REVIEW ARTICLE:

The Tolstoy Questions: Reflections on the Silbajoris Theses

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The critical history of certain writers sometimes centers on a set of recurrent questions. Addressed by virtually all studies that aspire to more than passing interest, these questions have typically been asked, answered, and reformulated from the writer's time to ours. A consensus somehow refuses to form.

Not all writers have proven controversial in this way. I can think of no "Turgenev question"; important studies usually focus on a variety of smaller issues pertaining to specific works or passages.[1] Perhaps there is a Chekhov question concerning the extent to which his plays are really comedies. Gogol in a sense is nothing but Question.

Most obviously, there is an "accursed question" about Dostoevsky, often phrased as the problem of "the two Dostoevskys." What relation do the fanatic views expressed in his journalism, and especially in the Diary of a Writer, have to do with his great fiction? For there is obviously a difference in quality of thought between the great novels and (let us say) Dostoevsky's writings on the Eastern question and the Jews. Did the act of composing novels somehow allow him to transcend his own most cherished convictions? If so, was that because of the need to create convincing characters or because of the consciousness that great literature must be more than topical?

It would seem that that we have not one, but several, Tolstoy questions. Significant comprehensive Tolstoy criticism always addresses one, and usually more than one of them. That is surely the case with Rimvydas Silbajoris' remarkable new book, which not only offers powerful answers but also redefines recurrent questions.[2] There is no doubt that this book makes a major contribution to Tolstoy criticism.

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[1]But a real sense of controversy and challenge to the image of Turgenev appears in Elizabeth Cheresh Allen's study, *Beyond Realism*, forthcoming from Stanford University Press.

[2]Rimvydas Silbajoris, *Tolstoy's Art and His Aesthetics* (Columbus: Slavica, 1991). Further citations, given in the text, are to RS.

I should like first, to specify some of the central issues in Tolstoy criticism and then indicate how Silbajoris addresses them. Finally, I will share some thoughts prompted by my reading of this strong study.

Five Questions

Tolstoy critics have repeatedly disputed the following issues (among others):

First, is there, as Tolstoy himself claimed, a radical break in his career, occurring around 1880, when he renounced his former convictions? Does his art and thinking change radically at this point? Numerous critics (for example, Mirsky[3]) have taken Tolstoy at his word, and there are some obvious reasons other than Tolstoy's own emphatic testimony for this view. Biographical factors, including the state of his marriage, are often cited. Among those critics concerned primarily with Tolstoy's art, many have detected a notable difference in quality, as well as purpose, between War and Peace and Anna Karenina, written before the break, and Resurrection, written after. Indeed, it would take a true enthusiast not to notice this novelistic decline. Whereas in Tolstoy's early period didactic essays and mediocre moralistic fiction recede to the background, in the last decades great fictional works rise like islands in a dogmatic ocean.

On the other hand, some of the best Tolstoy criticism has argued that the "crisis" was no crisis at all. Boris Eikhenbaum, as is well known, contends that this alleged break was but one of several crises in Tolstoy's perpetual quest for new forms.[4] Turning from form to content, Richard Gustafson's

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[3]To be precise, Mirsky's position is that if we are speaking of "Tolstoy the man" the notion of a break is "unjustifiable," but that if we are speaking of his literary development, the break is not only real but importnat for an understanding of Russian literary history (not just Tolstoy). "It so happens," writes Mirsky, "that Tolstoy's conversion, about 1880, to the religion of his later years coincided with a profound chage in his artistic views and aims that was partly conditioned by that conversion but was also an independent literary development with a definite place of its own in the general evolution of Russian literature, and was almost a negation of the whole achievement of the realistic school." D.S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature: From Its Beginnings to 1900*, ed. Francis J. Whitfield (New York: Random House, 1958), 257.

[4]Note that Eikhenbaum phrases this view as a challenge to prior Tolstoy criticism. "Tolstoy's work is to the present day considered to fall into two sharply divided periods, up to the *Confession* and after

recent book, Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger, detects a continuity in Tolstoy's thought so unbroken that the earliest works can be read in terms set by the later theology. "I believe this [Eikhenbaum's] interpretation is at best backward," Gustafson observes. "The crises were moral and religious, and they led to reevaluations of literary forms," 4) rather than the reverse.[5] In either case, there is no sharp break in Tolstoy's career.

Second, what is the relation of Tolstoy's art to his aesthetics? This question, which is the central one for Silbajoris, is the closest to the "Dostoevsky question." Are Tolstoy's treatises on art, and especially What Is Art?, a sort of key to the fiction, or would it be a mistake to read one in terms of the other? Is War and Peace applied What Is Art? and is What Is Art? the explanation for War and Peace?

This second Tolstoy question is clearly related to the first; for if What Is Art? is somehow a key to fiction written decades earlier, then it would appear that Tolstoy's views remained essentially the same and there was no sharp break in his career. We would expect that Tolstoy's earlier statements on art point directly toward his mature formulations, and that the fiction reflected these views all along. Sooner or later, this position must face the obvious objection that in What Is Art? Tolstoy rejects most of his earlier fiction, including War and Peace and Anna Karenina, a change of heart that would seem to suggest a radical break.

The alternative view, which posits a sharp distinction between Tolstoy's great fiction and his moralistic treatise, has also commanded great respect. As with Dostoevsky, its appeal lies in allowing the critic to separate Tolstoy's masterpieces from his own professed intentions, which often seem inadequate to the works. Those who read Anna Karenina as sympathetic to its eponymous heroine are understandably drawn to a position that discounts Tolstoy's own rather different interpretations. If there are two Tolstoys, then it may be said that he began with the intention of condemning Anna, but changed his mind in the process of creation; afterwards, he

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it. To the present day it is thought that after *Confession* Tolstoy became a moralist. That is not true." B.N. Eikhenbaum, "On Tolstoy's Crises" in *Tolstoy: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ralph E. Matlaw (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 53 (translated from *Skovz' literaturu*).

[5]Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 4. Further references, given in the text, are to RG.

did not recognize what he had done. This, indeed, is probably the prevailing view of Anna.

In fact, Tolstoy himself seems to underwrite the possibility of works diverging radically from the intentions of their authors. It will be recalled that in his essay on Chekhov's story "The Darling," Tolstoy maintains that Chekhov began with the puerile, feminist idea of condemning his heroine but that, as a true poet, he transcended this narrow didactic purpose and produced a complex story much more sympathetic to its central figure. Like Balaam in the Biblical story, Chekhov "intended to curse, but the god of poetry forbade him, and commanded him to bless. And he did bless.... What makes the story so excellent is that the effect is unintentional."[6] Could not the same thing have happened to the author of Anna Karenina?

