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IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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# THEORY OF PROSE VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY

TRANSLATED BY BENJAMIN SHER  
INTRODUCTION BY GERALD L. BRUNS



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## Preface

It is perfectly clear that language is influenced by socioeconomic conditions.

There is an essay by Gleb Uspensky in which he shows how a fishing crew creates its own reality by inventing names for a constellation of stars which guides them in their nightly "search for the white salmon."

In the language of cattle breeders you will find numerous words designating such peculiarities as the coat colors of cows and bulls. These do not lend themselves easily to translation.

Nevertheless, the word is not a shadow.

The word is a thing. It changes in accordance with the linguistic laws that govern the physiology of speech and so on.

If in some language the name of a breastplate becomes the name of the breast of a human being, then, of course, this can be understood historically. But the changes of words do not necessarily correspond to the changes in the form of the breastplate, and, besides, the word may survive the phenomenon that had given rise to it in the first place.

As a literary critic, I've been engaged in the study of the internal laws that govern literature. If I may bring up the analogy of a factory, then I would say that neither the current state of the world cotton market nor the politics of cotton trusts interests me. One thing alone concerns me: the number of strands that make up the cotton plant and the different ways of weaving them. For that reason, this book is devoted in its entirety to a study of the changes in literary form.

VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY

## *Introduction*

### Toward a Random Theory of Prose

Gerald L. Bruns

I have a taste for reading even torn papers  
lying in the streets.

—Don Quixote

Modernity begins with the recognition that the object before me is not a sign but a random particle. And it is all there is; nothing is behind or beyond it, nor is anything underneath. It is opaque and irreducible, one singularity among others multiplied excessively in every direction. The universe is made of such things. The historic task of modernity, starting in the seventeenth century and continuing to this day, has been to develop a theory of rationality adequate to a universe of randomness—and not only a theory but a program of strategic operations capable of entering into the heterogeneity of things and bringing it under control. One could say that with modernity the task of reason was no longer to interpret the world but rather to overcome it—to reduce it conceptually, to grasp and contain it within an order of general laws and technological systems, finally to intervene in its operations and to turn it to productive account. To make sense of the world, we must penetrate its incoherent surface and lay bare its deep structures; we must grasp not its hidden meanings but its inner workings. Grammar is mastery. And with this idea comes the invention of politics, whose task is to produce a cultural system free from internal contradiction, social fragmentation, and endless crises of legitimacy.

Another way to put this might be to say that modernity begins with the discovery that the book of the world is written in prose. A poetic universe is, philosophically speaking, a universe of correspondences. In a poetic universe, every fragment is a luminous detail. It resonates with the supersensuous. It is in perpetual transport from the everydayness of its material appearance to the sphere of the transcendental where it is really located, and its impact upon consciousness constitutes a moment of vision or the sense of embracing the totality of all that is. There are overarchings everywhere. But a prose universe is just one damn thing after another, like an attic or junkyard or side of the road. Shklovsky says that Cervantes began his great book by organizing it as a dinner table, but almost at once things got

away from him. *Don Quixote*, as Shklovsky emphasizes, is a narrative whose parts are out of place; and so is the world it mirrors, in which (in Ortega y Gasset's phrase) the poetic has collapsed, leaving only leftovers like the books Don Quixote reads. The prose world is a place of violent interruption; it is the nonlinear region of pure historicity that can only be described by means of chaos theories and models of catastrophe, or perhaps not so much catastrophe as the slow breaking down of entities piece by piece. It is an unpredictable and dangerous world in which everyone is someone's victim. We are liable to a beating at every intersection, because the adversary no longer dwells at the mouth of the cave or the depths of the fen but is going by in every direction, no more in place than we are. No quest is needed to take us to him; he is always at our blind side, the roving bandit or lurking street thug, but of course he might just as easily be the local innkeeper or a member of the family. The world of prose is bourgeois all the way down.

The task of reason in the world of prose is to bring things under control—not, however, by poeticizing them, not by allegorizing events into semantic superstructures (theories of chivalry, for example, or of culture), but rather by the construction of plots, that is, by means of deep syntactic structures whose operations do not so much abolish randomness as justify it, rather the way linguistics tries to justify the arbitrariness of words by appeals to internal necessity. Syntax, so to speak, replaces semantics. The effect of such justification would not be to transform the singular particle into something else but, on the contrary, to hold its singularity in place, fixing its difference as such. In this way the allegory of love gives way to structuralist poetics. The random particle is not to be interpreted as an element in a symbolic order that subsumes it and renders it transparent; the particle remains refractory and dense, nothing in itself but only a combinatory potential. Enclosed in a purely relational environment of codes, networks, and total systems, the particle gains in power what it loses in meaning; or rather its meaning is now its relationality as such rather than its correspondence to something external to itself. So Don Quixote is always out of place; he is not a character in a romance but at best a character exiled from romance, a character turned to prose, wandering in a world that takes him apart piece by piece and spreads him along a plane of random intersections. The task of reason is to connect him up with Sancho Panza. Here is a random encounter with binary consequences, the beginnings of a new system (call it the novel, or the discourse of everyday life). The difference between Sancho and Don Quixote has a point to it (it inscribes everydayness as the collapse of the poetic). Sancho meanwhile, like the comic figures in Shakespeare, is a prose character who understands that the world is best served by getting out of its way. Falstaff is likewise only Falstaff; the classical typology to which his sort once belonged has been swallowed up in a prosaic theory of the world, along with all thoughts of hierarchic grandeur. The honor ethic has given way to the ethic of ordinary life. The task of

reason in the world of prose is to articulate this ethical framework, which does not seek to endow the ordinary with any transcendental sublimity but simply seeks to preserve it as the untranscendable horizon of the singular. Shklovsky's way of putting this is to say that the task of art is to make the stone stony, that is, to keep us from experiencing an object as something other than it is; as if the task of art were to free us from allegory or the semantic transparency of particulars.

It is obvious at once, however, that the world of prose is irreducible even to a structuralist poetics. Prose is by nature unstable and self-interfering; it is refractory and uncontainable. Prose does not so much flow as overflow. Sancho Panza's storytelling in chapter 20 of part 1, which is more like counting than recounting, preserves exactly the nonlinear, self-interrupting excessiveness of the prose world. "Tell it consequentially, like an intelligent man," says the bewildered Quixote, but Sancho is already following Tristram Shandy's philosophy of composition, which is to let the world speak, let every singularity have its say, without respect to rules of reason or propositional order. Indeed, one could say that the natural inclination of prose is to organize itself into lists rather than into stories and propositions.

Could a historiographer drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,—straight forward . . . he might venture to foretell you to an hour when he should get to his journey's end;—but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible: For, if he is a man of the least spirit he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly; he will moreover have various

Accounts to reconcile:

Anecdotes to pick up:

Inscriptions to make out:

Stories to weave in:

Traditions to sift:

Personages to call upon:

Panegyrics to paste up at this door;

Pasquinades at that:—All of which both the man and his mule are quite exempt from. (*Tristram Shandy*, 1.14)

The world of prose only comes into its own with the invention of the printing press, which emancipates discourse from the transcendental bondage of narrative and the higher forms of consecutive reasoning. Prose documents its environment from the inside out, not from above, and so it counts things one by one instead of organizing them systematically into accounts that, among other coherent things, begin and end and point a moral. Prose is by its nature realistic in its unpredictable concern with the density of what is singular and refractory to categories. Prose is the unfinished discourse of inhabitants (who themselves never stay in place but, if they have the least spirit, wander maddeningly in every direction, picking up odds and ends, losing bits and pieces: one thinks here of Beckett's Malloy). So the fugitive

essay, the decrepit billboard, the meandering joke, entries in an abandoned diary, the muddled quotation, the jotted note, the newspaper page to wrap your cups in, dirty words in the public toilet, menus in French, pointless anecdotes, the crumpled shopping list, the broken-off conversation, police reports, the missent letter, the ad in the window, signs at a rally, gossip or hearsay, a student's answer, the weak radio signal, bureaucratic memos, translations from Japanese, shouting in the street, magazines in the garage, or words to that effect: these are some of the basic genres in the prose of prose.

Shklovsky, of course, is thinking (mostly) of artistic prose, or prose that in some fashion redeems itself from itself, raises itself by its bootstraps into some type of formal coherence. But he recognizes that there is always a historical tension between prose and form, and it is this tension that he seeks to study in the book that follows, which gives us the theory of prose, not as a semiotician or a narratologist might, but through the mediation of historical (one might just as well say random) detail. Russian Formalism is not Structuralism. Its method is historical research rather than the analytical construction of models. Structuralism raises itself on an opposition between system and history, structure and event; Russian Formalism defines itself not against history but against psychology. The difference between Formalism and Structuralism lies in the way the singular is preserved in the one but erased by the other. Structuralism is a method of subsumptive thinking. What matters is the totality of the system. But Shklovsky's formalism is distributed along a diachronic plane. His theory of prose is a *prose* theory of prose, not the systematic construction of a model indifferent to its examples but heterogeneous, internally conflicting descriptions of texts strewn irreducibly throughout the history of writing. Shklovsky's model is not the linguistics of Saussure but historical linguistics and comparative philology. He is closer to Auerbach than to Todorov. He is interested in the historicity of forms rather than in the rules of how formal objects work. So his theory has the richness of practical criticism as well as the lucidity of theoretical reflection, as in his suggestion that an anecdote that is not random (not to say pointless) is not an anecdote.

Not against history but against psychology: the idea here is to foreground the individual text in its formal intelligibility rather than to reconstruct what lies behind the text in the form of an originating expression or rule. The task of Russian Formalism was to emancipate the work of art from the theory of expression, which was Romanticism's way of coping with the world of prose. What's the poet's place in a world of prose? This was essentially Wordsworth's question in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The idea was to integrate extraordinary events of the mind into the everyday and so to redeem the everyday from its banality. The poet's task is to mediate between the banal and the transcendental—temporality redeemed by its spots. That the poet might come out of this mediation a bit prosy—looking entirely unremarkable, in Geoffrey Hartman's phrase—is fair exchange,

since the world comes out looking poetic, even inhabitable and serene, whereas without the poet's intervention it would be a plane of sullen objects impeding movement or escape. Wallace Stevens is perhaps not the last Wordsworthian but he's close: the poet determined to build an inhabitable world from the debris of prose.

But to make the stone stony is to chip away the inscription someone carved on it; it is to turn signs back into things. Formalist poetry (not to say a good deal of modern writing) does this by foregrounding the materiality of language, disrupting the signifying function in order to free words from the symbolic order that rational people say we construct from them. Other sorts of poets just take the world of prose to heart and confound the idea of poetry altogether, as when William Carlos Williams says (pace Stevens) that "A poem can be made out of anything": grocery lists, newspaper clippings, crude love notes, the unrevised doodlings of an exhausted pediatrician. A substantial portion of American writing has tried to work out the consequences of this idea, most recently in the movement called "language poetry," which, among other things, tries to write a poetry that (pace Mallarmé) doesn't seal itself off from whatever is not itself—doesn't, for example, try to seal itself off from the randomness of everyday talk. Here are some lines from Ron Silliman's *What* (1988):

Woman doctor and male nurse  
are running down the hospital corridor.  
Syntax freezes them forever,  
though I merely made them up.  
Whatness vs. Whichness. 'T's not  
just the large beard on the small guy but  
the way it juts forward. Swivel  
your hips with a knee dip and  
the skateboard serves  
up the curb ramp. Brit flag in window  
serves as curtain. Walker in sweatsuit  
and knit cap—lone figure  
on track at dawn. Pages of xerox  
in a dimstore binder. So let's patent blood  
(knowing the market). So there's Habermas  
in a guest spot on *Miami Vice*. Or the way tabloids  
use quotation marks in place of italics. Like water,  
language runs to the sea, flush with information.  
Not that, aardvark! Prefer poets' yap  
to their lap. Discordance in number  
triggers an audit. Squint  
just to keep glasses  
from sliding down nose. A  
line a day keeps  
the critic away. Re-  
work context for previous vowel.

NO PARK WILL BE TOWED

spray-painted freehand on garage door.

Zen grocer. Eyes ache

after day at CRT.

A teenage girl with a bright smile,  
safety pin thru her nose.

As Stephen Fredman says in his book *Poet's Prose*, language poetry like Ron Silliman's is written in prose but is not prose poetry; rather it is poetry that defamiliarizes language by incorporating the overfamiliar, or what belongs to the daily life of a prose environment.

A final point would be that prose is inherently comic precisely because it is the discourse of what is near at hand or everyday. What is remote is always mystified, but what we rub up against every day always inclines us toward laughter, particularly when we see it take the form of language, which is to say language that is not only material but palpable. Prose belongs to the world of flesh and skin. It is in its nature to be corpulent rather than lean. Of course, philosophers try to make prose lean by reducing it to propositional form, because they know that there's no saying anything in prose, no saying something about something and getting it exactly right, not when prose is allowed to go its natural way, growing as much as functioning. There's more to prose than sentences. It overflows thought. One needs paragraphs, chapters, volumes—and still prose will prove uncontainable. Not for nothing Henry James called such novels as he himself did not write "loose and baggy monsters," nor that his prose is distant, distancing, not of this world, impalpable and precise. But even James could hardly stop revising, as if what he had once written had gone to pot and needed to be pounded back into shape, the way of all prose.

## *Translator's Introduction*

### Shklovsky and the Revolution

Benjamin Sher

God's voice called for me and said:

"Arise, O prophet, listen and behold,

Fill every sinew with My will,

And as you travel over land and sea,

Set hearts on fire with your Word."

—Pushkin, "The Prophet"

Standing on the brink of the Stalinist nightmare of the 1930s, Viktor Shklovsky declared courageously and forthrightly that the word is autonomous and that the artist who commands its panoply of devices is sovereign and absolute in his domain:

A literary work is pure form. It is neither thing nor material, but a relationship of materials. . . . Humorous works, tragic works, world-encompassing or intimate works, confrontations of worlds or of cats and stones—are all equal in the eyes of literature. It is from this that comes the inoffensive character of art, its sense of being shut up within itself, its freedom from external coercion. . . . An artifact has a soul that is very much like a form, like the geometric relationship of masses. (189, 191)

What exactly does Shklovsky mean?

Is he proclaiming a New Critical manifesto à la Brooks, Warren & Co. centered on the artist as master craftsman? Or is he waging a rearguard battle to preserve a decadent, elitist, art-for-art's-sake individualism against the new dominant Marxist ideology and its mass culture? Or is he perhaps seeking some new synthesis as yet unknown?

One of Shklovsky's most telling distinctions in *Theory of Prose* is between, on the one hand, "recognition," that is, an understanding of an object or thing based on formulas, conventions and preconceptions, and, on the other hand, "seeing," the perception of an object as revealed by an artist wielding the devices of his craft. "Seeing" is an active, dynamic act of perception brought into play by the artist's technique which allows us to see what, until then, had not and could not yet come into view.

