Reply

THE POTENTIALS AND HAZARDS OF PROSAICS

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Sometimes friendly reviewers perceive one's shortcomings more acutely than hostile ones. That is because they have taken the pains to get inside one's argument and so are in a position to notice each small step that need not have been taken; to sense the small non sequitors; to question the dubious choices, and propose better alternatives. I suppose that this is what Bakhtin meant when he insisted that agreement, not just disagreement, is a dialogic relation.

Cathy Popkin, Alfred Rieber, and Freeman Dyson all sense a larger agenda in my book, especially in its concept of prosaics. (As one of my students once commented about Moby-Dick: Melville was not interested only in whales, he had other fish to fry.)

It is entirely correct that I did have other purposes in mind when I wrote Hidden in Plain View. To a considerable extent, those other purposes drew me to Tolstoy and continue to do so. I sensed in War and Peace an important set of ideas that, while in some sense timeless, also have a special relevance for "us" today. By "us" I mean not only scholars in the humanities, but also the wider world of cultural thought.

I wanted to understand Tolstoy's perspective from within, sort out what was valuable from what was not, and then think further with that revised viewpoint. Hidden is devoted primarily to the first goal, and only secondly and occasionally to hints about how Tolstoy's ideas might be extended.

At the same time I was working on Hidden, I was also working with Caryl Emerson on a study of Bakhtin, who, we believed, shared not only important parts of Tolstoy's perspective but also a key idea I have called "prosaics." By assessing prosaics as it was variously developed by two original and idiosyncratic thinkers, I hoped to see it in greater depth, and to "triangulate" it in the hope that it might lead to still more insights.

Such a process is bound to change the idea; indeed, if it does not, the process has failed. Bakhtin refers to "two aspects that define the text as utterance: its plan (intention) and the realization of this plan. Their divergence can reveal a great deal."[1] In the course of working on these two books, in writing a couple of articles on "prosaics," and of preparing a study of Anna Karenina, my sense of

prosaics has indeed changed. Criticisms and suggestions like the ones offered in this forum continue to be enormously helpful.

Chronocentrism

In working out this idea, I wanted to avoid a pitfall into which theorists often fall, into which some have argued it is impossible not to fall. I have in mind the danger of reading into an author only the views one already holds and of seeing in an author only what one already knows. If one does that, and if one believes that one cannot help doing that, reading can teach nothing new. Because I am old-fashioned enough to try to derive wisdom from literary works, I try so far as is possible to understand writers in their own terms before I enter into dialogue with them.

What I wanted to avoid, then, was a kind of ideological criticism that is very common today. For all the talk of "otherness" in literary theory, critics who brandish the term often find in authors only that old familiar otherness which is already a part of themselves, an otherness that is not really "other" at all. An author is judged progressive or reactionary, epistemically enlightened or benighted, from some standpoint sanctified by the current values of literary orthodoxy, and so criticism takes on the tone either of a defense attorney's brief or of a journalistic expose. This sort of criticism might be called an example of "chronocentrism" (by analogy to ethnocentrism). It sacrifices what I take to be a special reward of literary education: the experience of encountering and considering other viewpoints, other perspectives, other sets of values or, for that matter, one's own values worked out in surprising ways in an alien milieu. As Bakhtin would say, such criticism knows only one individualizing principle: error. It does not enlarge our sense of the possibilities of humanity, and its assumption that current critics are wiser than great authors, deprives us of the real challenges that literature might provide to current pieties.

To be sure, seeing the world as much as possible from within the author's standpoint should not be the final step. One also wants to return to one's own, see the now well-understood (or better understood) perspective of the author through one's own eyes, and indeed, see one's own perspective through the author's eyes. Bakhtin called this process "creative understanding." And one can go further: to see Tolstoy's perspectives not only through one's own eyes but also through Dostoevsky's (or any other writer's) eyes; to extend both their arguments; and to imagine how they would have reformulated them in light of each other's objections (real or imagined) and in light of later events they never lived to see. If one cannot do that with an author, the author remains just a monument or, as in much modern criticism, an object lesson. (Modern criticism seems to echo Onegin: ego primer drugim nauka.) Under such circumstances, literature has lost its function of enriching our moral and social sense of other people.

This is all rather a long digression to explain why I chose in Hidden to use the technique Rieber calls an immanent critique, with the added correction that in Hidden there is proportionally more immanence than critique. Not that the criticism is entirely absent; in the first chapter, I tried to convey some irony toward Tolstoy's deathbed tribunes and other acts of posing, and in the course of analyzing War and Peace, I occasionally allowed myself irony and in some cases even outright criticism, usually consigned to footnotes. But such passages are rare because I was trying to see the world through Tolstoy's eyes.[2]

Every method has its disadvantages, and the one I chose more or less precluded distinguishing my own views carefully enough from Tolstoy's. If my views had been more hostile to Tolstoy's, such distinctions would have been easy. But they were and are not; rather, they constitute a form of dialogic agreement, agreement with reservations and stipulations Tolstoy would not have accepted, agreement with updating qualifications. And this I failed to convey, as the replies to Hidden illustrate. In my attempt to avoid attributing my own form of prosaics to Tolstoy, I gave the impression of entirely accepting his, which I do not.

Prosaics and Its Occupational Hazards

So I would now like to supply what my book lacks. Popkin writes with the shrewdness that is her signature: "The foreword to Hidden in Plain View disavows adherence to the tenets of any theoretical or critical school; but to what extent is it the book's program to establish one? Or am I reading into this book what I know to be a broader concern of Morson's? Is this exposition of Tolstoy's philosophical and aesthetic project purely descriptive? And what would the normative force of prosaics be for literary narrative in general?" Popkin's phrasing -- a question that seem to wonder whether it is rhetorical -- is exactly right. I am not trying to establish a school, which in current American parlance would mean a group that "applies a method." Prosaics itself would suggest that that is a bad way to investigate literature. But I am trying to propose a sort of alternative to schools in that sense by defending and advancing a perspective that has in fact been around for a long time and is represented today by various thinkers in diverse fields. I would like to underscore what these thinkers have in common (without flattening out their differences) so that "dotted lines" can be drawn from their various positions. By supplying a name to this perspective, I hope to make it more self-conscious, more aware of itself as an alternative to current trends, and more confident in generating new insights from an already existing set of approaches.

The term "prosaics" has a double derivation. As opposed to "poetics," it is a theory of literature that takes prose on its own terms and seeks to explore the special character of great prose literature, especially the novel. The great theorist of prosaics is Bakhtin, which is why Emerson and I chose to call our forthcoming

book Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics. Secondly, as a view of the world, prosaics is characterized (1) by a suspicion of all-embracing systems and a respect for all that eludes them, and (2) by a reluctance to equate the noticeability of events with their importance. From this latter tendency, prosaics derives its focus on the ordinary and "prosaic" events of daily life. War and Peace and Anna Karenina are cardinal texts of prosaics as a view of the world. In fact, I think that Russian literature and thought are especially rich in prosaic insights, which perhaps developed as a counter-trend to the dominant ideological strands of Russian thought. Dostoevsky once observed that a Russian intellectual is someone who can read Darwin and decide to become a pickpocket; Russian prosaic thinkers -- Tolstoy, Herzen, Chekhov, Bakhtin and others -- respond with a principled suspicion of what Bakhtin called "theoretism."

