charm. It is a narrative type of storytelling, so was also called as "situated short story". At the turn of 20th Century, active thoughts in literary creation concept were expressed by strong interests in traditional Slavic plot and folk creation and traces for ancient cultural tradition. Drawing materials from the traditional folk culture and giving them new artistic form became the whole creative tone of writers at that time. As a result, the short body of skaz literature and the attention to plots became the best tools of writers to describe new and wonderful things or to get overall attention.

At this period short stories tends to describe those incidents of absurdity in the content. Changeable reversal of fate and unaccountable tease of heaven, symbolism and

mystery, rhythm and music have become common narrative skills. The survival topic about love and death become a central theme in narrative novels of this period. Writers often used traditional description of psychological novel, such as Amfygaterof's *Kids*, Иван Алексеевич Бунин's *Night Light* and Zaitsev's *Death*. These skaz literatures were featured by the description of trifling emotion and subconscious states after falling into love. In addition, the power of devil and Satan is another theme in the novel of this period, such as Nicholai Stepanovich Gumilev's *Forest Demon*, Сологуб Федор Кузьмич's *Poisoned Garden* and Gippius's *Imaginary*. These short works quenched the lights of the spiritual civilization of human beings without exception. Instead of this was the recovery of the evil side of human.

The story style wrote at the turn of 20th century was not limited to realistic writers, but generally existed in the various literary genres. "It can be seen in widely divergent schools, various societies and factions with different banners, traditional takers of Russian classical prose (a part of creations of Bunin, Chekhov, and Zaware and Andreyev), as well as works of new romantics. Some works of Golgi and Tolstoy are of this genre. It also can be seen in works of modernist writer as we still called by habit" (Елена Дмитриева, 1998: 4).

V. THE PERIOD AFTER 1930S AND THE CONTEMPORARY SKAZ LITERATURE

In 1920s, a masked narrative creation technique became popular. Writers arranged a narrator in text to support the layout of the entire article. It was of indefinite person and different viewpoints. It can be understood as a democratic emotional expression of the intellectuals under the control of a single political discourse. In this period, typical representative works were Billy Yake's *Naked Years*, Babel's *Odessa's Story* and Zochinko's series of short novels and some works of war literature. Babel's *Odessa's Story* received a high praise, and he was named as "the first writer of recovered story literary style in the Soviet literature" (Bakhtin 2009: 460). With unique and clear venation and a concentrated style, his novels appeared after fixed works of "dynamic prose" and became certain novel works. The skaz literature creation in this period focused on the response from the psychological level, expressed emotions of a specific age, and positively catered to the mainstream ideology or expressed suppressed views of dissidents.

The influence of the Soviet Union's disintegration on literature was not second to on politics, economy and social life. The survival soil of mainstream literature existing for more than half a century fell apart in an instant. The characters shaped before and the ideas of an ideal world were questioned as never before. People gradually revived the pent-up emotions, and returned to literature, constructivism, post-modernism, anti-Utopian mood and new realism. They were all products of this period. At this time, Russia is in the noisy context of multi-words and common voice. Accordingly, literary creation shows a great deal of inclusiveness. In this special background, the writing method of skaz literature changed frequently and continuously. And the breakthrough of the ideological content echoed with the

strong rhythm of the times and the nation. L. Peterashevskaya was a representative of women's literature. Her novel *Night* showed living condition of contemporary Russian women in different ways from the first person narrative. In the *Night*, the good, quiet and warm life women yearn for disappeared, and there were only continuous terrors, endless pains, exhausted hopelessness and numbness. At this point, the narrative has become a means for women writers to deconstruct the essence of women's existence and the image of women at the moment (Liu Wenfei, Chen Fang, 2007: 266), which is a subversion of the classical female images established by traditional literature. In addition, in 2008 the Booker Prize was given to a collection of story creation. The author Михаил Елизаров was named as "New Gogol" (Zhao Dan 2009: 7). The whole article seems to be chats. The relaxed tone and sharp sarcasm created a different kind of magical color and a horror atmosphere.

VI. CONCLUSION

In the 19th Century, German Romanticism ever regarded the "reversal point" (Wendepunkt) as an essential feature of narrative novels. They believed it is basic characteristics of the skaz literature that make it carry a rich symbolic meaning. "As far as the narrative of the skaz literature is concerned, this reversal point is really important, for it transforms mundane things into strange amazing events and asks us to see the mystery of life in the world through this incident... the ridiculous accidents, the excessive surly reversal of destiny and mysterious tease of environment on human – became the content of a series of skaz literatures at the early century" (Елена Дмитриева, May 1998). Under the influence of this point, moved stories, distinctive emergencies, unusual description methods and surprising but rational ends became the clear marking of many Russian narrative novel writers. The method of arranging storytellers in the story was not from Russian literature, but it was introduced, promoted and popularized as a new literary style. It formed a school that writers of each generation have made continuous exploration in creation practice. In this exploration, the mark of the times and the writer's personal style and creative ideals are penetrated one by one. This penetration process includes both absorption and innovation of previous achievements and the influences on others and later generations after the establishment of self style.

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