In reply, one may argue that such changes do take place, but that they do not always take place; and that the burden of proof must always lie with showing that an artist did not realize his intentions. Art, after all, may be wiser than its readers, not just its author. When an author defends views that run counter to those of his influential readers, and counter to those of the intelligentsia, critics (who belong to the intelligentsia) may find themselves almost irresistibly drawn to say that they, not the author, understand his book. I think that the pro-Anna critics have not taken this possibility seriously enough because they underestimate how radical a nonconformist Tolstoy was and how profoundly his views differed from intelligentsial truisms persisting from his time to ours. They have therefore read their own assumptions into Tolstoy's masterpiece. Nevertheless, the structure of their argument is a plausible one; and it remains central to this Tolstoy question.

The next three questions are closely related to each other. The third may be put this way: Everyone understands that Tolstoy was both a moralist and a great realist, but what is the relation of these two impulses to each other? Which is really primary? Does his unequalled ability to capture real life serve his moral or religious teaching by rendering his ideas concrete and palpable? Or is realism, the struggle to elude obscuring conventional forms, what shapes the work of this author who claimed that his only hero was "the truth"? Perhaps morality is important because it is an essential part of realistic truth, rather than the reverse? If one maintains this position, one may (or may not) go on to see Tolstoy's explicit moralizing as lamentable and harmful to his art, as

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[6]"Tolstoy's Criticism on 'The Darling'" in Anton Chekhov, *The Darling and Other Stories*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Ecco, 1984), 28.

is so often the case with preaching. Many critics, especially in the West, have taken just this position.

If one maintains that the moral or religious impulse is primary, one encounters the obvious objection that there have been many moralists or theologians whose contributions to those disciplines are at least as great as Tolstoy's; so that cannot be what makes Anna Karenina great. He, but not they, could capture the sense of existence with unparalleled accuracy; and so his greatness must lie in his realism. If Tolstoy is just another moral teacher, his value would seem to be greatly diminished. On the other hand, if one takes the view that the moralism is somehow a fault -- best "extracted" by judicious skipping because great art does not preach -- one finds it hard to explain the power not only of Tolstoy but of Russian literature generally. What would be left of The Possessed or The Death of Ivan Ilych if their moralism were somehow extracted? And what if the moralism of Anna Karenina is not something that can be extracted but is present at every moment? Both positions, then, seem most convincing as answers to the weaknesses of each other, which is one reason, I suppose, why the debate continues.

Fourth, one may inquire into the nature of Tolstoy's realism. Critic after critic, and reader after reader, has been amazed at Tolstoy's ability to represent reality as it feels -- as it is -- better than anybody else, but they have been unable to explain how he did so. When Tolstoy writes, it is as if the world were writing itself; if nature could speak, it would speak like Tolstoy. These formulations may seem too naive or too poetic, but the experience they grope to express cannot be doubted. Generation after generation understands why Matthew Arnold was driven to exclaim: "But the truth is we are not to take Anna Karenina as a work of art; we are to take it as a piece of life. A piece of life it is."[7]

Many have been drawn to attribute Tolstoy's realism to his total lack of artifice. With other writers, one feels, much more than with Tolstoy, that this is a book, governed by artistic conventions; that one is reading a work of art. That is not true of Tolstoy at his best, it is said, because he somehow managed to write without devices. Philip Rahv encapsulates this view:

> he art of Tolstoy is of such irresistible simplicity and truth, is at once so intense and so transparent in all of its effects, that the need is seldom felt to analyze the means by which it becomes what it is, that is to say, its method or sum of its

[7]Matthew Arnold, "Count Leo Tolstoi" in Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London, 1888), 260.

> techniques. In the bracing Tolstoyan air, the critic, however addicted to analysis, cannot help doubting his own task. . . . Tolstoy is the exact opposite of those writers, typical of the modern age, whose works are to be understood only in terms of their creative strategies and design. . . . One might say that . . . in Tolstoy [there is] simply the unquestioned and unalterable process of life itself.[8]

I remember hearing as a graduate student that, unlike Dostoevsky, Tolstoy inspires very little American criticism because however great he is, there is nothing to say about him.

By contrast, the Formalists, who were nothing if not "addicted to analysis," described Tolstoy's work precisely as the sum of his techniques. Of course, the very choice of Tolstoy to illustrate this thesis was, and was evidently meant to be, particularly shocking -- a "scandal," to use the overworked cliche of our own time -- precisely because Tolstoy was always described in the opposite way and because Tolstoy himself frequently denounced the view of art as "technique." By now, most critics would agree that Tolstoy does use a number of "devices," such as defamiliarization, as the Formalists insisted.

Yet somehow, for all their advances and perspicuity, the Formalists remain unconvincing in their treatment of Tolstoy as another Laurence Sterne. "Strider," their most famous example, hardly seems to be the right test case for what makes Tolstoy great, much as Bakhtin seems to stack the deck when he chooses "Three Deaths" as the exemplary Tolstoy work. However brilliant were Shklovsky's readings, and however insightful was Eikhenbaum in The Young Tolstoy, there remains a gap -- in fact, a chasm -- between their clever analyses and our experience of reading.

It cannot be correct that Tolstoy uses no devices. But the attribution of Tolstoy's unsurpassed realism to his skillfully deployed devices seems equally inadequate.

The fifth Tolstoy question is more like a conundrum. It may be stated very simply, because its outlines are already clear. Is it true, as many have felt, that Tolstoy was able to get away with what no one else could? Who else could make a line like "the hero of my story is truth" effective? Or could preach at us, as he does in War and Peace, and not ruin his work? Percy Lubbock's famous essay on Tolstoy could be seen as the expression of wonder at the greatness of a work that does everything wrong and triumphs over it. How is this possible? It is perhaps this question that is the most

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[8]Philip Rahv, "Tolstoy: The Green Twig and the Black Trunk," in Rahv, *Literature and the Sixth Sense* (Boston, 1970), 134-35.

important, but for understandable reasons, it usually provokes more speechless awe than considered argument. It is usually approached indirectly, through the other four questions; but it seems to lie behind all of them. As it should.

