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Narrative Mode as a Thematic Problem in Remizov

Remizov's works are usually interpreted from one of two critical perspectives: they are discussed within the framework of mimetic fiction or they are subjected to a strictly stylistic analysis. The shortcoming of the first approach is its disregard of certain stylistic and compositional peculiarities that may be thematic. The second, more strictly linguistic approach can be faulted for the opposite reason, since critics of Remizov's language have often avoided drawing conclusions about the thematic or aesthetic significance of the phenomena they examine. This paper attempts to combine the aims of the mimetic and stylistic approaches by considering the semantic value of literary techniques per se.

The primary focus will be on Remizov's use of narrative mode in several of his early novels.¹ Narrative mode itself will be defined as a function of a *narrating* text (roughly, the reporting text of the narrator), and a *narrated* text (the reported text of the characters).² The present study describes how Remizov manipulates a two-text system in his pre-Revolutionary prose fiction. It will show that his fiction replaces referential coherence with an emotional unity and a marked, conscious aestheticism. These features are manifested on the level of narrative mode in part because clear-cut distinctions between the narrating and narrated texts are blurred. Part One of the paper

deals with types of narrative mode and Remizov's work is discussed here in general terms. Part Two is a close examination of passages from the novels. It ends with suggestions for an inclusive interpretation of these works.

I.

The complex relationship between narrating and narrated texts in Remizov's prose is more easily understood if one first looks at distinctions made between them in mimetic fiction, which consistently assigns certain primary functions and features to one or the other form of text.³ In *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature* Lubomir Dolezhel writes that the narrating text has a representational function and a controlling function. The narrating text is representational insofar as it is "the verbal medium of narrated events."⁴ While fulfilling its representational function—that is, as it controls the flow of the narration and projects the illusion of a 'real world'—the narrating discourse necessarily interprets, as well, although in objective narration the narrator's interpretive aspects are hidden. With regard to the controlling function of the narrating text, Dolezhel finds that it manifests itself in the "incorporation of the narrated text into the framework of the narrating text" by means of devices such as introductory phrases, specification of the intonation, tone of the characters' speeches, and so on. Dolezhel notes that "no such reference to the narrator's discourse [the narrating text] can be found in the characters' discourse."⁵ Characters, as *dramatis personae*, possess an action function that the narrator shares only in first-person narratives. Like the narrator, characters also interpret; however, character interpretation is more direct, subjective, and limited, reflecting the characters' internal and subjective point of view with regard to the narrated situation.⁶ The narrator's language and other stylistic features of the narrating text approach literary norms—for example, the presumed language of the author himself—and are more denotative than character language, which is generally more conversational (individualizing), emotive, and connotative.⁷

In other words, in mimetic fiction one finds a relatively clear-cut distinction between the "objective" aspects of the text—those that give the narrator's viewpoint—and its "subjective" aspects—which concern the viewpoint(s) of the characters. The reader expects the former to be reliable in their presentation and interpretation of character and event, while he realizes that the characters bring a more limited understanding to their utterances and may be misleading or incomplete in what they say or think. The objective narrator's methods of presentation and arrangement are not meant to draw the reader's attention, and the reader is not usually conscious of a narrator manipulating the text. The relationship between the two forms of text in objective fiction provides a basis for the

representational, mimetic qualities that are a hallmark of such works: the reader's attention is unambiguously oriented toward those narrated events and characters that are the objects of the narrating text discourse.⁸ Such clear-cut distinctions between subject (an external or reliable point of view—the narrating text) and object (an internal or unreliable point of view—the narrated text) imply that the world as object may be comprehended and represented by a subject.

In his prose Remizov rejects both the narrative system of objective fiction and the world view inherent in it. The features and functions that distinguish the two texts in mimetic works are mixed in Remizov's fiction, with the result that interpretive and linguistic systems themselves become objects of the narrator's message to the reader. This dual focus on narrated event and on the narrating discourse itself interferes with the ability of Remizov's narratives to convey a message wholly "about" something or someone, to transmit a denotative statement in an unobtrusive manner. To the degree that the narrating discourse becomes its own object, the narrating text control of the narrated text is weakened.

Remizov's play on relationships between the narrating and narrated texts may be described in terms of three types of third-person discourse⁹—objective, rhetorical, and subjective—discussed by Dolezhel in an article on point of view of fiction.¹⁰ Each of these discourse types involves a play on linguistic and interpretive systems. Objective discourse is the least ambiguous type, since both the language and the point of view clearly issue from the narrating text. It should, however, be noted that Remizov's narrator often utilizes a conversational style. In rhetorical discourse or "narrator's rhetoric," Remizov allows his narrator to express a *more* emotional and eloquent response to the narrated situation than the characters themselves. The elaborate, highly connotative language of the narrator in these instances is clearly not character language, since only the speech of Remizov's narrator is marked by the extensive use of metaphor and folk and religious imagery. At the same time, when the narrating discourse is couched in narrator's rhetoric, it does adopt the internal point of view and, in general, the whole interpretive system of the character text. The most problematic discourse type is that which Dolezhel terms the "subjective *Er*-form,"¹¹ and which he subsequently calls "the most conspicuous device of modern narrative text."¹² As in rhetorical discourse, the narrator and the characters share a common interpretive system, so that both seem to occupy a stance internal to the narrated event. But in subjective discourse the narrator also adopts character language. This discourse type is based on an extensive use of quasi-direct discourse, a form that is half narration and half reported speech and thus lies midway between the poles of objective *Er*-narration and direct discourse. Quasi-direct discourse has been referred to in various languages as "represented discourse," "reported monologue," "Erlebte rede," "le style indirect libre,"

and “nesobstvenno-priamaia rech’.” As Dorrit Cohn has written, quasi-direct discourse occurs when “the character’s consciousness is rendered in an idiom” that preserves the original stylistic peculiarities of that consciousness, and yet “is presented in the third person and in the customary epic tense of narration, the preterite.”¹³ In other words, one often finds it impossible to determine which text is dominant in the quasi-direct utterance, since third-person and past tense remain as signs of the narrating text, while the characters’ idiom is utilized. Such ambiguity is an inherent feature of quasi-direct discourse, which represents the intersection of the lexical and value systems of the narrating and the narrated texts.¹⁴

Any one of these discourse types, with their play on linguistic and interpretive systems, will complicate a text. The fact that they exercise a reciprocal effect on one another, that one may be subtly, almost imperceptibly, transformed into another, renders Remizov’s prose all the more complex. In fact, in any actual context the boundaries between these discourse types are very often fluid and ambiguous.

