

Petersburg Writing in Tynyanov's Historical Novels

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ABSTRACT

From the perspectives of time and space, Yury Tynyanov's historical novels always revolve around Imperial Russia and Imperial Petersburg. Imperialism and Petersburg writing are two issues in Tynyanov's historical novels that have not been adequately studied so far. Taking Tynyanov's historical novels as a textual basis, this paper uses the city square and the people in the city as an entry points for analyzing the Petersburg writing. Petersburg Square reflected the author's thoughts on urban modernity in the text. According to Tynyanov, it was a revolutionary square and a space where the state power implements discipline and punishment. The emperor, the powerful presence in the imperial capital, became the subject of satire and parody in Tynyanov's short and medium-length historical novels, and the literary figure, the protagonist of a long trilogy, was in a relationship with Petersburg, while the author also portrayed a fringe figure with a distinct personality. Tynyanov's Petersburg writing was developed from a retrospective perspective, adopted cinematography in certain segments, and recreated several "Petersburg text" themes at the same time. His writing of the city was particularly valuable in the history of Soviet literature, which was not only a unique historical memory, but also a response to the history that the author was experiencing at the beginning of the 20th century.

Keywords: Tynyanov, Historical novel, Petersburg writing, City square, Imperialism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of urban writing in literature is an important starting point for the study of contemporary literature. As early as the beginning of the last century, Antsiferov started the study of Petersburg works in Russian literature. Bakhtin put forward the concept of "space-time body" in novels during the Soviet Union period, paying attention to the place in literary texts. Different from Antsiferov's emphasis on the relationship between the image of the literary place and the external reality, Bakhtin's emphasis on the genre by the concept of "space-time body", as well as his overall grasp of the indivisibility of time and space in literature, contemporary urban writing studies analyze the text from a more macro cultural perspective. As the research object of "Petersburg writing" was concerned, it overlapped with the "Petersburg text" proposed by Todorov in specific research fields. For example, both paid attention to the themes related to Petersburg in the text, urban mythology, and the "Petersburg" elements in specific writers' works. However, the research based on Todorov's "Petersburg Text" theory

emphasized on the historical philosophical connotation and metaphysical structure of cities, while the research on urban writing focused on the relationship between urban space and modernity shaped by literary texts.

2. CITY SQUARE OF URBAN SPACE

In Tynyanov's historical novels, the writing of Petersburg Square was particularly eye-catching.

The first novel, Chuhelia, had an entire chapter to describe Peter Square. Looking only at the titles of each chapter in the novel, there were more than one chapter with the theme of location (other chapters related to location included "Petersburg", "Europe", "Caucasia", "countryside" and "fortress"), which accounted for almost half of the total number of chapters in the novel. Also, this reflected that the constant change of space and location was one of the themes of the novel Chuhelia. The chapter "Petersburg Square" was the climax of the novel, and also the climax of the life of Chuhel Bekei. In Tynyanov's writing, the square in Petersburg was an integral part of the urban organism, endowed with the spirit of independence. Russia completed

