

Research Article

Dual Narrative Progression and Metaphors for Noise in Julian Barnes's *The Noise of Time*

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Abstract

In *The Noise of Time*, Julian Barnes once again turns to the writing of biography after *Arthur & George* (2005), and this time he experiments by tactfully setting dual narrative progression which is the combination of the overt plot and the covert progression. Also, the word “noise” in the title *The Noise of Time* has double metaphorical meanings, which correspond to the theme and characterization in the dual narrative progression. So, the present article aims to probe into the relationship between the dual narrative progression and the respective metaphorical connotation of the word “noise” in the title. In the overt plot centering on Shostakovich’s three Conversations with Power, for the sake of his friends and associates, in the struggle between life and death, the protagonist Shostakovich is depicted as a coward disciplined by the multiple mechanisms of “incarceration”, such as arrest, being taken to the concentration camps, forbidding his music, and banning his opera performed, in the service of the former Soviet government; and the word “noise” is a metaphor for the totalitarian society of the former Soviet Union which influences Shostakovich’s musical composition. However, in the covert progression, by mainly adopting indirect satire (irony), verbal defence, perfunctory behaviors and physical absence, the author characterizes the composer Shostakovich as a hero who follows the inner voice of his ego, and expresses his ridicule, resistance and intransigence in different ways, thus becoming an outsider or a stranger rebelling against the absurdity of the totalitarian society, and the metaphor for “noise” refers to the composer Shostakovich himself who strives to compose an artistic noise that is not compatible with the totalitarian society. Therefore, the overt plot and the covert progression form a striking contrast, and by so doing, Barnes creates an artistic paradoxical image of both a coward and a hero.

Keywords

Julian Barnes, *The Noise of Time*, Dual Narrative Progression, Noise, Metaphor, Stranger

1. Introduction

Julian Barnes (1946-), the chameleon of British letters, is “perhaps the most versatile and idiosyncratic author of an astoundingly talented generations of writers” [1]. According to Peter Childs, each of Julian Barnes’s books “sets its own parameters and challenges for the writer and the reader”, which makes many reviewers admire and love him [2]. In

2011, he was awarded the Man Booker Prize with *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) and the David Cohen Prize for Literature. “His daring, his challenge to himself to make every book a new departure not only for Julian Barnes but for the whole history of the novel, makes each of his books an event” [3]. Obviously, each of his books is innovative and adventurous in

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the literary history. After the publication of *Arthur & George* in 2005, in *The Noise of Time* (2016), the British postmodernist master Julian Barnes again turns to the writing of biography by combining fact and fiction, and represents the life of Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich. As we all know, as one of the greatest composers in the 20th century, Shostakovich was awarded People's Artist of the USSR, the State Medal of the Soviet Union, the State Prize of the Russian Socialist Federation, the Sibelius Prize and the International Peace Prize; besides, he was also awarded honorary titles by many universities and academies around the world. However, at the very beginning of the novel, Shostakovich is depicted as a man in his early thirties who waits by the lift of a Leningrad apartment block with a little suitcase. Afraid of being "dragged from the apartment in his pyjamas" by the Authority, he packs his case and spends "those inevitably sleepless hours out on the landing by the lift" [4]. Confronted with Power, this well-known composer shows his anxiety, restlessness and cowardice like the ordinary masses, and even yields to Power. These constitute the overt plot of the novel. But, based on further close reading, it is found that Barnes revolutionizes the single-plot narrative mode of traditional novels by setting a hidden narrative current behind the overt plot. This undercurrent is the covert progression of the novel. In the covert progression, Barnes focuses on Shostakovich's rebelling against Power and presents him as a hero. As to the significance of covert progression, the famous Chinese scholar Professor Dan Shen points out, "If we miss the covert progression, we may only get a partial (in the supplementary case) or distorted (in the subversive case) picture of the thematics, the characters, and the narrative's aesthetic value" [5]. Thus, in order to reveal a panoramic picture of the thematics, characters, and narrative aesthetic value, the present study will probe into the covert progression in the novel *The Noise of Time*.