II

In the following pages passages from the novels are analyzed. Whenever possible, longer passages exhibiting more than one of the features under examination have been selected. This approach lends the discussion a certain economy, but it does not imply the paucity of any of the techniques examined. The first example is the initial passage from *The Clock*. Sentences have been numbered for ease of reference.¹⁵

[1] Kostya Klochkov is the boy from the Klochkov clock shop. [2] Kostya had just left to wind up the clock on the Cathedral bell-tower—one evening a week Kostya winds the clock on the Cathedral bell-tower, and every evening he checks it.

[3] “Kostya, why is your nose crooked?” was borne along, as by the wind, and struck Kostya in the ear.

[4] Kostya bit his long, doleful lip from rage and began trembling: really and truly, he did have a crooked nose.

[5] And however much Kostya drew himself in, however much he hid himself, it thrust itself at everyone’s eyes—his hood didn’t help, the wind would blow his hood off.

[6] And passers-by didn’t miss a chance to bully and mock the deformed boy.

[7] Well, that’s what passers-by are like. [8] Well, that’s what Kostya is like.

[9] Kostya was making his way through the crowded streets of the flea market toward the Cathedral, to the Cathedral bell-tower to wind up the clock (p. 15).

Narrative flow is disrupted in this passage as the description of a single, specific action rapidly develops into more general comments about the character and the represented reality as a whole. As the narrator’s distance from the immediate narrated event changes, the reader becomes

aware of the narrative process itself. For example, the objective description of the first part of sentence [4] gives way, in the second part, to an emotional insistence on the aptness of the character’s response (“really and truly,” [vpravdu]). Here one finds a case of quasi-direct discourse, since it is impossible to determine whether the narrating or the narrated text is the source of the expression. The specific detail of the hood in sentence [5], for which the reader has not been prepared, contrasts with the generality of the observations in [7] and [8]. Even within the latter sentences one finds a tension, since the kind of omniscience that allows the conventional objective narrator to offer such generalizations is qualified here by this narrator’s use of the conversational particle, “Well” (*uzh*). Out of context, sentence [9] could be considered a simple descriptive statement. However, the near repetition between this sentence and sentence [2] tends to weaken the narrator’s ability to denote something insofar as the repetition draws the reader’s attention to his representational function per se. One feels the narrator is himself aware that he has strayed from the immediate task of describing Kostya’s progress toward the Cathedral bell-tower, and senses the need to reestablish the narrated situation. Indeed, this self-conscious attempt to unify the passage makes the reader even more aware of its lack of coherence.

The near repetition between sentences [7] and [8] also serves to emphasize the narrator’s representational *function*, and not the object of the description, but for another reason. Here similarity underscores the schematic treatment of social and psychological elements that are accorded much more narrative attention in conventional mimetic fiction. When, as in this case, repetition is substituted for a full elaboration of the represented reality, not only is the emotional impact of the repeated words, phrases or passages strengthened, but also the presence of the narrator as a controlling force is emphasized.

As has been pointed out, the narrator uses conversational words and expressions several times in the passage and to this extent departs from the norms for objective third-person narration. However, here these words and expressions are not borrowed from the narrated text—they do not originate in the mind of the character. Rather, this conversational style belongs to Remizov’s narrator himself.¹⁶ Thus, throughout this passage, the narrating text draws attention to itself in a number of ways with little or no borrowing of functions or of features from the narrated text.

One of the best known passages from Remizov’s pre-Revolutionary fiction is found in the first chapter of *Sisters in the Cross*, where the narrator describes the hero’s transition from a state of joy and innocence to the understanding that life is full of sorrow. The potential of this passage to denote a specific referent, namely, the hero’s particular situation and his response to it, is very strong. But Remizov reduces the emphasis on the narrated event by increasing the aesthetic palpability of the narrating

discourse (that is, by emphasizing speech event aspects of the utterances). In this case, he achieves his goal through the use of repetition. A series of repeated statements, each of which serves to summarize the preceding description of the character's thoughts, has the effect of emphasizing the narrator's descriptive function. This pattern of repetition appears as follows:

So, in this way, something struck Marakulin then and for the first time clearly dawned on him and plainly said: *man is a board to man* (pp. 18-19).

So, in this way, something struck Marakulin then and plainly said: *endure* (p.20).

So, in this way, something struck Marakulin then and plainly said: *forget* (p.21).

So, in this way, something struck Marakulin then and plainly said: *don't think* (p. 22).

As the reader begins to anticipate the repetition, the passage as a whole acquires a rhythmic quality which vies with its denotative aspects as an object of reader attention. At the same time, repetition of this type does not detract from the intensely emotional intonations of the passage. Rather, the character's more realistic emotion, directed toward the narrated event, is refracted into the narrating text where it receives a more formal and abstract expression.

Instances of narrator's rhetoric, the discourse type in which the narrating text adopts the subjective views and interpretive system of the narrated text, while utilizing linguistic features that are clearly distinct from character speech, are plentiful in all of Remizov's novels. Again, the opening pages of *The Clock* provide a striking example. The narrator's objective description of the harassment Kostya endures as he makes his way to the Cathedral bell-tower is suddenly interrupted as he shifts into narrator's rhetoric:

When that kind of loathsome vermin, that kind of leech sticks to a person, watch out!—it will show no mercy, will torment, suck out his whole heart (p. 17).

