
CONCLUSION

In striving to produce a coherent, readable account of Zoshchenko's short stories, commentators have often resolved their contradictions. Many critics have gone to great lengths to tidy up or explain away the fragmented form of Zoshchenko's *skaz* narratives as an encyclopaedia, a prologue or part one of an extended narrative. I hope to have shown that we can gain greater insight into Zoshchenko's short stories if we stop regarding their narrative form as an obstacle to understanding Zoshchenko's underlying purpose or world-view, but rather see that form as the irreducible embodiment of an ambivalent world-view. Zoshchenko drew on a number of genres and sources for his art, and transformed them by adding a *skaz* narrative, thereby creating an original form. This form is his supreme achievement and guarantees the stories' lasting appeal.

The problem of the relation between Zoshchenko and *skaz* is that critics tend to concentrate on analysing Zoshchenko and adopt a simplified view of *skaz*. In consequence Zoshchenko is forced to comply with a narrow view of *skaz* as par-ody. By redefining *skaz* we are better able to understand Zoshchenko. Whatever the context in which we intend to place Zoshchenko, his *skaz* narrative form is of the greatest importance. *Skaz* too reached its zenith with Zoshchenko. The tend-ency towards the fragment and the unstable status of narrative authority in *skaz* were extended to their utmost in an ideal epoch, the aftermath of a revolution, by an ideal exponent, a man racked by self-doubt. The fragmentation and con-fusion of Russian society in the 1920s created an atmosphere of unstable author-ity that is echoed by the structure of Zoshchenko's narratives. For this reason it has been necessary to combine an analysis of *skaz* with an investigation of Zoshchenko.

The analysis of *skaz* and Zoshchenko has at the same time provided us with a fascinating and instructive example of how text and author influence, and are influenced, by each other. Authors make their own meaning, but not in an original language or unprecedented forms. Form has its own philosophy, but that philosophy is not completely autonomous. It interacts with its author and with its reader: meaning is not solely a reader-text relation. Zoshchenko's views are relevant to an understanding of his work. To discount them in the pursuit of a unifying vision of him is a homogenising and impoverishing interpretation of the contradictory evidence of his work.

The term *skaz* was initially introduced by the Formalists to further the argument that meaning is textual and not authorial. Ultimately then, it is an irony (of fate) that I have come to believe, and have attempted to demonstrate, that authorial intentions, insofar as we can know them, are relevant to our understanding of works of fiction. The continued relevance of *skaz* as a term of literary criticism can only be ensured by insisting on Bakhtin's distinction between parodic and stylised *skaz*: a distinction that can only be maintained by reference to authorial intention. I do not see the resurrection of the author as an attempt to turn the clock back, but rather as an effort to establish balance in the debate as to what determines a text's meaning.

Moreover, I hope that in future *skaz* will be more consistently related to other modes of quotation such as parody, irony, stylisation and pastiche. Doing so will throw more light on *skaz* and will, I suggest, further illuminate such practices. Seen in this light, *skaz* becomes highly relevant to influential present-day intellectual currents, such as the thought of Derrida. The nature of this book, its combination of an examination of the *skaz* narrative technique with a study of its use by a given writer, has meant that I have not been able to explore such connections. This structure has also meant me touching upon or raising certain issues regarding the 1920s and Zoshchenko without being able to investigate them in full. These questions include the relation of Zoshchenko's work to that of other satirical writers of his time and a comparison of his documentary practices with those of the left-art movement. However, the study of these and all matters relating to Zoshchenko is at present hampered by the financial obstacles preventing the publication of an adequate collected edition of his works. Consequently this work and any research on Zoshchenko raises questions of textology that may have to wait for copyright to expire on Zoshchenko's works, in 2012, before they can be treated systematically. I hope that this work has enhanced the reader's appreciation of Zoshchenko sufficiently to have encouraged him or her to address these issues.

Finally, although it has been my intention in this work to stress the fragmented and contradictory nature of Zoshchenko's art, I hope to have avoided reproducing the fragmentary and contradictory nature of my subject matter. Whether or not I have successfully consummated this authorial intention is for the reader to judge.
