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Family Saga as a Genre of World Literature

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Abstract

This article questions the reasons for the interest in the genre of saga, and discusses the peculiarities of its construction depending on the time and place of its origin, starting with the oral tradition. This genre is defined firstly by describing the life of no less than three families during a considerable span of history of a country, it also includes precise environmental details, such as dress and behavior, and exact dates of events against which the life of the heroes flows. Yet there are some differences in the choice of the narrator (whether it is the heroes themselves, or an objective observer of the events), the way of presenting time and space, ways of communication, etc. These differences are analyzed in the examples of four novels representing four literary traditions. The specifics of Russian literary tradition are also emphasized.

Keywords

saga, family saga, link with history, autobiography, *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann, *Roots*, by Alex Haley, *Durbin* by Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *The Last Bow* by Astafyev

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Семейная сага как жанр мировой литературы

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Аннотация

В данной статье обсуждается современный интерес к жанру саги, появление значительного числа семейных саг, написанных как по материалам реальных биографий, так и в жанре фантастическом. Рассматриваются

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особенности построения жанра семейной саги в зависимости от времени и места возникновения, начиная с устной традиции. Так, сага, в отличие от скальдической поэзии, лишена авторского начала, в ней доминирует клановое сознание, она описывает только важные для клана события, и посвящаются они одному герою, поэтому лишь серия античных саг дает общую литературную историю. Саги отличаются от эпоса привязкой к конкретному времени. Интерес к жанру возрождается в период романтизма вместе с появлением исторического романа и жанра автобиографий. Именно последние ведут прямо к появлению современного жанра семейной саги. Вводится различие между семейной хроникой и семейной сагой. Семейная сага определяется прежде всего описанием жизни не менее трех семей на протяжении значительного отрезка истории страны, его также отличают точные детали в обстановке, включая одежду и поведение, точные даты событий, на фоне которых протекает жизнь героя. И все же есть некоторые различия в выборе рассказчика (будь то сам герой или объективный наблюдатель событий), способе представления времени и пространства, способах коммуникации и т.д. Эти различия анализируются на примере четырех романов, представляющих четыре разные литературные традиции, включая «Будденброки» Томаса Манна, «Корни» Алекса Хейли, «Дарбин» Ширшенду Мухопадхья, «Последний поклон» Виктора Астафьева.

Ключевые слова

сага, семейная сага, связь с историей, автобиография, «Будденброки» Томаса Манна, «Корни» Алекса Хейли, «Дурбин» Ширшенду Мухопадхья, «Последний поклон» Астафьева

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Introduction

Family chronicles (or family sagas) are one of the most popular genres of world literature, and they developed independently in different cultures at different times, and are now experiencing a rise. Such famous authors as Orhan Pamuk (*Cevdet Bey and his Sons*), Alex Haley (*Roots*), Salman Rushdie (*The Moor's Parting Sigh*), Ann Patchett (*The Dutch House*), Herbjørg Wassmu (*One Hundred Years*), Anne Karin Elstad (*Innhaug Manor*), Doris Lessing (*Great Dreams*), Michael Cunningham (*Flesh and Blood*), Daniel Speck (*Bella Germany*) and others all lean into this genre. And the modern saga sometimes acquires very peculiar features, including mythological and mystical motifs in the narrative or tries to reconstruct the family stories of the past in modern conditions. Examples include such works as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Vorkosigan Saga* by Lois McMaster Budjold, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *The House of Spirits* by Isabel Allende, or *The Wheel of Fortune* by Susan Howatch, etc.

This article discusses the reasons for the interest in this genre and some peculiarities of its construction depending on the time and place of its origin. In order to formulate the issue more precisely, it is necessary to distinguish the saga from similar genres. It is worth noting that the terms “family chronicle” and “family saga” are often used synonymously, although the term “chronicle” introduces an element of consistency, whereas the word “saga” introduces an element of epic nature. Nevertheless, the boundary between these names is so shaky that the overlap is much greater than the difference. In fact, originally, a “saga,” as defined by Munro Chadwick and Nora Chadwick, is a prose story preserved by oral tradition [Chadwick & Chadwick, 2010, p. 2]. That is, it is a narrative directly opposed to the poetic tradition. The saga appears when the individual clans and people as a whole become aware of themselves, for in time the appearance of the sagas coincides with the establishment of laws. “Both in Norway and in Iceland the writing of the vernacular seems to have begun with the Laws, which were written early in the twelfth century” [Chadwick & Chadwick, 2010, p. 9]. Roughly the same process can be observed in ancient Greece, where genealogies and then the first prose texts appear in the 7th – 6th centuries [See: Boedeker, 2011; Grethlein, 2011] and in ancient Israel [Van Seters, 2011].