In addition to the narrator's direct address to the reader, "watch out!" (*beregis'!*), the origin of the utterance within the narrating text is also clear from the use of metaphor—Kostya's nose is first compared to a vermin (*gadina*) and then to a leech (*p'javka*).

Narrator's rhetoric, though with a different coloration, also appears at the end of Chapter One of *Sisters in the Cross*. The passage begins with a relatively straightforward description of Marakulin's decision to continue living in spite of all that he has come to understand about life:

He did not fear people; they did not seem frightening to him. And it became somehow unimportant to him whether or not he was a thief. And he feared no misfortune whatsoever. And if, the thought came to him, misfortunes a thousand times worse should befall him, he was ready for everything, he would agree to everything, he

would accept everything and would endure through everything, and would live in any imaginable shame and in any imaginable degradation, seeing everything, hearing everything, feeling everything, and for what, he didn't know himself, only he would live (p. 29).

Only the final lines of this passage, after the phrase, "And if, the thought came to him" seem ambiguous in terms of the text to which they belong, and should probably be considered quasi-direct discourse.

Beginning with the next paragraph, the narrator starts to elaborate on the situation being described:

Was it in defiance of misfortune—that *One-Eyed Evil*, because for that one-eye where men sorrow and weep, there it feasts; it has harried forth its misfortune, loosed it, hungry, to roam the earth, and, one-eyed, looks down from beyond the clouds in the starry vault, squinting with its teary eye at how the earth is embroiled in sorrow, in anguish, in poverty, in sadness, in grief, in malice and hatred and meows like Murka [a cat whose death Marakulin witnesses—JB], and, perhaps, endures until the appointed hour . . . no, it is feasting its eyes: *As I find you, so shall I judge you! Or to spite Sorrow-Misfortune, emaciated, thin, squeezed out, belted up with bast, all entangled in bast, dishevelled like old man Gvozdev [Marakulin's neighbor—JB], to spite its mockeries, to spite its tears, which are feigned, when, having been pushed into the pit, it cries forth: this is a man! . . . Or would he just live, and not in defiance and not to spite and not from an understanding and not thanks to any spiritual attribute of his, but just so—for no reason, as for no reason before a holiday he would copy out the report for the director, days and nights on end stubbornly drawing out letter after letter, stringing the letters, like beads. Was this it?*

So, in this way, something struck Marakulin then and plainly said *for no reason—for no reason, but he will live—only to see, only to hear, only to feel* (pp. 29-30).¹⁷

One finds in this passage all three types of discourse, although narrator's rhetoric dominates the first long paragraph. In fact, the narrator's use of such elaborate language and imagery temporarily overwhelms the specific impulse for his discourse, i.e., Marakulin's decision to continue living. While the narrating discourse often draws from folk and religious literature, e.g., "One-Eyed Evil" (*Likho Odnoglazoe*), "As I find you, so shall I judge you!" (*V chem zastanu, suzhu tebia!*), it has also made use of conversational speech, e.g., "Was this it?" (*Tak, chto li?*). Moreover, the narrator may be very abstract one moment, e.g., "One-Eyed Evil," and very specific the next, e.g., "meows like Murka," "like old man Gvozdev." Thus, the language and imagery employed here make the passage as a whole self-reflexive. The narrating discourse itself draws almost all the reader's attention and so fails to project any coherent represented reality. However, if Marakulin's immediate situation—the ostensible object of the narrating text—is undoubtedly blurred, it is also made more intense by the wide-ranging eloquence of the narrating discourse. In this paragraph Remizov combines aesthetic density with an intense, but peculiarly abstract emotion, so that denotative coherence is replaced by an aesthetic

and emotional unity that is the result of his emphasis on speech event. The narrator's claim not to understand why Marakulin chooses to live, his adoption of a point of view internal to the narrated event, both lends a certain rationale to his emotional search for an explanation of Marakulin's decision and forms a striking contrast to his linguistic virtuosity.

In the last paragraph narrator's rhetoric slides into the ambiguity of the quasi-direct utterance in the phrase, "*for no reason*—for no reason, but he will live," and then suddenly—insofar as the emphasis seems to reproduce character intonations—into a reported internal monologue that seems to belong unambiguously to the character, i.e., "*only to see, only to hear, only to feel*" (tol'ko videt', tol'ko slyshat', tol'ko chuvstvovat'). At the same time, because the last paragraph duplicates the pattern used previously in the novel (pp. 18-22), a sense of the narrator as an organizing force is maintained.

In the preceding examples the narrator assumes a subjective point of view, which often includes an emotional response to the narrated event, along with narrator's rhetoric. In these cases the narrator's intense involvement helps draw the reader's attention to the narrating discourse itself. However, the narrating discourse may also draw attention to itself when the object of the narration is not treated with emotional intensity. One such instance occurs in the first pages of *The Fifth Pestilence*, where stylistic features in the narrating text are almost identical to those in the narrated text. That is, the narrator uses the same earthy and colorful language as do the townspeople whom he describes and whose speech he reports. The narrator's extremely colloquial style is established in the first paragraphs of the novel:

Anyone can live in Studenets, so long as he looks out for his money.

Bobrov is no novice in Studenets; for nigh on to twenty years Bobrov has been serving as the investigator. Twenty years isn't one year, you can get used to anything in that amount of time, but even so, of all the Studenets inhabitants it's hard to find even one, why the very least important, why, some Pashka—the *Old Man*, once a page and now the local vagrant, about whom people always talked with such irritation—they always talked about the investigator Bobrov just as if they were sinking their teeth into him for the first time (p. 11).