Shklovsky has nothing but contempt for any theory of literature that denies or ignores the creative process (in the modern sense of craft). For

him the artist is a magician, a supreme master in command of a whole array of "devices" (plot, rhythm, image, wordplay, etc.), without which art does not exist.

If this is so, a Western reader might be tempted to "recognize" affinities between Shklovsky's ideas and certain Western tendencies, when what is called for here is nothing less than a "seeing" that attempts to understand Shklovsky from within, that is, that sees him as a critic who sought to "enstrate," to transform our conventional perceptions of literary history. (See below for a discussion of the key concept of "enstrangement.")

Like Pasternak, Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and other luminaries of the post-Revolutionary era, Shklovsky was undoubtedly an outstanding representative of a *pre*-Revolutionary Russian intelligentsia that called Paris its home no less than St. Petersburg or Moscow. That is, it had strong links with Western values as we have come to know them since the Renaissance. Yet, such values founded on the sensibility of the solitary genius blossomed on Russian soil against the background of a society torn apart by a tug-of-war between the tsar's repressive, myopic regime and a long-suffering people (*narod*) increasingly alienated and radicalized against him.

From this welter of doubt, apprehension and loss of faith emerged a whole array of competing, fanatical ideologies promising salvation to nation and/or individual soul. These isms encompassed the whole spectrum of Russian culture, from politics (Bolshevism, a Russian variant of Marxism), history (Slavophilism), religion (Russian Orthodoxy), literature (symbolism, Acmeism, etc.), nature (primitivism), technology and urbanism (Futurism), etc. These indigenous isms, along with Western imports ranging from cubism and expressionism in art to liberalism in politics, thrived in an apocalyptic age ushered in by the tsar on Bloody Sunday, 9 January 1905, when he unleashed the first revolution by massacring peaceful petitioners on the streets of Saint Petersburg.

Thus, when the Revolution broke out in Russia in 1917 (in February and again in October), it had already been expected for nearly a generation. And for many years thereafter this world-historical cataclysm nurtured the imagination of writers, painters, composers and filmmakers, inspiring them to subordinate their personal sensibilities to the lofty ideals of the Revolution. This was the spirit of the age, embracing one and all, from the aristocratic, delicate Symbolists to the tough, younger breed. As Marc Slonim writes in *Soviet Russian Literature* (1964):

The Symbolists had had a foreboding of the cataclysm, and they were well qualified to express the belief that the flame kindled in Moscow would set the whole world ablaze. . . . Revolutionary messianism was in the air: in the cities and villages speakers were proclaiming Russia as the savior of humanity and the builder of a new society. . . . Other symbolists and acmeists, such as Anna Akhmatova, also sang of illumination and spoke of the Revolution with messianic fervor. . . . The romantic and heroic poems [of the young] stressed the grandeur, the universal sweep of

events and were frankly utopian and hyperbolic. A group of proletarian poets, calling themselves Cosmists, predicted a conquest of space beyond our planet: "we will first overthrow the earth, then we shall stage the rebellion of the stars. . . ." They expected the World Revolution to come at any moment from just around the corner; they could hear the tread of history. Consciously or unconsciously, the people of Russia welcomed the advent of a new era.

Thrust into this apocalyptic turmoil, Shklovsky must have felt the earth trembling beneath his feet. Yet, he boldly and unequivocally proclaimed the sovereignty of the artist and his vocation in a dying world that was waiting to be reborn.

Looking at a picture of Shklovsky in the company of Mayakovsky and Pasternak—reproduced on the cover—I found myself wondering about the possible relevance of this group photo to the major themes of *Theory of Prose*.

What is the significance of Shklovsky's presence in the company of two revolutionary Futurists? What were the exponents of a spiritual and historical transformation through destruction and regeneration doing side by side with an eccentric devotee of the artist and his devices?

It suddenly struck me that Shklovsky may have considered his role to be far more than a mere defender of the artist and his craft (a role he played, admittedly, with consummate art himself). Is it not conceivable that Shklovsky's preoccupation with craft may have arisen from a heroic, revolutionary conception of the artist as a man-god whose mission is to destroy the old and build the new, that is, the new paradise, on earth? If this is so, then may we not suggest, in turn, that the real thrust of Shklovsky's criticism was directed not merely at establishing the autonomy of the artist through his craft but at the *emancipation* of the artist from his historical bondage to extra-literary forces that have exploited him like a lackey for their own ends? In effect, Shklovsky is striving with might and main, or so it seems, to rehabilitate the artist, whether in the person of the anonymous storyteller of the Middle Ages or the Greek classics or Cervantes, or Dickens or Tolstoi or even Arthur Conan Doyle. He seeks to liberate him from the clutches of the social scientists, psychologists, political scientists, philosophers, theologians, historians, even from the clutches of literary critics themselves.

And it is here that we must ask the cardinal question: Why did Shklovsky strip these masters of their ancient, conventional non-literary layers of interpretation? In other words, why did he enstrate them, why did he, like a magician, remove the superfluous veil from our eyes if not indeed to transform these apparently literary valets into heroic, revolutionary artificers, into demigods with the power given them by their craft to create a new world, or at least a vision of it?

This may also account for Shklovsky's fascination with Sterne's all-encompassing power to create a literary universe that obeyed at will the commands of its one solitary creator, the author. And, incidentally, this



hypothesis would help explain Shklovsky's disapproval of Bely's involvement with the mystical movement of anthroposophy. For in Shklovsky's opinion, Bely doomed his phenomenological search for his childhood by chaining it to the procrustean bed of anthroposophy.

We may thus consider *Theory of Prose* as Shklovsky's paean to the artists of the past, who had in turn estranged the materials of their world and art, and who thus succeeded in transforming the formulaic, conventional perceptions of *their* age into a true vision of what man is and can be.

In his very style, Shklovsky betrays his kinship to the new revolutionary (though not necessarily Marxist) movement. Like Pasternak, Mayakovsky, and Tsvetaeva, Shklovsky uses a variety of devices to estrange his material and to provoke in us an irresistible scorn for whatever is hackneyed, trite, and stereotypical in the old world (Lesage, Gogol, Chekhov, Tolstoi) and an equally irresistible desire for a vision of the new age (Rozanov, Bely, Cervantes, even, aesthetically speaking, Sterne). And, like his Futurist comrades, he abandons the smooth, incantatory cadences of the Symbolists (so frequent in their celebrations of death and the world beyond death) in favor of a this-worldly, rough-textured, "laborious" and elliptical style that bristles with extravagant comparisons, witticisms, trenchant puns, liberal use of italics and endless digressions from the main theme. No wonder we find him often contradicting himself or thinking aloud, as it were, as he lunges here or there. His brilliant half analytical, half anecdotal approach to criticism, showing, it seems, little regard for the reader's comfort, "impedes" the reader at every turn, putting him on the defensive, forcing him to question age-old taboos, challenging him to "see" the artifact and not merely to "recognize" it.

Such a revolutionary hypothesis might help us to understand Shklovsky's obsession with the artist's sovereignty. Far from harking back to the Decadence of the 1890s, Shklovsky's whole thrust would then point instead to the future, to a utopian future that apparently was never meant to be. For these same artists and scholars and thinkers who celebrated the messianic age so fervently were later martyred for their faith in an orgy of annihilation that turned the apocalypse of the Revolution upside down.

\*

ENSTRANGEMENT: There are, to my knowledge, at least three translations of this key term of Shklovsky. First, let me state the problem: The Russian word *ostraniene* (noun) or *ostranit'* (verb) is a neologism, a fact in itself of supreme importance in a critic as given to serious wit and punning as Shklovsky is. There is no such word in Russian dictionaries. It is clear that the *o* prefix (*o-straniene*), often used to implement an action (though this is only one of its many and even contradictory uses), may be understood to apply to two stems simultaneously, that is, to both *stran* (strange) as well as *storon* (side, which becomes *stran* in such verbs as *otstranit'* [to remove, to

shove aside]). It is a pretty fair assumption, then, that Shklovsky speaks of *ostraniene* as a process or act that endows an object or image with "strangeness" by "removing" it from the network of conventional, formulaic, stereotypical perceptions and linguistic expressions (based on such perceptions). This being the case, how should we translate this concept into English?

The translation "estrangement" is good but negative and limited. "Making it strange" is also good but too positive. Furthermore, both "estrangement" and "making it strange" are not new, that is, they require no special effort of the imagination. In fact, they exemplify the very defect they were supposed to discourage.

Finally, there is "defamiliarization," a term used in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis's *Russian Formalist Criticism* (1965). This semi-neologism is very seductive until you realize that it is quite wrongheaded. Shklovsky's process is in fact the reverse of that implied by this term. It is not a transition from the "familiar" to the "unknown" (implicitly). On the contrary, it proceeds from the cognitively known (the language of science), the rules and formulas that arise from a search for an economy of mental effort, to the familiarly known, that is, to real knowledge that expands and "complicates" our perceptual process in the rich use of metaphors, similes and a host of other figures of speech. "Defamiliarization" is dead wrong!

And so, after some reflection, I decided to coin the word "enstrange," "enstrangement," built on the same cognate root. While positive (see other *en-* prefix words such as "enthrall"), it is also strongly associated with the counterpointing "estrangle," "estrangement."

A final word on the subject: The Russians I talked to reacted to *ostranit'* exactly the way an American reader would react to "enstrange," that is, they immediately assumed that it was a misprint for *otstranit'* (that is, the Russian equivalent, for the sake of this discussion, of "estrangle").

THE TEXT: *Theory of Prose* was originally published in 1925 in a book of around 190 pages, some of whose chapters had been previously published as journal essays. I have selected the expanded 1929 edition of *Theory of Prose* (250 pages plus index) for the following reasons: (1) University Microforms Inc. (Ann Arbor) chose the 1929 edition for its photocopy edition, available in many libraries. (2) Ardis Press, the famous Russian publisher also in Ann Arbor, chose the 1929 edition for its facsimile reprint in 1971. (3) While mentioning both editions, Victor Erlich, an authority on Formalism, shows an apparent preference for the 1929 edition (*Russian Formalism: History and Doctrine*).

PREVIOUS TRANSLATIONS: I would like to acknowledge the work of others who have helped to shape my approach to Shklovsky. First, I would like to mention the pioneering work of Richard Sheldon and Robert Sherwood. Though problematic in places, their published translations to date

demonstrate how maddeningly elusive Shklovsky can be.

On the other hand, Lemon and Reis are professional, lucid and empathic, and I hope I've matched their passionate commitment with my own. Naturally, our terms often differ, but that is inevitable in translating a writer as challenging as Shklovsky.

QUOTATIONS: All translations from Russian texts are mine unless otherwise noted. For other non-English works, standard translations have been used and translators credited. Although Motteux's baroque translation of *Don Quixote* is no longer considered standard, I've used it because it has a magnificence and nobility I find irresistible.

TRANSLITERATION: Russian names have been transliterated according to the system used in Victor Terras's *Handbook of Russian Literature* (Yale University Press, 1985). This excellent reference book also served as the authority for book titles, names of characters, literary terms, and English versions of untranslated Russian works.

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## Chapter 1

### Art as Device

“ART IS THINKING IN IMAGES.” This phrase may even be heard from the mouth of a lycée student. It serves as the point of departure for the academic philologist who is making his first stab at formulating a theory of literature. This idea, first propounded, among others, by Potebnya, has permeated the consciousness of many. In *Notes on the Theory of Literature* he says: “There is no art without imagery, especially in poetry.” “Like prose, poetry is, first and foremost, a mode of thinking and knowing.”

Poetry is a special mode of thinking—to be precise, a mode of thinking in images. This mode entails a certain economy of mental effort that makes us “feel the relative ease of the process.” The aesthetic sense is a consequence of this economy. This is how academician Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky understands it, and his recapitulation of this theory, based as it was on his teacher, whose works he had studied with great care, was in all likelihood quite accurate. Potebnya and the numerous members of his movement consider poetry to be a special form of thinking (i.e., of thinking with the aid of images). The *raison d'être* of the image consists, in their opinion, in helping to organize heterogeneous objects and actions into groups. And the unknown is explained through the known. Or, in Potebnya's words:

The relationship of the image to that which is explained by means of it may take one of two forms: (a) either the image serves as a constant predicate to a succession of ever-changing subjects—a permanent means of attracting changeable percepts, or else (b) the image is much simpler and clearer than that which is to be explained.

Thus, “since the purpose of imagery is to bring the significance of the image closer to our understanding, and since, without this, an image has no meaning, then, the image ought to be better known to us than that which is explained by it.”

It would be interesting to apply this law to Tyutchev's comparison of summer lightning with deaf-and-dumb demons or to Gogol's simile of the sky as the raiments of the Lord.

“There is no art without images.” “Art is thinking in images.” Enormous energy has been put into interpreting music, architecture, and song along the lines of literature. After a quarter of a century of effort, Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky has finally recognized the need for a special category of non-imagistic art encompassing song, architecture, and music. Separating them

from literature, he defines this category as that of the lyrical arts, whose essence lies in a spontaneous play of the emotions. And so it has turned out that at least one huge chunk of art is not subject to the imagistic mode of thinking. And one of these (i.e., the song) resembles, nonetheless, "imagistic" art: it too deals with words. What is even more important, imagistic art passes imperceptibly into non-imagistic art. And yet our perceptions of them are similar.

Still, the assertion that "Art is thinking in images," and therefore (leaving out the intervening steps known to everyone) the proposition that art is the creator, above all, of symbols, has persisted to this day, having survived the collapse of the theory on which it is based. It is particularly very much alive in the Symbolist movement, especially among its theoreticians.

Consequently, many people still believe that thinking in images (i.e., in "paths and shades," "furrows and boundaries") is the distinguishing feature of poetry. Therefore, these people must have expected the history of this "imagistic" art, to use their own words, to consist of the changes in the history of the image. It turns out, however, that images endure and last. From century to century, from country to country, from poet to poet, these images march on without change. They belong to "no one," except perhaps to "God." The more you try to explain an epoch, the more you are convinced that the images you thought were created by a given poet were, in reality, passed on to him by others with hardly a change. The work of successive schools of poetry has consisted essentially in accumulating and making known new devices of verbal arrangement and organization. In particular, these schools of poetry are far more concerned with the disposition than with the creation of imagery. In poetry, where imagery is a given, the artist does not so much "think" in images as "recollect" them. In any case, it is not imagistic thinking that unites the different arts or even the different forms of verbal art. And it is not the changes in imagery that constitute the essential dynamics of poetry.