The Silbajoris Theses: Uniformitarianism

Like Gustafson and Eikhenbaum, Silbajoris describes Tolstoy's career as essentially continuous. His answer to the first Tolstoy question, then, is that there was no single sharp break in Tolstoy's thought. To borrow a metaphor from geology, each of these scholars offer distinct justifications for what might be called the "uniformitarian," as opposed to the catastrophist, image of Tolstoy.

In defending this position, Silbajoris does not maintain that Tolstoy's development was tranquil, nor does he contend that the crises he described were somehow spurious. These were not mere literary devices or exercises in myth construction. Rather, Silbajoris sees Tolstoy's whole life as essentially conflicted, with opposing attitudes always in violent or potentially violent contention. Hence the appearance of occasionally marked crises is not surprising; they are the expression of the internal struggle always going on. In a quiescent world, catastrophes constitute an interruption, but if normal time is composed of catastrophes, then eruptions do not contradict, but confirm, a uniformitarian picture. This is, in effect, a catastrophist uniformitarianism. Silbajoris does not put his thesis this way, but this is what his argument seems to suggest. I am not sure whether I agree, but the power of this view cannot be doubted.

One example of Silbajoris' use of this approach concerns the crisis of 1857-62, during which Tolstoy rejected art as a lie, taught peasant children at Yasnaya Polyana, and published several memorable, if somewhat perverse, articles on education. Silbajoris detects throughout this period both an attachment and a repulsion to art, a tension that Tolstoy at last temporarily resolved with a new understanding of art's moral function. Properly practiced, art ceases to be a lie; quite the contrary, it is inevitable and universal, a "natural function of living" (RS, 67). But of course such a formulation itself reflects the conflict that engendered it and the distaste for the aesthetic that led to it; and so it looks forward to new questioning and later crisis. Chapter Two effectively and persuasively details this period in Tolstoy's aesthetic development.

For Gustafson, it is a religious thesis that governs Tolstoy's development, whereas for Silbajoris, the core problem is aesthetic. Their views do not contradict each

other, but rather differ in what they emphasize. Both scholars regard the aesthetic and the religious or moral as quite closely connected in Tolstoy's thought, as indeed they were.

Teleology and Experiments

At the beginning of his book, Gustafson offers a succinct, precise, and powerful formulation of the teleological uniformitarian thesis:

> Just as in any human utterance a sound takes its meaning only from within the total statement, so any Tolstoy text takes its meaning only from within the complete oeuvre. To understand any part of his life's text, a story or novel, an essay or tract, a diary entry or a letter, we must see the particular set of words in their relationship to all his words. The pattern of this relationship is shaped by the process of articulation. *The primary rule in reading Tolstoy, therefore, is that the later clarifies the earlier.* This does not mean that an earlier work of art is better than a later one or vice versa. It does mean, however, that an earlier work may be an *experimental version* of a later one and that later works may reveal the hidden patterns and meanings of earlier ones (RG, 6-7; italics mine).

For Gustafson, pretty much everything tends toward the late religious writings, which make explicit the implicit ideas and patterns of all earlier works. Silbajoris takes a similar stance, but, given his focus on aesthetics, What Is Art? becomes the key text toward which everything tends. Earlier writings on art or related topics foreshadow that treatise's veloped argument. This approach shapes Silbajoris' book and appears to be what he has in mind when, for instance, he observes that

> Tolstoy's little schoolhouse in Yasnaya Polyana was also the place where he made his first major effort to lay down the foundations for an eventual theory of art, even if he did not at the time explicitly so describe his ideas and his experiments in creative writing with the children. He may not even have been aware that an edifice of aesthetics was beginning to grow in his mind; yet, the process was there, and ultimately it reached its completion in the 1898 essay on art (RS, 68).

This approach, largely shared by Gustafson and Silbajoris, relies on number of related ideas. First, as we have seen, it is based on the teleological view of creative

biography, according to which everything tends toward a mature position that at last expresses ideas implicit all along. The author in his early years may not have known whither his ideas were leading, but in retrospect the path is apparent. He at last says what he would have wished to say (whether he knew it or not) all along. To borrow the Michelangelo simile, the artist at last succeeds in liberating the figure hidden (therefore already present in) the stone.

We may also note how this view places great importance on the concept of experiments. Early works are seen as intellectually primitive (even if they are aesthetically superior) versions of later ones; they are trials, rough drafts, discarded blueprints for the perfected monument to come. As with all experiments, they approximate to something, but there is no way we (or the author) could know what that something is so long as we confine ourselves to the experiments themselves. We must consult the outcome, and then the significance of the approximations will be apparent.

Such an approach evidently situates the critic in a position superior to that of the author at the time the author was writing his early works. Later events have endowed the critic with what Bakhtin called "an essential surplus of knowledge" unavailable to the creating author. The critic, but not the young Tolstoy, has read the old Tolstoy. Notably, this approach does not entail the idea that later writings are better than earlier ones; Gustafson and Silbajoris are too careful to use their teleology in such a misleading way. The difference between earlier and later is not between worse and better but between implicit and explicit.

The Oeuvre as a Text

Also worth stressing is the concept that Gustafson describes as the whole text of a life, the idea that all works compose a single utterance. Specific works of all kinds and periods are parts of a whole, which has a meaning that can in turn be read into each part. We must understand each part -- that is, each work -- not just intrinsically, not on its own terms, but in terms of the whole text of life in which it participates. Ultimately, there is only one utterance for the given writer's life. (Gustafson wisely does not say that all writers should be approached this way, just Tolstoy; his argument is not based on abstract theory but on concrete empirical work.)

It is this thesis that underwrites the practice of discovering later theses in earlier works.[9] For both Gustafson and Silbahoris, this assumption sometimes produces strained readings, but much more often allows for particularly powerful and convincing new ones. The compensation is more than adequate.

In Silbajoris' case, for instance, this approach allows him not only to shed new light on Tolstoy's early and hazy formulations, but also to read What Is Art? as a kind of condensation of a vast body of thinking, much longer than the treatise itself. He discovers in it hints of many ideas that might not otherwise be visible but which, I am persuaded, are there. The chapter devoted to this treatise will doubtless prove a point of reference for years to come.