Dyson, as usual, puts his finger precisely on one aspect of the prosaic sense of the world when he cites Bacon: "The subtlety of nature is greater many times over than the subtlety of the senses and understanding." What Bacon says of nature, I would say of "culture" and "literature." And so I would also adapt Dyson's other citation from Bacon: "For God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the literary work." Dyson's book, Infinite in All Directions, is itself one of the subtlest works in the tradition I am advocating; and his earlier study Weapons and Hope not coincidentally contains some of the most remarkable products of a "creative understanding" of War and Peace.

Dyson's anecdote about himself and another future physicist as boys also captures a debate in which prosaics is engaged. One boy wants to know the laws that make the stars move, the other wants to know their names. Chen Ning Yang wants to see what is generalizable, Dyson what is particular; and Dyson today tells us that even the hardest of the hard sciences requires both efforts. Still more, then, must the humanities cultivate an appreciation of the particularities.

In a similar spirit, Stephen Jay Gould has also argued that one characteristic of evolutionary biology and paleontology is that a sense of contingency, of what cannot be reduced to the simple unfolding of timeless laws, is absolutely essential to those disciplines, and that we do a disservice to science to assume that it is all Cartesian, all like Chen Ning Yang. Evolutionary biology must be understood as in a deep sense historical, that is, dependent on contingent events that no method can eliminate or think away.

If natural entities must be understood as historical in this sense, still more must cultural entities. For when we examine culture and literature, we are dealing with people, after all, and people have choice, history, everything that Bakhtin means by "surprisingness" and "unfinalizability." The dream of general laws of culture and society (in the strong sense of laws) looks increasingly like a mirage, as does the belief in a hidden system beneath the chaos of the world that ultimately "explains" everything. These are

prime examples of the semiotical totalitarian impulse. That impulse is what the underground man has in mind when he speaks of the "table of logarithms," and what Tolstoy has in mind when he writes that if life could ever be exhaustively explained by reason, the possibility of life would be destroyed.

Freud was very far from prosaics in declaring that there are absolutely no accidents in the psyche, and that every act of forgetting is the result of an intention to forget. If this were true, it would be pointless to try to design automobiles or air traffic controls with the aim of minimizing unintentional error. Unprosaic, too, is the Freudian "scientific" pride in denying the humanist idea of responsibility and freedom; as is the entire "therapeutic" view of human life.[3] Perhaps these views account for Bakhtin's dislike of Freudianism and explain why he dwells so long and so brilliantly on Dostoevsky's statement that "I am not a psychologist."

Fortunately, many Freudians, and even Freud himself, are inconsistent on these points. But so long as they adhere to the spirit of their school, it is hard to see how they could offer an alternative to it. Semiotic totalitarians often try to have it both ways, offering ad hoc qualifications without renouncing "ultimate" adherence to an all-embracing system. The qualifications are welcome, but so long as the view is maintained that knowledge to be real must be sytematic and describe its object as a system, the way to a real alternative perspective on knowledge is blocked.

In their qualifications, such thinkers resemble the generals in War and Peace who claim to believe in a science of strategy but then say one cannot push it too far, without saying what sort of knowledge their "science" then becomes. It will be recalled that Prince Andrei (and Tolstoy) prefer Pfuhl, who makes no concessions, and so at least, lets us see the consequences of his position. (The early Russian Formalists were similarly consistent in an untenable position, which is one reason that Bakhtin and Medvedev judged them significant and worthy opponents.)

Sartre advances much the same criticism of "Marxism with concessions," the qualified assertion that everything "ultimately" fits the laws of history Marx discovered, despite such unimportant accidents as the Napoleonic wars. Like Tolstoy, Sartre is a marvelous satirist in these passages. Marxists, he writes, tend to see only what can be "denatured" or "dissolved in a bath of sulphuric acid" to fit their laws, and then proceed by "getting rid of the particular by defining it as the simple effect of chance."[4] But this chance is denied any rich definition -- it is infinitely far from Tolstoy's "for some reason" -- not to mention any real effectiveness. Having made these observations, Sartre, rather disappointingly, suggests that we need to supplement Marxism with Freudianism -- to correct the limitations of one system by integrating it with another, which is rather like remedying astrology with a dose of alchemy. It is what we so often get when literary theorists offer us (as Pangloss or Polonius might have) combinations of

fashionable schools, so that when someone joined Freudianism with narratology, or deconstruction with Marxism, he could expect regard as an innovator. Nevertheless, two half truths do not make a whole one.

Let me stress: prosaics suggests that knowledge to be real does not have to be a system; neither must its object be imagined as a system. After all, most of the knowledge we use in our everyday life is not a system, and it is nonetheless quite valuable.

Current ethical theory embraces a movement that Bakhtin and Tolstoy would likely have admired. It argues, as Levin and Pierre learn, that ethics must not be viewed as the discovery and applications of timeless norms. Rather, it consists of a deepening understanding of particular cases, as Aristotle suggested long ago. This position does not imply that general statements are of no value; on the contrary, in understanding the circumstances that have prompted them, one can learn a great deal and in seeing where they fail, a good deal more. Norms can help us to sharpen our ethical sense of particular situations and real people in all their unrepeatability, which is what real ethics, real "oughtness," is all about. The same point applies to the humanities generally.[5]

But every view of the world has its "occupational hazards," prosaics included. By "occupational hazards" I mean the mistakes that are likely to arise from a strong theory when it is pushed too far or improperly applied, the blindnesses that are the other side of its insights. Every theory, I imagine, has such occupational hazards. For prosaics, the temptations are to make a <u>system</u> out of avoiding system, a categorical refusal to believe that noticeable or great events could <u>ever</u> be important, and, perhaps, to embrace a form of nihilism that is hostile to the very spirit of prosaics itself. Tolstoy clearly succumbed to these temptations at times, and Rieber detects a similar deviation in me. In failing to distinguish my views from Tolstoy's clearly enough, I have evidently given cause for such an interpretation. So I would like to clarify what I really do mean and where I part company with Lev Nikolaevich.

Carol Any cites Sir Isaiah Berlin's famous classification of thinkers into foxes and hedgehogs. I would adjust Berlin's idea to say: Tolstoy was by temperament a hedgehog, who discovered the value of foxiness. He was often tempted to make a system of it -- to "hedgehogize" the fox -- which led him rather inconsistently to his radical historiographical nihilism. Incidentally, Tolstoy himself was aware of this danger, which is why he satirized it, even if he yielded to it. For example, when Levin is writing his book on agriculture, he comes to realize that there can be no "general theory" of the subject; but then he somehow finds himself dreaming of turning <u>that</u> insight into a general theory that should save the world -- which will henceforth be indebted to Kostya, who was refused by the Shcherbatsky girl. (My private title for his book at this stage is <u>What Is Agriculture?</u>.)