The specifics of the ancient saga

The most thorough and well preserved are the Scandinavian sagas, where the word itself came from. “In amount, quality and variety Icelandic saga far surpasses anything of the kind which is to

be found in other countries. It provides us with a knowledge of the life, both material and intellectual, of the tenth and eleventh centuries and of the personnel of these times, which can hardly be paralleled in any other barbaric period – indeed perhaps in any period before the sixteenth century. The leading characters in the sagas differ greatly from the semi-idealised figures which we find in heroic poetry” [Chadwick & Chadwick, 2010, p. 332]. The sagas are structured differently depending on whether they are sagas of Icelanders (Family) sagas, King’s sagas, or Legendary sagas.

These narratives have some defining specifics. Firstly, they are devoid of authorial origin. M. I. Steblin-Kamenskiy notes that the authorship of the Icelandic sagas is not determinable because “...those who wrote the “Icelandic sagas” were certainly just as unaware of their authorial contribution as those who created or transmitted the oral tradition on which the sagas were based were unaware of it” [Steblyn-Kamenskiy, 1976, p. 151]. At the same time, the authors of the skaldic poems, which were performed along with the sagas, were clearly aware of their authorship. Thus, it is the genre of the saga that determines the lack of authorial identity. This is also pointed out by A. Gurevich: “In contrast to the skald, the author of the saga of the Icelanders was a representative of the predominantly “collective” type of creativity” [Gurevich, 2009, p. 89]. Secondly, the sagas represent “all events that took place in the private life of all the Icelanders of a certain age. ... Only a breach of the peace, i.e. a quarrel between individual members of society, was considered an event. If there was no quarrel, it was assumed that nothing happened and there was nothing to describe. “Everything was calm,” the Icelandic sagas say on such occasions” [Steblyn-Kamenskiy, 1976, p. 152]. Thirdly, a notable feature of the sagas is that they usually focus on one hero. If the saga is about kings, it is about one king. However, combining a number of sagas presents a common story. In this case the account of Danish history from the middle of the 10th century to the beginning of the 13th century, which includes hagiographies of some 20 kings, is rather a “corpus of king’s sagas” [Dzhakson, 2021, p. 8]. In the king’s sagas, unlike generic sagas, time is objectified. “The inner connection of events, characteristic of the ‘family sagas’, begins to give way to a connection of simultaneity” [Steblyn-Kamenskiy, 1980, p. 591]. However, the sagas, even the corpus of royal sagas, are not history in the modern sense of the word, because they lack a critical attitude to the events told. Moreover, the narrators, unlike historians, freely describe such details of the narrative that they could not know in principle, including, for example, conversations, etc. Fourth, the sagas also differ from epic works due to the fact that epic time is a completed time, it is the time of gods and heroes. Bakhtin singles out “absolute past”, “national legend” and “absolute epic distance” as features of the epic [Bakhtin, 2012, p. 617], whereas the sagas link representatives of clans that actually existed with their contemporaries. Fifth, the observational plausibility of the narrative of the saga can be compared with the genre of the historical novel, but while the author of the historical novel understands the subjectivity of the narrative, for the author of a saga, it is a completely objective account of what actually happened. Steblin-Kamenskiy introduces the concept of “prehistory” in order to combine, on the one hand, the truthfulness of the story, characteristic of a proper historical work, and, on the other hand, the liveliness and detail of the story, characteristic of the historical novel [Steblyn-Kamenskiy, 1980 p. 582–583].