two revolutions spanning a century in an independent city square. "The streets of Petersburg were formed earlier than the houses, which only filled the street lines. The square was formed earlier than the street. Therefore, these squares were completely independent, independent of houses and streets, and also independent of their builders. The unit in Petersburg was the square. The revolution in Petersburg was completed in the square. The December Revolution in 1825 and the February Revolution in 1917 took place in two squares." [1] However, the two revolutions in Petersburg Square had different outcomes. Tynyanov believed that "the uprising on December 14 was a square war". The party uprising in December was an important plot in this historical novel, and Tynyanov's description of it was particularly abstract. The main plot of the chapter "Petersburg Square" revolved around the day of December 14. The first section of this chapter was completely from the perspective of urban space. The streets, rivers and squares of Petersburg in the author's works seemed to have survived on this day and became real participants in the uprising, while the party members and soldiers in the square in December became passive roles. "On this day, some heroes just ran along the street to bring the blood of the city and Russia, namely, the corps, to the square, but they just stomped on the spot at most of the time. It was full of painful swings in the square all the whole day. They were like cups on the balance until Nicola's cannon shook violently, making them lose their balance." [1] Tynyanov seemed to provide reasons for the failure of the uprising by emphasizing the importance of urban space, especially the square. "It was the square that decided the issue, not the street, and there were no heroes this day. Ryleyev, who may become a hero, knew more about the uncertainty of the square than anyone else, left with incomprehensible pain, and went to an unknown place. Trubetzkoy just stamped his foot somewhere near the General Staff. They couldn't stop the terrible and numb stalemate in the square, which was a trade-off." [1] But the more the text highlighted the characteristics of the square, such as "independence", "uncertainty" and "balance", which were close to subjective initiative, the more readers could read the author's implicit criticism on the lack of initiative of the party members in grasping the historical opportunities in December. However, according to Tynyanov, the square in Petersburg was not just a revolutionary square. Although the author almost wrote a "square revolutionary song" in the work of "Chuhelia", the

square in Petersburg had different meanings in other novels.

In the city square, Tynyanov saw both the public and the country, both its revolutionary and rebellious side and its discipline and punishment side. The square sometimes united with the people and sometimes cooperated with the power. This coincided with the analysis of square in Bakhtin's space-time body theory. Bakhtin pointed out that Pushkin believed that the square was a square where "people", markets, theaters and hotels gathered, and excluded "official" from the square. But Bakhtin also pointed out that "the square in ancient Greece and Rome itself meant the state, the supreme court, all science and all art, and all people came to this square." [2] In the Poruchik Kizhe, the "declaration of death" of Sinuhayev was carried out on the square. The transformation of state (autocratic) power into an unquestionable command confused everyone. "There was no one around him... He looked at the disbanded square, and it became strange. At least, he had never noticed the eaves and gray glass on the windows of the red government building before." [1] It was used to be a part of the national power machine. After being expelled from the army under absurd instructions caused by writing mistakes, Sinuhayev unexpectedly gained a new perspective of "post liberation". He even began to pay attention to the institutional building where he worked and the square where soldiers were trained and tortured according to the military law. At this moment, the square "became strange", and even this city became different. "St. Petersburg lied in an orderly gray place with its bleak eyes on the wasteland, river and road. It was a city he didn't know at all." [1] Sinuhayev, who lost his military status, could see the grey order of Petersburg.

In the novel "Wax Doll", Yakov described the "Dance Square" from the perspective of "freak" with six fingers. "On the small square, there was a wooden horse with a long neck, broad side, small legs and face. The horse's back was very sharp. You could see how thin it was in the air, and it was just like a knife. Above it, even the air itself was thin. Around this monster liking horse, there were wooden stakes that were nailed into the ground. These wooden stakes were arranged in order, and the top was cut very sharp, and these wooden stakes were like a small dense pine forest. And there was a man dancing on these stakes. The man was barefooted and shirtless, and wore only a long gown. He stepped on the sharp awl at the top of the stake, jerked and staggered, and then jumped up

again. Around the fence, there was a soldier with a flint gun. The man ran to the side and knelt at the tips. Then he screamed, wailed loudly, and stood up to ask the soldier what to do. But the soldier leaned forward with his gun, and the man went to dance again." This short description of "Dancing Square" reminded Chinese readers of many execution scenes in Mo Yan's "Sandalwood Death", and the two authors presented the cruel execution process to the readers with almost indifferent brushwork. In modern China, most of the torture was carried out at the entrance of the vegetable market. During the Russian Empire period, the square or guillotine was often selected for execution, both of which gave the public space the function of discipline and punishment. At the same time, most people unconsciously acted as the "accomplices" of the violence machine, making such performances tend to be "perfect". Although Tynyanov's plot of "Dancing Square" was to let Yakov meet the brother who betrayed himself and compare the fates of the so-called "freak" and the betrayer, Tynyanov specially pointed out a "junior clerk" in the crowd, who watched the punishment with excitement and enthusiasm, and invited Yakov to become the audience. It had to be said that the author arranged the marginal role of junior staff in the scene of dance square, highlighting the political color of the square.

