There is not a greater difference between a single-horse chair and madam Pompadour's *vis-à-vis,* than betwixt a single amour, and an amour thus nobly doubled, and going upon all fours, prancing throughout a grand drama. (209)

The novel is continually interrupted and takes on the form of innuendos and allusions. Finally, these allusions begin to consolidate (i.e., around volume 6, chapter 34).

At this point, though, we encounter an intrusion of the "travel" motif. This new material seems to have reached a dead end at the conclusion of volume 7:

I danced it along through Narbonne, Carcasson, and Castle Naudairy, till at last I danced myself into Perdrillo's pavillion, where pulling a paper of black lines, that I might go on straight forwards, without digression or parenthesis, in my uncle Toby's amours—— (538)

And so the groin wound, with the widow's reluctance to confront this issue directly, is introduced into the text as a device for the purpose of impeding the Toby–widow romance.

I shall now demonstrate in several excerpts just how Sterne brings about this retarding of the action.

After a solemn promise to tell the story of Toby's amorous adventures without digression, Sterne brakes the action by introducing digressions into digressions, which are then linked to each other by the repetition of one and the same phrase: "It is with love as with Cuckoldom" (540, 542).

This is followed by metaphors of love. Love is a warm hat, love is a pie (504-5). Then follows a history of the widow Wadman's attacks on Uncle Toby. Yet, this description is again interrupted by a long, "importunate story," told by Trim, called "The Story of the King of Bohemia and His Seven Castles."

This tale is similar to the one told by Sancho Panza to his lord, Don Quixote, on the night of his adventure with the textile mill, when he tied up Rocinante by its legs. It is continually interrupted by Uncle Toby's comments on military affairs, technology and literary style. I've already analyzed this device of Cervantes' in *Don Quixote.* Like every "importunate story," it is based on its conscious use as a braking device and must therefore be interrupted by a listener. In this particular case, its role is to impede the main plot line of the novel. A little later, Trim abandons the story of the King of Bohemia and takes up the story of his love (568-75). Finally, the widow Wadman makes her appearance once again. This is occasioned by the wound motif:

I am terribly afraid, said widow Wadman, in case I should marry him, Bridget ——that the poor captain will not enjoy his health, with the monstrous wound upon his groin——

It may not, Madam, be so very large, replied Bridget, as you think——and I believe besides, added she——that 'tis dried up——

——I would like to know——merely for his sake, said Mrs. Wadman——

——We'll know the long and the broad of it, in ten days——answered Mrs. Bridget, for whilst the captain is paying his addresses to you——I'm confident Mr. Trim will be for making love to me——and I'll let him as much as he will——added Bridget——to get it all out of him—— (581-82)

Once again, the author introduces new material, in this case, in the form of a realized metaphor (which, generally speaking, is quite common in Sterne): (a) he realizes the lexical (linguistic) metaphor "hobbyhorse" (in the sense of "whim, caprice") and speaks of it as if it were a real horse; and (b) he realizes the metaphor "ass" (in the sense of the buttocks). The source for this metaphor may well be St. Francis of Assisi's characterization of his body as "my brother, the ass." The ass metaphor is also developed. Besides, it is also the basis for a misunderstanding.

When Shandy Senior asks Uncle Toby about the ass, the latter thinks that the posterior part of the body is euphemistically meant (539). A detail from the development that follows is of some interest. Shandy Senior's speech to Uncle Toby is nothing less than a parody of Don Quixote's speech to Sancho Panza on governorship.

I shall not parody them in turn by quoting these two speeches in parallel texts, all the more so since we'd thereby be keeping the widow Wadman waiting. Uncle Toby and Trim are going to see her. Shandy Senior and his wife are also on their way there. They are observing the first pair from the corners of their eyes, meanwhile chatting about the forthcoming marriage.

Again, we encounter the leitmotiv of the impotent husband, who sleeps with his wife only on the first Sunday of every month. This motif, appearing first in the very opening of the novel, now emerges once again (vol. 9, chap. 11):

Unless she should happen to have a child——said my mother——

——But she must persuade my brother Toby first to get her one——

——To be sure, Mr. Shandy, quoth my mother.

——Though if it comes to persuasion——said my father——Lord have mercy upon them.

Amen: said my mother, *piano.*

Amen: cried my father, *fortissimè.*

Amen: said my mother again——but with such a sighing cadence of personal pity at the end of it, as discomfited every fibre about my father——he instantly took out his almanack; but before he could untie it, Yorick's congregation coming out of church, became a full answer to one half of his business with it——and my mother telling him it was a sacrament day——left him as little in doubt, as to the other part ——He put his almanack into his pocket.