The similarity of stylistic features between the two forms of text has the effect of emphasizing the narrator's representational and controlling functions per se. These functions are, in fact, highlighted in the pages under consideration partly because the narrator is overly scrupulous in observing the *forms* for reporting character speech. In addition, he introduces some twenty characters in the first two pages of the work. Although he gives the names, nicknames, and professions of these characters and describes their vices and their quirks, the presentation is so fast-paced that the most attentive reader is hard-pressed to distinguish among them. In order to

maintain a minimal coherence within the narration, the narrator must frequently repeat not only a character's name and/or nickname, but his profession as well, again emphasizing his functions as a narrator. Finally, since these passages are devoted to a description of the chaotic life of the Studenets townspeople, they are not tied to a story line. Rather, they consist of a string of brief anecdotes related by the narrator. The two passages that follow illustrate the ambiguous situation that arises when the narrating text relinquishes its stylistic integrity while it continues to exercise its other functions:

Aleksandr Il'ich Antonov, the Studenets police chief, is cracked up to be tough, but he's all right.

"My master's all right, he only gets you with his *fingertips!*," Filipp the coachman would say about his master.

And the old man, the policeman Luk'yanov, quite goodheartedly and not without dignity would shake his grey bristle:

"I could take it because I fought at Shipka" (p. 11).

And who doesn't drink in Studenets! The police doctor, Toroptsov Ivan Nikanorych, is a person still not the least bit old, and during some happy little times his legs, like posts, won't bend. Petrusha Grokhotov—*The Bird of Paradise*, a veterinarian, well, whether he has three hundred or three rubles, it's all the same, he can acquire the most important thing, well and his patron is the pharmacist Adolf Frantsevich Gleykher. Petrusha, playing up to him, calls the German a luminary of erudition (p. 12).

In these passages one finds little or no distance between the interpretive and verbal systems of the two forms of text. At the same time, because representational and controlling functions are so prominent, one feels that the verbal dominant also lies with the narrating text. This is the type of quasi-direct discourse most commonly found in Remizov's works: an intersection of the two texts wherein the primary impulse lies with a narrator who has made wholesale incursions into the narrated text. The narrator's conversational language, along with his uncritical acceptance of the activities and judgments of the Studenets townspeople, imply an internal point of view on so many levels that he almost becomes a character. Occasionally one does find first-person pronouns within the narrating text, as in the following excerpts [emphasis added]:

... Bobrov is as untainted as a baby's kiss, so the police chief puts it, and Nakhabin himself covets Bobrov's canary, which chirps out *our* Russian national anthem (p. 16).

... and above everything else there resounded that choice, native swearing of *ours*, which is helpful on all occasions (p. 60).

Constantly present as a reporting and describing agent, as the medium of an extraordinary verbal exuberance, the narrator nevertheless fails to become a character. Rather, he is ultimately felt as an organizing force. These two factors account both for the liveliness and the abstraction that mark much of the narration in *The Fifth Pestilence*.

The following passage from *The Clock*, which appears immediately after the initial passage cited in this paper, is notable for Remizov's rapid shifts from one type of discourse to another, so that the relationship between the narrating and narrated texts is extremely fluid. (Again, sentences have been numbered for ease of reference):

[1] The keys to the clock were clanking in his pocket. [2] With these terrible keys he could split the most stubborn skull of any one of the passers-by who bullied him; but that accursed stamp—his nose which stuck out to one side gave him no peace. [3] Like a wound the accursed stamp was spreading out, and not *just* on his face, but somewhere in his heart, and like a heavy burden grew heavier from one day to the next, became more oppressive, bent his backbone.

[4] And he would lose heart.

[5] More than once at home in front of the mirror, Kostya would squeeze his crooked nose with his fingers. [6] He wanted to have a straight nose, a *picture-book* nose! [7] And he would squeeze it until it seemed to him that his nose had straightened itself up.

[8] But it only seemed that way to him, everything was the same as always, like before, worse—they would catch Kostya in front of the mirror, make him a laughing-stock, and often, falling into a rage, he would rush over and bite his tormentors, and then he would catch it for that. [9] And he would lose heart (pp. 15-16).

This passage contains the three types of discourse, objective, rhetorical, and subjective, that are common in Remizov's fiction. Sentences [1], [4], [5], [7], the first phrase of [8], and [9] represent relatively objective narration; however, repetition between [4] and [9] does draw the reader's attention. Although objective discourse is primarily oriented toward the narrated event or character, so that it preserves the linguistic and interpretive integrity of the narrating text, in a passage that mixes discourse types even objective discourse can draw the reader's attention. In the last half of [2] and in all of [3] Remizov uses narrator's rhetoric. This discourse type can be identified by the narrator's use of metaphoric phrases. Kostya's nose, for example, is an "accursed stamp," a "wound," and a "heavy burden." The connotations of the first image, which is reminiscent of the Biblical "mark of Cain," is especially characteristic of narrator's rhetoric in Remizov's work. Even though the narrator has adopted the character's internal and subjective point of view with regard to the narrated situation, the marked eloquence of these lines is not a form of expression accessible to the character. Thus, both the narrator's elaborate and emotional response and the narrated event itself are objects of the reader's attention. Remizov uses quasi-direct discourse in the first part of [2], in [6], and in the second phrase of [8]. The emotive expression in [2], "terrible keys," could belong either to the narrator or to the character. The expressive intonation in [6], "*picture-book* nose!" also represents the wholly ambiguous intersection of the narrating and narrated texts. In [8] the breathless phrasing, "everything was the same as always, like before, worse—," clearly carries the marks of direct character speech, so that only

the use of third-person and past tense reminds one of the narrator's presence. In these instances both the linguistic and interpretive subjectivity of the narrated text is so strongly felt, that the narrator's role as ultimate authority and guide of events is compromised. The last part of [8], from the phrase, "they would catch Kostya in front of the mirror," is more difficult than any other segment in the passage to assign to one or another discourse type. It could be considered an example of quasi-direct discourse if one finds that only the most basic features—tense and person—mark it as distinct from direct discourse, that Kostya could very well express himself and evaluate his situation in these terms. However, one might also consider it objective discourse because Remizov's narrator also uses a conversational style in objective descriptions. Thus, an expression such as, "he would catch it for that," is not unusual for the narrating text. Indeed, this conversational style is evidenced in [3], which is narrator's rhetoric, in the use of the particle, *uzh*, "and not *just* on his face."

