



An Analysis of Gogol's Art of Satire

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Abstract. Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol was a pioneer of Russian critical realist literature and an important promoter of naturalism. Together with the works of Pushkin, his works laid the foundation of Russian critical realist literature in the nineteenth century. Gogol's writing was sharp and humorous, exposing the tyranny of the Russian Tsar and the dark side of society at that time. His writing style dramatically changed Russian literature, breaking its inability to truly reflect the darker side of society and bringing a new, humor-filled expression to a new literary period. The thesis consists of two parts. The first chapter introduces the background of Gogol's upbringing and the formation of his critical realist thought, and introduces his three masterpieces of critical realism: the satirical comedy *The Chinaman*, the short story *The Coat*, and the long story *Dead Souls*, in order to serve as the basis for analyzing Gogol's satirical art. Chapter 2 analyzes Gogol's literary irony in these three works: "The Chinaman", in which "laughter" is the main character; "The Coat", in which irony is embodied by contrast and exaggeration; and "The Tearful Smile" in "Dead Souls". Gogol's literary irony is still of great significance and reference value for contemporary realist literature.

Keywords: Gogol; satirical art; masterpieces

1 Introduction

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, a towering figure in Russian literature, is renowned for his unparalleled mastery of satire and critical realism. Born in 1809 in the picturesque village of Velikyrozhentse in Ukraine, Gogol's early life was steeped in a rich cultural and religious heritage. This unique upbringing, combined with the socio-political upheavals of 19th-century Russia, profoundly influenced his literary development. Gogol's works, including masterpieces like *The Coat* and *Dead Souls*, reflect his acute awareness of societal injustices and his deft use of satirical techniques to critique the absurdities of the Russian bureaucracy and the oppressive feudal system. This paper explores the background of Gogol's upbringing, the formation of his critical realist thought, and the art of satire in his most celebrated works, offering a comprehensive understanding of his enduring legacy in the realm of critical realist literature.

2 Russian Critical Writer Gogol

2.1 Background of Gogol's Upbringing

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol was born in 1809 in a remote rural village in the town of Velikyrozhenstse, Milgrad County, Poltava Province, Ukraine, which, despite its distance from the town, possesses a very charming natural scenery, a long history and a rich cultural heritage that is breathtaking.[1]

Gogol's ancestors were from a famous family of the time, and Gogol's father was Vasily Afanasievich Gogol Yanovsky, who had a rich imagination, loved to tell jokes, and was a funny man and a good storyteller, as well as a high literary quality, often writing and directing his own dramas in Ukrainian, which he would perform in the countryside on the theater stage of his relatives' manor house, and sometimes on the stage himself. As a child, Gogol's greatest interest was to participate in these rehearsals and performances. [2]Gogol's mother, Maria Ivanovna, was a very devout believer with deep-rooted religious traditions, and Gogol's religious ideas were strongly influenced by his mother. When Gogol was ten years old, he was sent to the Poltava County Elementary School to begin his religious education. Here he was required to study thirteen subjects, including the Bible and various canons designed to develop his moral sense and values. "Questions and Answers on Doctrine", "History of Religions" and "Interpretation of the Bible" were mandatory courses for Gogol at Nerin High School. Influenced by his family environment and schooling, Gogol was raised to be a strong believer in religion.

From an early age, Gogol was imbued with traditional Russian culture and exposed to various forms of folklore, which had an extremely important influence on his later development as an outstanding literary figure.

2.2 The Formation of Gogol's Critical Realist Thought

The thirties and forties of the nineteenth century were a period of great changes in the economic and cultural development of Russia, a period of conflict and competition in society.[3] On the other hand, with the further development of capitalism, the landowners went bankrupt in large numbers, which seriously shook the foundations of feudal serfdom. Against this background, the idea of democratic revolution quietly began to develop.

The change of Gogol's thinking began in 1821. In this year, Gogol came to the high school of Nerin in Poltava province, which was on the eve of the armed uprising of the Decembrists in 1825, and the whole country was filled with the atmosphere of radical democracy. [4]The tragic defeat of the Decembrists led to a massive expansion of reactionary forces in the country, and Belousov, a progressive teacher at the Nerin Higher School, was forced to resign from his post, which brought the atmosphere of the school to a standstill. This caused quite a shock to the then sixteen-year-old Gogol.[5]

1829 the end of the year, Gogol in the state economy and public buildings department got a small civil servant's job. 1830 the end of the year, was transferred to the Ministry of fiefdom as a small scribe work. From this experience, Gogol deeply

appreciated the suffering of the common people under the authoritarian system, which greatly inspired and motivated his future literary creations.