To answer Rieber directly, then: I do not think that Tolstoy was right in arguing against the very possibility of meaningful historical research. Prosaics should lead to a deep skepticism, not the sort of nihilism Tolstoy succumbed to. That is one place where I part company with Lev Nikolaevich and join forces with Rieber, from whom I have learned so much; another is when Tolstoy categorically denies the possibility that great men or great events can be effective. A better position would be a principled suspicion: perhaps great events in history or our own individual lives seem important because they are so noticeable or memorable, and it would probably pay to see whether in fact the sum total of small events was more effective, even if it is hard to make a good and coherent story from them. But prosaics would not deny the very possibility of great events being effective. Similarly, prosaics, when true to its spirit, does not deny that systems ever exist. What it denies is that they can be presumed to exist, that behind all apparent chaos there must be an order. Thus, it emphatically does not follow from the fact that some forgetting is Freudian that all of it, or even most of it, must be. And in culture, when systems do exist they are (as Bakhtin liked to write) probably less "systematic" than they at first seem. They are in any case not given but created (ne dan, a sozdan). That is, they are always the result of human work, the real effort of real people in real particular circumstances, not just the manifestation of a hidden pattern always there to be discovered. Prosaics is especially suspicious of all attempts to reduce creativity to mere discovery or to regard the outcome of multiple choices as preordained simply because in retrospect one can make a neat story out of that assumption.

In fact, I have very little quarrel with the practice of current historians; on the contrary, I wish literary theorists, especially those who appeal to History, would sometimes be more like them. My real target in the last three pages of Hidden and in my articles on prosaics in The American Scholar and in the first issue of The Tolstoy Studies Journal was the predominant trends and representatives of Theory today. Some are semiotic totalitarians (with or without "concessions": semiotics with a human face) and those who are not tend to be radical relativists, which is simply semiotic totalitarianism in another form. Positive dogmatists are answered by negative dogmatists in an endless spiral of oneupsmanship. Both are equidistant from prosaics. The radical relativists share with the system-builders the assumption that knowledge to be real must be systemic; they simply deny that such knowledge is possible. One group is like Pierre when he imagines that he is "l'russe Besouhof," the other is like Pierre when he decides that since everything is relative then"it's all the same," all a matter of point of view or sheer power.

But what if knowledge does not have to be systemic? What if the literary text is neither a purely free play of meanings in which anything that suits one's interests goes nor a system with a hidden key? What if great literature is richer than the theories we devise to explain it and, to be up-to-date, replace it? When Robert Alter

recently argued as much in The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1989), his point was received as a slap in the face of academic orthodoxy. Fifteen or twenty years ago, Alter's point would have been as uncontroversial as a defence of motherhood, whereas today it is as controversial and as reactionary as -- as a defence of motherhood.

Systems, Patterns, and Emergent Meanings

Popkin, Any, Anna Tavis, and Frank Silbajoris (in his review in Slavic and East European Journal) all focus on another "prosaic" thesis of my book I am afraid I did not explain with sufficient clarity. In the section of Hidden devoted to Tolstoy's "creation by potential," a method Tolstoy dramatized as one way to illustrate prosaic insights about time, I contend that Tolstoy developed a way to take advantage of the accidents inherent in the creative process -- the drop of wax on Mikhailov's canvas. Creation by potential is opposed to creation by pre-planned structure, because structure eliminates the sort of contingency cultivated by Tolstoy's method, a method in which it is essential that the author not know the outcome of events. If he does, Tolstoy felt, his narrative violates the openendedness of each present moment, which always contains multiple possibilities. As Tolstoy argues over and over again, when one narrates with the eventuality that happened to result from an event already in mind, one narrates anachronistically and closes down the event's multiple possibilities. As Bakhtin would formulate the point, to capture the "eventness" of events, one must recognize that the plot is only one of many possible plots.

Of course, different works or genres may represent the present as more or less open: Oedipus the King, it would seem, depends on a maximal closure of time, because the work's considerable dramatic irony depends on our knowing the inevitable outcome of events in advance, and without such an inevitability the meaning of the work would be quite different. Bakhtin's characterization of novels, and still more of the polyphonic novel, specifies works in which time is, by comparison with other genres, maximally open. It seems to me that for Tolstoy even the novel closed down time too much -- for example, by depending too much on foreshadowing, which smuggles later meaning into present events. Thus, he decided to take the genre much farther in the direction it was already going. He arrived at a form so far beyond the novel as he knew it that he insisted his book was "not a novel"; but at the same time we can recognize it as ultra-novelistic - "as large as life and twice as natural," as a character in the Alice books observes. War and Peace has so much novelness that its author felt it had to be read differently from the great novels he knew.

In reply, critics have pointed to numerous passages in War and Peace and in Anna Karenina that do not seem to depend on a sense of pre-planned structure. No one who writes on Tolstoy is better at detecting such evidence and understanding its rich meanings than Silbajoris.

"To take just one example," Silbajoris writes, "we might consider the punishment of Kuragin. It is really not at all important for the outline of events that Kuragin who came to offer himself as a suitor to Princess Marya of the heavy tread, bounded up the stairs three steps at a time in Bald Hills, played footsie with Mademoiselle Bourienne, later seduced Natasha during a ballet, and finally lost his leg at Borodino. The sequence does make a sustained ironic point, becomes a device akin to Tolstoy's repeated physical details. Of similar value is the motif of birth and death and the closed or open door that recurs with Andrei at his crucial moments, and many other such repetitions amounting in the end, to a system that still awaits inquiry."[6]

I think any perceptive reader of Tolstoy will recognize that, as Silbajoris maintains, such repetitions are common in War and Peace and Anna Karenina. And the one about Kuragin's leg is a particularly superb example, which is (so far as I know) Silbajoris's discovery. There is no doubt that such repetitions exist and that they make an ironic point. But the question is whether they establish a "system." Do these examples render untrue the thesis that Tolstoy created by potential, that is, that he wrote without knowing in advance how he would (or whether he would) exploit particular details? Is it not still possible that instead of planning in advance the structure into which a detail would fit he planted elements of potential use, some of which he found ways to exploit and some of which remained unrealized; and that both the tapped and untapped potentials were part of his special open design?

In daily life, we often repeat ourselves. To our dismay, we recognize that we make the same old mistakes, that we have verbal tics often at cross purposes to our intentions, and that our habits lead us to actions that, if they appeared in a novel, might appear planned in advance. But we know that they were not planned in advance. Without structure or pre-planning by anyone, habits establish a certain consistency of action that surfaces and resurfaces at odd moments. And it is probably for the good that we cannot plan our lives in advance, because then we could not learn from experience even to the extent that we do; and our lives, which would simply unfold like a movie we taped long ago, would not really be lived. Nevertheless, our lives are manifestly characterized by repetitions and regularities, which make it possible for other people to rely on us (to the extent that they do).

Neither repetitions nor characteristics prove a pre-planned structure. Weather has a certain overall regularity we call climate, even though that overall regularity has defeated all attempts at long-term weather forecasting. Authors have certain stylistic habits that often blind them to better solutions. Professions often have an ethos that creates certain familiar rhythms and patterns. We all have characteristic ways of behaving, and we have enormous difficulty changing them even when we become aware that they exist and that they may be harmful. Although in retrospect, a person with an eye for a good story could lend a Sophoclean irony to our lives, in

doing so he would be decisively changing them. In short, it is entirely possible to have repetitions without an advance plan, structure, or system in the strong or non-trivial sense of those terms.

My thesis was that Tolstoy claimed to be writing the way Rostov learned to be a good soldier — that is, by not planning in advance, but by trusting to his skills and laboriously acquired habits to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. The difference of course, is that Tolstoy, unlike Rostov, also creates those opportunities. In doing so, Tolstoy did not know what they would lead to, but rather sensed that they had rich potential for interesting departures in unforseen circumstances. And my thesis is that those favorable and surprising circumstances also did arise (if they had not, the work would have been a failure).