A few highlights are in order. Silbajoris carefully explains the distinction Tolstoy drew between bad art and counterfeit art, a distinction that most commentators have missed. Bad art is genuine art -- it fits Tolstoy's definition of art -- but is bad on moral grounds. It sincerely and effectively communicates an author's particular experience, which infects the reader; but the experience is a morally bad one, and the reader is likely to become morally worse as a result. Counterfeit art, by contrast, is not art at all by Tolstoy's definition. No particular experience is communicated, and no infection takes place. The experience of viewing counterfeit art may also be morally corrupting, but not for the same reason.

Silbajoris effectively clarifies a number of other key but often misunderstood or overlooked Tolstoyan themes, including the Tolstoyan approach to the canon, his argument that good writing is not a teachable skill, and his odd comparison of art to food and reading to eating. Silbajoris does not engage in hero worship and offers some deft and biting responses to Tolstoy. He observes, for instance, that "To accept Tolstoy's argument here [about art and food] is like agreeing to live in some dreadful world of 'nutritional units' consumed by us as 'digestive entities'" (RS, 100).

Process

In this chapter and elsewhere, Silbajoris offers a particularly important clarification of Tolstoy's infection theory. For Tolstoy, "infection" was not the transmission of

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[9]Taken by itself, the idea of the whole text of a life could just as easily lead to the opposite position, that the early explains the late; it is the combination of this thesis with teleology that describes Gustafson's method.

messages but an ongoing exchange; art is a process not an entity. Silbajoris effectively links this idea to Tolstoy's interest in the Gospel assertion: "I am the path, the truth, and the life." The truth for Tolstoy is a path -- which is to say, a process -- and not a static set of rules; and the same is true of great art.

In support of Silbajoris' reading, I would cite Tolstoy's argument in his sequel to The Kreutzer Sonata that Christianity must not be understood as a set of rules for behavior. Here Tolstoy's longstanding suspicion of rules as inadequate to the complexities of life is apparent. "Christ did not legislate," Tolstoy insists, but the Church "concocted . . . an external code of rules called Church Doctrine, and supplanted Christ's true teaching of the ideal by this doctrine."[10] Rejecting "definitions and rules" (Sequel, 163), Tolstoy offers a simile for what Christ truly taught:

> A man professing an external law is a man standing in the light of a lamp fixed to a post. He stands in the light and sees clearly, but has nowhere to advance to. A man following Christ's teaching is like a man carrying a lantern before him at the end of a pole. The light is ever before him, and ever impels him to follow it, by continually lighting up fresh ground and attracting him onward (Sequel, 162).[11]

The uncertainty of life ensures that we will always encounter fresh ground; therefore what we need is not a lamp post, but a moving lantern that can help us deal rightly with the unforeseen, which is life.

I was particularly impressed with Silbajoris' reversal of the Formalist reading of Tolstoy. Because art infects and thereby unites, it does not make perception more difficult, as Shklovsky argued. Quite the contrary, it clarifies for us what we have only dimly known; rather than make the familiar strange, it makes the strange familiar. For Tolstoy, this explains how art helps us to understand other people and how we can learn from the particulars of their lives. We thereby extend our own experience into areas we may have vaguely intimated but have not clearly understood. Silbajoris observes: "The opposite device [to defamiliarization] is to 'make familiar': to infuse strange and distant things with a warm glow of recognition. . . ." (RS, 132).

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[10]Leo Tolstoy, "Sequel to The Kreutzer Sonata" in *The Works of Lyof N. Tolstoi: Master and Man, The Kreutzer Sonata, Dramas* (New York: Scribner's, 1929), 162.

[11]My thanks to Caryl Emerson for pointing out the significance of this passage.

Finally, Silbajoris suggests in this chapter that, by Tolstoy's own definition of art, What is Art? may itself by regarded as a work of art rather than as a mere tract. It endeavors to infect its readers with Tolstoy's own experience of art and his moral reaction to it, which is why its formulations are often less persuasive than they are revealing of the author.

Tolstoy's Art and Aesthetics

Many readers of Tolstoy's essays on art have dismissed them as essentially irrelevant to his fiction or, at least, to his great fiction. Indeed, even his religious and moralistic writings have commanded more respect than his esthetics, for, as Silbajoris wryly observes, "the moral stance of Tolstoy found many admirers who still liked their Shakespeare" (RS, 8). But perhaps this is not so surprising: few things are so appealing as a new doctrine professing the moral superiority of its advocates. It offers the right to judge in combination with the latest fashion. For all its charms, aesthetic condescension, rarely allows one to judge one's neighbors lives in so many ways.

Silbajoris' core thesis is that, contrary to the prevailing view, "Tolstoy's art and his esthetics are very intimately related ...contradictions notwithstanding, his entire life, entire opus, are distinguished by a singular kind of internal unity and consistency, and that the nature of this internal unity of mind and heart, once understood, will lead to a much fuller appreciation of his genius" (RS, 9). To separate the fiction from the essays in Tolstoy's opus, then, would be like reading War and Peace without examining its embedded essays (as many have done).

Perhaps the most impressive part of Silbajoris' study is Chapter Five ("Theory and Practice"), which most directly illustrates this thesis of "internal unity and consistency." Here Silbajoris focuses on many passages in Tolstoy's fiction in which art itself is the topic. A superb reader, Silbajoris offers interpretations that were (to this reader) thrilling. Particularly subtle are his analyses of Zherkov and his horse as they listen to the soldiers' singing -- I will henceforth think of this passage as central to Tolstoy's equine esthetics -- and of Natasha's "inimitable and unteachable" movements as she dances at Uncle's.

This chapter also stresses one usually overlooked reason for Tolstoy's dislike of Shakespeare. Ironically enough, Tolstoy objected especially strenuously to that precise aspect of Shakespeare that most other readers have taken to be his greatest accomplishment: his use of language. For Tolstoy, Shakespeare used language the wrong way -- as an end in

itself -- whereas he should have used it as a means for infection. As Tolstoy read Shakespeare, "thoughts arise either from sound repetitions or from verbal contrasts, and thus the artistically important relationship exists not between reality and language, but between a word and its shadow grinning foolishly at each other," as Silbajoris deftly paraphrases the point (RS, 143). "Humanity in Shakespeare is therefore a degree of eloquence, while humanity in Tolstoy is a matter or perception" (RS, 146).