3 The Art of Satire in Gogol's Masterpieces of Critical Realist Literature

3.1 The Art of Satire in The Coat

The Coat tells the story of Akaki Akakievich Bashmachkin, an ordinary civil official who is at the bottom of the Russian bureaucracy. Due to the cold weather, he has to get a new coat, however, as a poor official, a coat is very expensive for him. He invested all his savings in buying the coat, considered it his most honorable piece of clothing, and even considered it the honor of his life. The purchase of the coat is a small, ordinary thing, but it has extraordinary significance for Bashmachkin, which leads the reader to view the story from an unprecedented perspective. Bashmachkin is thrilled to finally own the coat. He was scheduled to attend a celebration by his leader, which came out of nowhere. He thought his life was going to change dramatically, no longer as obscure as before, and even thought he would make it big in the official world. However, on his way home, he met robbers and his jacket was snatched away, and he lost his mind. As a result, he decided to go and get an explanation. After much deliberation, he finally decided to go to the police station to report the case, but to his disappointment, the officer of the police station did not return justice to him, instead, he blamed him for not following the rules and regulations of petitioning to a higher level, which was a serious violation of the process of the governmental institutions, and therefore, his behavior was regarded as an unforgivable crime. Unable to accept this result, Bashmachkin eventually died of depression.

Gogol uses two different satirical techniques, contrast and exaggeration, in the short story "The Coat".[6]

The first is image contrast. There are many different ways of contrasting in Gogol's satire. He often contrasts the antics of minor characters with the solemn reverence of major characters as a way to highlight the despicability of the characters and the absurdity of their behavior; by contrasting the characters' appearance, personality and surroundings to better show the absurdity of the characters. In the eyes of his coworkers, Bashmachkin is a complete "other", completely out of place in their world. While his colleagues have a wonderful life after work, Bashmachkin's life consists of nothing but copying. Bashmachkin does not know, nor does he want to know, what the outside world is like; he has been reduced to nothing less than a copying machine. This contrast brings out the hollowness, monotony and tedium of Bashmachkin's life.

The second is artistic exaggeration, which polarizes the ugly and dirty aspects of social life, depicts them as impossible situations in life, and even exaggerates them to a grotesque degree to reproduce the monstrous phenomena of life, thus highlighting the most essential features of those phenomena. [7]Gogol was well versed in the art of exaggeration, and The Coat contains many elements of hilarious exaggeration, such as the description of Bashmachkin's demeanor as he was copying: "As he was copying he

saw a world of variety and delight. Pleasure flowed into his face; there were a few letters that were especially dear to him, and as soon as he wrote them he became delirious: again he laughed, again he winked, again he tugged at his lips, so that one look at his face seemed to make it possible to guess every letter traced out by his pen." When transcribing an instrument, Basmachkin gave his undivided attention to the text he was writing, regardless of the meaning or content of the text he was writing.[8] The reader originally felt pity for Basmachkin's bullying and destruction by the evil forces of the officialdom, but when Gogol depicted his exaggerated expression while he was working, the reader's mind was only left with Basmachkin's immense enjoyment of his work. Sympathy, but more hate, feel both pity and laughable, in the tsarist bureaucracy under the oppression of the "little man" distorted state of mind profoundly depicted.

In describing Bashmachkin's life, Gogol exaggerated his daily life to show that he had lost his basic ability to survive. In describing Bashmachkin's work, Gogol's exaggerated facial expressions show his great love for this mechanical work, making the reader deeply feel his misfortune and lament his incompetence.