We know of cases where we stumble onto a poetic something that was never meant, originally, to serve as an object of aesthetic contemplation. For example, we may point to Annensky's opinion concerning the special poetic character of Church Slavonic or to Andrei Bely's rapture over the practice by eighteenth-century Russian poets of placing the adjective after the noun. Bely raves about this as if there were something intrinsically artistic about it. Or, more precisely, Bely goes beyond this in assuming that this artistic quality is also intentional. In fact, though, this is nothing but a general peculiarity of the given language (the influence of Church Slavonic). In this way a work may be either created as prose and experienced as poetry, or else created as poetry and experienced as prose. This points out the fact that the artistic quality of something, its relationship to poetry, is a result of our mode of perception. In a narrow sense we shall call a work-artistic if it has been created by special devices whose purpose is to see to it that these artifacts are interpreted artistically as much as possible.

On the basis of Potebnya's conclusion, which asserts that poetry equals imagery, a whole theory has arisen declaring further that imagery equals symbolism. This presupposes that an image is capable of serving as a constant predicate to a succession of changeable subjects. This conclusion, lying at the heart of the Symbolist movement, has seduced, by virtue of its kinship of ideas, such writers as Andrei Bely and Merezhkovsky with his "eternal companions." This conclusion flows partly from the fact that Potebnya did not distinguish the language of poetry from the language of prose. Thanks to this he has failed to notice that there exist two types of imagery: imagery as a practical way of thinking, that is, as a means of uniting objects in groups, and, secondly, imagery as a way of intensifying the impressions of the senses. Let me illustrate. I'm walking along the street and I see a man walking ahead of me wearing a hat. Suddenly, he drops a package. I call out to him: "Hey, you with the hat, you dropped a package!" This is an example of a purely prosaic use of an image. A second example. Several men are standing at attention. The platoon leader notices that one of the men is standing awkwardly, against army regulations. So he yells at him: "Hey, clean up your act, you crumpled hat!" This image is a poetic trope. (In one case the word *hat* serves as a metonymy, while in the other example we're dealing with a metaphor. And yet I'm really concerned here with something else.)

A poetic image is one of the means by which a poet delivers his greatest impact. Its role is equal to other poetic devices, equal to parallelism, both simple and negative, equal to the simile, to repetition, to symmetry, to hyperbole, equal, generally speaking, to any other figure of speech, equal to all these means of intensifying the sensation of things (this "thing" may well be nothing more than the words or even just the sounds of the literary work itself). Still, the poetic image bears only a superficial resemblance to the fairy-tale image or to the thought image (see Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky in *Language and Art*, where a young girl calls a round sphere a "watermelon"). The poetic image is an instrument of the poetic language, while the prose image is a tool of abstraction: the watermelon instead of the round lampshade or the watermelon instead of the head is nothing more than an act of abstracting from an object and is in no way to be distinguished from head = sphere or watermelon = sphere. This is indeed a form of thinking, but it has nothing to do with poetry.

The law governing the economy of creative effort also belongs to a group of laws taken for granted by everyone. Here is what Herbert Spencer says:

On seeking for some clue to the law underlying these current maxims, we may see shadowed forth in many of them, the importance of economizing the reader's or the hearer's attention. To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum towards which most of the rules above quoted point. . . . Hence, carrying out the metaphor that language is the vehicle of thought, there seems reason to think that in all cases the friction and inertia of the

vehicle deduct from its efficiency; and that in composition, the chief, if not the sole thing to be done, is to reduce this friction and inertia to the smallest possible amount. (*The Philosophy of Style*)

And Richard Avenarius writes:

If the soul possessed inexhaustible resources, then it would be of no moment to it, of course, how many of these inexhaustible resources had actually been spent. The only thing that would matter would be, perhaps, the time expended. However, since our resources are limited, we should not be surprised to find that the soul seeks to carry out its perceptual activity as purposefully as possible, i.e., with, relatively speaking, the least expenditure of energy possible or, which is the same, with, relatively speaking, the greatest result possible.

By a mere allusion to the general law governing the economy of mental effort, Petrazhitzky dismisses James's theory, in which the latter presents the case for the corporeal basis of the effect. The principle of the economy of creative effort, so seductive especially in the domain of rhythm, was affirmed by Aleksandr Veselovsky. Taking Spencer's ideas to their conclusion, he said: "The merit of a style consists precisely in this: that it delivers the greatest number of ideas in the fewest number of words." Even Andrei Bely, who, at his best, gave us so many fine examples of his own "laborious," impeding rhythm and who, citing examples from Baratynsky, pointed out the "laboriousness" of poetic epithets, found it, nonetheless, necessary to speak of the law of economy in his book. This work, representing a heroic attempt to create a theory of art, demonstrates Bely's enormous command of the devices of poetry. Unfortunately, it also rests on a body of unverified facts gathered from out-of-date books, including Krayevich's physics textbook, in fashion when he was a student at the lycée.

The idea that an economy of effort lies at the basis of and governs the creative process may well hold true in the "practical" domain of language. However, these ideas, flourishing in the prevailing climate of ignorance concerning the nature of poetic creation, were transplanted from their native soil in prose to poetry.

The discovery that there are sounds in the Japanese poetic language that have no parallels in everyday Japanese was perhaps the first factual indication that these two languages, that is, the poetic and the practical, do not coincide. L. P. Yakubinsky's article concerning the absence of the law of dissimilation of liquid sounds in the language of poetry, and, on the other hand, the admission into the language of poetry, as pointed out by the author, of a confluence of similar sounds that are difficult to pronounce (corroborated by scientific research), clearly point, at least in this case, to the fundamental opposition of the laws governing the practical and poetic uses of language.

For that reason we have to consider the question of energy expenditure and economy in poetry, not by analogy with prose, but on its own terms.

If we examine the general laws of perception, we see that as it becomes

habitual, it also becomes automatic. So eventually all of our skills and experiences function unconsciously—automatically. If someone were to compare the sensation of holding a pen in his hand or speaking a foreign tongue for the very first time with the sensation of performing this same operation for the ten thousandth time, then he would no doubt agree with us. It is this process of automatization that explains the laws of our prose speech with its fragmentary phrases and half-articulated words.

The ideal expression of this process may be said to take place in algebra, where objects are replaced by symbols. In the rapid-fire flow of conversational speech, words are not fully articulated. The first sounds of names hardly enter our consciousness. In *Language as Art*, Pogodin tells of a boy who represented the sentence "Les montagnes de la Suisse sont belles" in the following sequence of initial letters: *L, m, d, l, S, s, b*.

This abstractive character of thought suggests not only the method of algebra but also the choice of symbols (letters and, more precisely, initial letters). By means of this algebraic method of thinking, objects are grasped spatially, in the blink of an eye. We do not see them, we merely recognize them by their primary characteristics. The object passes before us, as if it were prepackaged. We know that it exists because of its position in space, but we see only its surface. Gradually, under the influence of this generalizing perception, the object fades away. This is as true of our perception of the object in action as of mere perception itself. It is precisely this perceptual character of the prose word that explains why it often reaches our ears in fragmentary form (see the article by L. P. Yakubinsky). This fact also accounts for much discord in mankind (and for all manner of slips of the tongue). In the process of algebrizing, of automatizing the object, the greatest economy of perceptual effort takes place. Objects are represented either by one single characteristic (for example, by number), or else by a formula that never even rises to the level of consciousness. Consider the following entry in Tolstoi's diary:

As I was walking around dusting things off in my room, I came to the sofa. For the life of me, I couldn't recall whether I had already dusted it off or not. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I felt that it was already impossible to remember it. If I had in fact dusted the sofa and forgotten that I had done so, i.e., if I had acted unconsciously, then this is tantamount to not having done it at all. If someone had seen me doing this consciously, then it might have been possible to restore this in my mind. If, on the other hand, no one had been observing me or observing me only unconsciously, if the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been. (29 February [i.e., 1 March] 1897)

And so, held accountable for nothing, life fades into nothingness. Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war.

If the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it's as if this life had never been.



And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By "enstranging" objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and "laborious." The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. *Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant.*

The life of a poem (and of an artifact) proceeds from vision to recognition, from poetry to prose, from the concrete to the general, from Don Quixote, the scholarly and poor aristocrat enduring half-consciously his humiliation at court, to Turgenev's broad and hollow Don Quixote, from Charlemagne to Charles the Fat. As the work of art dies, it becomes broader: the fable is more symbolic than a poem and a proverb is more symbolic than a fable. For that reason, Potebnya's theory is least self-contradictory in its analysis of the fable, which, he believed, he had investigated thoroughly. Alas, his theory never dealt with the "eternal" works of imaginative literature. That accounts for the fact that Potebnya never did complete his book. As is well known, *Notes on the Theory of Literature* was published in 1905, thirteen years after the author's death. Potebnya himself had managed to work out fully only the section on the fable.

After being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of "recognition." An object appears before us. We know it's there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it. The removal of this object from the sphere of automatized perception is accomplished in art by a variety of means. I wish to point out in this chapter one of the devices used almost constantly by Tolstoi. It is Merezhkovsky's belief that Tolstoi presents things as he sees them with his eyes without ever changing them.

The devices by which Tolstoi enstranges his material may be boiled down to the following: he does not call a thing by its name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time, while an incident is described as if it were happening for the first time. In addition, he foregoes the conventional names of the various parts of a thing, replacing them instead with the names of corresponding parts in other things. Let me demonstrate this with an example. In "Shame" Tolstoi enstranges the idea of flogging by describing people who, as punishment for violating the law, had been stripped, thrown down on the floor, and beaten with switches. A few lines later he refers to the practice of whipping their behinds. In a note on this passage, Tolstoi asks: "Just why this stupid, savage method of inflicting pain and no other: such as pricking the shoulder or some such other part of the body with needles, squeezing somebody's hands or feet in a vise, etc."

I apologize for the harshness of this example but it is typical of the way Tolstoi reaches our conscience. The usual method of flogging is enstranged by a description that changes its form without changing its essence. Tolstoi constantly makes use of this method of enstrangement.

In "Kholstomer," where the story is told from the point of view of a horse, the objects are enstranged not by our perception but by that of the horse. Here is how the horse views the institution of property:

What they were saying about flogging and about Christianity I understood very well. But I was completely mystified by the meaning of the phrase "my colt" or "his colt." I could see that humans presupposed a special relationship between me and the stable. What the nature of that relationship was I could not fathom at the time. Only much later, when I was separated from the other horses, did I understand what all this meant. At that time, however, I couldn't possibly understand what it meant when I heard myself called by people as the property of a human being. The words "my horse" referred to me, a living horse, and this seemed to me just as strange as the words "my land," "my air" or "my water."

And yet, these words had an enormous impact on me. I thought about this night and day, and it was only after many diverse contacts with humans that I learned at last the significance of these strange words. The gist is this: People are guided in their life not by deeds but by words. They love not so much the opportunity of doing (or not doing) something as the chance to talk about a host of things in the possessive language so customary among them: *my* book, *my* house, *my* land, etc. I saw that they applied this "my" to a whole gamut of things, creatures and objects, in fact, even to people, to horses, to the earth itself. They have made a compact among themselves that only one person shall say "my" to any one thing. And, in accordance with the rules of this game, he who could say "my" about the greatest number of things would be considered to be the happiest of men. Why this is so I don't know, but it is so. For a long time I tried to see in this some direct benefit to me, but in the final analysis, it all seemed so unjust.

Many of the people, for example, who call me their horse did not ride on me. Others did. These same people never fed me. Others did. Once again, I was shown many kindnesses, but not by those who called me their horse. No, by coachmen, veterinarians and strangers of all sorts. As my observations grew, though, I became increasingly convinced that this concept of *mine* was invalid not only for us horses but also for human folk, i.e., that it represents nothing more than man's base and beastly instinct to claim property for himself. A landlord, for instance, says "my house" but never lives in it, concerning himself only with the structure and maintenance of the house. A merchant says "my shop," "my clothing shop," yet he himself does not wear any clothes made from the fine material displayed in it.

There are people who call a piece of land theirs but have never laid eyes on it nor walked it. There are people who call other people theirs, but who have never seen them. And their entire contact with these people consists of doing them evil.

There are people who call women "theirs" or "their" wives, yet these women live with other men. And people do not aspire to do good. No, they dream of naming as many objects as possible as *their own*.

Leaving aside other good reasons for our superiority, I am now convinced that what distinguishes us from humans and gives us the right to claim a higher place on the ladder of living creatures is simply this: that the human species is guided, above all, by *words*, while ours is guided by *deeds*.

The horse is killed off long before the end of the story, but the mode of telling the story, its device, does not change:

Much later, they dumped Serpukhovsky's body into the ground. He had walked the earth. He had drunk and eaten of it. Neither his skin nor flesh nor bones were of any use to anybody.

For twenty years, this dead body walking the earth was a great burden to everyone. Now, the dumping of this body seemed like another hardship to others. He was no longer of any use to anyone and could no longer cause anyone any grief. Nevertheless, the dying who buried the dead had found it necessary to dress up this bloated body, which was about to rot, in a dress uniform and to lower him, with his good boots on, into a fine coffin adorned with new tassels at the four corners. They then put this new coffin into another coffin made of lead, took it to Moscow, where they dug up ancient human bones and buried this body infested with worms in its new uniform and polished boots. Then they poured earth all over his coffin.

We see by the end of this story that Tolstoi continues to make use of this device even when no motivation for it exists.

In *War and Peace* Tolstoi describes battles using the same device. They are all presented, above all, in their strangeness. Unfortunately, I cannot offer any full examples, because this would require excerpting a large portion of the monumental novel. However, a description of the salons and the theater will suffice for the moment:

Level boards were spread out in the center of the stage. Along the wings stood painted pictures depicting trees. Behind them, a canvas was stretched on boards. In the middle of the stage sat young girls in red bodices and white skirts. One young girl, very fat, and attired in white silk, was sitting separately on a low bench to which a green cardboard was attached from behind. They were all singing something. When they finished singing, the young girl in white walked over to the prompter's box and a man in tight-fitting silken hose on his fat legs approached her, sporting a plume, spread his arms in despair and began singing. The man in tight-fitting hose sang alone, then she sang. Then they both fell silent, the music roared, and the man began fingering the hand of the young girl dressed in white, evidently waiting again for his turn to join her in song. After their duet, everyone in the theater applauded and shouted. Gesticulating, the lovers then smiled and bowed to the audience.

The second act included scenes depicting monuments. The moon and stars peeped in through holes in the canvas and lampshades were raised in frames. Then, to the sound of bass horns and double basses, hordes of men rushed onto the stage sporting black mantles and brandishing what looked like daggers. Then still others ran up and started pulling on the arm of a young girl. Dressed earlier in white, she was now dressed in a light blue dress. They did not drag her off right away. First, they joined her in a song for what seemed like a very long time. At long last, after whisking her off, they struck three times on some metallic object offstage. Then, everyone fell on his knees and began singing a prayer. Several times the actions of the protagonists were interrupted by the enthusiastic screams of the audience.