The first Lord of the Treasury thinking of *ways and means,* could not have returned home, with a more embarrassed look. (613-14)

I've permitted myself this lengthy excerpt in order to show that Sterne's inset material does not play a merely peripheral role in the novel. On the contrary, every passage belongs to one of the novel's compositional lines.

Once again, we encounter digressions from other plot lines, e.g., the knot

motif (617). Finally, the wound motif takes the stage. It is presented, as is usual in Sterne, in medias res:

——* * * * * * * * * *
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* * * * * * *——

—You shall see the very place, Madam; said my uncle Toby.
Mrs. Wadman blush'd——look'd towards the door——turn'd pale——blush'd slightly again——recovered her natural colour——blush'd worse than ever; which for the sake of the unlearned reader, I translate thus——
"L--d! I cannot look at it——
What would the world say if I look'd at it?
I should drop down, if I look'd at it——
I wish I could look at it——
There can be no sin in looking at it.
——I will look at it." (623)

Yet, something quite different takes place.

Uncle Toby thinks that the widow wants to know the place where he was wounded (i.e., the geographical locality) when, in fact, she seems to have in mind the anatomical place on his body. By the way, neither is the reader quite sure at this juncture what is meant. The whole point of this shift in the plot, however, is clearly to impede the action.

Well, so Trim brings the disappointed widow a map of Namur (the locality where Uncle Toby was in fact wounded). Once again, we are witnessing a play on Uncle Toby's wound. This time Sterne himself picks up the theme in his digressions (625-29). Then comes the famous transposition of time. Chapter 25 (of volume 9) is succeeded by the previously missing chapters 18 and 19. The action resumes only with chapter 26:

It was just as natural for Mrs. Wadman, whose first husband was all his time afflicted with a Sciatica, to wish to know how far from the hip to the groin; and how far she was likely to suffer more or less in her feelings, in the one case than in the other.
She accordingly read Drake's anatomy from one end to the other. She had peeped into Wharton upon the brain, and borrowed Graaf upon the bones and muscles; but could make nothing of it. . . .
To clear up all, she had twice asked Doctor Slop, "if poor captain Shandy was ever likely to recover of his wound——?"
——He is recovered, Doctor Slop would say——
What! quite?
——Quite: madam——
But what do you mean by a recovery? Mrs. Wadman would say.
Doctor Slop was the worst man alive at definitions. (636-37)

Mrs. Wadman interrogates Captain Shandy himself about the wound:

"——Was it without remission?——
——Was it more tolerable in bed?
——Could he lie on both sides alike with it?
——Was he able to mount a horse?" (637)

Finally, the matter is resolved in the following manner: Trim is speaking to the widow's servant girl (Bridget) concerning Captain Shandy's wound:

. . . and in this cursed trench, Mrs. Bridget, quoth the Corporal, taking her by the hand, did he receive the wound which crush'd him so miserably *here*——In pronouncing which he slightly press'd the back of her hand towards the part he felt for——and let it fall.
We thought, Mr. Trim, it had been more in the middle——said Mrs. Bridget——
That would have undone us for ever——said the Corporal.
——And left my poor mistress undone too——said Bridget. . . .
Come——come——said Bridget——holding the palm of her left-hand parallel to the plane of the horizon, and sliding the fingers of the other over it, in a way which could not have been done, had there been the least wart or protuberance——'Tis every syllable of it false, cried the Corporal, before she had half finished the sentence—— (639)

It is worth comparing this hand symbolism with the same device of euphemistic eroticism found elsewhere in *Tristram Shandy.*

A brief, preliminary comment.

For the protagonists of this novel, this euphemistic manner of speaking represents proper speech. For Sterne though—when this same phenomenon is considered from an artistic point of view—this becomes material for enstrangement.

It is a curious point that this same device of hand symbolism is encountered in the specifically masculine, "obscene" anecdotes of folklore, where, as is well known, there are no rules of decency, other than, of course, the desire to speak as obscenely as possible. Yet, even here we encounter material of a euphemistic character, in particular hand symbolism, though employed as a device of enstrangement.

Let us now return to Sterne. I must again quote nearly an entire chapter. Fortunately, it is rather short:

——'Twas nothing,——I did not lose two drops of blood by it——'twas not worth calling in a surgeon, had he lived next door to us. . . . The chamber-maid had left no ******* *** under the bed:——Cannot you contrive, master, quoth Susannah, lifting up the sash with one hand, as she spoke, and helping me up into the window seat with the other,——cannot you manage, my dear, for a single time to **** *** ** *** ******?

I was five years old.——Susannah did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family,——so slap came the sash down like lightening upon us;——Nothing is left,——cried Susannah,——nothing is left——for me, but to run my country. (376)

She flees to Uncle Toby's house and he takes the blame, for his servant

Trim had removed the sash weights from the window to make some model cannons.