3. PEOPLE IN THE CITY

If the square was a very representative place in Tynyanov's description of the urban space of Petersburg, the author adopted a more three-dimensional writing angle when describing the relationship between the city and people. According to Tynyanov, the outermost veil of Petersburg was "Empire/Capital of Emperors", while its gorgeous clothes were woven by writers, and the texture of the city was inseparable from the people.

The three short and medium-length historical novels described Petersburg as the capital of the empire comprehensively, and the plot of the novel focused on different emperors in Russian history. In *Poruchik Kizhe*, which was born out of the script and was first completed, Petersburg, like its leader Paul I, became the embodiment of "emptiness". The theme of "emptiness" in this novel and the concept of "emptiness" in the other two novels were discussed in Matveyeva's doctoral thesis[3]. The researchers believed that the fluctuating meaning of some words in *"Poruchik Kizhe"* or some representation similar to life filled the seemingly

empty space. At the same time, they pointed out that the theme of hollowness in the novel was often associated with the Emperor Paul. "He felt the hostility around him, and the desire to be close to the people became a greater alienation, forming a void around the Emperor." Toterjes also pointed out in the postscript[4] of *"Poruchik Kizhe"* that this topic could be studied separately. Matvieva also noticed the theme of "emptiness" in *"Wax Doll"* and the "emptiness" that accompanied Emperor Nikolai I in *"The Young Vitushnikov"*. At the same time, the researcher reminded the readers to think about the relationship between the theme of "emptiness" in the novel, history and artistic creation. The researcher believed that the most direct and vivid description of the emptiness of Petersburg in *"Poruchik Kizhe"* was in the plot of the emperor Paul sleeping. The sentry informed the people of the city near the castle where the emperor lived of curfew by shouting. "One shop closed the door after another, and people who were walking also hid in their homes." "The castle rose on the bridge... He (Paul) was temporarily safe on his own island." "The emperor was asleep"¹, making the whole city go into a dormant state and even the sentry on the castle "walk like a clock". Paul, who had been questioned by the author and other characters in the novel for many times about the authenticity of his existence, made Petersburg an imaginary dream city in this plot. Since the theme of "emptiness and nothingness" was the theme of Petersburg mythology at the beginning of city construction, Tynyanov's writing on this theme was first related to the city. He also expanded the traditional writing content of Petersburg's "emptiness and nothingness" theme in Russian literature, and wrote the relationship between city and emptiness, emperor and emptiness into the text.

Petersburg, the imperial capital described by Tynyanov, was also the stage for the czars and politicians of past dynasties. In the novel, the author once wrote about the "actor characteristics" of the emperors and politicians with very little words, and the "actor characteristics" of the characters were related to the image of the mirror. In *Tiresias' Memory*[5], Yampolyski paid attention to the "mirror-like structure" in Tynyanov's text. He believed that this kind of mirror structure was related to "unreality". The shadow in the mirror and the entity were a game of double meanings. Sometimes the entity became less real than the

1. Incidentally, *Poruchik Kizhe* was released in the US as *The Czar Wants to Sleep*.

shadow in the mirror, and vice versa. In the series of "Kizhe", there were many straightforward mirror images in the script of "Poruchik Kizhe" and the film of the same name. In the novel "Poruchik Kizhe", the mirror function was completed by the glass screen surrounding Paul I, which could reflect Paul's shadow. In "Wax Doll", when Yagurenski was anxious, "he walked from one mirror to another, and all mirrors reflected the same one." It was not to mention Nicholas I, who imitated the Peter I, in Young Vitushnikov. The central plot of the novel was that Nicholas I imitated the heroic image of Peter the Great. In the above three novels, cities and history became the stage for emperors and politicians to perform. These characters paid close attention to themselves, and could even admire themselves in the text world without the care of the text creator himself. This was also in sharp contrast to Tynyanov's positioning of a writer or artist in the historical novels.