So also in the third act:

... But suddenly a storm broke out and in the orchestra you could hear the chromatic scales and diminished seventh chords and they all ran up and dragged another of the characters offstage as the curtain fell.

Or in the fourth act:

There was a certain devil on the stage who sang, with arms outspread, until someone pulled the board from under him and he fell through.

Tolstoi describes the city and court in *Resurrection* in the same way. Similarly, he asks of the marriage in *The Kreutzer Sonata*: "Why should two people who are soul mates sleep together?"

But the device of enstrangement was not used by Tolstoi to estrange only those things he scorned:

Pierre got up and walked away from his new friends and made his way among camp fires to the other side of the road where, as he had been told, the captive soldiers stayed. He wanted to have a little talk with them. On the way, a French sentinel stopped him and ordered him to return. Pierre returned, but not to the camp fire, not to his friends, but to an unharnessed carriage that stood somewhat apart. Cross-legged and with his head lowered, he sat on the cold earth by the wheels of the carriage and thought for a long time without moving. More than an hour passed. No one disturbed him. Suddenly, Pierre broke out with a robust, good-natured laugh that was so loud that people looked back from all directions at this evidently strange laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha," Pierre laughed and he began talking to himself: "So the soldier wouldn't let me through, ha, ha, ha! They seized me, blocked my way. Me. Me. My immortal soul. Ha, ha, ha," he continued laughing as tears rolled down his cheeks. . . .

Pierre looked up at the sky, at the playful stars that were receding into the distance. "And all of this is mine and all of this is within me and all of this is me," Pierre thought to himself. "And they seized all of this and shut it off with boards." He smiled, returned to his comrades and went to sleep.

Everyone who knows Tolstoi well can find several hundred examples of this sort. His way of seeing things out of their usual context is equally evident in his last works, where he applies the device of enstrangement to his description of the dogmas and rituals he had been investigating. He replaces the customary terms used by the Orthodox Church with ordinary, down-to-earth words. What results is something strange, something monstrous which was taken by many—quite sincerely, I might add—as a form of blasphemy, causing them great pain. And yet this is the same device that Tolstoi applied to his perceptions and descriptions of the world around him.

Tolstoi's faith was shattered by his perceptions. He was confronting that which he had been trying to evade for a long time.

The device of enstrangement is not peculiar to Tolstoi. I illustrated it with examples from his work for purely practical considerations, that is, simply because his work is known to everyone.

Having delineated this literary device, let us now determine the limits of its application more precisely. In my opinion, enstrangement can be found almost anywhere (i.e., wherever there is an image).

What distinguishes our point of view from that of Potebnya may be

formulated as follows: The image is not a constant subject for changing predicates. The purpose of the image is not to draw our understanding closer to that which this image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way, in short, to lead us to a "vision" of this object rather than mere "recognition."

The purpose of imagery may be most clearly followed in erotic art. The erotic object is here commonly presented as something seen for the very first time. Consider, for example, Gogol's "Christmas Eve":

Then he moved closer to her, coughed, let out a laugh, touched her exposed, full arm and said in a voice that expressed both cunning and self-satisfaction:

"And what's that you have there, my splendid Solokha?" Saying this, he took several steps back.

"What do you mean? My arm, Osip Nikiforovich!" Solokha answered.

"Hm! Your arm! Heh, heh, heh!" the secretary, satisfied with his opening gambit, said warmly and paced about the room.

"And what's that you have there, Solokha? Why are you trembling?" he said with that same look in his eyes as he started for her again and touched her neck lightly with his hand. He then pulled back as before.

"As if you didn't see, Osip Nikiforovich!" Solokha answered. "It's my neck and on my neck there is a necklace."

"Hm! So there is a necklace on your neck! Heh, heh, heh!" and the secretary again paced up and down the room, wringing his hands. "And what's that you have there, my peerless Solokha?"

Who knows how far the secretary would dare go with those long fingers of his?

Or in Hamsun's *Hunger*: "Two white miracles showed through her blouse."

Or else erotic objects are depicted allegorically, where the author's intent is clearly something quite other than a conceptual understanding.

Here belongs the description of private parts in the form of a lock and key (e.g., in Savodnikov's *Riddles of the Russian People*), or in the corresponding parts of a loom, or in the form of a bow and arrow, or in the game of rings and marlinespikes. We find the latter in the traditional bylina (folk epic) about Stavyor, where the husband fails to recognize his wife, who has put on the armor of a bogatyr (folk) heroine. She poses the following riddle:

"Do you remember, Stavyor, remember, dear?  
How we strolled along the street when young,  
How we played rings and 'spikes together:  
Your marlinespike was made of silver,  
While my ring was made of gold.  
I would hit the target now and then  
But *you* struck bull's-eye every time . . ."  
Stavyor, son of Godinovich, says in turn:  
"I have never played marlinespikes with you!"  
Vasilisa Mikulichna fires back, quote:  
"Don't you remember, Stavyor, don't you recall

How we learned our alphabet together:  
Mine was the silver inkwell, and your pen was golden?  
I moistened your pen then and there,  
Yes, I moistened it, all right, then and there."

There is another version of this bylina where a riddle is answered:

At this point the fearsome ambassador Vasilyushka  
Raised her dress all the way up to her navel.  
And behold, young Stavyor, the son of Godinovich  
Recognized the gilt-edged ring . . .

But enstrangement is not a device limited to the erotic riddle—a euphemism of sorts. It is also the foundation of all riddles. Every riddle either defines and illustrates its subject in words which seem inappropriate during the telling of it (for instance: "What has two rings with a nail in the middle of it?") or else it represents a peculiar audio form of enstrangement (i.e., a kind of mimicry: "*slon da kondrik*" instead of "*zaslon i konnik*").

Similarly, erotic images that are not riddles may also be a form of enstrangement. I mean, of course, the whole range of colorful obscenities associated with the burlesque. The device of enstrangement is perfectly clear in the widely disseminated image—a kind of erotic pose—in which bears and other animals (or the devil, prompted by a different motivation for non-recognition) do not recognize man. Very typical is this tale of non-recognition, one of the *Great Russian Tales of the Perm Province* collected by D. S. Zelenin:

A peasant was cultivating a field with a piebald mare. A bear approaches him and asks: "Hey, brother. Who made this mare piebald for you?"

"I myself, of course," the peasant replied.

"Really, and how?" the bear fired back.

"Come on, let me make you piebald too."

The bear agreed.

The peasant tied the bear's legs with a rope, removed the ploughshare from the plough, heated it in the fire, and off he went to apply it to the bear's flanks. This scorched his coat to the very bone, making him piebald. After the peasant untied him, the bear moved away and lay under a tree.

A magpie swooped down on the peasant to peck at his flesh. The peasant seized it and broke one of its legs. The magpie then flew off and sat down on the same tree against which the bear was resting.

Finally, a horsefly came along and sat on the mare and began biting it. The peasant seized the horsefly, shoved a stick up its behind, and let it go. The horsefly flew off and sat in the same tree where the magpie and bear were reposing.

All three were resting together when the peasant's wife arrived on the scene with her husband's dinner. After eating his dinner in the open air, the peasant beat his wife, throwing her repeatedly to the ground.

Seeing this, the bear said to the magpie and the horsefly: "My God! Looks like this peasant is out to make someone piebald again."

"No, no," the magpie answered, "no, he wants to break someone's leg."



"Oh, no, fellows, you got it all wrong," the horsefly announced solemnly: "Not at all. He wants to shove his stick up her behind!"

The similarity of the enstrangement device here with its use by Tolstoi in "Kholstomer" is, I believe, quite obvious.

The enstrangement of the sexual act in literature is quite frequent. For example, in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio refers to "the scraping of the barrel," "the catching of the nightingale," "the merry woolbeating work" (the last image is not deployed in the plot). Just as frequent is the enstrangement of the sexual organs.

A whole series of plots is built on "non-recognition," for example, Afanasiev's *Indecent Tales*. The whole tale of the "Bashful Lady" revolves around the fact that the object is never called by its proper name (i.e., it is based on a game of non-recognition). The same is true of Onchukov's "A Woman's Blemish" (tale no. 525) and "The Bear and the Rabbit," also from *Indecent Tales*, in which a bear and a rabbit give each other a "wound."

To this device of enstrangement belong also constructions such as "the pestle and the mortar" or "the devil and the infernal regions" (*Decameron*).

Concerning enstrangement in the form of psychological parallelism, see my next chapter on plot formation. Here let me say only, what is important in psychological parallelism is for each of the parallel structures to retain its independence in spite of obvious affinities.

The purpose of parallelism is the same as that of imagery in general, that is, the transfer of an object from its customary sphere of perception to a new one; we are dealing here with a distinct semantic change.

In our phonetic and lexical investigations into poetic speech, involving both the arrangement of words and the semantic structures based on them, we discover everywhere the very hallmark of the artistic: that is, an artifact that has been intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception. It is "artificially" created by an artist in such a way that the perceiver, pausing in his reading, dwells on the text. This is when the literary work attains its greatest and most long-lasting impact. The object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity. That is, because of this device, the object is brought into view.

These conditions are also met by "poetic language." According to Aristotle, poetic language ought to have the character of something foreign, something outlandish about it. In practice, such language is often quite literally foreign: just as Sumerian might have been regarded as a "poetic language" by an Assyrian, so Latin was considered poetic by many in medieval Europe. Similarly, Arabic was thought poetic by a Persian and Old Bulgarian was regarded likewise by a Russian. Or else it might indeed be a lofty language, like the language of folk song, which is close to literature. To this category belong also the widespread archaisms of poetic language, the difficulties of the language of the twelfth century called "dolce

stil nuovo," the language of Daniel, with its dark style and difficult forms, *presupposing difficulties in pronunciation*. Yakubinsky has demonstrated in his article the law of difficulty for the phonetics of poetic language, particularly in the repetition of identical sounds. In this way, therefore, the language of poetry may be said to be a difficult, "laborious," impeding language.

In certain isolated cases, the language of poetry approaches the language of prose, but this does not violate the principle of "difficulty." Pushkin writes:

Her sister was called Tatiana.  
Willfully shall we shed light  
On the tender pages of this novel,  
Naming her so for the first time.

For the contemporaries of Pushkin, the elevated style of Derzhavin was poetic language, while the style of Pushkin, due to its banality (as was thought then) represented for them something unexpectedly difficult. Let's not forget that Pushkin's contemporaries were horrified at his trite expressions. Pushkin employed folk speech as a special device of arresting the reader's attention precisely in the same way that his contemporaries interspersed *Russian* words in their everyday French speech (see the examples in Tolstoi's *War and Peace*).

At this point, an even more characteristic phenomenon takes place. Though alien to Russia by its nature and origin, the Russian literary language has so deeply penetrated into the heart of our people that it has lifted much of popular speech to unheard-of heights. At the same time, literature has become enamored of dialect (Remizov, Klyuev, Esenin, and others, all of these so uneven in their talent and yet so near to a consciously provincial dialect) and of barbarisms (we might include here Severyanin's school). Maksim Gorky, meanwhile, is making a transition at this very moment from the literary tongue of Pushkin to the conversational idiom of Leskov. And so folk speech and the literary tongue have changed their places (Vyacheslav Ivanov and many others). Finally, a powerful new movement is making its debut with the creation of a new, specialized poetic language. At the head of this school, as is well known, stands Velimir Khlebnikov.

All things considered, we've arrived at a definition of poetry as the language of *impeded, distorted* speech. Poetic speech is *structured* speech. Prose, on the other hand, is ordinary speech: economical, easy, correct speech (*Dea Prosa*, the queen of correct, easy childbirth, i.e., head first). I shall speak in more detail of the device of impeding, of holding back, when I consider it as a general law of art in my chapter on plot construction.

Still, those who favor the economy of artistic energy as the distinctive feature of poetic language seem to be quite persuasive when it comes to the question of rhythm. Spencer's interpretation of the role of rhythm seems on the face of it quite unshakeable:

Just as the body in receiving a series of varying concussions, must keep the muscles ready to meet the most violent of them, as not knowing when such may come: so, the mind in receiving unarranged articulations, must keep its perspectives active enough to recognize the least easily caught sounds. And as, if the concussions recur in definite order, the body may husband its forces by adjusting the resistance needful for each concussion; so, if the syllables be rhythmically arranged, the mind may economize its energies by anticipating the attention required for each syllable.

This apparently convincing remark suffers from a common defect, that is, the turning upside-down of the laws that govern poetry and prose. In his *Philosophy of Style*, Spencer completely failed to distinguish them. It may well be that there exist two types of rhythm. The rhythm of prose or of a work song like "Dubinushki" replaces the need for an order from a supervisor by its rhythmic chant: "let's groan together." On the other hand, it also eases and automatizes the work. And indeed, it is easier to walk with music than without it. Of course, it is just as easy to walk while talking up a storm, when the act of walking disappears from our consciousness. In this sense, the rhythm of prose is important as a factor leading to *automatization*. But such is not the rhythm of poetry. There is indeed such a thing as "order" in art, but not a single column of a Greek temple fulfills its order perfectly, and artistic rhythm may be said to exist in the rhythm of prose *disrupted*. Attempts have been made by some to systematize these "disruptions." They represent today's task in the theory of rhythm. We have good reasons to suppose that this systemization will not succeed. This is so because we are dealing here not so much with a more complex rhythm as with a disruption of rhythm itself, a violation, we may add, that can never be predicted. If this violation enters the canon, then it loses its power as a complicating device. But enough of rhythm for the time being. I shall devote a separate book to it in the future.

## Chapter 2

### The Relationship between Devices of Plot Construction and General Devices of Style

"Why walk on a tightrope? And, as if that were not enough, why squat every four steps?" asked Saltykov-Shchedrin about poetry. Every person who has ever examined art closely, apart from those led astray by a defective theory of rhythm as an organizational tool, understands this question. A crooked, laborious poetic speech, which makes the poet tongue-tied, or a strange, unusual vocabulary, an unusual arrangement of words—what's behind all this?

Why does King Lear fail to recognize Kent? Why do both Kent and Lear fail to recognize Edward? So asked Tolstoi in utter astonishment about the underlying laws of Shakespearean drama. This comes from a man who knew greatly how to see things and how to be surprised by them.

Why does the recognition scene in the plays of Menander, Plautus and Terence take place in the last act, when the spectators have already had a presentiment by then of the blood relationship binding the antagonists, and when the author himself often notifies us of it in advance in the prologue?

Why is it that in dance a partner requests "the pleasure of the next dance" even after the woman had already tacitly accepted it?

What keeps Glahn and Edvarda apart in Hamsun's *Pan*, scattering them all over the world in spite of their love for each other?

Why is it that, in fashioning an *Art of Love* out of love, Ovid counsels us not to rush into the arms of pleasure?

A crooked road, a road in which the foot feels acutely the stones beneath it, a road that turns back on itself—this is the road of art.