So far, in terms of *The Noise of Time*, critics and scholars mainly research into it from such perspectives as characters, themes, the author and the postmodernist narrative strategies, but they haven't paid attention to the dual narrative progression, which refers to the combination of the overt plot and the covert progression, and the dual metaphorical connotations of the word "noise" in the title which metaphorically contains the main ideas. Therefore, via analyzing the dual narrative progression and the different cultural metaphorical meaning of noise, the present research will dig deep into the complex relationship between the two, so as to enrich the image of the protagonist Shostakovich and the thematic meaning, and thus elaborate the author's humanistic thoughts.

2. Overt Plot and Self-Alienating Totalitarian Society

In *Metaphors We Live By* (2003), George Lakoff and Mark

Johnsen state, the essence of metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" [6]. Then, what does Barnes want readers to experience and understand by the metaphor of noise in the overt plot? To solve this problem, the paper will focus on Shostakovich's three Conversations with Power, analyze the metaphorical connotation of noise in the overt plot in details, and reveal the relationship between overt plot and the metaphor for noise as well as their influence on the characterization of Shostakovich and the construction of thematic meaning.

In the spring of 1937, Shostakovich had his "First Conversation with Power" [4]. Before the Conversation, he had heard that many had disappeared after their conversations with power. Thus, when Power Zakrevsky asked about "his work, how his professional affairs were proceeding, what he intended to compose next", he replied, "almost as a reflex", "he was preparing a symphony on the subject of Lenin - which might conceivably have been the case" [4]. Confronted with Power, he chooses to give up his artistic formalism and succumbs to the realism inflicted by Power to serve for the Soviet government. He was rendered "docile and useful" by the discipline of Power for the fear that he might also be forced to disappear from the public together with his mother, his wife Nita and his daughter Galya [7]. Afterwards, he began his vigils by the lift, wanting to spare those he loved the spectacle of his arrest. In the meanwhile, many of his friends and associates began to disappear: some were taken to the concentration camps, and others were executed. According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault in *Discipline & Punish* (1995), "arrest" and "being taken to the concentration camps" are different prison forms, and both of them belong to the "innumerable mechanisms of discipline" [7]. By such "multiple mechanisms of 'incarceration'", Power successfully makes Shostakovich become the "disciplinary individual", a prisoner who loses his subjectivity and falls prey to Power [7]. Under the high pressure of the totalitarian politics, he made further concessions to Power in order to survive. In the summer of 1937, he "permitted those with asses' ears to hear" what they wanted to hear in the Fifth Symphony, as "on such things might a life - might several lives - turn" [4]. That means, if he failed to let Power hear what Power wanted to hear in the symphony, some of his friends and associates might lose their lives. Here, without doubt, the extreme punishment of losing lives/death also constitutes the mechanism of discipline, which disciplined Shostakovich again in the service of the Soviet government. Besides, according to Sigmund Freud's theory of id, ego and superego, it is not hard to see that, in the first Conversation with Power, his concerns for his friends and associates and his fidelity to music constitute his id, and the external Power of totalitarian politics becomes the oppressor of the id and ego. As a result, the compromise of ego and id to Power makes the composer a coward and a dead man, who loses his self and is forced to compose the political Fifth Symphony and betray his loyalty to music. In other words, in order to survive, in front of the totalitarian politics working as

the Other and the different forms of prison, Shostakovich is deprived of the right to create music, becomes a slave and puppet of Power, a disciplinary individual, and even loses his right and subjectivity as a human being, for the sake of his family and friends and associates. So, in this sense, Shostakovich's first Conversation with Power makes him "a dead man" with an alienated self [4], docile and useful in the service of the former Soviet government, as he abandons his passion for music and yields to Power.