Tynyanov not only put the writer at the center of his historical novel creation system, but also put the relationship between the writer and Petersburg at the core of urban writing. There was a big difference in the text volume between the writing of emperors and the writing of writers, showing that different characters in the same space had different meanings and weights. Although there were various characters in the city of Petersburg, the emperors had obviously become the foil of writers. In the novel "Chuhelia", the protagonist Chuherbekai seemed to have been attracted by Petersburg all the time. Although he traveled to Europe, moved to Greece, and was demoted to the Caucasus, his personal fate always revolved around Petersburg before the failure of the revolution. "Chuhelia had traveled in various ways. He had taken a carriage, a ship, a gondola, and a rickety cart of a farmer. He travelled from Petersburg to Berlin, Weimar, London, Marseille, Paris and Nice, and then returned to Petersburg. He traveled from Petersburg to Usviyat, Vitebsk, Olsa, Minsk, Slonim, Wengrove, Livo, Warsaw, and then returned to Petersburg." [1] For Chuherbekiah, Petersburg was both the starting point and the end point of the journey. For the December party, Petersburg was the starting point and the end point of the revolution. What's more, the Imperial Village in the suburb of Petersburg was the starting point of everything, and also the cradle of the new literature and culture in the city. Different from the other two novels' exploration of the literary side of the city, Chuhelia emphasized the political significance of Petersburg. The "literary luncheon" in the Petersburg scene of

"The Death of Vazel Mukhtar" was another highlight moment for the protagonist in addition to the award. "This luncheon had become an important event that must be written by those memoirs writers in the future." [6] At the meeting, Gribowordorf read the fragments of his tragedy "Night of Georgia", "The tragedy was really well written", but such works could only be read in Fejay's living room at that time. It was a sentence of subjunctive mood. "This tragic and eloquent sentence could certainly break into the insignificant literary world of Petersburg. Its voice was particularly strong and sonorous." This highlighted the tragic fate of Griboyadov as a writer. At that time, none of Griboyadov's major works could be published. In the Death of Vazel Mukhtar, Petersburg was a frustrated literary city, expelling a great writer in the form of banned edition and driving him to the edge of life. In "Pushkin", the situation was almost the opposite. Although young Alexander had never been to the capital, he had already understood the literary significance of Petersburg. "The next morning, he lied on the bed and clearly imagined his life in Petersburg. He was immersed in imagination and was overwhelmed by the excitement of walking along Neva Street. He recited one of his latest poems and imagined himself in the living room of Ivan Ivanovich Dmitriev... There were many friends in Petersburg. Needless to say, it was the capital of the country. Vasili Lvovich, a native of Moscow, suddenly felt that Moscow could no longer be compared to Petersburg, and that it was out of date." [7] Even before he reached Petersburg, Pushkin felt the charm of the literary capital with the poetry that came from there. "Alexander's eyes were to burn. In Moscow he had no idea of the Petersburg poetry fever. Wine and Bachushkov's poetry stirred in his mind. As he could not remember, he asked Turgenev to repeat it, and Turgenev read it again. The candle was lit, the moon was shining, the window was open, and the air was getting cooler. The three people sat there and were shocked by the news of Petersburg. At night he woke up with his head still dizzy and his mind as clear as day. Bachushkov's poems were sound in this room." [7] Petersburg was as important to Pushkin as Pushkin was to Russian literature. It could be overemphasized. Unfortunately, Tynyanov failed to complete this masterpiece, and the novel ended abruptly in Pushkin's young age when his literary life in Petersburg had just begun.