Thus, examples such as the ones Silbajoris offers are compatible either with the thesis of system or with that of creation by potential. What, then, tells us how Tolstoy created (or, more accurately, how Tolstoy wanted us to assume he created)? To begin with, Tolstoy made a point of saying in his essay "Some Words about the Book War and Peace," published while the work was still being serialized, that he does not know in advance what will happen to his characters; but I admit that that is "external evidence" (even if some of these statements also appear in draft prefaces that Tolstoy apparently considered publishing as part of the work itself). At least as important is internal evidence: all the scenes of rich potential not exploited. War and Peace is rich in characters introduced with great fanfare but who never reappear and in events (like the portentous encounter of Prince Andrei with Prince Dolgoruky, which seems to set the stage for a dramatic confrontation between the two proud men) that have written all over them — "Pay attention! This is important, like the pie Pip gives to a convict" -- but which lead to nothing or nothing commensurate. Initial reviewers (and today's undergraduates) experience this aspect of the work keenly, even if we scholars who have read the book long ago and taught it too frequently see it through the obscuring glasses of remembered memories and reinterpreted reinterpretations.[7]

It is to all those wasted potentials, the fact that the text is a fabric of lost as well as found threads, that seem to verify Tolstoy's claim. Tolstoy himself comments on numerous habits of thought that find order by "stencil work," that is, by excluding evidence of disorder, much as Freudians take significant errors as proof that there can be no other kind. It seems to me that both War and Peace and Anna Karenina exploit potentials for just the sort of irony that Silbajoris detects, but that those patterns are not offered as the result of a preconceived design. In fact, they seem all the more powerful if one accepts that there was no preconceived design. They become proof that Tolstoy was, like Rostov and Mikhailov, effective when unforseen opportunities arose.

We know that in daily life incidents often seem striking that do not seem so when we narrate them: "you have to have been there," we

say. One common reason for this divergence is that, as experienced, the event was impressive because it actually happened as it might have been described in a story; or it was impressive because it happened when we expected that nothing unusual would happen at all. But once one narrates such an occurence, it already is in a story, and our audience knows that something unusual must have happened, or what would be the point of telling about it at all? (Shaggy dog stories depend on such an expectation by defeating it.) What Tolstoy discovered was a way to defeat such expectations, to avoid smuggling later meaning into events, without making his work uninteresting or unreadable, that is, without making it into a shaggy dog story with modernist pretensions.

Let me also offer an analogy to the problem Silbajoris raises. Gould argues that defenders of evolution misunderstand it when they offer as proof an organism's perfect design, the optimal solution to a problem. For perfect design is also obviously, perhaps still more obviously, compatible with divine creation. It is also a misunderstanding of Darwin to argue that everything in an organism must have a function or else it would not be there (the fallacy of "hyperselectionism"). That, too, is a view more compatible with divine creation than evolution. God could easily have a reason(or several reasons) for every feature of every organism he has made.

No, the best proof of evolution is imperfect design, solutions that barely work, like the Panda's thumb. Having already brought the thumb together with the other digits (as with most mammals), the panda did not have it available when something was needed to perform the functions of a thumb; and so the panda, so to speak, used another bone to form a sort of thumb, which, however, does not work very well. No divine creator, making the organism all at once, would have done it that way; which is why we may infer evolution from imperfect design. When we see a collection of compromises, we may visualize a historical process, one in which possibilities at each moment were constrained by previous choices. In history, it is necessary to tinker with the resources at hand, which are rarely optimal. As Gould observes: "You cannot demonstrate evolution with perfection because perfection need not have history....But, Darwin reasoned, if organisms have a history, then ancestral stages should leave remnants behind. Remnants of the past that don't make sense in present terms -- the useless, the odd, the peculiar, the incongruous -- are the signs of history....When history perfects, it covers its own tracks....The panda's 'thumb' demonstrates evolution because it is clumsy and built from an odd part."[8]

The same reasoning applies to hyperselectionism: it is the fact that not everything in an organism contributes to its survival that serves as evidence for natural history rather than divine creation. If organisms developed by evolution, then we might expect that some features would be only the by-product of other features; a feature that contributes to survival may bring others along with it. But once those contingent by-products are present, they may create the possibility for new functions and new paths of evolution. Thus,

each stage of evolution not only closes down some possibilities but also creates others, which need not have been there. As a result, no straight line can be projected from any moment into the future; and although it might appear that a straight line or prior plan led to the present, such an interpretation would be mistaken.

It is not necessary that everything in an organism serve a function, it is only necessary that nothing be very dysfunctional. For that matter, the same argument applies against social "hyperfunctionalism": not everything in a society has to serve a helpful function to be there. Rather, practices may continue as long as they are not so harmful that people undertake the considerable effort necessary to get rid of them. The same is true of personal habits.

And the evidence for creation by potential is similar: it is not the passages that seem perfectly designed that are evidence for it, but those that are not. Tolstoy would have us believe, and he created a text that confirms the belief, that he planted potentials. He took advantage of opportunities for rich scenes and interesting developments as they presented themselves, in the process producing new potentials, at times intentionally and at times as the byproduct of exploiting earlier potentials; and so he created a work with both realized and unrealized opportunities for patterning and repetitions, new departures and unexpected changes. He discovered an artistic method that allowed him to create a work that reads as if there were no method, a kind of artifice that allowed him to fabricate the lifelike as no one had ever done before or has done since.

Serialization, I argued, was also exploited for this purpose. That is, serialization was not just a fact of publication but an intrinsic part of the work itself. As he reminded his readers in "Some Words," and as he had planned from the outset to remind them in his draft prefaces, serialization was exploited so that the author could not go back to correct what he had done before to make it fit what occurred to him later -- just as one cannot go back in life or history. And for readers, serialization made the experience of encountering each section essentially different from reading it as a whole, because when one knows how much of a book one has read one can guess at what complications are possible. Detective Colombo cannot have solved the crime yet, because we are only half an hour into a two-hour show; this cannot be Raskolnikov's real confession because the book has three hundred pages remaining. For the original readers, War and Peace was not a very long book but a book of indeterminate length. So was Anna Karenina, which is why it was so much in character for Tolstoy to add a part eight after many readers thought the book had ended (as it could have)with Anna's suicide. It was also characteristic of Tolstoy that part eight of Anna deals with events in the real world that had not happened yet when part one appeared, which means that those events could not have been part of the original design. (In writing War and Peace, set sixty years in the past, Tolstoy did not have this opportunity.) But what was part of the original design was the expectation that unexpected events might be exploited and a method of composition adapted to take advantage of such opportunities should they arise.

Popkin asks sagaciously whether such a device makes War and Peace "a book that cannot be reread? By knowing its outcome, do we begin to view its developments as inevitable?" And are we not deprived of the sense of indeterminate length? In short, is it possible to read the book as Tolstoy intended, and if not, why has it lasted? (Popkin does not actually ask these last two questions, but I think she implies them.) My answer in brief is that although we cannot fully capture the original sense of strangeness and indeterminate length, we can imagine it if we think to do so. That is one reason I spent so much time in describing the responses of reviewers to the work when it was still incomplete, and why I pay special attention to the responses of students today who do not know the plot in advance.