One word fits another. One word feels another word, as one cheek feels another cheek. Words are taken apart and, instead of one complex word handed over like a chocolate bar at a candy store, we see before us a word-sound, a word-movement. Dance is movement that can be felt. Or more accurately, it is movement formed in order to be felt. And behold, we dance as we plow. Still, we have no need of a field. We can dance even without it.

There's an old story in some Greek classic . . . a certain royal prince was so impassioned with the dance at his wedding that he threw off his clothes and began dancing naked on his hands. This enraged the bride's father, who shouted, "Prince, you have just danced yourself out of a wedding." To

which the young man, addressing the would-be father-in-law, said, "Your Majesty, I couldn't care less!" and went on dancing anyway, his feet up in the air.

### The Ethnographic School

The ethnographic school, represented amongst us most forcefully by A. N. Veselovsky, has come to the following conclusion in its quest for a poetics of plot structure—but before going any further, it would behoove us to let Veselovsky define the concepts of "plot" and "motif":

A) By *motif* I mean the simplest narrative *unit*, corresponding imagistically to the diverse needs of a primitive mind and to the needs of ordinary perception. As a result of the similarity or, rather, unity of *material and psychological* conditions existing at the early stages of human development, such motifs could have arisen independently of each other and nonetheless could still have exhibited similar features at one and the same time. As examples, we may cite the following:

1) The so-called *legendes des origines*, the sun/eye simile, the sun (brother or husband)/moon (sister or wife) comparison, sunrise and sunset myths, myths about spots on the moon, eclipses, etc.

2) Everyday situations: abduction of a young woman (the folk wedding episode), abduction of "Rostan" (in fairy tales), etc.

B) By *plot* I mean a theme, into which a variety of motif-situations have been woven. For example:

1) Tales of the sun and his mother (cf. the Greek and Malaysian legends of the cannibalistic sun).

2) Tales of abduction. The more complex and illogical the combination of motifs (as in a song, where we are dealing with an integration of stylistic motifs), the greater the number of its component motifs, the more difficult it is to suppose, when faced with, e.g., two similar tales originating in two different tribes, that each of them arose by process of psychological self-generation against a background of identical concepts and realities. In such cases one may raise the possibility of *borrowings in historical time* of a plot structure by one nationality from another.

Thus:

If in different national milieus we encounter a formula with an identical, random sequence of  $x$  ( $a-x$ ,  $x(1)$ ,  $x(2)$ , etc.) then such a resemblance must not be unconditionally replaced by analogous processes of the psyche. If we posit 12 such  $x$ 's, then, according to Jacobs's calculations (*Folklore*) the probability of its independent formation takes on the ratio of 1:479,001,599. In that case, we have the right to speak of borrowing something from another nationality.

However, this coincidence of plot structures may be encountered even where there is no presumption of borrowing; for example, the American Indian legend of how the birds chose for themselves a king, with the smallest

bird managing to win the honor through sheer cunning, is remarkably similar to a European legend on the same subject (Klinger). Similarly, as Veselovsky notes, a certain legend from Zanzibar resembles Grimm's tale no. 15.

Especially remarkable is the Potanian parallel between the story of Bat and his wife Anupa (the Egyptian tale of the two brothers) and the Turkic tale of Idiga (in *Oriental Motifs*).

I would like to point out that an interval of four thousand years separates these records. True, it is a common practice in such cases to resort to the hypothesis that such a story was carried there by colonists. Yet such an explanation reminds us too easily of Voltaire's hypothesis that fossil sea-shells found on the Alps were brought there by pilgrims. Besides it is quite inexplicable as to why the *random* sequence of motifs should be preserved during this borrowing, when eyewitness testimony shows that it is precisely the sequence of events that is usually most deeply distorted under such circumstances. Moreover the (fairy) tale, even when remaining within the same linguistic milieu, is not distinguished for its textual stability. Rybnikov explains:

Let's listen to the *storyteller*. If he is a good one, his words will weave themselves into place like beads on a string. You can hear the rhythm itself. Whole lines of verse. But all of this is true for stories which the storyteller has *learned by heart*, which he has told and retold. The fortuitous cadence, the lines of verse, come evidently from the traditional locutions of the heroic "bylina." Force him to repeat and he will express much of it differently. Ask him if anyone else knows the story, and he'll point to a *fellow villager*, a certain So-and-So, and he'll tell you that this So-and-So heard this story along with him from a certain old man or minstrel. Then go ask this So-and-So to tell this same story, and you will hear the story told not only in a different language and with different figures of speech, but often in a different key. One storyteller introduces (or preserves) the piteous details, another contributes (or perpetuates) the satirical point of view in certain episodes, while a third storyteller adapts a denouement from another tale (or from the general *fund* that is available to all *storytellers*, of which later). In addition, new characters and new adventures appear on the scene. Then, following up, you ask him how he learned this story and he will answer by saying that he was fishing on the shores of Lake Ladoga or Lake Onega or that he was in a shelter or in some *dwelling* or sitting by a campfire when he first heard it and many others like it told. Some were told by Povenchians, others by Zaolongenans, still others by Kopels and still others by Swedes (Finns). He crammed as many of these stories into his head as he could. Yet, he had no more than two or three of these stories in his repertoire. The well-known, communally shared conceptions had put on a certain costume and were expressed with a certain turn of speech. *Story = Structure*.

The story disintegrates and is rebuilt anew.

To sum up: Fortuitous coincidences are impossible. Coincidences can be explained only by the existence of special laws of plot formation. Even the admission of borrowings does not explain the existence of identical stories separated by thousands of years and tens of thousands of miles. For this

reason, Jacobs is wrong: he presupposes an absence of laws governing plot formation, positing instead a fortuitous arrangement of motifs into series or clusters. As a matter of fact, such stories are forever disintegrating and forever being rebuilt in accordance with special laws of plot formation still unknown to us.

### Motifs

Many objections may be raised against the ethnographer's theory of the origin of motifs. Proponents of this theory have explained the resemblance of narrative motifs by the presence of identical socioeconomic forms and religious conceptions. This theory is concerned exclusively with motifs as such and deals with the influence of story schemata upon each other only in passing. As for the laws governing plot construction, the ethnographers couldn't have cared less.

Yet, even apart from this consideration, the ethnographic theory is flawed to its very core. According to this theory, story motif-situations constitute recollections of relationships that have actually existed in reality. So, for example, the presence of incest in certain stories attests to a primitive "hetaerism." Similarly, the presence of helpful beasts attests to traces of totemism, while the abduction of brides alludes to the practice of elopement.

The works of these scholars, especially Veselovsky, are practically chock-full of such explanations. In order to show just how far such an explanation of the origin of motifs may go, I shall analyze one classic study of the origin of a tale, namely of the legend of Dido, who had seized control of land through cunning. This story has been analyzed by V. F. Miller in an essay in *Russian Thought* (1894).

Miller connects the plot dealing with the seizure of land (by covering it with cowhide cut into strips) with the following: (1) the classical Greek legend of Dido, used later by Vergil; (2) three local Indian legends; (3) an Indo-Chinese legend; (4a) a Byzantine legend of the fifteenth century and (4b) a Turkish legend timed to coincide with the building of a fortress on the shore of the Bosphorus; (5) a Serbian legend; (6) an Icelandic saga concerning Ragnar Lodbrok's son Ivar; (7) the Danish story of Saxo Grammaticus of the twelfth century; (8) the Gottfried chronicle of the twelfth century; (9) a certain Swedish chronicle; (10) the legend of the founding of Riga, as recorded by Dionysius Fabritz; (11) the legend concerning the founding of the Kirillo-Belozersky monastery (with a tragic denouement); (12) the folk legend from Pskov concerning the erection of the walls of the Pechersky monastery under the reign of Ivan the Terrible; (13) the Chernigovsky Little Russian legend about Peter the Great; (14) the Zyryansky legend of the founding of Moscow; (15) the Cabardinian legend of the founding of the Kydenetov Caucasian village (a Jewish hero); (16) the stories of the North American Indians having to do with the deceitful seizure

of land by European colonists.

Having thus exhaustively traced all of the variants of this plot, Miller directs our attention to the peculiar fact that the deceived party in these stories never protests against the violent takeover of land by the other party. This is brought about, of course, by the convention lying at the heart of every work of art, namely, that the situations in question, isolated from their interrelationship in reality, affect each other only in accordance with the laws of the given artistic nexus: "In this story one has the sense of a *conviction* that the act of covering a parcel of land with a strip of cowhide constitutes a juridical act having the force of law."

The meaning of this act is conveyed in some sense in the Vedic legend recorded in the oldest Indian religious work entitled *Kathaka-Brahmana*. According to this legend the Asuri spirits, who are hostile to the gods, measure out land with the hide of a bull and divide it among themselves. Corresponding to this legend, the ancient Indian word *go* stood for "land" or "cow." The word *gocarman* (cowhide) stood for a definite piece of land: "We have a parallel to this ancient Indian measurement (*gocarman*)," says Miller,

in the Anglo-Saxon word *hyd* and in the English "hide," signifying, first, the skin (German *haut*) and, secondly, a specific strip of land, equivalent to forty-six morgens. This leads us to believe with a high degree of probability that the Indian *gocarman* had originally designated a piece of land that could be covered by the strips of a cowhide. Only later it seems, when its ancient meaning was forgotten, did this word come to designate an area occupied in toto by one hundred cows with their calves and bull.

As we have seen above, the attempt to clarify the socioeconomic substructure is carried not only to the bitter end but to absurdity. It turns out that the deceived party—and all variations of the story are based on an act of deception—did not protest against the seizure of land because land was, generally speaking, measured by this means. This results in an absurdity. If, at the moment of the alleged action of the story, the custom of measuring land (i.e., of covering a portion as far as possible with strips of cowhide) actually existed and was known to both sellers and buyers, then not only was there no act of deception, but neither was there a story plot-line, since the seller himself knew what it was all about.

The abduction of brides, which has similarly been taken as a depiction of a real custom, can likewise hardly be regarded as a reflection of a socioeconomic institution. There is every reason to believe that the wedding rituals that allegedly survive as vestiges of this custom are really charms and spells designed to ward off the Evil Spirit, lest it harm the newlyweds. According to N. S. Derzhavin,

We can be quite certain of this in part and by analogy with other particulars of the wedding ceremony, at least, with the wedding rooster, who serves ordinarily as an object of amusement and plays a large role in Little Russian and Bulgarian

weddings. . . . And so we shall not be mistaken if, in summarizing our conclusion, we say that in those modern nationalities *where the predatory abduction of women still takes place, this practice has arisen as a corruption of an original ritual abduction*. Although wedding rites have been traditionally regarded as an echo of the abduction ritual, these must be considered only as measures designed to protect the wedding procession from the Evil Spirits. This is so because these rites, like the custom of ritual abduction, are closely bound up with the primitive religious conceptions of the nation.

Much the same can be said for the plot (motif) "husband at the wedding of his wife." Kruk and Veselovsky explain its occurrence by alluding to the custom of *levirat*, the acknowledgment that the husband's relatives have a right to his wife. If this is true, then the wrath of Odysseus, who evidently did not know of this custom, is reduced to nonsense.

Without denying the possible emergence of these motifs on a socio-economic basis, I would like to point out that it is a common practice in the creation of such motifs to make use of a clash of customs (i.e., of their conflict).

The recollection of a custom no longer in existence may be used in the setting up of this conflict. So we find in Maupassant a whole series of stories (e.g., "The Old Man") based on the depiction of a simple, non-emotional attitude towards death as experienced by a French peasant. It appears that the story is based on a simple description of everyday reality. On the contrary! The whole story achieves its effect by presupposing a reader from a different milieu with a very different attitude towards death.

The same technique is found in "The Return": a husband returns home after a shipwreck. He discovers that his wife has remarried. The two husbands drink wine amicably. Even the tavern keeper isn't surprised. This story is meant for a reader who is familiar with the plot motif of "A Husband at His Wife's Wedding" and who has, therefore, a more sophisticated attitude toward things. We see here the embodiment of the law that underlies the formation of a motif on the basis of an obsolete custom.

I would like to add the following as a general rule: a work of art is perceived against a background of and by association with other works of art. The form of a work of art is determined by its relationship with other pre-existing forms. *The content of a work of art is invariably manipulated, it is isolated, "silenced."* All works of art, and not only parodies, are created either as a parallel or an antithesis to some model. *The new form makes its appearance not in order to express a new content, but rather, to replace an old form that has already outlived its artistic usefulness.*

*Note:* I would single out only one group of non-sensuous forms, the most important group by far in my opinion, that is, *differential perceptions or perceptions involving distinctions*.

Whenever we experience anything as a *deviation* from the ordinary, from the normal, from a certain guiding canon, we feel within us an emotion of a special nature, which is not distinguished in its kind from the emotions aroused in us by

sensuous forms, with the single difference being that its "referent" may be said to be a perception of a discrepancy. What I mean is that its referent stands for something inaccessible to empirical perception. This is a field of inexhaustible richness because these differential perceptions are qualitatively distinguished from each other by their point of departure, by their forcefulness and by their line of divergence. . . .

Why is the lyrical poetry of a foreign country never revealed to us in its fullness even when we have learned its language?

We hear the play of its harmonics. We apprehend the succession of rhymes and feel the rhythm. We understand the meaning of the words and are in command of the imagery, the figures of speech and the content. We may have a grasp of all the sensuous forms, of all the objects. So what's missing? The answer is: differential perceptions. The slightest aberrations from the norm in the choice of expressions, in the combinations of words, in the subtle shifts of syntax—all of this can be mastered only by someone who lives among the natural elements of his language, by someone who, thanks to his conscious awareness of the norm, is immediately struck, or rather, irritated by any deviation from it.

Yet, the domain of the norm in a language extends far beyond this. Every language possesses its own characteristic degree of abstraction and imagery. The repetition of certain sound combinations and certain forms of comparison belong to the realm of the norm, and any deviation from it is felt fully only by a person who is thoroughly at home in the language. Every change of expression, of imagery, of a verbal combination, strikes him as a sensuous perception. . . .

Moreover, there is the possibility of dual and inverse differentials. A given deviation from the norm may, in its turn, become the point of departure and yardstick for other deviations. In that case every return to the norm is experienced as a deviation. . . .

This idea has been expressed essentially by Nietzsche in his aphorism on "good prose": only in the presence of poetry can one write good prose. Prose, writes Nietzsche, is engaged in a continual war of courtesy with poetry, and all of its charms consist in this, that it constantly seeks to flee from it and contradict it. If poetry by nature holds itself at some remove from everyday prose, then we may say similarly that good prose holds itself at some remove from poetry.

Anything which may serve as a norm may become the starting point for active differential perceptions. In poetry, this may take the form of a geometrically rigid system of rhythm: words submit to this order, but not without certain nuances, not without conflicts that weaken the severity of the meter. Each word insists on its own syllabic stress and length, thereby expanding or contracting the space allotted to it in the verse line. This is why we perceive minute aberrations from the rigid demands of the meter.