In 1949, Shostakovich had his Second Conversation with Power. For this time, Power invited him to attend the Cultural and Scientific Congress for World Peace in New York. However, his music had been forbidden by the State Commission for Repertoire. Ironically, Power claimed that they "didn't give the order" [4], and that it was a mistake. A few days later, Shostakovich and other composers received a copy of the original banning order, on the top of which there was a document recognizing the decree as illegal, and "reprimanding the State Commission for Repertoire for having issued it" [4]. Under such pressure and "lenient" discipline, finally, he went to New York. But, what was not anticipated by Shostakovich is that New York becomes the place where he felt the most disgraced and the most humiliated. He became a mouthpiece for the Stalinist regime, a parrot, delivering political speeches that others had written for him as well as the political music theory. What's worse, when Nicolas Nabokov asked him whether he personally subscribed to the views expressed about his music and those of other composers by Minister Zhdanov, Shostakovich replied, "Yes, I personally subscribe to the views expressed by Chairman Zhdanov" [4]. As is known, it was the Chairman Zhdanov who had persecuted him since 1936; and it was Zhdanov who had banned him and derided him and threatened him, and even compared his music to "that of a road drill and a mobile gas chamber" [4]. Undoubtedly, Shostakovich's subscribing to Zhdanov's views makes him a shame. It is clear that, in his Second Conversation with Power, in order to lift the ban on his music, Shostakovich was coerced into attending the conference in New York by totalitarian politics. Similarly, oppressed by the Other of totalitarian politics, Shostakovich had to strangle his id and distort the ego, and again became a docile puppet of the Stalinist regime, delivering music theory contaminated by politics and compromising with his persecutor Chairman Zhdanov against his will. Therefore, he betrayed himself and his fidelity to music, and once again he became Power's slave and parrot. That is to say, Power drowns the true voice of the artist once more, and also kills the artist by disciplining him with banning his music, rendering him docile and useful and self-alienated.

After twelve years, Shostakovich had his Third Conversation with Power. For Shostakovich, this third Conversation became the most devastating. Power thought, Shostakovich's becoming chairman of the Union of Composers was an effective proof that the era of Stalin's Cult of Personality was over. Power considered his decline as hesitation and modesty,

and even mistook his hesitation and modesty as his worry about the fact that he didn't join the Party, since according to the constitutional rules, only after joining the Party could he be the chairman of the Union. Thus, Power further proposed joining the Party to him, and assured him that, "there will be no obstacles put before you. It is really no more than a question of signing the application form. We shall take care of the rest" [4]. At this very moment, even his religion failed to save him, and he felt that suddenly as if "all the breath had been taken out of his body" [4]. Absurdly, in the eyes of Power, "Beliefs which you have wisely kept to yourself for many years, of course you have. And since they are not publicly known, this is not a problem we need to overcome" [4]. Denying his religious beliefs and making him deviate from his religious beliefs give him the sense of absurdity, and make him feel like an alien. As is said in Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1979), "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger.... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" [8]. According to Power, the religious beliefs, which provide comfort and light to the protagonist Shostakovich, have no value at all. There is no doubt that such a totalitarian society makes people feel both absurd and strange. Furthermore, Power explained, Shostakovich must give something to get something in the world if he wanted to get his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* performed. Although the spokesman of Power Pospelov left exhausted, Shostakovich would see Pospelov, glass in hand, coming towards him, wherever he turned. Pospelov even began to inhabit his dreams, "always speaking in a calm, rational voice, and yet one driving him to madness" [4]. Shostakovich drank, he was unable to work, and his nerves were shredded. Eventually, he submitted to Pospelov, as "a dying man submits to a priest" [4]. Facing the Other Power, again, Shostakovich was forced to repress himself, and was made spiritually disordered. In the third Conversation, Power is everywhere. To prove the victim of the Cult of Personality returned to the normal life in the so-called era of freedom, and to prove the progress of the new era, Power coerced Shostakovich into becoming its mouthpiece, acting as the chairman of the Union, and joining the Party. So, this progress of the era is tantamount to the persecutor and killer of the victims, which is also the last straw that overwhelms the composer. Under the totalitarian political pressure, his ego has no say at all, and he can do nothing but submit to Power while deviating from his religious beliefs and formalism of composing music, which also makes himself alienated into a docile and useful spokesperson for power, and renders him absurd.

Based on the above detailed analysis, we can see that, in the overt plot centering on Shostakovich's three Conversations with Power, for the sake of his friends and associates, in the struggle between life and death, Shostakovich is disciplined by "multiple mechanisms of 'incarceration'" like arrest, being taken to the concentration camps, forbidding his music, and banning his opera performed [7], so he has to bow to the Other