I teach a whole course on War and Peace every year, and as the students read each weekly assignment I am careful not to tell them what happens next, and to have them record their impressions as they go along. And many of them do make the same sort of "mistakes" as the early reviewers, who, for instance, assumed Dolokhov was to be equal in importance to Pierre and Prince Andrei. In this respect, students apprehend the text better than we do, which ought to prompt a Tolstoyan question: who should be learning about War and Peace from whom?

But What Are the Facts?

The fact that Tolstoy claimed to be writing without a preconceived design, and that the work gives evidence that this is so, does not conclusively prove that he actually created the way he said he did. It is conceivable that he carefully structured such an impression in advance. Even if that were so, one would still be mistaken to read War and Peace as a pre-planned structure -- in the sense that to do so would be counter to the author's intention. I do not know if Silbajoris would agree with me on that point, but I imagine he would agree that it would be of great interest to know whether Tolstoy actually or only ostensibly created by potential.

To answer this question, I turned to the notebooks and drafts, which I found bewildering, and to several studies, including Eichenbaum's, which Any paraphrases so acutely. As might have been expected, I found many disagreements among the textual scholars. By far the most convincing solutions were to be found in Kathryn Feuer's unsurpassed dissertation on the topic.[9] But even this study did not answer my question, and I began to wonder whether it was answerable at all.

A quandary presented itself. What would count as evidence that Tolstoy did not know in advance what would happen next? Obviously, there cannot be negative evidence -- any more than one can tell us what one is not presently thinking about; there could only be the absence of positive evidence. And the absence of positive evidence would still not prove the case that Tolstoy did not know in advance what would happen to his characters, because it is always possible that he did know but did not write it down. On the other hand, one

could reverse the question and try to demonstrate that Tolstoy did plan falsely to create the impression that his work was unplanned in the usual sense. Of course, even if one found such a direct statement, it, too, might turn out to be false. But in fact I found no such statement, and the evidence I did find was ambiguous, which is to say, like most documents about the creative process, it lends itself easily to anithetical interpretations.

Let me provide an example. Might the notebooks not contain plans for future action? Yes, in fact they typically contain many such plans for actions that do and do not eventually occur in the book as it eventually came to be published. The problem, however, is that such plans are fully compatible with creation by potential. In fact, War and Peace explicitly discusses the logical problems with drawing inferences from such evidence. After an event, Tolstoy repeatedly observes, one can always find "evidence" that someone "predicted" it because there are always so many predictions or intimations of predictions that one of them is bound to come true no matter what, at least most of the time; and we would be likely to remember only such instances in any case. But what about all those predictions that did not come true?

And what are the status of plans for actions that do not happen in the published text? Is it not possible that they were not intended to dictate future action but rather to understand present moments? For one way in which we do understand any present moment is to imagine what might happen as a result of it; and to envision a character in a rich way it might well be helpful to understand who he is by outlining some possibilities of what he might do without ever assuming that he would have to do those and only those things. Even in life, we understand people by considering what they are capable of, without believing they will necessarily do what they are capable of. Of course, they might actually do some of those things, as Tolstoy's characters might fulfill some of those "plans." But such an outcome would in no way indicate that the "plans" were intended to predetermine what the characters had to do. Tolstoy might still have created with a multiplicity of possible outcomes in mind and the readiness to devise a new one if occasion suggested it -- much as he "pardoned" Prince Andrei after Austerlitz and allowed Vronsky to commit and recover from attempted suicide. Did Karenin have to forgive Anna at her bedside? Did Kuragin have to lose a leg? Did Petya have to die? Might Prince Andrei have confronted Prince Dolgoruky, and could Ramballe have come back to play a role in the action, as some of the "plans" seem to indicate?

It is not uncommon for writers to alter their plans in the course of creation. The phenomenon is hardly unique to Tolstoy. But what is unusual about Tolstoy is that he created (or claimed to have created) so as to change his mind in that way, and to take maximal advantage of such unforeseen opportunities. Whether he actually did so I cannot yet decide.

Reading, Overreading, and Underreading; or, Who is to Blame?

I confess to my greatest discomfort when Popkin quoted my earlier book, The Boundaries of Genre, and asked me how I would square my two theories. For in Boundaries I argued that to read a work as literary is to read it as complete; and "if a work is assumed to be complete, we are justified in hypothesizing the thematic and formal relevance of all of its details. This is not to say that all of its details will necessarily be equally relevant....On the contrary, to identify a structure of a work is to construct a hierarchy of relevance that makes some of its details central and others peripheral. No detail, however, can be completely irrelevant....It may be observed, in fact, that a large part of the pleasure of reading literature derives from the identification of that structure, from the process of ordering through which we perceive or postulate the wholeness of a text... The way readers go about this process of ordering, it should be noted, is not a constant....[But] So long as the work is read as literature at all, readers will seek an integral design and postulate a structure so as to reward that search."[10]

In light of Popkin's question, we may ask: How is this statement to be reconciled with (1) the prejudice of prosaics against perfect design, and (2) the theory of creation by potential, with its insistence on details that turn out to be irrelevant? Irina Paperno asked me much the same thing in different words. And when I read Popkin's contrast of my two statements, I did what any theorist would do in such circumstances: I squirmed.

Up to a point, I could reconcile the two statements by shifting the emphasis of the first. But in a larger sense, Popkin is right. If the two statements can be reconciled in terms of explicit theory, they are nevertheless very different in spirit. And when it comes to tracing the implication of theories, the spirit is often as important as the letter.

Over the years, I have obviously, bit by bit and tiny alteration by tiny alteration, changed my mind. I imagine I will probably do so again. One reason I changing my mind was working on Tolstoy, Bakhtin, and prosaics; another was my continued work with my favorite topic in literary theory, the nature of the creative process. A statement about literary structure is implicitly a statement about authorial control, and therefore, about how that control was exercised. To describe how a text is "made" is to imply something about the process of its making. Tolstoy apparently felt as much, which is, I suppose, why his essay on War and Peace includes a statement about how he was writing it. It would take me too far afield to discuss this problem in greater detail than I do in Hidden, but in light of these questions, let me now sort out how I would presently reformulate my statements in Boundaries.

First, about the search for order in a text. I still believe that

when readers interpret a text, they would be wise to seek the place of each apparently irrelevant detail in a larger design of some sort. But I would now caution that there is no guarantee they will find that place. The lack of such a guarantee is the consequence not only of an inevitable lack of some crucial evidence, but also, and more importantly, of the prosaic fact that a work of human hands is extremely unlikely to be perfect. That is especially true of a long novel written over many years.

I suppose that for any detail we may readily identify in a sonnet, the author may have imagined a place for it. But when we are dealing with a thousand-page novel written over five years, let us say, such perfection is almost inconceivable. Tolstoy makes Natasha age more in a given number of years than the number of years that have elapsed. Some semiotic totalitarian or textual hyperselectionist, who assumed that for every feature there must be a good structural reason, might detect a sort of surrealist symbolism here, but I think that would be a classic case of overreading brought on by the refusal to recognize the limits of planning and the presence of accident, contingency, and (just plain) mistakes. Memory fails, control lapses. As every proofreader knows, texts remain imperfect, and the very activity of correcting mistakes introduces new ones. Fortunately, we usually do not notice such lapses, because if they were easily noticeable the author would probably have noticed them too and corrected them - unless so many other things would have to change in consequence (would Andrei have to give up proposing to Natasha if she had aged at the normal rate?) that the author prefers the mistake to the correction.