Devices

Silbajoris' response to the remaining three Tolstoy questions are closely linked. For Silbajoris, it was Tolstoy's moral concerns, more than the drive to realism, that shaped both his art and his aesthetics. The wisdom Tolstoy sought

> must bring forgiveness and salvation, that is, it must exist on the moral plane. It is clear from the evidence of Tolstoy's works that they encode an ongoing effort to understand and define art in general while the power of his own art in particular was emerging from what his works could accomplish in the moral dimension. In this process, Tolstoy's personal quest for moral value invariably extends to the very act of writing fiction, of breathing life into people who must then seek answers to the questions that plague their own creator. As these answers emerge, they become a kind of metalanguage about art itself and can ultimately be articulated also in theoretical terms, as Tolstoy finally did in his essay (RS, 9)

Thus a moral quest shapes both Tolstoy's art and his aesthetics, which, in turn, shape each other.

Because for Tolstoy, art must infect its readers with the sense of a particular moral experience, accurate perception of the moral realm is required. Thus, the realist agenda follows from the moral one. No less important for infection to take place, the reader must focus on the experiences and moral concerns that have evoked the work. What the reader must not be drawn to contemplate is the artifice of the construction itself, neither the language nor the devices as used for their own sake. I suppose one might say that they must be chosen, as Anna Karenina chooses a dress for a ball, so that "her dress could never be conspicuous on her."[12]

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[12]Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, the Garnett translation revised by Leonard J. Kent and Nina Berberova (New York: Random, 1965), 85 (part I, ch. 22).

But this does not mean that the author should not use sophisticated devices. Silbajoris is very clear that Tolstoy did use them. Devices are used, but are not felt as such: they should be invisible to the reader so that it seems that life itself is writing. Great skill is required for skill to be invisible.

Therefore, Tolstoy relies most tellingly on a kind of self-concealing metaphorization. Tolstoy gives us real, concretely observable details which also have great symbolic power; often, they achieve such power only as part of a network of similar details. "Tolstoy works not through metaphorical deformations, as does Verlaine, but through the placement of delicately perceived facts exactly where they will link up with the most crucial events and with the most powerful emotional associations" (RS, 169). Silbajoris offers a number of contrasting examples, including a telling comparison of Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil with the Sevastopol stories. In Tolstoy, he concludes, "it is not the metaphor which encodes reality, but reality which comprehends the potentiality of metaphorical meaning that may be realized as a structural function of given context" (RS, 170).

In my view, this line of argument seems the most fruitful one for understanding Tolstoy's peculiarly powerful realism. For it is apparent that however often he may use the devices analyzed by the Formalists, it is not radical defamiliarization that most strikes readers nor gives them the sense that they are somehow reading life itself. On the other hand, the formula of reality writing itself can at best describe an effect, not a means, for it is clearly not nature but Tolstoy who created War and Peace. It is equally clear that Tolstoy had to find means to do what he did.

Thus it seems most likely that something like "devices" of a special sort are involved in creating the incredibly lifelike quality of Tolstoy's work -- devices that do not feel like devices because, perhaps, they repeat or capture the processes of human perception themselves. Many of our best critics have explored versions of this idea: one thinks of Gustafson's concept of emblematic realism and Barbara Hardy's contrast of Tolstoyan perception with the relatively artificial descriptions in other nineteenth-century novelists. I would add that for this reader what most contributes to our sense of Tolstoy's uncanny realism is his understanding of the flow of time; and that his most interesting experiments were directed toward transmitting our felt experience of temporality.

Questions about the Questions

Like all truly significant studies, Silbajoris' book is rich in implications and encourages reflection on the issues it raises. It will therefore doubtless lead to future work grounded in his formulations. Let me share a few reflections that have occurred to me.

(1) On the problem of continuity (uniformitarianism or catastrophism) it might be helpful to clarify the logic of the question. Whenever there is an apparent break in a single life or in history, it is possible to argue either that the break really does or does not exist, depending on what one regards as important. If we consider the reforms of Peter the Great, or the Russian Revolution of 1917, we find that there have been those who have argued that the break is more apparent than real. In answer to Belinsky's idea of a radical discontinuity with pre-Petrine Russian culture, one can point to significant continuities in the Russian literary tradition. Berdyaev, for one, insisted on the specifically Russian nature of Soviet Communism. Others have pointed to numerous features that link the dictatorship of the proletariat with the autocracy of the tsars.

Such arguments may always be expected because no break is ever total. Much continues even in the most violent and extensive revolution, and distinct personality features extend beyond any conversion experience. What this means is that in answer to those who describe only the sudden change there will be wiser and more cautious people who indicate lines of continuity.

Whether one refers to a sharp break -- in this case, to "two Tolstoys" -- therefore depends in large measure on one's own interests. If one is concerned with those aspects of a life or the history of a nation that have proceeded relatively smoothly, one will paint a uniformitarian picture; if the scholar chooses to examine an area where there was a break, the resulting portrait will tend toward "catastrophism." Consequently, scholarly differences often reduce to a choice of emphasis or primary topic, which is to say, no substantive disagreement about the break may exist. A real difference would have to pertain to something more precisely identified.

That is perhaps why, although my own work tends more or less toward the "two Tolstoys" picture, I found myself agreeing with both Gustafson and Silbajoris. Each is quite careful not to be categorical, and each names areas where there are indeed differences between the younger and older Tolstoy. In turn, I was persuaded that they had identified important areas of continuity.

On the one hand, the author of War and Peace was not yet a pacifist; Tolstoy's "prosaics" undergoes significant modification after Anna Karenina; and there is never again a work of the same type as the two great novels. Nothing after Anna seems so concerned with capturing the experience of

extensive temporality. On the other, a great deal of the personal dialectic that Silbajoris and Gustafson describe is assuredly present throughout Tolstoy's life, as are important areas of moral, religious, and aesthetic thought. One need only think of the young Tolstoy's diary notation that he would like to found a new religion.

(2) A similar analysis applies to Silbajoris' central issue, Tolstoy's art and its relation to his aesthetics. There are indeed writers who first develop or borrow an aesthetic "theory," translate it into a set of rules for producing a work, and then produce such a work. Poe claims to have produced "The Raven" in just this way; and we can perhaps all think of contemporary examples. I think, however, that no great work of art is produced in this way, and for a very simple reason: because the work would then be nothing but (or little more than) an illustration of the theory. If one knew the theory, one would not need the work at all. An extension of this insight is conceptual art, which gives us the idea but does not make the work because the idea is the work. And we all know students or scholars who ar comfortable only when they have posited such an all-encompassing theory that in effect makes the work under consideration superfluous.