Power to survive, compose the political Fifth Symphony, deliver political music theory, and go against his religious beliefs. As a result, he becomes a slave, a mouthpiece and spokesman of the totalitarian society without subjectivity. Under the high pressure and discipline of the Other totalitarian society, the voices from his id and ego are completely overwhelmed. The totalitarian society not only stifles his true self and alienates his ego, but also forces him to wear the persona of a coward, so that he can avoid being punished by different prison forms and protect the people around him. Therefore, in the overt plot of self-alienation, the word "noise" is a metaphor for the totalitarian society of the former Soviet Union which influences Shostakovich's musical composition. Therefore, for Shostakovich, the totalitarian society of the former Soviet Union, as a metaphor for noise, is an absurd and alien society, and the object of the author's mockery and critique. At the same time, in the process of Shostakovich's self-alienation, the author also characterizes an image of a selfless heroic artist: for the safety and life of those around him, he sacrifices himself by compromising with power. Undoubtedly, in the overt plot, confronted with the totalitarian society, Shostakovich is a coward, a disciplinary individual, but, in front of his family and friends, he is a hero who sacrifices himself to save others. Just as is stated by the existentialist Sartre in "Existentialism Is a Humanism", "To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen; for we are unable ever to choose the worse" [9]. Clearly, what is affirmed by Shostakovich is his value as a husband, father, son and friend, in which case he becomes a selfless hero. Besides, as is claimed by Julian Barnes, "You or I would have been cowards in his position, and had we decided to be the opposite of a coward - a hero - we would have been extremely foolish" [10]. It is not hard to imagine, in the Soviet governed by Stalinist totalitarianism, if one chooses to be a hero, not only will he/she not be able to compose music, but also will probably get incarcerated and executed; and even the family members, friends and associates will be involved, sent to the camps, or executed. As a consequence, according to Julian Barnes, "being a coward was the only sensible choice" [10].

3. Covert Progression and the Stranger Shostakovich

The tradition of criticism since Aristotle in ancient Greece focuses on the single plot development, however, the well-known Chinese narratologist Professor Dan Shen has transcended this criticism paradigm by putting forward a key term of literary criticism: covert progression. In 2013, in "Covert Progression behind Plot Development: Katherine Mansfield's 'The Fly'" issued on the Journal *Poetics Today*, professor Dan Shen first internationally put forward and defined the literary term of covert progression: "a *continuous* undercurrent running from the beginning to the end of

the narrative" [5]. Different from the overt plot, the covert progression refers to a powerful narrative dynamic that runs parallel to the plot throughout the text. As is mentioned above, the covert progression is crucially important to get a complete picture of the thematics, the characters and the narrative's aesthetic value. Consequently, the paper will probe into the covert narrative dynamic in *The Noise of Time* based on Shostakovich's three conversations with Power in the following section and its metaphorical meaning of noise, to fully reveal Barnes's profound thematic thinking, characterization, and complex formal innovative values.

In his First Conversation with Power, as is shown in the overt plot, Shostakovich was forced to compromise with Power and compose the Fifth Symphony, letting those in Power hear what they wanted to hear. Power only heard triumph itself, "some loyal endorsement of Soviet music, Soviet musicology, of life under the sun of Stalin's constitution," however, Power missed the "screeching irony of the final movement, that mockery of triumph" [4]. Actually, the final movement of the symphony, which "ends in an affirmation so over the top that it has often been read against the grain as a parody rather than as a sincere effort", expresses more about the dissatisfaction with reality than celebration of the reality [11]. Seemingly, in the Fifth Symphony, he chose to prove his loyalty to the official authority in an optimistic and heroic way by composing music that glorified the Stalinist regime. But, he deftly included the "tawdry, commonplace, and even the nervous frenzy of the empty steppes music" in the "optimistic" finale, to present a sharp mockery of those in Power, and thus shows his inner true music as well as his dissatisfaction with the totalitarian society of the former Soviet Union [12]. Here, we can notice that, in the covert progression, the author mainly uses irony to develop the narrative. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2012), M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham defines the root sense of irony as "dissembling, or of hiding what is actually the case" [13]. Accordingly, it is not difficult to find, what Barnes wants to hide is the composer's dissatisfaction with the disciplining reality and his mockery of the reality. In the totalitarian society, Shostakovich can only take this indirect measure of irony to express his rebel against the absurdity of such a society. So, in the First Conversation with Power, despite the existential dilemma of a life-threatening situation, Shostakovich still uses irony - an indirect way - to express his true inner voice. In this sense, without abandoning himself and his formalism of music composition, he bravely chooses to be Camus's stranger, or an outsider, that is the absurd, and the sensible or the sane, and composes the art noise of the ironical Fifth Symphony to indirectly satirize the Stalinist regime.