In any (or almost any) long or sufficiently complex work, there must be many such mistakes that even if noticed detract from the work very little or not at all, and there may also be mistakes that do detract from it. That is, we really need at least three categories --details that contribute to the design; mistakes that if noticed detract from it; and neutral features that are neither functional nor dysfunctional. In effect, Jonathan Culler's attack on Roman Jakobson's way of reading poems may be seen as a principled suspiciousness of how Jakobson makes every neutral element functional,[11] which is another type of overreading no less exasperating than that of turning actual flaws into virtues.

Interpretation is a risky business. Not only do critics risk overreading, but they also face the possibility of underreading. The history of interpretation is filled with instances in which critics dismissed as a flaw what later was shown convincingly to be a well-planned effect. In such cases, previous critics are usually shown to have failed to consider the sort of design the author had in mind; looking for one kind of order, they dismissed as unnecessary a detail that finds its significance in a different kind. The history of criticism of most complex works, War and Peace included, is bound to include numerous cases of both underreading and overreading.

How, then, are we to tell which is which, and whether a given textual feature is functional, dysfunctional, or neutral? Is there a Method for doing so, a Theory that can serve as a court of appeals? Prosaics

answers that there can probably be no non-trivial formulation of such a theory, no rules that can help us in all but the simplest cases, which are unlikely to be troubling anyway. What we can do is offer a few general guidelines that may remind us of past experience and a few tricks of the trade that have proven useful in some difficult situations; but we must ultimately trust to our sensitivity to each text. That sensitivity, which is the product of experience, is, like a good ethical sense, unformalizable. It is what a literary education seeks (or should seek) to convey. There is no "alibi" for it.

If the significance of details is not guaranteed in advance, then why should readers nevertheless "hypothesize" order, as I still think they should? The answer is practical: If order does exist, if a detail does have an unsuspected place, we are unlikely to find that place unless we look for it. The reason to postulate order, then, is not that it is guaranteed but that there is no equally good way to find it if it should be there. To cite Bakhtin: Order is "not given but posited" [ne dan, a razdan]. The postulate of order is heuristic, which is to say, a good bet. But we should always be alert to the possibility a given detail could really be neutral or dysfunctional, that there may be no good reason for its presence. Such alertness may guard us from strained readings recommended only by their justification of a favored author, or by the consolation they provide to those who need to believe in perfect design, or by their exhibition of sheer cleverness, or by their conformity to some currently orthodox theory, ideology, or political prejudice.

When I say that postulating order in a literary work is a "good bet," I mean that literary works tend to be a lot more ordered than historical periods, societies, or on ongoing lives. That is what prosaics would lead us to expect, because in a world that is always more or less messy order results from hard work. And literary works are characteristically the product of such work. We cannot make our lives into a work of art, as one of Dostoevsky's characters counsels, because we cannot go over each "scene" many times, perform the neglected better action, adjust the pictures on the wall to suggest an ironic second meaning to our choice, or make the responses of other people fit. In life, each moment is unrepeatable, as Bakhtin would say. But the creation of artworks allows for such reworkings when they would be helpful. So it is hardly surprising that artworks would be more ordered than experience; indeed, that is one reason we read artworks. And artworks require such orderliness because they are typically designed to be of interest in diverse contexts and periods and so must be maximally efficient and patterned. But I doubt that very many, if any, artworks are perfectly patterned.

Because a metaphysical poem by Donne or a lyric by Pushkin is likely to be more ordered than anything in human history, the tendency of some theoretical schools to read historical periods and contexts like metaphysical poems strikes me as intuitively suspect. For what could provide such order, what eliminates the messiness of life, who is the grand historical artificer analogous to an author

and capable of perfect design? Behind such theories lies an implicit appeal to God, or to a leap of faith in historical laws explaining everything, or to some sort of gigantic conspiracy. This way of reading history "as a text" or as a poem is another form of "hyper-selectionism" and as such, is close in spirit and often in practice to conspiracy logic. Historical periods as seamless texts in which the most unexpected details turn out to fit; the psyche as a whole with no genuine accidents or contingencies; the sort of masonic numerology that captivates "l'Russe Besouhof"; the model of events offered in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion -- all these forms of semiotic totalitarianism, so influential in our time, gain their plausibility from the unprosaic assumption of an underlying Order behind all apparently messy or contingent circumstances.

I do not imagine that the world is fundamentally chaotic, only that it is never fully ordered; it contains clumpings -- in fact, many divergent clumpings -- of relative orderliness, aggregates of regularity in competition with and completely unrelated to each other, and some random elements that are about to be incorporated into or have just been "excorporated" from some aggregate of order, whose relative orderliness may have been somewhat unsettled in the process.

Where Dostoevsky and Tolstoy Stumbles

Which brings me by yet another route to the problem of creation by potential. When Tolstoy wrote War and Peace and Anna Karenina, and when Dostoevsky devised The Diary of a Writer, they hit upon the idea of exploiting unforseen elements of the creative process to establish a different concept of authorial design. The Diary daringly proposes to make contingent events of ongoing history central to its design; War and Peace develops the unsuspected potentials of its own events. Thus the design of War and Peace is fundamentally different from that of works that were either made, or designed to be read as if they were made, according to a pre-planned structure; our sense of a process with unforseeable results becomes a part of our experience of the work. With any work, a plot summary leaves out important elements, but in War and Peace the violation is different in kind and so much greater in degree, because, by leaving out the "irrelevant" events and the unexploited potentials, it tends to reduce the work to a "structure" in the narrow sense.

Thus I would not say that War and Peace does not have a structure (in the sense specified) but it does have a design. It has elements that would fit into a structure and elements that would be irrelevant to a structure but are still relevant to the work's special design. The question therefore arises as to whether the kind of design Tolstoy uses could in principle contain events that are irrelevant not only to the structure but also to its design. That is, could War and Peace contain truly irrelevant events? Or does the special status the work grants to "irrelevance" preclude genuine irrelevance?

My answer is that genuine irrelevance is not precluded. Even this method does make anything a sure bet. Not everything could have fit

into War and Peace, because its principle of design has its own rigorous integrity. The author had to be true to his process of creation, and to do so was an enterprise no less demanding, and I suspect much more demanding, than creation by structure. If Tolstoy had chosen events that were not rich in potential -- that closed down or eliminated future possibilities -- the work would have failed; and perhaps that is one reason he abandoned some earlier projects, such as the longer work of which The Cossacks was to have been a part or his projected novel about a "Russian landowner." (Kathryn Feuer is particularly perceptive with regard to the relation of War and Peace to these earlier projects.)

Indeed, we have in Russian literature an example of an artistic failure based on a version of this method: The Diary of a Writer, which succumbed to what (in Boundaries) I call "generic risks." Every set of constraints that creates the possibility of success also creates possibilities for failure, and I imagine that no one, least of all myself, would proclaim The Diary an artistic success in the sense that War and Peace or Eugene Onegin are. One measure of that failure is that very few readers have recognized that the Diary was intended to be an artistic work at all: the work might have been called, as Mark Twain called one of his stories, "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed."