Quasi-direct utterances represent a maximal loss of narrating text control over the narrated discourse, since both the narrator's linguistic features and his representational functions are collapsed with those of the character. Narrator's rhetoric represents a less extreme loss of textual integrity. Although the narrator adopts the internal stance of the narrated text vis-à-vis the narrated event, his control is evident in a stylistic level that cannot be confused with that of the characters. The following breakdown of this passage into discourse types helps one see how rapidly Remizov shifts the relationship between the two texts:

[1] The keys to the clock were clanking in his pocket. (OBJECTIVE DISCOURSE)

[2] With these terrible keys he could split the most stubborn skull of any one of the passers-by who bullied him; (QUASI-DIRECT DISCOURSE)

but that accursed stamp—his nose which stuck out to one side gave him no peace. [3] Like a wound the accursed stamp was spreading out, and not *just* on his face, but somewhere in his heart, and like a heavy burden grew heavier from one day to the next, became more oppressive, bent his backbone. (NARRATOR RHETORIC)

[4] And he would lose heart. (OBJECTIVE DISCOURSE)

[5] More than once at home in front of the mirror, Kostya would squeeze his crooked nose with his fingers.

[6] He wanted to have a straight nose, a *picture-book* nose! (QUASI-DIRECT DISCOURSE)

[7] And he would squeeze it until it seemed to him that his nose had straightened itself up. [8] But it only seemed that way to him, (OBJECTIVE DISCOURSE)

everything was the same as always, like before, worse— (QUASI-DIRECT DISCOURSE)

they would catch Kostya in front of the mirror, make him a laughingstock, and often, falling into a rage, he would rush over and bite his tormentors, and then he would catch it for that. (OBJECTIVE DISCOURSE)
(QUASI-DIRECT DISCOURSE)

[9] And he would lose heart. (OBJECTIVE DISCOURSE)

The assumption of subjective points of view by the narrating text often results in a context wherein various interpretations of character or event seem to be equally valid. Because the narrator only rarely imposes a point of view that is even momentarily more inclusive and objective than that of the characters, conflicting points of view may be left unresolved, or may be resolved by the narrating text only toward the end of a work. One instance of unresolved interpretation occurs between the second and third chapters of *Sisters in the Cross*. Chapter Two begins with the narrator's describing the various inhabitants of the huge Burkov house in which the hero lives. Among these people is the general's widow, Kholmogorova, whom the narrator characterizes briefly and humorously by reporting what "everyone" knows about her:¹⁸

Above the Oshurkovs and Vittenstaube is the general's widow, Kholmogorova, or the *louse*, as the general's widow was commonly called.

Everyone saw Kholmogorova . . . and they all knew very well that just the interest alone would last her until her death, and she would hang on another fifty years—strong and sound, she would outlive everyone or, in the words of the *palmist*, her end was not in sight; and it was likewise known about the general's widow that on Tuesdays she went to the bathhouse and took steam baths and in this way tempered herself, so that she wouldn't age, but would stay in the same condition; and they also knew, and God knows

how, that it was as if there were nothing whatsoever in her heart for her to repent of: she had not murdered and had not stolen and would not murder and would not steal, because she just fed herself—drank and ate—she digested and tempered herself, and finally, they knew that she would leave home in no other fashion than with her *little folding chair*, and she would take it in case she should fall, and so one could meet her with the little chair as she strolled daily along the Fontanka for exercise, and on Saturdays and Sunday, on holiday eves and on the holiday she could be met at the Zagorodnoe church and coming from the church (pp. 32—33).

There are no substantial distinctions in this passage between the narrating and the narrated texts. Even those few phrases that clearly belong to the narrator are marked by conversational intonations, for example, "Above the Oshurkovs and Vittenstaube is the general's widow, Kholmogorova, or the *louse*, as the general's widow was commonly called," or "in the words of the *palmist*, and by a limited point of view, as in the phrase, "And God knows how." An interesting instance of what appears to be unmarked direct discourse is found in the use of the third-person plural in the phrase, "and she would take [the chair] in case she [literally, 'they'] should fall" (*esli napadut*). The third-person plural was commonly used by the lower classes when speaking to or about their social superiors. One would not expect to find such a usage in a narrator's speech. Here its source is undoubtedly the narrated text. In addition to these peculiarities, the narrator's own reporting phrases are themselves quite rudimentary, suspiciously monotonous, as if he wished to efface himself, e.g., "they all knew very well that . . .," "and it was likewise known . . . that . . .," "and they also knew that . . .," "and finally, they knew that . . ."

But most importantly, the above passage provides an example of what can occur to characterization when both narrated event and speech event are highlighted. Although the passage is ostensibly devoted to characterizing Kholmogorova, the stress on linguistic and interpretive aspects has significantly reduced its denotative power. The reader confronts directly both the subjective values of the narrated text and the highly textured prose that conveys them. Since the narrator fails to establish an authoritative perspective with regard to Kholmogorova, she remains somewhat incomplete, unstable; she is in fact a caricature rather than a characterization. And as the obvious product of highly marked speech event, rather than narrated event, her character will readily lend itself to radical reinterpretation.¹⁹

The humorous presentation of Kholmogorova in Chapter Two does unexpectedly undergo a different interpretation in Chapter Three. This appears in a long segment (pp. 61-67) describing Marakulin's attempts to understand the injustices he sees in the Burkov house. These pages liberally mix objective discourse, narrator's rhetoric, quasi-direct discourse, and direct discourse (in a formally marked internal monologue). The first mention of the general's widow occurs a few lines into the passage, and consists of a brief summation of the portrayal offered in Chapter Two:

And suddenly for some reason [Marakulin] recalled the general's widow, Kholmogorova, going along so satiated and healthy, satisfied and triumphant—a louse, who need repent of nothing, who takes walks for the exercise—who with a little folding chair strolls along the Fontanka or comes back through Zagorodnoe from church (p. 61).