As is stated above, in his Second Conversation with Power, Shostakovich was invited to be the representative to attend the Cultural and Scientific Congress for World Peace in New York. Yet, as to the invitation, he replied, "No, I cannot, I am afraid." [4] Pressured by Power's constant

persuasion, he further replied, “No, I really cannot go.” [4] Nevertheless, Power insisted on his going to New York by lifting the ban on his music. In New York, the speeches delivered by him were written by others, including the short one on the Friday and the very long one on the Saturday. He was handed them in advance and “instructed to prepare his delivery” [4]. As a matter of fact, he did not prepare for his speech, and “read the Friday speech in a fast, uninflected gabble, reinforcing the fact that he was quite unfamiliar with the text” [4]. He “carried straight on over punctuation marks as if they did not exist, pausing neither for effect or nor reaction” [4]. As for the Saturday speech, Shostakovich “merely read the first page and sat down, leaving the full text to the translator” [4]. Based on these textual details, the study finds that, in this covert progression, Shostakovich not only rejects power in words, but also ignores and confronts it in an uncompromising, perfunctory manner, publicly making power an object of ridicule. Such fooling with Power disintegrated the authority of Power, and also reflected the composer's disapproval of the totalitarian society of the former Soviet Union which was full of lies and absurdities. For the absurd reality, he did not blindly identify with it, but maintained his own sobriety and chose to be a sober, sensible man. Therefore, in the struggle against such a totalitarian society, he chose to distance himself from the absurd reality by verbal refusing and perfunctory behaviors, and to be an outsider or a stranger in an absurd way.

In his Third Conversation with Power, as is previously mentioned, Power invited Shostakovich to be the Chairman of the Union of Composers. For the invitation, he kept saying he couldn't accept it, “This is far too great an honour,” “I am not worthy of such an honour,” “I could not possibly accept it,” and he even added, “I am unworthy,” “I am nothing but a worm beside the First Secretary” [4]. What's more, his conscience was always there to “insist that more courage could have been shown” [4]. But, Power mistook his indecision and reject as his worry about not joining the Party. For a little breath of freedom, he defended, his religious beliefs are incompatible with Party membership. Absurdly, in the eyes of Power, his religion is not important at all, and it is easy to solve the problem, as his religious beliefs are not publicly known. To coerce him to compromise one more time, Power asked him to be practical, threatening that if he wanted his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* performed under the First Secretary Nikita Sergeyevich, he should give something. At the moment, he was enraged finally by Power's slipperiness, so he reached for the final argument, “I have always said, and it has been one of the fundamental principles of my life, that I would never join a party which kills” [4]. As is discussed in the above, Power doesn't want to hear his inner true voice at all, and that's why Power keeps coercing him to compromise. In the end, he could not bear Power anymore and signed on the application form to join the Party as a dying man. Afterwards, he fled to Leningrad and “holed up with his sister” [4]. It is in this physical ab-

sence that he tried to combat Nikita Sergeyevich's new regime concerning ideas for the future of Soviet's music composition. Similarly, in this covert progression, we can see that, although Shostakovich is forced to give up his religious beliefs and join a killing Party, he chooses self-humiliation, argument and flee to express his anger as well as his rebel against Power. In this dark reality, music and religion are what can give him “illusions and lights”, however, he is forced to undergo the “divorce” between himself and music, and the “divorce” between himself and religion. Just as Camus claims, the divorce “between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity” [8]. So, in the novel, the divorce from music and religion makes Shostakovich feel the very absurdity of the society. Shostakovich maintains his distance from the absurd reality by declining, arguing and fleeing, so as to stubbornly fight against the absurd Power of Soviet's totalitarian society. In order to have a bit of spiritual freedom and express his resistance, thus, he can only choose to become an outsider by his escape from this strange and alien totalitarian society.