Furthermore, there is the opposition of meaning and verse. The verse line demands the emphasis of certain syllables on which the main stress falls, while the sense of the text imperceptibly transfers the accent onto other syllables.

Again, there is also the delimitation of each line of verse from its adjacent lines. The connection demanded by the sense leaps over these intervals, allowing only an occasional pause, if any (which should come at the end of a line), and carries it over, into, perhaps, the middle of the next line. Thanks to the stresses and pauses called for by the meaning, we witness a continual violation of the basic meter. These distinctions bring life to the structure of verse. Meanwhile, the metric scheme fulfills



a function other than that of serving as a basis for formal, rhythmic perceptions. It also serves as a standard by which to gauge deviations from the norm, and therefore, it serves as a foundation for the differential perceptions themselves.

This same phenomenon is familiar to us from music: the mathematical conception of the beat is felt as a background against which a living stream of sound flows, and this is attained by the combination of the most subtle nuances and distinctions. (S. V. Khristiansen, *Philosophy of Art*, 1911)

### Stepped Construction and Deceleration

There are those who think that the purpose of art is to facilitate something or to inspire or to generalize. Lacking a sufficient number of steam hammers, these people enlist the help of rhythm to do the job (see, chiefly, Bücher's *Work and Rhythm*). And yet, those who have looked deeply into this matter know better. Indeed, how thoroughly alien is generalization to art. How much closer it is instead to "particularization."

Art is not a march set to music, but rather a walking dance to be experienced or, more accurately, a movement of the body, whose very essence it is to be experienced through the senses.

The practical mind seeks generalizations by creating, insofar as possible, wide-ranging, all-encompassing formulas. Art, on the contrary, with its "longing for the concrete" (Carlyle), is based on a step-by-step structure and on the particularizing of even that which is presented in a generalized and unified form.

Progressive structure includes under its rubric such devices as repetition (with its particular form of rhythm), tautologies, tautological parallelism, psychological parallelism, retardation of the action, epic repetitions, the rituals of fairy tale and legend, peripeteia and many other devices of plot construction.

The convergence of many identical phrases of the type "I command you," "I order you," and so forth, are often encountered in refined English business speech (as pointed out by Dickens in *David Copperfield*). This was common practice in ancient oratory (Zelinsky). This phenomenon represents a kind of general principle in folk poetry. Here are some examples from Dovnar-Zapolsky's *Songs of the Pinchuks*: "They are beating the drums — they are pounding on them; tambourines — drums; the wind blows — the wind wafts; cherry — wild cherry; to order — to command; walks — strolls; weeps — grieves; drank — caroused; knock — rattle," etc.

Here are some examples from Professor Speransky's *Russian Oral Literature*:

Russian poetry is apparently quite enamored of this device and has evolved in this respect a great diversity of forms: this consists either of a simple repetition of one and the same word or of consonants synonymous in meaning, e.g., "*chudnim*

*chudno*"; "*divnim — divno*," etc. This device may also take (with especial frequency) the form of a repetition of the preposition, such as "in" glorious "in" old "in" Kiev, etc., or, again, this device may frequently take the form of a repetition of one and the same word or phrase in two adjacent lines of verse, where the final word of one line reappears as the first word of the next line:

Of this sable, perhaps, from abroad,  
From abroad, a sable with earflaps,  
A sable with earflaps, covered with down . . .

Sometimes this repetition takes the form of a denial of an antithesis: "by a direct route, not a circuitous one"; "from great rather than little vexation"; "a bachelor, an unmarried man." Here belong also such synonymous expressions as "without a fight, without bloodshed"; "from grief, from sorrow"; "an estate — fortune"; etc., etc. Sometimes this expression consists of two words, one native, the other borrowed or dialect in origin, as for example, "luck — fate," etc. Or else of a species concept modifying a genus concept: "pike fish," "feathergrass," "titmouse."

A more advanced form, a simple repetition, may involve entire episodes of a story. These can be especially effective and pleasing. Such, for example, are the bylina episodes concerning the battle between Dobrynya and Dunaya (the description of Duna's tent, Dobrynya's arrival, Dobrynya and Alyosha, Dobrynya's punishment of his wife and its consequences). As an especially clear example of repetition, we may point to Potyck's wrestling with the underground serpent (Gilferding, no. 52). Finally we ought also to include under this rubric combinations of two words, each of which belongs to a different grammatical category yet linked by the root: "to build a building," "to gild with gold," "to cry out with a cry," etc.

The use of synonyms was Gogol's favorite stylistic device.

The distinguishing feature of Gogol's style lies in the unusual frequency, indeed, the constancy with which the author employs two synonymous expressions in succession, even though this does not necessarily contribute to greater clarity or precision of thought. Nearly always one of the expressions turns out to be completely superfluous, being in every sense a full repetition of the other expression and only rarely serving to bring the symbol into greater relief. The reader may satisfy himself as to the truth of this phenomenon by examining its occurrence even within a comparatively narrow scope: ". . . with *firmness* in the cause of life, with *cheerfulness* and with the *encouragement* of all around you." Or, in the same vein, but in the form of a verb: "so that he may *help* his fellow man with good counsel . . . so that he may *cheer* and *invigorate* him with intelligent words of parting." Or else in the form of a participle or adjective: "you will therefore carry it out precisely as one should, and as required by the government, i.e., with *invigorating* and *encouraging strength* . . ."; "You may act with measures that are neither *coercive* nor *violent* . . ."; "Direct passages have *become weaker*, have *lost their strength* due to the introduction of indirect . . ."; "Do not *hurry*, do not *hasten* to add them on," and so on.

In his book *The Nature of Gogol's Style*, Professor Mandelshtam offers

numerous such examples. In Pushkin too we find such examples as "the thunderstorm thunders" and "locked in by a lock" (cf. Brik's "Sound Repetitions").

This phenomenon expresses the common principle: *form creates for itself its own content*. For that reason, whenever the corresponding twin of a word is absent, its place is taken by an arbitrary or derivative word. For example: helter-skelter, topsy-turvy, pell-mell, and so on. All of these examples of an impeded, progressive construction do not usually appear together and a separate explanation has been offered by some for each of these cases. So for example, an attempt has been made to sharply delimit psychological and tautological parallel structures. A parallelism of the type

Our Yelinochka is happy winter and summer  
Our Malashka is wonderful every day

constitutes, in Veselovsky's opinion, an echo of totemism and of a time when individual tribes regarded trees as their ancestors. Veselovsky therefore believes that if a singer compares a man to a tree, then either he is confusing them or else his mother had confused them. This psychological parallelism is, in his opinion, sharply distinguished from a rhythmic parallelism as practiced in Jewish, Finnish, and Chinese poetry. Veselovsky offers the following example:

The sun did not know where to find his peace,  
The moon did not know where to find his strength.

Psychological parallelism is sharply distinguished from this musical-rhythmic tautology originating, according to Veselovsky, in the method of performance—trochaic or iambic. Yet even formulas of psychological parallelism occasionally turn into or, in Veselovsky's words, "sink" into a type of tautologically musical parallelism. Even Veselovsky acknowledges here, if not an affinity, then at least a predilection on the part of each of these types of structure for each other. They share a common, peculiar poetic cadence. Each of these cases reveals a need for deceleration of the imagistic mass and for its arrangement in the form of distinct steps. In one case, an incongruity of images is used for the formation of these steps, in the other case, a formal-verbal incongruity. For example:

How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?  
How shall I abhor whom the Lord does not abhor?

Here is an example from Psalms illustrating a variety of steps:

Give unto the Lord, oh ye sons of the Lord,  
Give unto the Lord glory and strength.

Or a movement forward with a kind of enjambment from line to line:

For the Lord knows the way of the impious,  
And the way of the impious leads to perdition.

Here we observe a phenomenon common in art: a particular form seeks to complete itself in a manner analogous to the way that words seek completion in certain sound-blurs in lyrical poetry (see Veselovsky's "Three Chapters from Historical Poetics" and Hugo's comments on completing the space between rhymes). For this reason, in the Finnish epic where synonymous parallelism is the norm and where the stanzas take the form of

If you take back your incantation,  
If you withdraw your evil spell . . .

and where numbers are found in the verse which, as is well known, lack synonyms, then the number that is next in order is selected that does not numerically call attention to a distortion in meaning. For example:

He finds six seeds on the ground,  
Seven seeds he raises from the ground.

Or consider the Finnish *Kalevala*:

On the seventh night she passed away,  
On the eighth night she died.

In my opinion, a triolet presents a phenomenon that is very close to a tautological parallelism. As in the case of the rondeau, this device has already been canonized (i.e., it serves as the foundation for the "web" and pervades the entire work). The effect of the triolet lies partly in the fact that one and the same line of verse lands in different contexts, a fact which produces a much needed differential impression. A similar degree of differentiability is represented by psychological parallelism, and the development of a negative parallelism alone shows that there was never a question here of confusing a human being with a tree or a river. Here we encounter two unequal figures that partially overlap: the effect consists in this, that in spite of the incongruity thus created, the first part of the parallel is echoed by the analogous phrase in the second part.

As refutation of a totemistic interpretation, we may also assert that a parallel is often established, not between objects or actions of two objects, but between an analogous relationship between two sets of objects, each set taken as a pair. Here is an example taken from a lovely folk ditty:

Not along the sky do rain clouds drift,  
Not along the sky's heights,  
Not for virgins do lads pine,  
Not for a virgin's beauty.

The synonymous (tautological) parallelism with a transition and repetition from stanza to stanza turns into what is called in the poetics of

the Russian song a "deceleration." As an example, here is an excerpt from a bylina concerning Ilya Muromets, as recorded for P. V. Kireevsky in the province of Simbirsk:

Ilya walked out onto a high hill,  
Onto a high hill that's rolling,  
Spread out the white flaps of his tent.  
After arranging his tent, he started a fire.  
He started a fire, began unpacking.  
Fanning the fire, he began to cook his stew,  
After cooking his stew, he ate it all,  
He gobbled up the stew and lay down.

We find the same device in the song recorded by Kireevsky in Moscow:

Shall I go then, lovely damsel,  
To stroll in the open field,  
To gather the harmful roots?  
Gathering the harmful roots,  
I shall wash them out white as snow.  
Washing out the roots,  
I shall dry them out as dry as sand.  
After drying the harmful roots,  
I shall crush them to little bits.  
After crushing the harmful roots,  
I shall boil some sweet honey.  
Having boiled some sweet honey,  
I shall invite a friend as a guest.  
After inviting my friend as a guest,  
I shall sit her down on my bed.  
Having sat her down on my bed . . .

There are numerous examples of this type of deceleration. However, thanks to the negligence of those people who have been seeking in these songs a social message, a soul, a philosophy, many examples have been lost. For example, all of the repetitions in Professor A. I. Sobolevsky's collection of Russian songs have been deleted. In all probability, the esteemed professor believed, along with many others, that literature is of interest only insofar as it reflects the history of a culture.

We find peculiar instances of deceleration in the old French poem concerning Renaud de Montauban. In it we come across just such an endlessly drawn-out episode. Charles wants to hang the captive Richard and proposes to Beranger the knight to carry out the sentence. Beranger answers: "May he be cursed who has shamefully thought of seizing the captive's estate for himself." Charles then turns to Ozier and to the six other knights and, with minor changes, repeats his declaration. He receives from them the exact same answer. And each time Charles exclaims: "Scoundrel, God will punish you, but I swear by the beard of Charles, the captive shall be hanged." Finally one of the knights takes upon himself this commission. . . .

What is true of deceleration is equally true of parallelism: a particular form seeks fulfillment and, if numerals happen to occur in the creation of the steps, then the author deals with it in a very original way, in accordance with the laws of a given "web":

My young nightingale,  
Do not sing early in the spring!  
Do not sing sweetly, do not sing loudly!  
The young man won't feel so wretched,  
Not so wretched or so bitter.  
I myself do not know why, I only know  
That I long for her, for my beloved,  
My beloved who has left me behind,  
Left me behind—left behind four hundred,  
Four hundred, five hundred, twelve cities,  
Twelve cities, thirteen cities,  
And came to the glorious city of Moscow.

In "Epic Repetitions as a Chronological Factor," Veselovsky tried to explain these peculiar repetitions with their enjambment from stanza to stanza by alluding to their mechanism of execution (his usual explanation): he assumed that these works (or prototypes of these works—a crucial factor insufficiently explained in his article) were executed iambically, and that these repetitions accompanied each singer as he joined in the song. Here are some of Veselovsky's examples of repetitions:

The Saracens surrounded Charlemagne's rear guard; Olivier tells his companion Roland that there are many enemies about; Olivier tells him to blow his horn so that Charlemagne will hear it and come to their rescue. But Roland refuses, and this circumstance is developed three times in the following manner:

1) Comrade Roland, blow your horn! Charlemagne will hear it and his army will return. Roland answers: I would be acting senselessly in that case; I would lose my glorious fame in sweet France. I shall strike mighty blows with my sword Durendal, so that the blade of my sword shall become crimson to its very hilt. The vile pagans have come to the mountain gorges at a bad hour; I guarantee you that they are all doomed to a certain death.

2) Comrade Roland, blow your horn. Charlemagne will hear it and order his army to return. Roland answers: God will not permit my kith and kin to be shamed on my account and for sweet France to be denigrated, were I to blow my horn on account of these pagans. On the contrary, I shall begin to hack away mightily with my sword Durendal. . . . You will all see the bloody blade of my sword. These vile pagans have gathered here at a bad hour. I guarantee you that they are all condemned to a certain death.

3) Comrade Roland, blow your horn! Charlemagne shall hear it and come rushing across the gorges. I guarantee you that the French troops shall return. And Roland answers: But the Lord shall not permit that someone among the living should say that I had blown my horn on account of pagans; I shall not go against the traditions of my family. In the heat of battle I shall rain down a thousand and seven hundred blows. You shall see the blade of Durendal made crimson with blood. . . .



Finally, Roland, who has been wounded, decides to blow his horn.

1) Roland places his horn in his mouth, grasps it firmly with his hand and begins to blow forcefully. The mountains are tall. You could hear the echoes far away. On the thirty major peaks you could barely hear its echo. Charlemagne and his troops hear it. The emperor says: It's our boys! They are fighting the good fight. But Ganelon answers him: Had anyone said that, it would have been considered a great lie.

2) Count Roland blows his horn with much effort, difficulty and great pain. Scarlet blood streams out of his mouth and the veins on his temples burst. Far away the sound of his horn is heard. Charlemagne hears it as he advances through the gorges. Duke Nemon hears it. The French troops hear it. The emperor says: I hear Roland's horn. Ganelon answers: No, there is no battle. He twits the aged emperor for his childish gullibility, as if he didn't know how haughty Roland was. Why, he was just showing off before his peers. Let's go forward, France is still so far away.