Great artists, I suppose, think very hard about aesthetic issues, as Tolstoy surely did. When composing works, they have a number of specific and general aesthetic problems in mind, which guide them. But they also have many other considerations in mind, as well as a sense of what it is for a work to be rich and powerful, not just illustrative. Their creative process produces real surprises and, while perhaps offering an answer to some initial problems, hardly resolves them. More likely, the problems themselves become more complex. Reflecting on the work and the surprise it is even for its creator, the author may formulate new abstract aesthetic questions, which may appear in notebooks, letters, or articles. New works respond in turn, and the process continues. Thus there is a continual interplay of new formulations and inexhaustible works, each of which are profoundly important for understanding each other but neither of which exhausts the other; certainly the essays do not exhaust the works unless the works are decidedly thin.

It seems to me that this is essentia. y what Silbajoris himself argues, which is what he means by the "intimate" relation between the two classes of writings. His position seems to me not just correct, but profoundly so.

(3) Teleology. It is often the case that a theoretical formulation with which one disagrees leads to specific results that one nevertheless finds compelling. Thus, various

approaches that have presumed an essential total unity of culture at a given time (whether in terms of Zeitgeist or the semiotics of culture) seem objectionable to those who, like myself, do not believe that culture is ever so unified. Nevertheless, the approach may inspire significant work on those aspects of a culture that are indeed related in interesting, if overlooked, ways. For all the shabbiness of their professed theories, even Marxists, Freudians, and deconstructionists do sometimes provide important insights. Such results cannot be dismissed simply on the basis of their theoretical grounding; they must be judged on a case by case basis. The same, I think, is true of the sophisticated teleology when applied to a writer's life and work.

What are the weaknesses and strengths of this approach? Tolstoy himself points to the weaknesses. Just because something followed something else does not mean it had to follow. Many other outcomes were possible, even if they are now hard to discern. We tend to see what led to us; this might be called the natural, if regrettable, narcissism of temporal perspective.

Moreover, what happened later was not necessarily already contained in what happened earlier. The earlier does not relate to the later as a seed relates to a plant. Much of what essentially constitutes later stages may have resulted from processes in the interim, and so may be absent at earlier moments. Nevertheless, we may still be inclined anachronistically to detect the later in the earlier, as if it had to be there, because in pursuit of narrative neatness we often overlook intermediate contingencies. In short, perceptual illusion of various kinds encourages teleological interpretations.

War and Peace may be regarded as a long polemic against teleological thinking. According to Tolstoy, no matter what happens in history some historian will find a straight line leading inevitably to it and perhaps even someone who "planned" it. So many possibilities are always suggested that no matter what happens it will turn out to have been "foreseen." (Jeanne Dixon, too, must be well aware of this.) Tolstoy offers some striking similes for these historiographical fallacies. A group of men are going to haul a log. "Each of them gives his opinion as to how and when to haul it. They haul the log away and it turns out that it has been done in accordance with what one of them said. [Therefore we conclude that] He ordered it."[13] Elsewhere Tolstoy compares teleological, straight-line thinking to "stencil work" in which "one or another figure comes out, not

[13]Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Ann Dunnigan (New York: Signet, 1968), 1434–35 (second epilogue).

because the color was applied from this side or that, but because it was laid on from all sides over the figure cut in the stencil" (War and Peace, 1432).

Bakhtin had much the same point in mind when he insisted that any accurate portrayal of historical time involves the sense that "the plot is only one of many possible plots," that what did happen need not have happened. For Bakhtin, as for Tolstoy, that is also true of individual lives. The novel was for Bakhtin the most temporally sophisticated genre in part because "Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities; it is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities."[14]

We have identified two problems, therefore, in the teleological approach: later stages were not the only possible outcome of earlier ones; and the forces that have produced what we recognize as essential in later stages may have been operating, at one time or extensively, in the interim but not at the beginning. We overlook the roads not taken and the roads that merge on the journey.

In much Bakhtin criticism, the assumption that everything important was present in the early manuscripts has led to forced readings of late ideas into early works, even though (for example) the young Bakhtin had not yet discovered the importance of either language or the novel, which were later to become so central to his thought.[15] The assumption that his works constitute one large consistent piece -- a single consistent text -- leads people, with too little reflection to harmonize real differences. It is assumed that somehow all of his theories are versions of the same theory, even though there are notable differences between (let us say) "Discourse and the Novel" or the chronotope essay on the one hand and the Rabelais book on the other. This assumption, combined with the fact that the Rabelais book was the first to be translated into English, has led in some quarters to the Rabelaisification, or the carnivalization, of Bakhtin's thought.

Nevertheless, the teleological approach has its benefits. Sometimes early ideas are indeed cruder formulations of those that came later, and everything essential in the one is to be found, though less clearly expressed, in the other. In such cases, there may be significant benefits to be derived from

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[14]Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1981), 37.

[15]Caryl Emerson and I discuss Bakhtin's development and various approaches to it in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

teleology. One may learn things about a work that would not be evident from an examination of other writings of the same or still earlier periods. For all its dangers, anachronism is sometimes a useful tool. Moreover, we are understandably more interested in what a writer did do than in the "other possibilities" left unrealized. In fact, it seems to me that, as Silbajoris and Gustafson use the approach, it works well. In both cases, the result is important new insights perhaps not otherwise available.

(4) Definition and Evaluation. I have mentioned that Silbajoris deftly examines the distinction between "counterfeit" and "bad" art. Let me just comment on the logic of this distinction.

Sometimes the definition of a class is itself evaluative. The entity defined is good because the qualities that define it are good. It follows that, all else being equal, the more of these qualities present, the better the entity relative to other examples of its kind. If the presence of virtue and the absence of vice define a moral person, then the more virtue and less vice, the greater the person's moral stature. If genius is defined in terms of intelligence, then the greater the intelligence the greater the genius.

In other cases, however, what defines something as a member of a given class is quite distinct from what makes it a good member of that class. If hair establishes that a given animal is a mammal, it does not follow that the furrier an animal is the more mammalian, or the better, the mammal. Print, paper, and binding may define a book, but they are not what make us say some books are better than others. In the case of What Is Art?, Tolstoy's point is that a certain kind of communication -- infection -- makes a work art, but what makes it better or worse is a distinct set of moral criteria. That is why works that infect with immoral feelings are genuine, but bad, art; whereas those that do not infect at all are, regardless of the moral propositions they may contain, not art at all.

