

Title: Beyond Good and Evil: Aleksei Remizov's "Chinese Strange Stories"

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Abstract:

Translation is usually between two different languages, but sometimes not. In his sketches of Petrograd in the revolutionary years "The Noises of City" (Shumy Goroda, 1921), Aleksei Remizov, who was famous for his remakes of biblical and medieval religious plots, also revised chapters from the Medieval Chinese writer Pu Songling's "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio" (Liao Zhai Zhi Yi, 1740), a collection of short stories based on Chinese folklore and retold in the voice of an unsuccessful scholar. Remizov, without the knowledge of Chinese, had to rely on the Russian translation by his friend Vasily Alekseev, a prominent Russian Sinologist and an active participant in Maksim Gorky's World Literature Publishing House. In this paper, I will firstly reveal how Remizov became acquainted with Pu Songling's works based on my recent discoveries in Alekseev's personal archives; secondly by comparing Remizov's Russian texts with the Chinese original and Alekseev's Russian translation, I will show how Remizov transformed the popular genre in Medieval China "strange story" into Russian modernist prose; thirdly, I will relate Remizov's case to the broader question: the ambiguous boundary between translation and creative writing in 1910s-1920s. I argue that Remizov and Alekseev's uses of Pu Songling's strange stories were not out of exoticism, but another salient feature in Russian modernism, the revival of "skaz."