To sum up, in the three Conversations with Power, the author mainly adopts indirect satire (irony), verbal defence, perfunctory behaviors and physical absence to promote the covert narrative progression. In the covert progression, we can see, the composer Shostakovich follows the inner voice of his ego, and expresses his ridicule, resistance and intransigence in different ways, becoming a sober rational person and an absurd person in the former Soviet's totalitarian society. Therefore, in the covert progression, Shostakovich becomes an outsider or a stranger rebelling against the absurdity of the totalitarian society, and the noise metaphor refers to the composer Shostakovich himself. Under the main theme of promoting socialist realism in the Soviet's totalitarian era, he expresses his intransigence and protest in such sober and absurd ways, endeavoring to adhere to the music of his heart, and striving to compose an artistic noise that is not compatible with the totalitarian society. That is to say, being such a “noise” or Camus's stranger is a heroic expression of his fidelity to his ego and art. According to Sartre's view, “To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen; for we are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better” [9], the value affirmed by Shostakovich's choice is his fidelity to the ego and art, which is different from the value affirmed in the overt plot, and what Shostakovich chooses between art and Power is always the better. In the alien, totalitarian society, he is forced to divorce himself from music and religion that can bring him the only light, which enhances the absurdity of the reality and highlights his status of an outsider or a stranger. Perhaps only in this way can he distance himself from the absurd reality, maintain his loyalty to music and art, and fight against the totalitarian society. So, in this hidden narrative undercurrent, the author presents the reader with an indomitable composer Shostakovich, a sensible stranger, who

rebels against Power indirectly, and thus praises the hero Shostakovich who is uncompromising in the face of Power.

4. Conclusions

By contrast, we can see that, in the overt plot development, Barnes characterizes Shostakovich mainly as a coward, who is disciplined by the multiple mechanisms of “incarceration” in the service of the former Soviet, and the metaphorical meaning of noise is the self-alienating former Soviet’s totalitarian society which influences Shostakovich’s music composition; whereas in the covert narrative dynamic, the author characterizes a hero who tenaciously fights against Power and maintains his loyalty to himself as well as art circuitously. So, on the one hand, through adopting dual narrative progression, Barnes bravely innovates traditional single-plot narratives, and creates an artistic paradoxical image of both a coward and a hero, which deconstructs the traditional binary-opposition relationship between a coward and a hero; on the other hand, via the pun of the word “noise” in the title, the author implies the antagonistic relationship between Shostakovich and the absurd totalitarian society.

To conclude, in the totalitarian society, confronted with the struggle between life and death, Shostakovich submits to Power for the sake of his family, friends and associates and thus becomes a disciplinary individual. Meanwhile, he bravely fights against the absurd totalitarian society in his own characteristic ways, expressing his dissatisfaction and uncompromising subject position. Perhaps, in the former Soviet’s society full of lies and absurdities, these are the best choices he can make, just as Sartre states, to choose between this or that, “we are unable ever to choose the worse” [9]. By choosing to be a coward in front of Power, Shostakovich affirms the value of his image as the husband, the father, the son and the friend; in the process of teasing and fighting against Power, he affirms the image value loyal to himself and music. Whether it is the former or the latter, we cannot deny the universal value and significance of his choice for mankind, as “In fashioning myself I fashion man” [9]. In a sense, he is the epitome of mankind. Under the high political pressure, Shostakovich’s sober rationality also makes him a Camus’s stranger and the one who also experiences the very feeling of absurdity, and he expresses in an absurd way that uncompromising is the only rational choice he can make in the totalitarian society. So, Barnes’ humanism not only coincides with that of Sartre and Camus, but also challenges the single view influenced by the traditional dualist mode of thinking about hero/coward. There is no denying that in the struggle between life and death, Shostakovich tactfully unites the love for others and the love for himself and art in the pressured society, and injects new vitality into British novel creation, which again shows Barnes’s artful experimentation of postmodernist literary creation. In a word, under the political pressure, Shostakovich is an excellent model, just as

Richard Taruskin says, “No one could make a career as successful as the one Shostakovich made in Soviet Russia while maintaining the kind of moral and aesthetic purity his mythologizers attribute to him. No one makes a successful career anywhere without learning and executing a complicated social dance” [11].

Author Contributions

Shengjie Zhao is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Shengjie Zhao (1984-) received her PhD in British and American Literature from Beijing Normal University in 2015 under the supervision of Professor WANG Liya. During her PhD, Dr. Zhao conducted the main research on the Narrative Art in Julian Barnes's *New Historical Novels*, which was published as a monograph in 2021 by China Social Sciences Press (Beijing). After obtaining PhD, Dr. Zhao worked at Shanxi University. Dr. Zhao's research interest includes Narratology, and British and American Novels. Her findings resulted in a number of publications in China's high impact journals such as *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, *English and American Literary Studies*, and *Foreign Language and Literature*.

Research Field

Shengjie Zhao: Narratology, and British and American Literature