Saga: the new appeal

The original genre of saga existed for a few centuries in vernacular language while European literature asserted itself in Latin, and since 14th – 15th centuries in national languages. An interest in folklore, particularly the saga, parallels the interest in the life of the individual with the Romantics from the end of 18th century. At this time, national history is reinterpreted, the historical novel appears and develops, as well as such genres as the autobiography¹ and so called ‘fictional autobiography’. The latter has been coined in order “to define novels about a fictional character written as

¹ The word “autobiography,” even though some works of this genre were known as far back as antiquity (Augustine’s *Confessions*) was first used by W. Taylor in the *Monthly Review* and in 1809 by R. Southey [See: Mann, Naumova, p.160].

though the character were writing their own biography". The examples are the autobiographical novels of Ch. Brontë *Jane Eyre* (1847), with "An Autobiography" noted on the front page of the original version and Dickens's *The Life of David Copperfield. Told by Himself* (1850). In Russian literature the most distinguished narratives are S. Aksakov's *A Family Chronicle* (1856), *Recollections* (1856) and *The Childhood Years of Bagrov Grandson* (1858), Maxim Gorky's *Childhood* (1913), *Among People* (1915) and *My Universities* (1928). These novels lead us directly towards family sagas. Fictional autobiographies eventually split with family sagas due to the fact that the former concentrates around one individual while the latter widens to the description of the family history, which is "the systematic narrative and research of past events relating to a specific family. While genealogy is the convenient label for the field, family history is the overarching term, since genealogy in the strict sense is only concerned with tracing unified lineages" [Mann, Naumova, 2011, p. 167]. If we take family history as the generic term, the specifics of the saga are 1) the presentation of family history in at least three generations and 2) set upon the background of the history of the state or nation. Thus, Thomas Mann in his novel maintains a consistent interest in the changing climate of economic life in the social and business world [Swales, 1991, p. 89].

Thereby, the modern saga to a certain extent bears the features of the old sagas. It is a focus on the story of a specific person as a representative of the family (clan) in very specific situations with precise details in dress and behavior, the exact dates of the events against which the life of the hero flows. And this distinguishes the family chronicle from another major genre: the epic novel. It should be indicated that the epic novel is developed predominantly in Russia ("War and Peace" by Leo Tolstoy) because "...the Western mentality is strongly individualistic, which is why we do not find epics in the literature of Western Europe and America. Major, fateful events are presented here through the prism of the lives of individuals, and we rather observe the biography of a person in the background of events, rather than vice versa. This is why the tradition of novels, historical and biographical novels, family chronicles, rather than epic novels, has taken root here. The epic hero is unthinkable in an individualistic paradigm" [Nikol'ski, Lill'-Bezak, 2019, p. 60]. Thus, the epic novel is more relevant with the Russian communal mentality.

Nikol'ski and Lill'-Bezak state: "The family chronicle is similar in scope to the epic, but it introduces pictures of life and the everyday life of generations, rather than describing a historical event, and also differs in its temporal length (50 – 100 years). Its heroes are individuals rather than social types. It does not have a panoramic and global nature, due to the lack of a high level of generalization, as it is customary for an epic. It may refer to a major historical event, but only if it concerns an individual family. The family chronicle also lacks epic completeness, which is why its finale is open. The difference also concerns the image of the author: they are not a demiurge, as in the epic, but rather an observer". [Nikol'ski, Lill'-Bezak, 2019, p. 27]. The comparison with the epic is important in the sense that since the 1960s in the USSR several major literary paintings have been produced that clearly claim to be epics. But they should rather be characterized as socialist realist family chronicles. These are *Eternal Call* by A. Ivanov, *The Strogovs* by G. Markov, *The Zhurbins* by V. Kochetov, *Destiny* and *Your Name* by P. Proskurin. This is an attempt to understand an important historical period in Russian life through the prism of family relationships. Presenting the tragic events of a transition to a new social relationship, these authors are in the blinds of socialist realism. V. Astafyev, on the other hand, spent 25 years writing his book, having started in 1968, and ideologically, his book has nothing to do with socialist realism, and here one can really speak without any reservations about the continuation of the pre-revolutionary tradition. It is important to note that in this tradition the spiritual and moral vector of the family chronicles is evident. They are designed to stipulate the unity of the cultural and historical field. It can be seen in proper family chronicles (Aksakov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Garin-Mikhailovsky, etc) as well as in memoir literature (*Grandmother's Tales: From the Memories of Five Generations...* D.D. Blagovo, *Memories of the past: from the family chronicle* by E.A. Sabaneyeva, *From the family chronicle: memories of children and grandchildren* by N.P. Grot etc.) [Evdokimova, Komatesova, 2017].