From the perspective of the main characters in Tynyanov's historical novels, he seemed to focus

more on those who could be remembered in history, whether politicians or writers, but this did not mean that there was no public or "marginal figures" in his historical novels. Based on the analysis of literature and text sources in his historical novels by researchers, it could be seen that Tynyanov not only processed historical literature and text sources, but also explored new text meaning generation mechanisms through semantics and other means. Some researchers believed that the concept of "fluctuating meaning" put forward by Tynyanov in "The Language of Poetry" had become a way of portraying characters in his novels. Taking the novel "Poruchik Kizhe" as an example, the nonexistent Kizhe obtained everything that physical entity human beings couldn't obtain through signs, while Sinuhayev lost the basis of existence due to pure language errors. When imagining the latter, Tynyanov also linked the "posthumous" Sinuhayev with the image of the vagrant in the city. As he was regarded as air in the army, Sinuhayev began to wander in Petersburg in confusion: "He walked along the streets of Petersburg all night without thinking about the place to go. Early in the morning, he was tired, sat at the door of a family and took a nap for a few minutes, then suddenly jumped up and walked away without looking back. Soon he came to the city border, and the sleepy clerk leaned against the road block to record his name. He never returned to the barracks." [1] Unlike Baudelaire's "wanderers", Tish's wanderers were not detectives with insatiable desires, but they were all strangers wandering among the crowd, and observers gazing at the city from a certain distance. Another image of a wanderer was Yakov, the six fingered "freak" in "Wax Doll". When he escaped from the treasure house, he first wandered around the city, and "went to the Bashkir and went to the land of having no one" with another marginal "thief". [1] Tynyanov not only made up the image of a marginal vagrant, but also brought the real marginal man in literary history to the center through academic research and novel creation. The attention to the marginal people also coincided with Tynyanov's view of literary history. He emphasized the dynamic view of literature, paid attention to the details in literature, and extended this research perspective to historical writing and urban writing.

4. URBAN WRITING TECHNIQUES

The stylistic features of historical novels provided Tynyanov with a writer's perspective similar to double exposure. From the time dimension, Tynyanov's writings on Petersburg

often had a distinctive retroactive color. "For historians, it would be very useful to look at a work of art from the perspective of the Third Age, which was neither his time nor the original author's time, or to look at the historical interpretation and criticism of this work as a way to explore its full significance. That was the perspective of 'perspectivism'." [8] When studying Tynyanov's historical novels, researchers should not forget that Tynyanov was a literary theorist, and his literary creation was a bold experiment of his literary theory of the formalist school. Ginzberg pointed out when talking about Tynyanov's academic research that "it must be inseparable from historical thinking when understanding works of art, which was one of Tynyanov's most important academic views." [9] When constructing the space of the novel, the author's application of "perspective" of historicism could be seen everywhere. For example, the previous analysis of Tynyanov's writing on the uprising square in his novel "Chuhelia" superimposed the space of the two historical periods of 1825 and 1917. It was not new to unfold the plot from a retrospective perspective in historical novels. When this perspective was applied to urban writing, it would increase the time and space connection between the author's era and the era he wrote, and also add imagination depth to the physical space of Petersburg.

In addition to the obvious perspective, Tynyanov also used the cinematic method to write the city. There was a passage about Petersburg in "Wax Doll":

Two winds met on the Neva River (the north wind from the Swedes and the southwest wind from the wet places). When these two winds met, they formed the third wind, namely, the west wind from Finland.

The north wind was blowing, and the southwest wind was blowing obliquely with the force of breaking everything. But when the west wind of Finland was formed, it could sweep everything. The wind whirled along the Neva River, swept a small area, blew the white beard up, and then stood up straight, sweeping the earth.

At this time, two young wolves left the wolves in the forest behind Peter Island and ran along the tributary of the Neva River. They crossed the Neva River, stood for a while, and looked around. Then, they ran to Vassili Island and stopped again along the straight road. They saw a shack and a wooden fence. A man was curled up and asleep in the shack. They rounded the wooden fence and ran down the

narrow path. After passing through two rooms, you could go down to the Neva River from the side of the house in Myitschkov.