3.2 The Art of Satire in Dead Souls

The story of the novel is simple: a very decent-looking small businessman named Kilkov arrives in N city and befriends the local government officials and socialites - the landowners. With his warmth and elegance, he earned a very high reputation in the provincial social circles. Everyone thought he was distinguished, but he ran off to investigate the number of dead but uncanceled serfs held by the local landowners. A week later, Kilchukov returned to visit Manilov, the squire he had just befriended, as expected. When Manilov learned that Kilnikov was prepared to buy the dead serfs from him at a low price, he agreed without hesitation and gave them away for free. After that, Kilchukov came to Pryushkin's estate, where he owned thousands of serfs. Pryushkin was deeply thrilled by Kilchukov's talk of discounts on the purchase of dead spirits; he had never expected the dead to be profitable. After striking a deal, he has his servants bring out moldy cookies to entertain his guests for the first time. After visiting many farms and purchasing a large number of dead souls, Kilchukov returns to the provincial capital. He was going to make a huge profit by mortgaging the dead serfs as living serfs at high prices. Kilkov's unique business methods were a special product of the serfdom society.[9] Kilkovs symbolized the special power of commercial capital because their business practices were often predatory. The process of selling dead souls exposes the greedy faces of the landowners, whose most basic purpose is to extract the maximum surplus value from the serfs.

In *Dead Souls*, Gogol still uses his usual method of contrasting irony: the contradiction between the words of the Kilgorevs and their real intentions; the contradiction between the outward behavior of the landowners, Manilov and Rostelev, and their inner thoughts. Here we are shown a world full of contradictions; the stark contrast between the landowners' positive attitudes and their boring behavior. This contrasting writing style gives the readers a glimpse of a dystopian world full of contrasts.

Gogol's satirical art in *Dead Souls* is also reflected in the following aspects:

Firstly, the white color portrayal of the characters. In *Dead Souls*, the author is never lengthy in his description of the characters; he just outlines and describes the characters in simple but precise language, and accurately expresses the form and spirit of the characters with exaggeration.[10] When describing Sobakevich's face, the author uses a fiery red hot color, like five kopeks of copper coins. It is well known that all kinds of faces exist in the world, but when people make them, they don't take much care to study them, nor do they use any delicate tools, such as files, small drills, etc., but they cut them one by one without any restraint When the eyes are dug out, they are not taken away cleanly, they are just put out in the world to give out the word: Awesome!!!! "Through the characterization of Sobakevich in the work, we can find that Gogol's language art is how superb, all the descriptions are just right outside, there is not a word redundant, not to mention the lack of a word, a few figures, will let the reader see a Sobakevich, a treacherous, realistic image of the landlord.

Gogol not only carves the characters in his works as if they were in relief, with simple ink that is, the most basic features of the characters outlined, and will be satirized implicitly in the character's dialogue and scene description, pen and pen is a carving knife, everywhere with irony, Gogol's words are the caricatures of the era, facing the reality of the nature of the irony to make people laugh to reveal the ugliness of their souls.

Secondly, rendering comedy effect to achieve the purpose of satire. In *Dead Souls*, the author tries his best to create a humorous and comical scene, which seems like a farce, but behind it, it is the effect of satire created by Gogol through laughter. When Kilchukov and Manilov enter the living room, Manilov pretends to be very modest and respectful, which makes people feel ridiculous and awkward, but he himself does not think so; Kilchukov is a smooth character image, and he is able to cope with all kinds of situations skillfully, in the reader's opinion, the two of them are like a pair of clowns with comedic humor and sarcasm, which makes people cannot help but feel sorrowful in their hearts after laughing. , one cannot help but feel sadness in one's heart.[11]

Dead Souls is a masterpiece of critical realism, in which Gogol generally uses the writing technique of "mockery". He aimed his ridicule at the greedy human nature under the authoritarian system, but sympathetically described the miserable life of many serfs under the Tsar's rule. Gogol looked into the dark side of social life and showed the ugly side of Russian social life to the fullest. Gogol's critical realism satirical works make the readers feel funny from the beginning, but gradually the heavy feeling comes out, and after laughing and ridiculing with abandon, people begin to think about the problems pointed out in the works.

4 Conclusion

Gogol is a master of satirical art. In *The Chinaman*, *The Coat* and *Dead Souls*, the storyline is skillfully transformed, the characters are vividly depicted, the satirical language is used flexibly and the profound revelation of the reality of the society makes the works become immortal. This artistic expression of the dual character of the characters allows us to appreciate the true charm of Gogol's critical realist satirical art.

Gogol's literary satire is still a worthwhile form of artistic expression in present-day realist literature.

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