Being the heir to this tradition Astafyev also clearly refers to the so-called Village Prose. Therefore, he belongs to the group of such writers as Vasily Belov, Fyodor Abramov, Aleksander Yashin, Valentin Rasputin, Vasily Shukshin, and other writers who predominantly originated from Northern regions of Russia and from Siberia.

It is interesting to compare some examples of modern literary sagas representing different cultural and literary traditions in order to understand the specifics of the Russian family saga.

The examples of modern family sagas

In this case, *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann, *Roots* by Alex Haley, and *Durbin* by Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay are selected for comparison to examine similarities and differences with the Russian family saga represented by Astafyev's *The Last Bow*.

Buddenbrooks by Thomas Mann is a prominent work of 20th-century German literature, and is often regarded as the prototype of the Western family saga genre. The novel's structure and themes are in line with the literary traditions of 20th-century German literature, particularly the theme of realism. While there are other modern family sagas of German literature, such as *The Glass Bead Game* by Hermann Hesse, *The Seventh Cross* by Anna Seghers, and *Stein House: A German Family Saga* by Myra Hargrave McIlvain, *Buddenbrooks* stands out as a significant example of the genre due to its impact on subsequent family sagas in Western literature.

A noteworthy number of 20th-century American literary works are influenced by the experiences of African immigrants in America, with a focus on slavery, racism, and other forms of discrimination faced by African Americans. Novels such as *Roots* by Alex Haley, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones, and *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead are prominent examples of this genre.

In 20th-century Bengali literature, there are several notable family saga novels such as *Durbin* (Telescope) by Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *Pother Panchali* (Song of the Road) by Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, *Jal O Jiban* (Water and Life) by Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay. Among them, *Durbin* is a significant work of Bengali literature that is often studied for its typology of the family saga genre. The novel's structure adheres to the literary traditions of 20th-century Bengali literature, which were influenced by social realism, colonialism, and modernism.

Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*

The *Buddenbrooks* created a new literary trend by incorporating elements of the family saga into a literary work. Ru says, "I regard Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* as the first prototype of Western family novels (family saga) that mark the ripe development of this sub-genre, one that differentiates it from other kinds of novels" [Ru, 2001, p. 100]. Kerstin Dell says, "A classic example of the family chronicle is Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* [Dell, 2007].

Using a third-person narrative technique, Thomas Mann systematizes it as a family saga genre, including the concept of a multi-hero narrative and extensive family discussions. Lokteva says: "Now there is a renaissance of a type of panoramic, multi-hero narrative, a family chronicle (family saga) in the style of the *Buddenbrooks* or the *Forsyte Saga* [Lokteva, 2022, p. 2] The plot of this novel centres on the bourgeois German Buddenbrook family and the life of their four generations from 1835 to 1877. Like any family saga, this book is partly autobiographical. Harold Bloom describes the book as 'autobiographical' and also sees it as the tale of four generations of a merchant family [Bloom, 2003, p. 12]. The book contains many autobiographical elements, including various settings, characters and incidents from the author's own life. The novel shows the actions, thoughts and gatherings of the family, as well as their lavish lifestyle, and even includes recipes for dishes such as carp in red wine. Much of the historical context of this book can be found on the pages of the enclosed family chronicle. H. Mundt says, "The novel spans German history, from Napoleon's conquest of the German states to the Gründerzeit, the founding of a unified German Empire under

Bismarck. While the Buddenbrooks' decline is embedded in a turbulent time of German history, the changing political and social climate has little if any significant impact upon them" [Mundt, 2004, p. 41].