A reason for this failure is readily apparent. As I understand it, Dostoevsky's design was to create for each issue of the Diary a melange of genres from ongoing events in the press and from the vagaries of his own creative laboratory. A network of possible relations among the different pieces was to be detectable in each issue, and across issues over time. To a great extent, this design does govern the issues of January, February, and March 1876, but by the middle of 1877, mere polemic has overwhelmed everything else. So much has become irrelevant to the work's already open design that the design has faded from view, even for those who attempt to detect it. It would of course be theoretically possible to find an artistic reason for the work's excrescences, but I imagine only those with the supreme confidence of a semiotic totalitarian would argue that the Diary is a success even in its own terms. As an innovative artwork, The Diary of a Writer is interesting primarily for the boldness of its attempt and the instructive nature of its failure, but not for its success in fulfilling its design.

Are there any places where War and Peace also fails in this way, if not to this degree? I think there are, and one regret I have about Hidden is that I was so intent to explicate the nature of the work's design and the way in which it works itself out where it succeeds (as it generally does), that I did not point out instances that either do not fit or do not fit as well as they might.

The argument that follows is pure speculation on my part. What may have happened in the course of writing War and Peace is that not only did events have unforeseen consequences (as Tolstoy's design demands) but that the design itself turned out to change, bit by bit, in

unforeseen ways, thus creating a new and different kind of problem. Specifically, it seems to me that the work began with a sense of historical scepticism and a sense that this scepticism demanded a radically new kind of narrative, but that before long it led to a total historical nihilism, which in turn led to still more radical changes in narrative design. In particular, it seems to me that the early portions of the book, at least through Schongraben and perhaps through Austerlitz, do not evince that total rejection of causal explanations evident later. It is as if in the process of writing, Tolstoy's own work led him further than he had intended. Fortunately, the changes were gradual, and so the design alters in a smooth curve; the differences are apparent only across hundreds of pages. But I do feel now that the earliest portions of the book are somewhat inconsistent with later portions.

I think Eichenbaum, whose views Any has so deftly paraphrased and analyzed, was mistaken when he argued that Tolstoy changed abruptly from an intention to write an English family novel in the style of Trollope to a very different intention to compose an epic. I do not think he ever intended either one, and, more important, I see no abrupt changes, But I do think Eichenbaum was correct in seeing some sort of inconsistency, and in suggesting that the problem of the work's unity becomes supremely interesting, especially because the change did not make the work a failure. My purely speculative guess is that Tolstoy, like Kutuzov and Rostov, was supremely good at solving problems as they presented themselves, and that he realized he could make subtle changes in design work, if they were not too abrupt. If Dostoevsky had done the same, the Diary might not have become an artistic failure.

A second example of a section that may partially exceed even the open design of War and Peace is the famous second part of the epilogue. I am at a loss to give a reason why I think so, except intuition, readerly dissatisfaction, and a sense when I am teaching that beyond the second part's first few chapters, nothing much would be lost by not paying as much attention to it as I do the other essays in War and Peace. Perhaps that is why in other plans and versions Tolstoy made the second part of the epilogue the first part, and in one edition moved it and other essays to an appendix, only to allow it to be restored later.

The number of changes that Tolstoy made or allowed to be made in various editions has prompted Eichenbaum to contend that War and Peace is somehow special in that there can be no definitive edition of it. As Eichenbaum states it, the argument is unsatisfying because many works go through variants, and so the problem is hardly unique to War and Peace. And yet, I think, Eichenbaum did hit on something important. What if -- more pure speculation -- the changing editions of the book were a sort of continuation of the process that made it to begin with? What if new editions were a form of serialization by other means? Perhaps continuous re-designing, potentially without end, is somehow deeply in spirit with the work as a whole?

Closure and Aperture

These speculations bring me to another question that has troubled reviewers (for example, Helena Goscilo, review in Russian Literature Triquarterly, Spring 1988, pp. 236-7) as well as other readers. I have in mind the problem of closure in War and Peace, or as we might say in this case, its aperture.

As the term closure is used in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End, it refers to the completion of a structure: "Closure occurs when the concluding portion of a poem creates in the reader a sense of appropriate cessation. It announces and justifies the absence of further development; it reinforces the feeling of finality, completeness, and composure, which we value in all works of art; and it gives ultimate unity and conherence to the reader's experience of a poem by providing a point from which all the preceding elements may be viewed comprehensively and their relations grasped as part of a significant design."[12] Smith's reasoning is very close to that of Russian Formalist discussions, especially when she discusses anti-closure, which, like the Formalists, she describes as just another form of closure. From the perspective of Smith and the Formalists, that would have to be the case, because the work could not function as one if it genuinely lacked closure. Anti-closure completes a structure by ostentatiously failing to complete it, and its wit derives from the fact that this supposed violation actually fits the norm.

Thus, from this standpoint, the existence of the poem as a poem per se creates a closural demand: "The poem's status and effect as art, and the reader's sense of its closural adequacy, are, then mutually reinforcing and to some extent mutually dependent. The possibility and significance of precisely that relationship between closure and art comprise, perhaps, the major burden of our argument throughout these pages" (Closure, 260).

It is easy to provide examples of anti-closure that would justify this description: the endings to Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, to Gogol's "Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt," and to Mark Twain's "A Story Without an End" and "A Medieval Romance" come readily to mind. Robert Belknap has argued that The Brothers Karamazov was designed much the same way.[13] Other common examples are romantic poems (including "Kubla Khan"?) that dramatize the whimsicality of inspiration by suddenly breaking off. Anti-closure not only affirms structure but is inconceivable without it.

What is right about the traditional position, then, is its identification of anti-closure as a form of closure. What is wrong with it is its assumption that these alternatives are exhaustive and that in principle a work of art could not have significant design without requiring closure (or anti-closure). And supporting this assumption is another one, which equates significant design with "structure."

War and Peace does not use anti-closure because it does not use closure at all. Because it replaces structure with a different sort of design, Tolstoy's work does away with closure and so does away with anti-closure. Not only is closure not necessary for this work, it would violate its design. Let me here cite one of Tolstoy's own comments in one of the drafts for an introduction to War and Peace:

> I cannot determine how much of my work will consist of what is now being published, because I do not know myself and cannot foresee what dimensions my work will assume.
>
> My task is to describe the life and the encounters of certain people in the period 1805-1856. I know that if I were occupied exclusively with that work and if that work of mine were carried on under the most favorable conditions, I should still hardly be in a psoition to complete my task. But provided that I write it as I want to, I am convinced that interest in my story will not cease when a given section is completed, and I am striving toward this end. It seems to me that if my work is of any interest, then the reader's interest will not only be gratified at the end of each part of the work but will also continue. As a result of this special quality, this work cannot be called a novel.
>
> Because if this special quality, I think that this work can be printed in separate parts without in any way losing the reader's interest and without inciting the reader to read the subsequent parts.
>
> It will not be possible to read the second part without having read the first, but having read the first, it will be very possible not to read the second.[14]

It is fairly remarkable for an author to announce not only he deliberately does not know where he is going but also that the reader need not read subsequent parts, which, after all, the author might just as well not have written. And all this is part of the author's design, a design neither requiring nor tolerating structural closure.