3) Blood streams out of Count Roland's mouth. The veins on his temples are bursting. He blows his horn with pain and difficulty. Charlemagne hears him. The French troops hear him. The emperor says: This horn is mighty and powerful. Duke Nemon answers: Barons, a loyal vassal is fighting the good fight. In my opinion, a battle is raging. He suspects Ganelon. We must help our own men. . . .

Meanwhile, Roland, dying, (a) tries to smash his sword Durendal so that it won't fall into the hands of infidels; and (b) confesses his sins. Each of these motifs is developed in three consecutive "laisses."

1) Roland feels that death is at hand. Before him is a dark stone. In anger and anguish he strikes it ten times with his sword. The steel scrapes but does not break nor is it notched. An address to the sword with which the hero had been victorious in so many battles follows.

2) Roland strikes his sword against the hard stone. The steel scrapes but does not break and is not notched. Complaints follow along with epically developed reminiscences. . . .

3) Roland strikes the grey stone and chips off more than I could ever tell you. The sword scrapes but does not break and is not shattered. . . .

Innumerable similar examples analogous to the three strikes by Roland can be found elsewhere, although in other epics such a device is not the norm.

For example, the three strikes by Ilya against Svyatogor's coffin or the three strikes inflicted by Tor against the giant. I would like to call your attention to the fact that in all such comparisons it is my purpose to stress not so much the similarity of motifs, which I consider of little significance, as the similarity of the plot schemata.

In spite of this repetition, the action does not come to a stop. It advances, but more slowly. The factory song about Marusa is constructed along the same lines. Marusa, who has been poisoned, is visited first by her girlfriends, then by her mother, and finally by her close friend. These visitors are given an answer first by the nurse, then by the doctor, and finally by the watchman: "Marusa is in delirium"; "She is unconscious"; "She is in the mortuary." This device of the three arrivals is also utilized in the Little Russian *duma* (Ukrainian folk ballad):

Shaded by the Beskid's snowball trees,  
Stands a new tavern proud and strong.  
Within, a Turk sits drinking away,  
As a girl kneels before him and cries:  
"Oh, Turk, oh, Turk, oh, Turk!"  
Don't kill me, for I am so young!"

The young woman says that her father has already paid for her ransom. But her father does not show up and the young woman weeps. The following stanza repeats the same scene: Beskid, the inn, and the young woman's entreaty. This time it appears that her mother has paid her ransom. The third time the same thing happens and finally a kind man appears with the ransom.

Similarly, a young wife's call home in the vernal songs of the *Malmariée* type is also broken down into three stages. Many Russian songs are based on the same technique (Veselovsky).

Similarly, in Perrault's tale, the deceived wife of Bluebeard waits for help:

"My sister Anna! Please go up the tower to see if our brothers are coming: they promised to come see me today. And if you see them, give them a sign so that they may hurry."

The sister climbed up to the tower and the poor woman screamed out to her: "Anna, my sister Anna! Do you see anything?"

"I see only the dust gleaming in the sun and the green grass."

Meanwhile Bluebeard, holding in his hand a large kitchen knife, screamed at the top of his voice: "Come down quickly or else I'll come up myself!"

"One more minute I beg of you," replied his wife. Again she called softly to her sister: "Anna, my sister Anna, do you see anything?"

And her sister answered: "I see only the dust gleaming in the sun and the green grass."

"Come down quickly," Bluebeard cried, "or I'll come up myself."

"I am coming," his wife answered again. And again she shouted to her sister: "Anna, my sister Anna, do you see anything?"

"I see," answered the sister, "a cloud of dust approaching."

"Are those my brothers?"

"Alas, no, my sister. I see a herd of rams."

"Will you come down, for goodness sake!" Bluebeard shouted.

"Just one more minute," answered his wife and then shouted to her sister: "Anna, my sister Anna, do you see anything?"

"I see," she answered, "two horsemen traveling in our direction, but they are still far away."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "Those are our brothers. I'll try my very best to give them a sign to hurry."

This schema, among other things, has been widely used in England, where it is found in parodies.

I shall refrain from offering further examples, so as not to turn this essay into a chrestomathy.

Constructions of the type  $a + (a+a) + ([a + (a+a)]) + \dots$  follow an arithmetic progression.

There are tales constructed on a peculiar plot tautology of the type  $a + (a+a) + ([a + (a+a)] + a2)$ , etc. For example, these tales from E. R. Romanov's *Belorussian Anthology*:

### The Slave Hen

Grandpa and Grandma had a slave hen. She lay a basketful of eggs. Grandpa beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them; Grandma beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. A mouse passed by, wagged its tail and broke them. . . . Grandpa wept, Grandma wept, the hen cackled, the gate creaked, the fire crackled, the dogs barked, the geese honked, people yelled.

A wolf came along and said: "Grandpa, why are you crying?"

Grandpa answered: "Why should I not be crying? Grandma and I were living peacefully. We had a slave hen. She lay a basketful of eggs. I beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. Grandma beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. A mouse passed by, wagged its tail and broke them. . . . Grandpa cried, the hen cackled, the gate creaked, the fire crackled, the dogs barked, the geese honked, people yelled. . . ."

The wolf howled. Along came a bear who said: "Why are you howling, oh wolf?"

"Why should I not be howling," said the wolf. "Once there was a Grandpa and a Grandma. They had a slave hen. She lay a basketful of eggs for them. Grandpa beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. Grandma beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. A mouse passed by, wagged its tail and broke them. . . . Grandpa cried, the hen cackled, the gate creaked, the fire crackled, the dogs barked, the geese honked, people yelled, and I, a wolf, am howling. . . ."

And the bear growled. Along came an elk who said: "Why are you growling, oh bear?"

"And why should I not be growling? Once there was a Grandpa and a Grandma. They had a slave hen. She laid a basketful of eggs for them. Grandpa beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. Grandma beat on them, beat on them but didn't break them. A mouse passed by, wagged its tail and broke them. . . . Grandpa cried, Grandma cried, the hen cackled, the gate creaked, the fire crackled, the dogs barked, the geese honked, people yelled, the wolf howled, and I, a bear, am growling."

And the elk lowered its horns. . . .

This round of questioning eventually leads to the priest's servants, who crush a bucket from grief. And then to a deacon who rends his books out of sympathy. And, finally, to the priest himself, who, from sheer woe, sets the church aflame.

### The Rooster and the Hen

Grandpa and Grandma had a rooster and a hen. Once they were digging a hole in the dump. The hen dug up a pin and the rooster dug up a pea. The hen then said to the rooster: "Give me your pea, and I'll give you my pin!" The rooster gave the hen the

pea, and the hen gave him the pin. The hen ate the pea, while the rooster swallowed the pin and started choking on it.

The hen ran to the sea for water and said: "Oh my sea, my sea, give me water. The rooster is choking to death."

"No, no, I shall not give you water. Go down to the badger. Go down and ask the badger to give me his tusks."

The hen ran up to the badger and said, "Oh badger, my badger, give the sea your tusks. Then the sea will give me water, for the rooster is choking to death."

"No, no, I shall not give you my tusks, go down to the oak and ask him to give me his acorns!"

The hen ran to the oak and said: "My oak, my oak, give the badger your acorns."

"No, no, I shall not give him acorns. Go down to the cow, and ask her to give me some of her milk."

The hen ran up to the cow and said: "Oh cow, my cow, give the oak some of your milk!"

"No, no, I shall not give any milk. Go down to the reaper and tell him to give me his hay!"

The hen ran up to the reaper and said: "Oh reaper, my reaper, give the cow some of your hay!"

"No, no, I shall not give him hay. Go down to the linden tree and ask him to give me bast for my shoes."

The hen ran up to the linden tree and said: "Oh linden tree, my linden tree, give the reaper bast for his shoes!"

"No, I shall not give him the bast. Go down to the blacksmith and ask him to give me a knife!"

The hen ran down to the smith and said: "Oh smith, my smith, give the linden tree a knife, so that he may give the reaper bast for his shoes."

"No, I shall not give the linden tree a knife. Go down and get me some peas and bring them to me. Then I will give you a knife."

The hen scoured the yard till it found a pea, then brought the pea to the smith and the smith gave her a knife. She then brought the knife to the linden tree. The linden tree gave the hen the bast for the reaper's shoes. The reaper then gave the hen hay. She carried the hay to the cow. The cow ate the hay and gave the hen milk. The hen carried the milk to the oak. The oak gave acorns to the badger. The badger gave the hen the tusks. The hen took the tusks from the badger and ran off to meet the sea. And the sea gave the hen water. The hen then carried the water to the rooster and poured it into his mouth and the rooster screamed: Kuka-reku!

It is absolutely impossible, if I may observe, to fathom from this tale why the sea needs the badger's tusks as a form of ransom. The motivation here is obviously an artistic one. That is, the author feels a need to create a step-by-step structure.

Some versions involve a peculiar, everyday interpretation of this motif. In these variants, when the rooster returns, he finds that the hen has already been eaten up by the worms. (In some versions, it is the rooster who runs for help, in others, it is the hen.)

Along these lines (Fedorovsky), a little boy, born miraculously from the saliva of a blade of grass, demands that the latter rock it like a cradle. The

blade of grass refuses. He sends for the goat, then for the wolves, then for people, and finally for fire, etc. They all refuse. Finally, the hens are on their way to peck the worms. The worms are on their way to sharpen the pin, and so on. The goat is foraging for a blade of grass.

Similarly, that which is designated in prose by an "A" is expressed in art by means of an "A(1) A" (for example, a tautology) or by means of an A A(1) (for example, psychological parallelism). This is the foundation of all technical devices. In accordance with this, if the realization of a certain task demands a degree of effort equal to A(n), then it would take the form of A(n—2), A(n—1), A(n). Thus, in the bylina it is Alyosha Popovich who takes the field of battle first, then Dobrynya Nikitich, and finally Ilya Muromets. This is the order of battle for the heroes of these tales. This device was preserved and utilized by Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King*. Similarly, the "koshchei," the hobgoblin of Russian folklore, was beaten three times in order to get him to confess where Death is. In the Bible, too, Samson confesses the secret of his strength three times.

In the Belorussian tales of E. R. Romanov, Ivan is bound "as a test of his strength" first with canvas, then with silk (or with a strand of hair), and finally with a piece of rough rope. The delivery of the ring or the kiss of the princess through the twelve panes of glass is similarly constructed. The first time he jumps, but he doesn't reach it, three crowns. The second time he jumps, almost reaching it, two crowns. The third time he jumps and reaches it and attains the goal.

Seeking refuge from king/maiden, the prince finds at each way station a valiant horse waiting for him at the hut of Baba Yaga, the witch. With each station the race brings him closer and closer to the goal. At first, fifteen verst, then ten verst, and finally five. And the prince saves himself by hiding in the grass and leaving behind him a deceptive inscription.

Osip Brik observed ingeniously that the dead and living waters represent nothing more than the concept of "healing waters" broken down into two separate concepts (as is well known, the "dead water" of legend joins together the hacked-off limbs of a body), that is, A is depicted as: A(1), A(2). In the same way, a certain "type" is reduplicated in Gogol's *Inspector General*. Undoubtedly, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky form a double, a fact which is evident from their surnames. Here too, A is presented as A(1), A(2).

The answer usually given in this case is that we are dealing here with the "rituals of legends." However, in saying this, a critic may fail to realize that this ritual characterizes more than just legend. It is also the ritual and sacrament of all art. So, for example, *The Song of Roland* is not a legend, and neither is a film a legend. Even now we can see a chase in a film: with the enemy breathing down his neck, our hero suddenly makes his getaway in a car. Let me suggest a comparison with the description of a chase after Jean Valjean in Hugo's *Misérables*. The concluding effect consists of climbing over a wall and finding refuge in a monastery.

### Deceleration as an Artistic Device

In general, the device of a belated rescue, as a fitting theme for a step-by-step structure, is widely used in legends and in adventure novels. The prince is near death. Animal helpers, rushing to his rescue, eat their way through twelve iron doors. The prince asks for permission to bathe.\*

Ivan Tsarevich walks up to the bathhouse and starts lighting the fire. Suddenly, a crow flies up to him, crying out:

"Caw! Caw! Ivan Tsarevich. Light the fire. Light the fire! It's going out! Your greyhounds are rushing to your rescue! They have already broken through four doors."

Behold Ivan Tsarevich as he lights the fire. Still, it keeps going out.

No sooner does the crow vanish than Koshchei, the evil spirit who knows not death, appears to the boy:

"Ivan Tsarevich, is the bathhouse ready?"

"No, not yet, the stones are not yet in place."

"Well then, try harder!"

At that very moment a second crow flies up to the boy, crying out: "Caw! Caw! Ivan Tsarevich, light the fire, light the fire! It's gone out again. Your greyhounds have broken through another four doors."

No sooner does the second crow vanish than Koshchei, the goblin who knows not death, appears again:

"Ivan Tsarevich, Ivan Tsarevich, is the bathhouse ready yet?"

"Not yet, but I've just set the stones in place," the lad replies.

"Well then, hurry up and light the fire!"

Behold again how Ivan lights the fire.

A third crow flies up and cries out: "Caw! Caw! Ivan Tsarevich, light the fire, light the fire! It's gone out again. Your greyhounds have broken through the last four doors."

At that moment Ivan finally lights the fire. When the fire is hot and ready, Koshchei, the spirit who knows not death, appears and says:

"Well go on, take your bath. I can wait a little longer."

As soon as Ivan walks into the bathhouse, his greyhounds rush in . . . (E. R. Romanov, *Belorussian Anthology*)

In another version, Ivan Zlatovus received permission before his death to play the zhuleika, a wooden flute:

He climbed up the birch tree. When he played the flute, a bird flew up to him. When he played it the second time, more birds flew up. When he played it for the third time, all of the beasts of the field ran up to him. (Ibid.)

\*This brief introduction is in single space, without quotes, in the Russian text, as is, of course, the tale that follows it. Shklovsky's (his editor's?) punctuation, paragraph division, etc. are, like so much else in *Theory of Prose*, so erratic and arbitrary that one cannot always be sure what his real meaning in a given context is. In this case, it seems that Shklovsky himself is speaking. [Trans. note]

So also does Solomon play under the gallows tree as he climbs up step by step calling for help (see A. N. Veselovsky, "Solomon and Kitovras").

The existence of rituals in legend has been, generally speaking, acknowledged by everyone to be canonical for this genre. I would like to offer several examples out of the thousands available: the three underground kingdoms of honey, silver and gold; the hero's three battles with the characteristic graduated nature of the tasks—for example: the capture of the Fire Bird, the capture of the steed, the capture of the Beautiful Vasilisa. This series of tasks is preceded by an exposition which explains the necessity for the tasks. This type ("threading" of the tasks) passed on into the adventure and chivalrous novel.