(5) Infection. Perhaps because so much of What Is Art? is either absurd or paradoxical, too little attention has been paid to its truly interesting and valuable ideas, such as infection. By contrast, Silbajoris recognizes the importance of this concept and stresses some of its key aspects, for example, its implication that both writing and reading must be understood as processual.

One of the interesting implications that follow from this concept is that the moral importance of literature consists not in the propositions that may be extracted from it but in the moment-to-moment effect it has in an active exchange with the reader. Bit by tiny bit, the reader's activity in

extending sympathy or wishing for a given outcome, and the acts of perceiving or judging that are so much a part of the moral drama of reading, shape the reader's own values. This process, not abstract judgment of transcribed propositions, must ground a moral approach to art.[16]

We may appreciate the importance of the infection theory when we recognize that it is radically incompatible with an approach to language and literature that is often taken for granted and at times even appears to be the only possible one: the model of literature as encoding, as the telegraphic transferral of information. This metaphor is one of the worst legacies of semiotics and structuralism.

Silbajoris appears to be of two minds on this question. When cautious, he himself uses the familiar language of encoding (as in one passage cited above) and observes that Tolstoy's theory of art "can best be understood in contemporary terms as 'encoding'" (RS, 110). At other times, however, he seems to contrast Tolstoy's ideas with this model: "Furthermore, unlike present-day Structuralists, Tolstoy regarded art not as an autonomous sign, but as an event in the universe of feeling" (RS, 129). I should like to extend this bolder line of thinking.

Let us consider briefly what the metaphor of encoding suggests. There is a message that the author or speaker wishes to send, and so he encodes it in a form that is transmitted to the reader, who then decodes it to arrive at its meaning. Bakhtin objected to this model for several reasons, some of which recall Tolstoyan premises. Coding and decoding to be worthy of the name must proceed by algorithmic rules. When one transfers a message by Morse code, for instance, there is a strict set of rules for turning English into electronic impulses and turning impulses back into English. But a Shakespeare play or a Dostoevsky novel cannot, without considerable reduction, be regarded this way. To do so would be to view the work as having an extractable message; and so we rapidly arrive at the primitive notion that art is sugar-coated (or cryptographic) philosophy. Undoubtedly, one can derive propositions from art, but unless we are dealing with hack work, no method of decoding, no set of rules, will be adequate.

Moreover, the creative process cannot be a matter of encoding, for that would mean that the work is somehow already present in the author's mind before he finds the form to express it -- that nothing essential happens during the creative process. There is only one way to translate this sentence into Morse code, and nothing except mere form is

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[16]This idea is developed in Morson, "Prosaics, Criticism, and Ethics," *Formations*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer-Fall, 1989), 77-95.

changed in the process of encoding. But a great deal happened between the initial idea for Anna Karenina or The Possessed and the novels we read.

Both Tolstoy and Bakhtin strongly and repeatedly objected to the idea that a system of rules could adequately describe either ethics or language or art or anything else in culture. Both belonged to the great Russian counter-tradition that was suspicious of all forms of semiotic totalism. Bakhtin, who lived to see semiotics and structuralism, objected to them on precisely these grounds:

> Semiotics deals primarily with the transmission of ready-made communication using a ready-made code. But in live speech, strictly speaking, communication is first created in the process of transmission, and there is, in essence, no code.... Context and code. A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information, but it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context.[17]

Context is infinitely richer than any code. What is important -- what for Bakhtin constitutes language and what for Tolstoy constitutes art -- is what exceeds the code. Bakhtin focussed on the particularities that make each utterance "unrepeatable" and Tolstoy stressed the tiny specificities that make the artwork original. Where Bakhtin spoke of the "surplus", Tolstoy referred to the "tiny bit." "Art begins where the tiny bit begins."[18] Silbajoris deftly analyzes a number of passages where Tolstoy insists that because life and literature are matters of the tiny bit beyond any set of rules, there can be no science of history, nor of pedagogy, nor of what we are today pleased to call "creative writing." Tolstoy felt about cultural rules or laws the way we feel about paint-by-numbers. They lead to "counterfeit art" -- counterfeit, because it is made to formula and reflects no appreciation of some tiny bit of experience.

As soon as one reflects upon encoding, inadequacies become apparent. John Ellis put it this way: codes and languages are quite different things because one must already have a language in order to encode something. Language itself

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[17]M.M. Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970-71," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern McGee, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1986), 147.

[18]Tolstoy glosses this line from Bryullov in ch. 4 of "Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?," *Leo Tolstoy: Selected Essays*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Random House, 1974), 197.

cannot therefore be a matter of encoding. English in Morse code is just disguised English, so it is hard to see how English itself could be a code. One might just as well describe language as a form of typing or word-processing.

If two people who had no language were given a code, they could still not communicate. "The surprising fact," Ellis concludes, "is that the very common vocabulary of code and message, used so often as a model of how language works, has nothing whatever to do with language...language can not be thought of only or even primarily as a means of transfer of information because without it there is no such thing as information."[19] I suspect that this is part of what Bakhtin means when he criticizes the encoding model as one that presumes "ready-made" information. The live act of speech is described as the mechanical transfer of words, and so what Bakhtin called "eventness" is lost.[20]

Viewed historically, infection belongs to a family of recent ideas about language and literature that do not take the "information transmission" model as definitive. After all, as Ellis asks, how could the model of language be the precise scientific statement, as so many have assumed, when that must be a relatively late development? One does not have to be a Tolstoyan to see that something much more primitive is more likely to be definitive.

(6) Silbajoris reminds us that for Tolstoy art should be original; that it should also be sincere; and that, in addition, it should be accessible to ordinary people. Now, to most twentieth-century audiences, these requirements may verge on contradiction. Today, one usually thinks of originality in avant-garde terms, which imply some daring method or form that is usually not accessible to ordinary people. Thus we have the difficulty of contemporary art and critical schools that value difficulty for its own sake. (The Formalists, who made difficulty definitive of art, immediately come to mind.) Thus, originality and accessibility would seem to exclude each other. And, it may be asked, what does sincerity have to do with either, inasmuch as original ideas maybe patently insincere and sincere utterances are, more often than not, vapid. One may go even further and deny (or deconstruct) the very notions of originality and sincerity. Accessibility may likewise be treated in a purely relativistic fashion (accessible to whom on what occasion?).

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[19]John M. Ellis, chapter 2 of *The Theory of Language: A Logical Analysis*, manuscript submitted to Princeton UP.