And yet it does require a unity, which in this case derives from our sense of a consistent project. Unity without closure is impossible for a work with structure but it is a necessity for a successful work created as War and Peace was created, by potentials. In place of closure, we are given "aperture."

By "aperture" I mean that the work lacks a special place where it can be assessed as a whole requiring (as Aristotle said of endings) nothing that follows. There is never a point, nor is there a need for a point, "from which all the preceding elements may be viewed comprehensively and their relations grasped" in a way that "announces and justifies the absence of further development." The work neither promises nor provides nor in prinviple tolerates a moment when all the threads are tied, when a continuation "might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended" (last sentence of Crime and Punishment. War and Peace is written so that it might go on forever, not as a very long work, but as a work of indeterminate length.

Stated positively, aperture invites us to form a relative closure at several points, each of which could be a sort of ending, at least as much of an ending as we are ever going to get. At the end of each installment, for instance, we may assess events and their patterning, and we may do the same at the "close" of the work, which becomes just the last of these installments we happen to have. At each of these points, some things but not everything will tie together, and we know that the work in principle could continue. If it does, then events that had one significance may acquire another, and events that led nowhere might (or might not) turn out to lead somewhere. What would have been the status of Prince Andrei in War and Peace if it had continued, as Tolstoy considered, until 1856? George Steiner asks: why could there not have been a ninth part of Anna Karenina? To read the work with aperture is to recognize that there could have been; and if there had been one, we would be encouraged to ask the same question about a possible tenth part. This sense of aperture is integral to any work successfully created with a design of open potentials rather than a pre-planned structure.

If this series of tentative considerations of uncompleted patterning seems an odd way to assess meaning, we might reflect that in our own lives that is what we often do — indeed, have no choice but to do. Herodotus and Greek tragedy teach us the danger of such assessments, which may always seem foolish in light of later events: "count no man happy until he is dead." I think this formulation, for all of its wise caution against underestimating change, is profoundly mistaken, because it enjoins us to assess each life, and each action in a life, as it is never experienced. As Bakhtin would say, it teaches us to treat lives as totally "finalized," but human life as we live it and cannot help living it is unfinalizable. My completed death is not an event in my own life. And it is, of course, utterly impossible to reflect on ourselves after we are dead. (The problem does not change if there is an afterlife, which would, after all be a part of our whole lives, and the judgments we make in it would themselves be part of what we are judging.) Tolstoy perhaps has such considerations in mind when he describes the wounded Prince Andrei trying to imagine the world without him, which is in principle impossible, because Andrei would at least have to be present as an observer.

Prosaics would teach us both the value and the limitations of assessing in process. And Tolstoy's fictions, with their design of aperture, make both a part of the experience of reading. To have captured this aspect of living was a remarkable achievment of Tolstoy's, and constitutes another reason why his two great novels are the most realistic works ever written.

Other Works, Other Values, Other Sources of Interest

Popkin asks whether, on the basis of realism, I mean to reject work not created as Tolstoy created War and Peace, whether we must "relinquish the very possibility of a 'good read' in favor of Truth?" Must works that are structurally neat somehow be regarded as superseded?"

She and others have also asked whether prosaics dictates a rejection of poetry. The answer to all of these questions is no.

We read literary works for many reasons, and we derive different kinds of wisdom and pleasure from them. Realism in the Tolstoyan sense is only one criterion; the same may be said of an understanding of ethical problems as prosaically complex and unformalizable.

In elaborating his prosaics, and in celebrating novelistic discourse, sense of character, and chronotope, Bakhtin did not mean to enjoin us never to read poetry. He meant to stress that great novels contain a depth and wisdom to which we have not paid sufficient critical attention and which cannot be adequately understood if we apply norms and practices derived from a reading of poetry. That does not mean that poetry, epic, and other genres do not have their own profound lessons to teach us. Certain genres are best at some things, others at others; and some critical practices offer a better starting point than others for approaching given kinds of texts. If Bakhtin not only described novels but also celebrated them as the greatest achivement of Western thought, it was because they were best at the problems that most concerned him, especially ethics. But there are many reasons to read literature and novels will not satisfy all of them.

One reason I feel so strongly about prosaics is that the world of "theory" today is so captivated by the dramatic, the ideological, the semiotically totalitarian and the totally relativist. My enthusiasm for Bakhtin derives in part from my sense that his "prosaics" offers an alternative to theory and the study of literature as it is now usually understood in departments of English and Comparative Literature (though mercifully not in Slavic departments). I am rather wryly aware that the tone with which I advocate prosaics is somewhat out of keeping with prosaics itself, and I imagine that the various reviewers here assembled are responding, very aptly, to this discrepancy.

In another review, Michael Andre Bernstein writes: "isn't 'prosaics,' by its very articulation as a general theory, in danger of becoming just another kind of 'semiotic totalitarianism,' doomed to discover its own self-confirming truth in every circumstance?" Yes, that is a danger, though not an inevitability. Perhaps an awareness of the danger may aid in avoiding it, but as prosaics itself teaches, there are no guarantees.

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1. "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis" in M.M. Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, trans. Vern McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U. Texas, 1986), 104.

2. It should be apparent that I am not in principle hostile to intentional criticism. Although it is not the only valid kind of reading, intentional criticism is surely one of the most rewarding kinds, and perhaps the most rewarding when we are dealing with writers who have thought

profoundly about the world. I cannot help thinking that Shakespeare has more to teach us than current literary theorists. It seems to me that the usual debate between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists is off-center, because both sides assume a relatively simplistic understanding of intentionality. As it happens, one of Tolstoy's central goals in War and Peace and Anna Karenina was to offer a much more complex account.

3. For an interesting account of the "therapeutic" view and its social consequences, see Robert Bellah, et.al, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley: UC, 1985).

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (NY: Random, 1986), 43-4, 56.

5. See Stephen Toulmin, "The Tyranny of Principles," The Hastings Center Report, vol. 11, no. 6 (December 1981), 31-9, especially the splendid discussion of Anna Karenina; and Toulmin and Albert Jonsen, The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning (Berkely: UC, 1988). For Bakhtin's development of a similar position, see "K filosofii postupka" in the 1984-5 issue of Filosofiia i sotsiologiia nauki i tekhniki, a yearbook for the Soviet Academy of Sciences, 80-160.

6. Slavic and East European Journal, vol. 32, no. 4 (Winter 1988), 652-3.

7. As Anna Tavis seems to suggest, the apparently (but only apparently) still more radical experiments of modernism also obscure our reading of the book.

8. Stephen Jay Gould, The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History (NY: Norton, 1982), 28-9.

9. Kathryn Feuer, "The Genesis of War and Peace," Columbia University doctoral dissertation, 1965.

10. The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's "Diary of a Writer" and the Traditions of Literary Utopia (Austin: UT, 1981; reprinted Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989), 42.

11. Jonathan Culler, "Jakobson's Poetic Analyses," Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975), 55-74.

12. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End (Chicago: UC Press, 1968), 36.

13. See Robert Belknap, The Structure of "The Brothers Karamazov" (The Hague: Mouton, 1967; reprinted Northwestern UP, 1989).

14. Draft 3 of an introduction to War and Peace, as translated by George Gibian in the Norton Critical Edition of War and Peace (NY: Norton, 1966), 1365. The Russian text of Tolstoy's draft introductions may be found in volume 13 of the Jubilee edition, pp. 53-7.