The *Buddenbrooks* follows a chronological order. The first part of the novel begins with an incident in 1835 and then moves chronologically to 1877. Family saga novels are often long, as they cover a large period of time and several generations. The *Buddenbrooks* is more than 700 pages long, which is the typical length of a standard family saga volume as estimated by Harris and Rowe [See: Harris & Rowe, 2005]. In a family setting, reciprocal relationships between family members are common. In this text, family members often have various house parties, which is one example of their good family relationships. Along with this, intra-family conflict also becomes a defining aspect of this novel. Mann also adheres to the religious beliefs of family members that are commonly found in family sagas. Because of their religious views, many of the characters take a strong stand against any immoral act. The theme of fate plays a semantically important role in the novel *Buddenbrooks*, affecting the personal and family lives of different generations of the Buddenbrook family and leading them to decline, as indicated by the novel's subtitle ("Verfall einer Familie"). This theme shows how one generation's fate (including births and deaths) is linked to another, developing the plot. The birth of a child brings new fates, hopes and aspirations to the family and is celebrated as a joyous occasion. The use of the concept of death is observed in this novel, which is the syntactic and semantic criterion of the family saga genre.

Thomas Mann presents the elements of the family saga on a large scale in this novel. He includes almost all the literary and realistic elements necessary: specific narrative technique, depiction of different generations, autobiographical motifs, the life experiences of the Buddenbrook family, the history of the country, chronological order, family relationships, religion, the theme of fate, birth and death.

Alex Haley's *Roots*

Alex Haley's popular novel *Roots*, published in 1976, is well-received by readers. When speaking about this novel, Barbara J. Shade says, "*Roots* is the story of the progress of an American family with an African heritage" [Shade, 1977, p. 335]. The author has presented the entire history of the Kinte family: "Finally I've woven our whole seven generations into this book that is in your hands" [Haley, 2007, p. 884]. Among all the generations, Kunta Kinte, the main character of the text, belongs to the first generation to settle in America. The author himself is in the seventh generation. John David Smith says, "This is an excellent, although ponderous historical saga which traces the history of the author's black family from its origins in Africa, through American slavery, and up to the present" [Smith, 1977, pp. 246].

Haley uses the third-person narrative technique. He also utilizes a multi-hero narrative technique to analyze different generations of Kunta's family, covering the time frame in which they lived, giving readers a deeper understanding of the characters. He also examines the life experiences of the family members of the successive generations, their memories, their culture, their religiosity, and their births and deaths, which are developed in the plot of the novel. And all of these are the essential criteria for a literary work to be regarded as a genre of the family saga. In the novel each family member has their own personality and unique identity. The intra-family relationship between family members enhances the family structure of this novel. Along with highlighting the history of several generations, the author also depicted the history of America. Taylor says, "However while writing with a historical backdrop that reflects the growth of the United States from the American Revolution to World War I, he frequently gives the reader bits of history that seem too contrived, too convenient" [Taylor, 1977, p. 204]. In *Roots*, the author chronologically begins his narrative from 1750 and traces the lifestyle of many generations over the next two centuries. In terms of volume *Roots* meets the requirements of the structural model of Harris and Rowe [Harris & Rowe, 2005].

The life experiences of generations are characterized by the theme of slavery and racism that are used in the process of the realistic portrayal of their lives in that era (1750 – 1976). Taylor says, “However, the work’s importance is not only as a genealogical study of an Afro-American family, but also as one of the first composite histories of slavery as seen through four generations of slaves” [Taylor, 1977, p. 203]. Here, because of being black Africans, the Kinte family was exploited by whites. According to Maryam Esmikhani and Behzad Pourqarib, “Alex Haley’s *Roots* is the history of black slaves whose identities were stolen from them” [Esmikhani & Pourgharib 2016, p. 24].