Quasi-direct discourse dominates these lines from the words, "she goes along so satiated . . ." Even though the narrator at first seems to set the utterance into his text (i.e., "[Marakulin] recalled . . ." [vs *pomnil . . . kak*]), the original tones of the character's thoughts and feelings are also being directly conveyed. The narrator's use of the modal expression, "for some reason" (*pochemu-to*) also weakens his authority vis-à-vis the reported speech, permitting it to slide into quasi-direct discourse.

After this brief summation of the previous description, the last part of the paragraph offers a more sombre interpretation of Kholmogorova:

... and how it's as if a musty cobweb were dragging along behind her, the kind that hangs in the corners in dark, rat-filled storerooms which are never ventilated, or that lies between the floor and the bottom of immovably heavy trunks; a cobweb drags behind her and crawls right into your mouth and chokes you, even if you jump into the Fontanka (p. 61)!

The extended metaphor in this passage signals a further shift to narrator's rhetoric. Emotional, subjective aspects of the utterance—the expressive punctuation, for example—and the themes expressed show the narrating text in full accord with the narrated text. Thus, within one short paragraph, the discourse type shifts from objective, to quasi-direct to narrator's rhetoric. Because the original characterization of Kholmogorova in Chapter Two was couched in discourse wherein speech event, rather than narrated event (denotative) aspects predominated, and because no distinctive narrating text perspective was established, the characterization has easily lent itself to reinterpretation. Indeed, after this paragraph from Chapter Three, Kholmogorova cannot be perceived as a stable character. This fluidity directly reflects formal ambiguities, such as the summation in Chapter Three of the description offered in Chapter Two, and, as a whole, the absence of the kind of authoritative narrating text that will present characters directly, dramatically. In these passages, the "action"—a lively interplay between the texts—is primarily on a verbal and aesthetic level.

Taken together, these passages finally open up the work for the reader, who may begin to make associations derived from the various interpretations of Kholmogorova. For example, in one of the best known passages from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Svidrigaylov suggests to Raskol'nikov that eternity may not be an endless expanse, as is usually imagined, but rather a "little room, something like a village bathhouse, sooty, with spiders in all the corners."²⁰ Both the earlier

mention of Kholmogorova's regular visits to the bathhouse and the idea that she is perhaps eternal will reappear later in Marakulin's internal monologue. The reader is all the more tempted to make these associations because another, and even more direct, allusion to *Crime and Punishment* occurs almost immediately after the paragraph cited above from Chapter Three. Marakulin, tormented by the very idea of Kholmogorova's "louse-like" life, reads in the paper that a doctor has been accused of poisoning just this kind of woman. Marakulin has already toyed with the idea of murdering Kholmogorova, and he calls the doctor a "benefactor of humanity" because he is riding the world of a "sisterhood of lice" (p. 62). The parallel with Raskol'nikov's murder of the moneylender, Alyona, becomes very clear.

Another allusion to Dostoevsky appears in Marakulin's formally marked internal monologue in which he considers various ways people have decided to live (pp. 63-64). Once more Marakulin recalls the general's widow, but here he decides suddenly that her easy life makes her a "chosen vessel," with a "divine right" to such an existence (p. 64). The reader is reminded of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* as Marakulin imagines a world in which a "New Zion" would be created, in which everyone would gladly cast aside old ideas of what is proper or improper, along with the old ideas of salvation, and would begin a "new louse-like life—carefree, sinless, immortal," in which "rational and good" people would eat, digest their food and temper themselves (p. 65). Marakulin begs God for even a few moments of such a life, but finally realizes that for him it is unattainable. The extensive use of literary allusion in these passages ultimately establishes a bond between the reader and the author himself that supercedes the narrating/narrated text distinction.

The emotional and intellectual intensity that marks the presentation of Marakulin through such a long section of the novel might have resulted in the creation of a realistic, coherent narrated situation had not Remizov destroyed or compromised much of the potential for mimetic illusion by using the techniques described above. However, it is the intricate interweaving of discourse types, that is, a constant shift of linguistic and interpretive systems, that provides the basis for all the other peculiarities. Not only is Remizov able to allude to Dostoevsky's works, he can also bring in a previous section of his own text (i.e., the original description of Kholmogorova from Chapter Two). To the extent that they are expressed aesthetically, Marakulin's emotional responses are deflected from the immediate narrated situation. In one sense, his inner state is more powerfully expressed because it recalls the intensity of the Dostoevskian originals. Nevertheless, as illusion gives way to allusion, Marakulin's responses are displaced from any concrete referent. The increase in textual complexity when the potential for denotative stability increases is a common feature of Remizov's work. In this way he is able to maintain the dual focus on narrated event and on the narrative discourse itself.

Kholmogorova finally does appear firmly within the control of the narrating text, but only in the novel's last chapter (Chapter Six). While wandering through the streets of Petersburg, Marakulin notices a gray-haired woman:

And when Marakulin wanted to overtake her, she suddenly bent down and in a stupid sort of way started to run, and at that very moment from a bar came shots, one after another, and help, police! And there on the sidewalk with a broken back, hunched over to the pavement, lay a lady—a healthy, strong old woman, and alongside lay a little folding chair.

"There's an immortal one for you!," thought Marakulin, having recognized the slain old woman as his unfortunate general's widow—the chosen vessel (pp. 146-147).