[20]It will be recalled that for Bakhtin thought is "inner speech," that is, it is already linguistic.

When Tolstoy's formulations are viewed from a prosaic standpoint, however, the sense of contradiction vanishes. The prosaically new is always around us. It exists in the fine gradations of experience, in the tiny bits that make up each minutely specific impression when it is viewed with sufficient care. The new is neither grand nor dramatic, but scarcely noticeable without the right sort of attention.

Real artists cultivate that sort of attention; they train themselves to notice the small. For Mikhailov, the true artist in Anna Karenina, such attentiveness has at last become a habit:

> He walked rapidly to the door of his studio, and in spite of his excitement he was struck by the soft light on Anna's figure as she stood in the shade of the entrance listening to Golenishchev, who was eagerly telling her something, while she evidently wanted to look round at the artist. He did not himself notice how, as he approached them, he seized on this impression and absorbed it, as he had the chin of the shopkeeper who had sold him the cigars, and put it away somewhere to be brought out when he wanted it (*Anna*, 494).

It is this sort of noticing, not some special kind of brush work, that makes Mikhailov a great artist. He recognizes his art as successful because, based on such fineness of perception, it is truly original. "Of his picture...he had at the bottom of his heart one conviction -- that no one had ever painted a picture like it. He did not believe that his picture was better than all the pictures of Raphael, but he knew that what he tried to convey in that picture no one had ever conveyed" (Anna, 494). He knows this, because the fineness of perception almost guarantees that it is not a repetition. It is not a new adaptation of a received artistic model, which anyone might fabricate. This sort of responsiveness to one's own experience is what Tolstoy means by sincerity, and so the connection between sincerity and originality becomes apparent. Least of all is real originality a matter of "technique" or avant-garde experimentation.

It is not some special technique, but the fineness of perception acquired by much effort over many years, that shapes Mikhailov's painting. "If to a little child or to his cook were revealed what he saw, it or she would have been able to peel the wrappings off what was seen" (Anna, 498).

Newness of this sort is readily accessible to viewers because it does not require any special education in the history or theory of art. It requires not esoteric or specialized knowledge, but an appreciation of that most general and yet most specific field of inquiry, life. We all continually acquire this sort of newness, if less often and

less clearly than the artist, which is why we can, without specialized knowledge, recognize it. Even Vronsky can appreciate Mikhailov's painting.

In short, the combination of originality, sincerity, and accessibility appears paradoxical only if we look for the new in the wrong place. For Tolstoy, it is the ordinary that is truly extraordinary.

(7) My final observation pertains to the idea of accessibility. Silbajoris is entirely correct to criticize Tolstoy's peculiar notion that art must be accessible to peasants. The absurd lengths to which Tolstoy's maximalism drew him make his formulations unacceptable. But if one reads not so as to score debating points but so as to find something of value, then one may look for a different and more compelling formulation of Tolstoy's idea.

Here as elsewhere, Tolstoy takes aim at the pretentiousness of professional critics and the intelligentsia, whose standards seem radically at odds with what constitutes great art. The intelligentsia too often confuses the artistic with the rhetorically effective packaging of currently fashionable aesthetic or ideological truisms. Intelligentsial conformism offended Tolstoy, as it has offended many other artists (e.g. Chekhov), who have often found it at least as oppressive as its popular counterpart. This attitude toward the intelligentsia is also a central feature of the Russian counter-tradition.

But since my purpose here is theoretical, rather than historical, it might be most useful to consider a somewhat Tolstoyan idea advanced by a non-Russian.

In his Life of Gray, Samuel Johnson severely criticizes that poet for resorting to difficult obscurities. In a Tolstoyan spirit, Johnson laments that Gray too often takes refuge in "the puerilities of obsolete mythology," in striking events, and in "effective" endings. No less than fantastic contrivances, writes Dr. Johnson, "suicide is always to be had without expense of thought."[21] Gray's odes "are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments: they strike rather than please.... He has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe." (Johnson, 445).

But when Johnson turns to the famous "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," he abandons his satirical tone. "In the character of his Elegy," Dr. Johnson observes, "I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be

[21]Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose*, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson (New York: Holt Rinehart, 1858), 445.

finally decided all claims to poetical honours" (Johnson, 446). By the "common reader," Dr. Johnson obviously means neither the illiterate peasant nor the barely literate yeoman. This common reader is literate and sensitive. What Dr. Johnson apparently has in mind is the reader who has no stake, either by profession or by fashion, in arriving at a judgment or interpretation. He need not publish or perish. The common reader is of course not a blank slate, but whatever prejudices he has, they are not borne of making criticism a profession.

Even more than in Dr. Johnson's time, professional readers and critics have come to dominate the literary world. Universities typically teach a self-consciously professional style of reading, which is designed to be "up-to-date" and striking. Critics make such style a standard for judging each other's work.

The best readers I know are not professional critics; and the best critics I know are those who were first superb unprofessional readers and make their experience as common readers a standard for their own work. They measure their formal interpretations against their experience as unprofessional -- common -- readers. When their interpretation seems forced in comparison to that experience, they abandon or refine it, however well it may answer to currently fashionable professional norms. Above all, they respect the work of literature and their own sensitivity, which they continue to refine.

I think this softer version of the accessibility idea is basically correct. That is why I anticipate that my best students will be those who have been reading literature since childhood. And it is why I object most strenuously to all those new undergraduate literature programs in which the main topic of study is critical theory rather than great literature. While they are undergraduates, students should read George Eliot not Hillis Miller. Indeed, they will be better able to become good theorists if they do so.

Theory requires a sense of the data, and for literary studies that means a sensitive appreciation of the text. Literary theory without a sensitive appreciation of literature is as empty as physical theory without experiments: it can easily be done, because one can say anything. To paraphrase Dr. Johnson, it is not difficult to do if one will only abandon one's mind to it. But such theory is counterfeit, because it is borne of imitating models -- "criticism of criticism of criticism," as Tolstoy wrote (cited RS, 73) -- and not of reflection upon sensitive reading. Good theory is not hindered, but helped, by a non-theoretical undergraduate education.

It is only by attending to the common reader within us that we can produce uncommon criticism, as Silbajoris has done.[22]

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[22]For a superb example of reading along these lines, see Clara Claiborne Park, *Rejoining the Common Reader, Essays 1962-1990* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1991).

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