Memories are used as a thread from which a family story is woven, connecting the characters with their past, giving an idea of their present, and transmitting to the reader their culture, religious beliefs, celebrations (birth), mourning (death), etc. Iyunolu Osagie outlines the implication of memory in the novel as follows: “Through the implications of migration, memory, and narrative performance, *Roots* illustrates the complexities surrounding the cultural location and production of African American bodies and the inherent anxieties of exilic identities” [Osagie, 2004, p. 394]. The author vividly presents the African culture of that time, especially the culture of the Mandinka tribe. Nancy L. Arnez says, “Approximately one-fifth of the book, *Roots*, is devoted to the cultural history of African people. It is vividly told. It is electrifying in its imagery [Arnez, 1977, pp. 368]. Apart from this, the religious values of the Kinte family over generations, and their change over time, have also been highlighted by the author: the early generations are followers of Islam and follow different customs and policies, while the generations living in America follow Christianity. The narrative of this novel also includes the joyful celebration of family members in the birth of a new child, as well as the shadow of grief that comes from someone's death. Thus, everything that should be in an ideal family saga can be found in this novel.

Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay’s *Durbin*

Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay is a well-known writer of 20th-century Bengali literature. His novel *Durbin*, published in 1986, created a sensation among readers in Bangladesh and India for its literary excellence. Abir Maitra says that this novel, written in the context of a broad period of social life and all the changes from the late 1920s to the 1980s, is a fine example of Shirshendu's literary genius [Abir Maitra, 2020]. The author vividly portrays three generations of the Chowdhury family over six decades. The author uses first- and third-person narrative techniques to tell the story of several generations and their experiences in a simple but subtle manner. Yet the chronological order of this novel is slightly different from other family sagas that have been discussed above: instead of preserving the chronological order of events, the first generation is discussed in the odd chapters (1,3,5...) and the 2nd and 3rd generations in the even chapters (2,4,6...). The length of this book is more than 500 pages, which also fulfills the structural criteria of a standard family saga.

As mentioned above, it is very common for a family saga book to have a narrative involving many heroes. Each hero has a unique perspective and experience. The multi-hero narrative in this book includes Hemkant as the hero of the first generation; Krishnakant as the hero of the second generation; and Dhruv as the hero of the third generation. Through this narrative structure, the author explores how a family's heritage and property are passed down from generation to generation. The author is also interested in introducing many characters at once. Nadejda Lokteva says that the family saga is characterized by a fairly large number of characters belonging to different generations [Lokteva, 2022, p. 2]. The author employs a large cast of characters (more than a hundred) to create a vivid and realistic portrait of 20th-century Bengali society.

Family sagas frequently center on intra-family dynamics. Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay also explores the complex and volatile relationship between family members. Most of the time, they have close relationships characterized by mutual support, shared experiences of joy and sorrow, and a strong sense of loyalty to one another in times of danger or adversity. Apart from this cordial relationship, sometimes conflicts arise between family members. The author also discusses cultural traditions, and practices of contemporary society: the familial concern over a daughter's marriageabil-

ity, the practice of giving dowry to the son-in-law, hunting, political repression, etc. The author also focuses on the history of the country. Historical events (Swadeshi movement 1903 – 1908), Communal riots, Partition of India 1947) that had a direct impact on the family members are mentioned in this novel as well as the names of many historical figures (Khudiram Bose, Surya Sen, Mahatma Gandhi, etc).

In this novel, the author also presents an examination of the religious beliefs and practices of a Hindu family, and explores how their religious practices intersect with their daily lives and cultural traditions. Through religious practices, the Chowdhury family demonstrates how religion is deeply intertwined with their personal and cultural identities. The theme of fate, an important thematic element of the family saga genre, is a crucial aspect of this novel, as it examines how external forces shape the lives of family members across multiple generations. The book also focuses on various festive events marking memorable moments in the lives of the characters, including family gatherings, weddings, and the birth of new children, as well as discusses the deaths of various family members and their impact on others. Thus, in *Durbin*, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay incorporates many literary, realistic, and structural elements that are integral to the thematic and structural development of the family saga genre.

V. P. Astafyev's *The Last Bow*

The study of V. P. Astafyev's *The Last Bow* within the theoretical framework of the family saga genre in the context of the analysis of the three novels (*Buddenbrooks*, *Roots*, *Durbin*) is necessary to identify the commonality and uniqueness of Russian family saga represented by *The Last Bow*.