The brief description of an action finally lends a mimetic quality to the portrayal of the general's widow. Only in these lines, firmly under the control of the narrating text, does Kholmogorova cease to be perceived primarily as a verbal construct.

Internal monologue is common in Remizov's fiction; however, one rarely encounters an internal monologue that belongs wholly within the narrated text. With its inherent orientation toward half-conscious thought and intense emotion, internal monologue provides Remizov with the perfect context for quasi-direct discourse and narrator's rhetoric. But *dialogue* is relatively *infrequent* in Remizov's prose. Along with objective third-person narration, dialogue is problematic for writers who, like Remizov, wish to neutralize distinctions between the two forms of text. In the first place, as Voloshinov has noted, there are no syntactic forms with which to build a unity of dialogue.²¹ Moreover, as the Czech structuralist, Jiri Veltrusky, has written, dialogue, unlike monologue, "unfolds not only in time, but also in space":

Every single unit of dialogue is situated...in a specific "here and now"...This constantly changing "here and now" may be called the extralinguistic situation of the dialogue.²²

Clearly, one of the major aims of Remizov's techniques is to obscure or erase the kind of specificity dialogue serves to establish. Veltrusky goes on to describe yet another feature of dialogue that conflicts with Remizov's abstract and aesthetically oriented fiction. As he writes,

...unlike monologue, dialogue is always integrated in the extralinguistic situation. This comprises not only the material situation, that is, the set of things that surround the speakers, but also the speakers themselves, their mentality, intentions, knowledge pertinent to the dialogue, their mutual relations, the tensions between them, and so on—in short, what may be called the psychological situation.²³

Remizov's protagonists do not share such an extralinguistic or psychological situation. This kind of isolation helps to account for the paucity of

dialogue in the novel. When dialogues do occur, Remizov blunts their denotative aspects by making them inconclusive, brief, pointedly trivial, or absurd. In addition, characters will occasionally express ideas whose comprehensiveness or seriousness belies information that the narrator has given the reader about that character's knowledge of events or his understanding of himself and of other characters. Even though the narrator may maintain a formally objective reporting stance, direct discourse can still fail to project coherent ideas about characters or events, and the reader may still find it difficult or impossible to enter into any mimetic illusion.

One of Remizov's most successful absurd dialogues occurs in *The Clock*. In a scene between Kostya Klochkov and his father (pp. 33-34), Kostya displays an eloquence for which the narrator has not prepared the reader. When his father asks him if he has read the newspaper, Kostya unexpectedly responds that he is "not that kind of person":

"Animals, Daddy...lawyers' speeches, savage peoples, in general, something philosophic, that is my passion, because nature, actually, is everything...Travels, the genesis of millions of creatures of all kinds and whence they evolved and why, and what their duty and purpose are—such reading is food enough for me. My passion is not about the war, that's a passion for little children" (pp. 33-34).

Kostya's father responds to this outburst by calling his son "stupid," and then helping himself to a can of sardines. Kostya, however, continues in the semi-serious vein of his earlier remarks. He asks if there isn't a book that tells "how to live and to manage one's life" (p. 34). His father, all the while munching on sardines and letting fish oil run down his dressing gown, answers that there was such a book, but that it has sold out. He adds that the book was the "laughingstock of the world" (*kuram na smex*).²⁴ Kostya responds as follows:

"And why should I live, if I shall die, and I shall certainly die, and there is no joy to be had from life, so I am just living for nothing." Kostya threw aside his flower, went up to the table, and stared at his father. "Dad, I feel like learning to play the trumpet, but Katya's teacher says that I am weak and mustn't study the trumpet. But that's where my future lies! I'd like to master it in secret, Daddy, so that no one will know (p. 34)."

The old man doesn't answer Kostya, because at that moment he sees cow feet sticking out from his tea cup.

As in any absurd conversation, the notion that people can communicate meaningfully is discredited in Kostya's dialogue with his father. Moreover, in the first line of the speech cited above, as well as earlier in the dialogue, Kostya displays a seriousness that is out of keeping with information the narrator has given about him. Even though the narrator may maintain a formally objective reporting stance, as he does in the passages above, direct discourse may still fail to project coherent ideas

about characters or events. The reader is aware of the narrator's refusal to account for inconsistencies between the two texts and, in general, of the lack of an objective, coherent narrating text.

Both the description of actions and dialogues are forms oriented toward a dramatic "showing" and as such are at odds with the kind of textual interplay that is a basic feature of Remizov's prose. The extremely conversational style adopted by Remizov's narrator and his assumption of character text types of interpretation obviate the need for extensive recourse to dialogue. An ongoing "dialogue" between the narrating and the narrated texts resulting from a mutual borrowing of features and functions lends Remizov's prose a liveliness, however abstract and aesthetic it might be, that compensates for the absence of traditional dialogue.

Although one can describe what Remizov does technically in his prose fiction and determine the effect of these devices on his portrayal of reality, it is more difficult to decide why he strives for certain effects or to determine the thematic value of his aesthetic system. Remizov himself said that he had no message, no new ideas to propagate in his works.²⁵ However, much of his work may be read as a rejection of the notion that life can be rationally comprehended, that all the richness of human experience can be reduced to a predictable and controllable system. The kinds of textual interplay analyzed in this paper should be seen in the light of this idea. The narrating and, as a consequence, the narrated texts lack the integrity and coherence necessary to generate stable structures on the levels of plot, character and surface theme. In fact, although only one structural problem has been discussed here, the dynamism noted on the level of narrative mode occurs on the other planes of Remizov's prose as well, from the level of individual words, with their clashing social and historical origins,²⁶ to the thematic level, where one theme asserts the fated tragedy of life and another, developed simultaneously, claims that life can be lived with gratitude and humor.