They came down from the bank carefully. There were stones piled up at random everywhere. Some of the stones were covered with thin snow, and some of them were exposed. The two wolves gently trod their paws on the stone and ran to the sparse forest in the distance.

The two wolves ran to the bank and passed through the Summer Garden to reach the Yelika section of Dafortanka River. They passed through the wide and profound Neva Avenue, which was paved with wooden boards and led to Novgorod. They crossed the mounds on the marsh and disappeared into the woods by the Fontanka River.[1]

This passage appeared in the story when Peter the Great was dying. Were the two stray wolves dreamed by Peter who was bedridden? Or was it just the author's new perspective? With the eyes of the wolf and the running path, each paragraph was a complete shot, and the connected pictures were very dynamic. Readers could travel in the cold wind to the new city that Peter built but was far from completed. Petersburg, surrounded by the sea and marsh, was a "city on the horizon" surrounded by cold wind and wolves. The shacks, adobe houses and log cabins were becoming increasingly small and fragile in the rough natural environment. The westerly wind from Finland sweeping the Neva River endowed the natural environment of this city with the cosmic characteristics of openness, grandeur and desolation.

The theme of "Petersburg Text" had been repeated many times in Tynyanov's historical novels, and this article only gave a few examples. Some scholars said that "Wax Doll" was a "novel written beside Pushkin's Bronze Knight"[10]. After the novel was published, critics constantly compared it with the "Bronze Knight". Eihenbaum was the first person to associate the "Wax Doll" with the "Bronze Knight". In his 1940, in "The Creation of Tynyanov", he wrote: "considering the unique conception of the wax doll, it seemed that you could feel the presence of thinking and art in Pushkin's Bronze Knight." [11] After that, A Belinkov was more convinced of the relationship between the two texts: "Tynyanov fought against Pushkin's bronze knight with his wax knight... Peter of Rastrelli and Peter of Farikonet were in contrast. This was a dispute between two materials, two monuments and two historical values, and it was

also a two point of view on the permanence and disappearance of deeds." [12] There was no doubt that "Bronze Knight" was the subtext of "Wax Doll". Both of them were related to the theme of "the vivid statue of Peter the Great". The names of the two works contained two different materials — bronze and wax, showing binary opposition. Jakobson also pointed out in his classic work on statue mythology that two titles: "one was inanimate and static material; the other was a living creature in motion" [13]. The theme of "flood" was related to Paul I in "Poruchik Kizhe". Paul I was likened by the author to a swimmer in a print about the world flood. At the same time, the flood represented a force that was not tamed. "He (Paul I - the author's note) was not afraid of those suspicious happy ministers and suspicious gloomy generals. He was not afraid of any of the 50 million civilians, who were scattered on the small mounds, marshes, deserts or fields in his empire. He could not imagine them. He was not afraid of them, and they were caught one by one. Although all these things came together to be an ocean, he would drown in it." The flood here had changed from the force of nature to the metaphor of civilian power.

5. CONCLUSION

When people talk about Petersburg's writing in Tynyanov's historical novels, it's talking about his writing of history itself. Urban space is the space where history unfolds, and people in cities are the carriers of history. Tynyanov not only inherited the writing tradition of this topic in Russian literature since Pushkin, but also added his own understanding of the times to this topic, connecting urban writing with modernity issues such as revolution and imperial consciousness. "I love those rough and unfinished things. I respect those unsuccessful and ineffective losers and stammers, and should express them clearly. I love people from other provinces. History crawls awkwardly on them, so these people are in a sharp turn. There are some quiet riots hidden in the box for a hundred years or two. At the time of destruction, collapse and change, people found the box and opened the lid." [14] Tynyanov explained his writing mission in the article "How We Write". When people peel away the texts that are covered by various techniques, they can find that there is just a vivid expression of this mission in Petersburg's writing.

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