V. P. Astafyev's *The Last Bow* is widely recognized as an extraordinary literary work due to its innovative style and insightful portrayal of different generations from a Siberian village. Rayhan in his article *The Last Bow by V. P. Astafyev as a family saga* examined this book in this respect [Rayhan, 2021]. This book also provides a thorough analysis of the experiences and relationships of three generations from interconnected families.

The novel shares many similarities with the other three novels in terms of its themes and structure. Like the others, this novel is characterized by its depiction of multi-generational family history (three generations: the generation of the narrator's grandparents, the generation of the narrator's parents, and generation of the narrators) that spans over a long period (the 1930s to 1990s), resulting in a lengthy volume (more than eight hundred pages) with a large cast of characters (more than 150). Like the above-discussed family sagas, this novel employs a multi-hero narrative that interweaves the family's story with the broader context of the country's history (Dekulakization, Collectivization, World War II). As in the other sagas, the narrative also explores intra-family relationships, religious beliefs, and also depicts significant life events such as births, deaths, marriages, and life-struggles, etc. The intra-family relationship is seen in family gatherings, providing emotional and practical support during times of crisis, assisting each other with work and other tasks, etc. The birth of a child and the death of the family members also have an impact on their lives as well as on the thematic development of the novel. The plot construction also includes marriage, which is an essential element of the family saga genre. The epidemic (the famine of the 1930s) as a part of their life struggle also creates a great impact on the structure of the novel as well as on their lives.

The Last Bow, like the other three novels, explores multiple generations, but in a distinct manner. While *Buddenbrooks*, *Roots*, and *Durbin* focus on several generations within one family, *The Last Bow* portrays the experiences of three interconnected families across different generations.

The authors of *Buddenbrooks* and *Roots* depict their life experiences using the third-person narrative technique. Unlike them, in *The Last Bow*, the author primarily employs a retrospective prose narrative, frequently using the word "I" and following the autobiographical structure of narration introduced by Philippe Lejeune where the author, narrator, and personage are the same entity [Lejeune, 1975]. *The Last Bow* is also different from the other three novels concerning its eco-critical awareness. The other works are situated in either urban or rural settings and their authors do

not give much attention to the relationship between human beings and nature. On the other hand, *The Last Bow* sets itself apart by highlighting the crucial interdependence between human beings and the natural world. The novel's characters have a strong affinity for nature due to their upbringing in Siberia's rural environment which is vividly depicted in this novel. Here, while the author highlights how the human relationships with one another change from one generation to another, he also highlights the deterioration of the relationship between the characters and nature over time, urging readers to cultivate a greater sense of kindness towards the natural world. Rayhan asserts that Astafyev justifies his stance on the preservation of the ecological system by portraying the importance of maintaining a proper ecological balance, the interdependent relationship between humans and nature, and the environmental crisis resulting from humanity's dominant and destructive nature [Rayhan, 2023].

Conclusion

The genre of saga is quite different from the epic, the historical novel, and the autobiography. In sagas (ancient and recent) history is not an 'absolute past' but rather is presented through the eyes of certain real people, through their subjective attitudes and emotions. The time span is defined by generations rather than by any historical events. Also, the life and environment is depicted in extremely conspicuous details. The family saga as it appears in modern times bears the peculiarities of national, literary traditions. The described novels provide a multi-generational analysis of a family's history, but to varying extents. They differ in their narrative perspectives, with some authors telling the life stories of family members across generations from a first-person perspective, while others use a third-person perspective. For example, while Thomas Mann and Alex Haley use the third-person point of view to tell the story's events, Shirshendu uses a hybrid narrative that mixes two different point of views. They also differ in relation to the autobiographical details: if *Roots* is considered autobiographical, tracing the family history of Alex Haley, *Buddenbrooks* includes just some autobiographical elements, and *Durbin* does not have any autobiographical connection to the author.

The Russian family saga eventually differentiated itself from the epic, memoirs, and other genres, though strong autobiographical elements are included. Due to its strong alignment towards reality, the inclusion of mythological and mystical motifs is not popular like in the Western literary tradition. Instead the link to nature is emphasized. Affinity to real life is also accentuated by the "I" narrative technique, which allows the author to better and more vividly demonstrate various details.

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Rayhan Md Tapu – detailed comparative analysis of modern saga samples.

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