

PROFESSOR SILBAJORIS REPLIES:

I am grateful to have my book placed in the broader context of several basic approaches to Tolstoy criticism: the so-called "Tolstoy question," or questions. I agree that the question of the relation of Tolstoy's art to his esthetics does resemble the "Dostoevsky question," and I might even accept a further implication that there could be a mode of reading both authors on some basis of their essential coherence together. Any attempt at developing some such manner of reading the two authors would very likely run into the presently prevalent notion, established quite long ago, possibly by Merezhkovsky, that Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are to be read in terms of their contrast, not coherence together. Morson's elaborate and illuminating discussion about Tolstoy's moralism versus his realism is fascinating and instructive in itself, and it almost seems only incidental that he has developed it here, in the course of reviewing my book that now seems to be sitting on the sidelines, like Clara in *The Nutcracker*, watching the Sugar Plum Fairy and her five basic issues of Tolstoy criticism dance in front of her eyes.

Morson's description of my approach in the book as "catastrophist uniformitarian" seems at first rather a tough nut to crack, even intimidating to poor Clara who merely dreamed of some linkage between Tolstoy's expository thought and his art. Actually, it is very apt and does describe my approach accurately and is truly useful for any further dialogue on the issue. What I had in mind, but apparently did not articulate very well, was that the several radical turns on Tolstoy's path of thought did indeed seem to him like catastrophic revolutions, making all previous achievement not only irrelevant but even "evil," but that we, his readers, can perceive underneath such a conviction a consistency that neutralizes, or at least assuages, the drama of Tolstoy's "conversions". For that, of course, it was not necessary for Tolstoy to be always and constantly in conflict with himself, and the book should not have implied that he was.

I was somewhat astonished to read that I have reversed the Formalist reading of Tolstoy, possibly indeed, of any artistic text by showing that, in Tolstoy's view, art "does not make perception more difficult." In general, I have no quarrel with Shklovsky's idea, or his terminology; indeed, I sometimes like to use it to argue that "making difficult" really means that, in order to comprehend a text, the reader must undergo a process of moral, psychological, ideological metamorphosis that will both augment and fulfill his potential in the spiritual dimensions, and that this is indeed the "difficult" part. Such an approach would, I believe, be relevant exactly to Tolstoy's requirement for a moral substance in esthetics. What I actually had in mind, but

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failed to convey clearly enough, was the idea that simplicity is never a reality, at least not in art, but always a perception (just like complexity, of course). Each and every instantaneous event in the comprehension of a text, that infection with feeling Tolstoy spoke about, is in actuality a very complex process, possibly as complex as the instantaneous big bang that supposedly created the universe. Even so it is instantly accessible, because the reader, a human being, has in the soul a "decoder," a potential for response that is as complex as the creation of the universe (this, by the way, was behind my notion of using the concept of "fractals" in this connection). A rather weak example of what I meant was the episode from Anna Karenina where Kitty saw a great many things in Varenka's eyes within an infinite fragment of a second. Nevertheless, I find the idea that I might have reversed the Formalists highly flattering and will gladly accept it.

I am glad that Morson feels positive about my core theses pertaining to the relationship between Tolstoy's theories and his art. If my arguments there were not valid and could not have been supported by examples, the book would have lost most of its relevance to any reader of Tolstoy. However, here again I must try to introduce a small correction of my originally insufficiently precise thought. My idea was not that Tolstoy constructed at least some rudiments of a theory of art and then proceeded to develop texts in accordance with it, but rather that he, mostly unbeknownst to himself, was allowing an outline of theoretical thought to emerge from his primary effort of creating an artistic text. In other words, not first theory then text, but first text, then theory, and the latter often becomes visible, and suggests lifelong coherence, consistency, mostly to the reader who, unlike the young Tolstoy, has read his later works.

Morson's idea that the source of Tolstoy's "uncanny realism" is his understanding of the flow of time seems very tantalizing and highly promising, and I do hope to see it developed in the future.

I am very glad to see that Professor Gustafson agrees with my thesis that there is an overall consistency in Tolstoy's thought on art, and in the relationship of that thought to the art itself, throughout the writer's career. The notion of such consistency arose from observing numerous points in Tolstoy's fiction spanning a large number of years both before and after his "conversion" that seemed to remain the same even when Tolstoy said he had changed. Gustafson, who came to quite similar conclusions in his own book, had much the more difficult task because of his general topic, and it is especially reassuring to see that our paths met.

Gustafson's well-taken observation that I did not develop further my "theory" of contextual impact ultimately points to a somewhat different task than the one I had chosen. My

various particular examples of the "simple complexity" of Tolstoy's art, as well as of other elements in that art which seemed relevant to the main line of argument on the coherence of Tolstoy's art and his thought on art, were definitely meant to be no more than just that, examples. I did not mean to elevate my remarks to the status of a theory, and so, I did not develop them. It may be, however, that Gustafson is right, and I should have, or perhaps should in another place. I agree that the structure of my book was a limiting factor; perhaps I should have staked out a larger claim in Tolstoy criticism. Perhaps it is not so much that the book needs another chapter as that there should be another monograph. Anyway, I must be grateful to Gustafson for pointing out that some aspects of my book may contain an incipient coherent approach, perhaps new to some extent, in reading Tolstoy as a whole.

Professor Terras makes the excellent point, unfortunately not brought out in the book, that much of the "art of the people" that would, according to his own ideas be both true and good, is actually just the sort of thing Tolstoy condemns among the educated classes.

I would agree with Kathleen Parthé that the fruitful approach to Tolstoy is to start with particulars, with striking passages that yield a good harvest of insight, and to work from them toward a general understanding. In fact, the various examples in my book of the coincidence of theory with art did first come to me in their own rich potential (some I found in class notes for a Tolstoy course long before I undertook the art-esthetics issue). However, it is true that once that issue is stated and deliberated upon as the main topic of the book, it tends to reverse a reader's perception of what came first.

It was not my intention to offer *What Is art?* as the "high point of Tolstoy's work on aesthetics." I agree with Parthé that such high point is in the art itself; in fact, in a way that is my thesis. If there is a misunderstanding between us, it comes, probably, from different perspectives; I undertook to place *What Is Art?* within the framework of Tolstoy's total oeuvre and was anxious to show that the essay does in a way reflect, in a way summarize the esthetics that can be felt emerging from the oeuvre itself, whatever the, sometimes even rather nasty, rough spots so well indicated by Parthé. No comparison of relative value, however, was intended between the art and the theory; the two are, after all, different things.

I feel that Professor Moser's corrective to my book pertaining to the 1860's and the relationships of Tolstoy's thought on esthetics with those of Chernyshevsky (in particular), Dobroliubov and Pisarev is very well taken and will restore the general perspective that now seems a bit

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askew. There might be some faint possibility that the coincidence of Tolstoy's ideas with those of the radical critics are not so much a matter of "source" as of coincidence: both sides may have arrived at, at least superficially, similar insights coming from very different directions. If the critics' practical prescriptions were the inevitable consequences of their ideas, then this might be an indication that those ideas, however similar they seemed, were in actuality quite different. This entire matter seems like an interesting topic for further work.

Rimvydas Silbajoris
Ohio State University