The tasks themselves are extremely interesting. They serve as a motivation for the creation of an apparently unresolvable situation. Here the posing of riddles serves as the simplest means of creating such a hopeless situation. Characteristic of this type are the tales of the "seven years" (Afanasiev).

A task is imposed: do not come by foot, do not come on horseback, do not come naked, do not come dressed, and so on. A young woman is wrapped in a net, and rides on the back of a rabbit, etc. Here the story is constructed backwards, as a motivation is sought to justify a successful resolution of the story. The recognition of one of twelve look-alikes with the help of a bee is similarly constructed, etc. The "wisdom" here is more complex, that is, it calls, for example, for distinguishing young maidens from adolescent girls. Similarly, it calls for identifying the illegitimate son by the latter's "inappropriate thoughts," as, for instance, in the case of the smith's son, who has been fraudulently replaced by Solomon. Upon seeing the beautiful place, he says: "Here should we put the blacksmith's forge" (Onchukov, *Legends of the North*).

Consider also the thief in *A Thousand and One Nights*, who, among his other tasks, recognizes the cook as the sultan's son because the latter confers upon him an award in the form of food. We meet with an echo of this in the nobility of "mistaken children" in adventure novels—for example, *Le Destin* in Scarron's *Le roman comique* and the numerous heroes of children's tales.

(An interesting story about a falsely exchanged "counterfeit white boy" is to be found in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.)

The part preceding the tasks constitutes what in the poetics of cinematography is called a "segue" (i.e., a scene that has no independent significance, serving only as preparation for what follows).

As I have already said, the fulfillment of the tasks often occupies the tale in its entirety. We may distinguish (looking at it from the standpoint of technique rather than essentials) two types of such fulfillments, or resolutions: resolution by the guessing of riddles or resolution by means of some magical or non-magical creature such as animal helpers. The classical type of resolution in the latter case has each wild animal carry out a task that it

alone can do. The ant gathers seeds (tale from Apuleius). Sometimes, the ant is called upon to accomplish a specific task, such as gathering and bringing (or taking out) seeds into (or out of) a closed barn. A fish or crab is called upon to bring a ring from the depths of the sea. A mouse purloins the ring from the teeth of the abducted princess. The eagle or falcon captures a duck. In cases where the tasks are of a similar nature, each animal is called upon to perform its task with a progressively greater degree of strength (tale of Prince Larokoney). The animal helpers may be replaced by helpful people and helpful magical objects or of the type "Oak-Slayer" ("felling the oak") or "Mountain-Tamer" ("overturn the mountain") and so on, or by strong men of progressively greater strength (compare the names of dogs of the type of tale represented by "Beast-milk," "Crushmountain," "Breakwall," "Breakiron"). Or else people wielding magical powers possess specific attributes. This mirrors the specific tasks of the wild beasts. We encounter here the "glutton" or "guzzler," the man who trembles with cold in the fire and "a marksman shooting a pestle from a mortar." We encounter echoes of these helper figures in novels, for example, in the form of helpful strong men, such as Ursus in Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis?*, Maciste in d'Annunzio's film *Cabiria*, Porthos in *The Three Musketeers* by Dumas, and others. Similarly, Rabelais employed in his *Pantagruel* the well-known legendary character of the helper acrobat. In the contemporary "scientific" adventure novel a special role is assigned to the helpful scientist. Under this rubric falls also the type of tale represented by "The Seven Semions," the seven brothers who each possess a unique skill (e.g., how to steal, or how to build a ship [Afanasiev]).

This entire collection of devices associated with the genre of the legend makes possible the construction of a tale in which the fate of the hero, caught, it seems, in a hopeless predicament, is unexpectedly resolved. A situation that is capable of creating such plot complications is selected as a motif—for example, the motif of the "two keys to the same door" (Spanish drama), or of the "secret door" (*A Thousand and One Nights*), the Egyptian tale of the cunning thief (reported by Herodotus). Thanks to this, certain motifs have become special favorites—for example, the motif of the shipwreck or of the abduction of the hero in adventure novels. The hero is not killed immediately, since he is still needed for the recognition scene. If they want to remove him from the picture, then they drag him off somewhere. Quite frequently, these episodes involving stealing and re-stealing, escapes and other vain attempts are complicated by the fact that their victims, in love with each other, strive towards their goal by the most circuitous path. The episodes, following one upon the other, are hard to distinguish from each other and play in adventure novels the same role of deceleration that the task or rituals of legend play in tales, or that parallelism and the slowing of the narrative do in song. The motifs of the shipwreck, of abduction by pirates, etc., are introduced into the plot not out of realistic but rather out of technical-artistic considerations. No more of the real world impinges upon



a work of art than the reality of India impinges upon the game of chess. The adventure novel is to this day interrupted, according to Veselovsky, by schemata and methods inherited from the genre of the legendary tale. Veselovsky himself considers "adventures" to be a stylistic device ("Belle Lettres in Ancient Greece").

This type, the type of the circuitous path, very closely resembles the game called "Move Up" ("Staraysya Vverkh") or the game of "Goose" ("Gusyek"), which is played in the following way: Dice are cast; in accordance with the number of points allotted, you receive a place on a chart. Depending upon the number shown by the dice, the player's position either moves up or down on the chart. This is precisely the kind of labyrinth represented by the adventure novel. This similarity has been pointed out by the creators of adventure novels themselves. In Jules Verne's *Testament of an Eccentric*, the different coincidences and adventures of the heroes are motivated by the fact that the heroes must go where the dice point. In this case, the map of the United States is divided into quadrants and represents a playing field, while the heroes represent nothing more than figures—that is, "geese."

The motivation for the difficulties undergone by the hero of the adventure tale is very much worth noting. Let me offer two examples, again from Jules Verne, who is presently under consideration. The first novel bears the title *The Return Home*, which tells of the return of certain acrobats from North America to France by way of Canada, the Straits of Dezhnev and Siberia, due to their having lost their money. In the other novel, a stubborn Turk by the name of Keriban travels from one shore of the Bosphorus to the other by a roundabout path which takes him all over the Black Sea. The reason for this is that he refuses to pay a few kopecks required by customs. Naturally, these crooked paths are called into being by specific conditions—by the demands of the plot. As an example of the difference between resolutions of a problem in prose and poetry, I recommend the reader look at Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The matter at hand concerns the freeing of a fugitive Negro. Huck Finn represents the method of prose, when he suggests:

"My plan is this," I says. "We can easy find out if it's Jim in there. Then get up my canoe to-morrow night, and fetch my raft over from the island. Then the first dark night that comes, steal the key out of the old man's britches, after he goes to bed, and shove off down the river on the raft, with Jim, hiding day-times and running nights, the way me and Jim used to do before. Wouldn't that plan work?"

"Work? Why cert'nly, it would work, like rats a-fighting. But it's too blame' simple; there ain't nothing to it. What's the good of a plan that ain't no more trouble than that? It's as mild as goose-milk. Why, Huck, it wouldn't make no more talk than breaking into a soap factory." (chap. 34)

And there you have it! A poetically laborious plan is concocted. A leg from a bed is sawn off. It is wrapped in a chain. Although it could have been

lifted with little effort, an underground passage is dug up, a rope ladder is constructed and handed over to the prisoner in a pirogue, the neighbors are warned of the abduction—in a word, everything is played according to the rules of art. At the conclusion of the novel, it turns out that Jim is not a fugitive at all. He had been emancipated long before. We may see a parallel here with a "recognition" and with the attendant collapse of all obstacles standing in the way of a marriage. It is precisely this marriage, after all, that the parents of the concerned parties desire. So how do we answer Tolstoi's question "Why didn't Lear recognize Kent, and why didn't Kent recognize Edward?" Simply by saying that this is necessary for the creation of a drama, that Shakespeare was as undisturbed by the unreality of the literary work as a chessplayer is undisturbed by the fact that a knight can only move obliquely on the board.

I would like to now return to the abduction and recognition plot. Zelinsky supposes that it has a foundation in reality. Concerning a certain play by Apollo Karistky, he writes:

No doubt about it! You couldn't find a better planned story line. There's nothing superfluous in it, all the scenes hold together beautifully. Similarly, there is no violation of the principle of verisimilitude, except perhaps for the capricious play of Fate. But people saw things quite differently in those troubled times before the advent of passports and telegrams. Unexpectancy ruled their lives. For that reason, it was permissible for an author, in constructing his work, to select from a multitude of meaningless, fortuitous events by which he was surrounded, to select those events in which an intelligent plan and good will made themselves manifest.

First and foremost, Zelinsky's explanation fails to explain precisely how the plot could have survived beyond the times of Alexandria to the times of Molière and almost to our own day. Besides, this explanation is factually incorrect. By the time of Menander, the plot having to do with the recognition of abducted babies had already passed from an actual phenomenon to pure literary tradition. So, for example, the slave in the play *Epitrepontes*, having found the baby with items indicating its origin, speaks of the possibility that this child might be recognized by his parents, alluding thereby not to reality as such, but to the play seen by him in the theater (cf. G. Tseretely's *The Newly Discovered Comedies of Menander*). In precisely the same way, Merezhkovsky is too soft-hearted when he laments the breakdown of mores in the city of Alexandria:

We must point out a similar characteristic in the mores [of the times] in the frank and naive admission made by Daphnis' father: he had abandoned his little son to the vicissitudes of fortune only because it seemed to him that he had already had enough children. Daphnis was born a superfluous child, of little account. His father threw him out of the house like a puppy. The father deals with Chloë similarly. However, he apologizes for his poverty and for the predicament that made it impossible for him to bring up (and marry off) his daughter in proper style. These features attest to the degenerate state of the family and to the barbarism of late Byzantine culture. This barbarism is capriciously intertwined with a pathological refinement of mores, as in

all periods of decadence. This is not a pagan patriarchal severity, which we encounter in Homer and in the works of the Greek tragedians—rather, it represents a case of savagery, of a coarsening of mores in a degenerating culture. Of course, it would be absurd to condemn the author: he took from life only what he found in it, and a deep artistic objectivity prevented him from embellishing it. (*Eternal Companions*)

As I have already said, the abduction plot had already become a purely bookish affair by that time. To set Merezhkovsky's mind at rest, let me relate the following:

In the age of *Sturm und Drang* in Germany, the overwhelming majority of plays during a space of five years were based on the subject of fratricide. So, for example, all three plays presented at a competition in a theater in Hamburg in 1776 depict just such a crime (*Julius von Tarent* by Leisewitz, *The Twins* by Klinger, and *The Ill-Starred Brothers* by an anonymous author). Schiller's *The Robbers* also bears some relationship to the theme. Nevertheless, this does not prove that cases of fratricide were occurring in massive numbers in Germany at the time. It is worth repeating that Veselovsky considers the adventures of the Greek novel to represent a purely stylistic device.

The abduction device took a long time in dying. Its fate is a curious one. As it degenerated, it began to appear in subsidiary plot lines. Now, however, it has descended to the level of children's literature. It flared up feebly when it was renewed in the so-called war stories of 1914 to 1916. However, even before that, this device suffered a most unusual and curious fate. We should mention in passing that a device in a state of deterioration can still be used to parody the device itself. So Pushkin made use of the banal rhyme "rose/close" even as he pointed out its banality in his verse.

The abduction plot was already parodied by Boccaccio in the seventh story of the second day, the one having to do with the Babylonian sultan who sends one of his daughters to be married to the king of El Gharb. As a consequence of every possible kind of fortuitous incident, she goes through ten husbands in as many localities during the course of four years. Returning at last to her father, she leaves home once again, as a virgin, for her meeting with the king, in order to enter into marriage with him according to the original plan. The point here is that the effect achieved in the classic adventure tale involving a young woman as a heroine lies precisely in her preservation of her innocence even in the hands of her abductors. This virginity, left inviolate (by writers) for the next eighty years, was mocked by Cervantes.

The ending of the story, with its assurances of the maiden's chastity and with the light-headed prank of the mouths that would not shrink from kissing, has the same effect on Veselovsky that a dissonant chord has when it unexpectedly demolishes a fatalistic melody.

However, the correctness of our interpretation of this story as a parody is confirmed by the fact that Boccaccio has several other literary parodies in his book. Let me mention two of them.

The eighth story of the fifth day: In Ravenna a certain Nastagio degli Onesti loves a young woman of the Traversari family. Even after lavishing his fortune on her, his love remains unrequited. At the insistence of relatives, he travels to Chiazza. There he watches as a knight persecutes a young woman, kills her and throws her body to the dogs. Seeing this, he invites his kinfolk and the woman he loves to Chiazza for dinner. During dinner, she sees the dogs ripping the young woman apart. Fearing a similar fate, she decides to marry Nastagio. "Nor was it in her instance alone that this terror was productive of good: on the contrary, it so wrought among the ladies of Ravenna that they all became, and have ever since been, much more compliant with men's desires than they had been wont to be" (Rigg translation).

Boccaccio's women, it turns out, are thus severely punished for their intractability. In the legend which serves as the prototype for this story, however, such a punishment was reserved for adultery only. Veselovsky cautiously suggests that Boccaccio did not draw on this legend for his prototype but on a different, less orthodox one. This is Veselovsky's usual point of view. He has never fully recognized the independent, deliberate changes and transformations effected by the writer himself, and which are the very source of his creativity. We may suppose that Boccaccio had in mind here a work based on the conflict between new and old interpretations of morality and punishment. This assumption is all the more right in that Boccaccio offers us another story with calming assurances concerning retribution beyond the grave. This is the tenth story of the seventh day.

Recognition, however, represents only an isolated case of a peripeteia. The fundamental principle on which peripeteia is based also calls for impeding and retarding it. That which ought to have been revealed immediately and that which is already clear to the spectator is slowly made known to the hero. Example: Oedipus finds out about his misfortune. Here the drama slows down, caught in the torture of deferred pleasure (see Zelinsky's analysis of peripeteia in Sophocles' *Oedipus*). But this question is easier to study in the everyday rituals of life than in a play that is a work of art. Let me recommend, as an example, the best man's story at a Russian wedding, reported by Veselovsky.

The best man declares that he has come neither under duress nor under coercion. Rather he was sent by the bridegroom, and so on:

Our young bridegroom was coming out of the tower chamber onto the wide street just as I, his best man, walked past. I harnessed my brave horse, saddled and reined it and whipped it with a silken lash. My valiant horse became angry and kicked against the ground. Wagging his tail, my brave horse leaped from mountain to mountain and from hill to hill. Across valleys and rivers he leaped till he reached the edge of the blue sea. In the blue sea swam grey geese and white swans and brilliant falcons. I asked the geese, the swans: "Where is that tower chamber of our young bride?" And the geese answered me:

"Go to the blue sea, to the eastern side of the blue sea. There you'll see an oak of