With its sustained contradictions, ambiguities and surprises, Remizov's fiction challenges the reader to piece together a coherent world. But Remizov ultimately does not provide enough consistent information about character and event to allow his reader to reconstruct either a world that is internally consistent, such as a fantasy world, or a world that correlates with one's sense of external reality. Remizov emphatically avoids creating the illusion of a "real" world that can become objectified for a reader-as-subject. His image of reality is deliberately generalized, referrable to external reality only in its broad outlines. At the same time, these peculiarly unrealistic images exercise a strong appeal to the reader's emotions. The hallmark of Remizov's longer fiction as a whole is that same combination of aesthetic abstraction and emotional immediacy that has been shown to characterize his use of narrative mode. The reader, drawn to

commiserate with the characters, cannot wholly enter into any specific set of events, since he must constantly maintain his sensitivity to the intricacies of Remizov's aesthetic structures. But these aesthetic structures are themselves thematic. In essence, Remizov has substituted aesthetic complexity for the intricacies of real life, so that artistic structures become metaphors for relationships in external reality. When Remizov breaks down the dichotomy between subject and object (the narrating and the narrated texts), for example, he may be understood to urge his readers to practice in their own lives more accepting and compassionate relationships with others. The dissolution of narrating text/narrated text distinctions through an emphasis on their participation within the same aesthetic structures suggests, again analogically, that differences which divide people in the real world can be bridged through an emphasis on our common participation in the human condition.

One might protest that such relatively simple notions fail to justify the complexity of Remizov's prose. The answer to such an objection must be that difficulties in these works arise not from their ideological complexity, but from Remizov's desire that one exercise on an aesthetic level the kinds of perception he would have one exercise in life. Remizov's work cannot be understood as direct comment on the world. Rather he constructs an abstract model of reality in which the overriding theme is that of perception itself.

NOTES

1. Works cited include *The Clock (Chasy)*, 1903-1904 and *Sisters in the Cross (Krestovye sestry)*, 1910, both in Reprint (Munich: Fink, 1971) and *The Fifth Pestilence (Piataia iazva)*, 1912, also in Reprint (Letchworth, Hertfordshire: Bradda Books, 1970). Although only these works are used as examples in the present paper, the discussion is applicable to all of Remizov's novels and to much of his shorter prose fiction as well.

2. A typology of narrative discourse is found in Lubomir Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes in Czech Literature* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 3-13. In this work, Dolezhel terms the narrating text "discourse of the narrator" (DN) and the narrated text "discourse of the characters" (DC).

3. See Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, p. 6.

4. Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, p. 6.

5. Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, p. 6.

6. Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, p. 6.

7. Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, pp. 9-10. See also Carol Pearce, "Refinements on a Structural Theory of Skaz," *Proceedings: Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages*, No. 27, Part I (1976), pp. 150-153.

8. Lubomir Dolezhel, "The Typology of the Narrator: Point of View in Fiction," *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, Vol. I (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 548-549.

9. First person narratives present special problems with respect to the study of narrative mode. (See, for example, Dolezhel, "Typology of the Narrator," pp. 550-552). The play on oppositions between the narrating and narrated texts which is peculiar to third-person forms of narration is a very important factor in Remizov's narratives.

10. Dolezhel, "The Typology of the Narrator," pp. 548-549.
11. Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, pp. 8-11, 53-55.
12. Dolezhel, *Narrative Modes*, p. 11.
13. Dorrit Cohn, "Narrated Monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style," *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1966), p. 97.
14. Valentin Voloshinov writes of quasi-direct discourse that "in terms of the sense of what is said, it is the character speaking." See Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 144. Voloshinov's view does not apply to Remizov. It is not at all clear from the sense of what is said whether the narrator or the characters are the source of the remarks because Remizov's narrator very frequently adopts character values and because, even when he does not clearly borrow the characters' lexicon, his speech is marked by conversational features.
15. Page numbers following citations from the novels refer to the primary source editions cited in Footnote One.
16. It should be emphasized that no narrating persona is created in the novels. The act of narration rather than any "narrator" draws the reader's attention and becomes subject to reader interpretation.
17. In this and all passages, spaced dots indicate my ellipses, unspaced dots are Remizov's ellipses. Likewise, underlining, when not in the original, is noted as having been added.
18. See also Remizov's novel, "The Irrepressible Tambourine" (*Neuemnyi buben*), 1909, in Reprint (Munich: Fink, 1971), pp. 24-25. Interestingly, this passage precedes the description of the hero Stratilatov's birth, childhood, and youth, in which Remizov plays on the schema of the saint's life genre and thereby alludes also to Gogol's story, "The Overcoat." Similarly, in Chapter Three of *Sisters in the Cross*, the earlier passage from Chapter Two will figure in allusions to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.
19. Similarly, the character of Bobrov's wife receives a humorous elaboration in Chapter One of *The Fifth Pestilence* (p. 15), and a more serious evaluation in Chapter Two (pp. 35-36). The latter scene contains a literary allusion to the child-birth scene in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.
20. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 30-i tt.* T. VI, (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973), p. 221.
21. Voloshinov, p. 128.
22. Jiri Veltrusky, "Basic Features of Dramatic Dialogue" *Semiotics of Art*, Ed. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), p. 128.
23. Veltrusky, p. 128.
24. They are discussing the "Dove Book" (*Golubinaia kniga*), which takes its name from the symbol for the Holy Ghost. Compiled from various ancient sources, the book supposedly explained all the mysteries of the universe. It was popular among the Russian masses from Kievan times.
25. In Natal'ya Kodryanskaya's biography of the writer, *Aleksei Remizov* (Paris: 1959), she repeatedly records remarks of his to this effect. For example: "It is not necessary to teach anyone. You can't correct [people] with words" (p. 130). Also: "I am not a pedagogue, not a moralist. To teach people how to be people is a fruitless exercise" (p. 229).
26. See Andrej Kodjak, *The Language of Aleksei Remizov*, Unpublished dissertation (The University of Pennsylvania, 1963).