Once again we encounter a device typical of Sterne: the effects are presented prior to the causes. The description of this cause occupies pages 377-78. The incident is related with the aid of the hand symbolism:

> Trim, by the help of his forefinger, laid flat upon the table, and the edge of his hand striking a-cross it at right angles, made a shift to tell his story so, that priests and virgins might have listened to it;——and the story being told, the dialogue went on as follows. (379)

This is followed by a development of the rumors concerning the incident, then by digressions and by discussions concerning digressions, etc.

Interestingly enough, Shandy Senior runs to see his son the moment he finds out about the incident—with a book in his hands, whereupon begins a discussion concerning circumcision in general. It is worth noting at this point how Sterne parodies the motivation for interpolated passages:

> —was Obadiah enabled to give him a particular account of it, just as it had happened.——I thought as much, said my father, tucking up his night-gown;——and so walked up stairs.
>
> One would imagine from this——(though for my own part I somewhat question it)——that my father before that time, had actually wrote that remarkable chapter in the *Tristrapaedia,* which to me is the most original and entertaining one in the whole book;——and that is the *chapter upon sash-windows,* with a bitter Philippick at the end of it, upon the forgetfulness of chamber-maids.——I have but two reasons for thinking otherwise.
>
> First, Had the matter been taken into consideration, before the event happened, my father certainly would have nailed up the sash-window for good an' all;——which, considering with what difficulty he composed books,——he might have done with ten times less trouble, than he could have wrote the chapter: this argument I foresee holds good against his writing the chapter, even after the event; but 'tis obviated under the second reason, which I have the honour to offer to the world in support of my opinion, that my father did not write the chapter upon sash-windows and chamber-pots, at the time supposed,——and it is this.
>
> ——That, in order to render the *Tristrapaedia* complete,——I wrote the chapter myself. (383-84)

I have not the slightest desire to continue this study of Sterne's novel to the very end. This is so because I am far less interested in the novel itself than in the theory of plot structure.

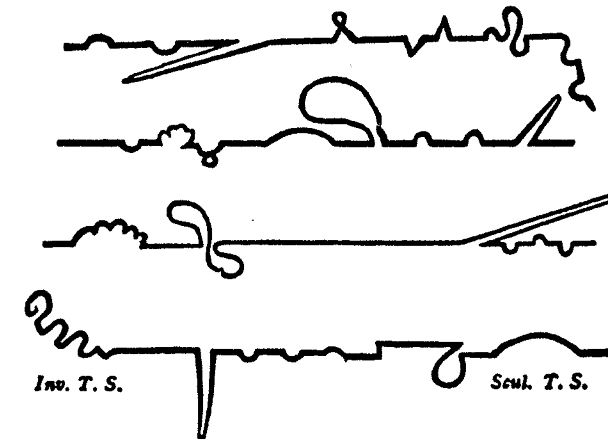
I shall now say a few words concerning the abundance of citations in my book. Naturally, I could have made fuller use of every passage and excerpt in this book, since there is hardly a device that appears anywhere in its pure form. However, this would have transformed my work into a "pony," which, by obstructing the text with grammatical annotations, would have hindered the reader from interpreting it on his own.

Nonetheless, in analyzing this novel, I consider it my duty to demonstrate its thoroughgoing "lack of consistency." It is precisely the unusual order of

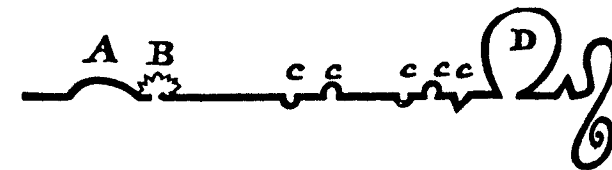
even common, traditional elements that is characteristic of Sterne.

As an end-piece and at the same time as proof of Sterne's conscious manipulation and violation of traditional plot schemata, I'd like to cite his own graphic illustration of the story line in *Tristram Shandy:*

> I am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegitable diet, with a few of the cold seeds, I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle Toby's story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line. Now,



> These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes.——In the fifth volume I have been very good,——the precise line I have described in it being this:



> By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A. where I took a trip to Navarre,——and the indented curve B. which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady Baussiere and her page,——I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till John de la Casse's devils led me the round you see marked D.——for as for c c c c c they are nothing but parentheses, and the common *ins* and *outs* incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared with what men have done,——or with my own transgressions at the letters A B D——they vanish into nothing. (473-74)

Sterne's schemata are more or less accurate, but he fails to take into account the interruption of the motifs.

*

The concept of plot (*syuzhet*) is too often confused with a description of the events in the novel, with what I'd tentatively call the story line (*fabula*).

As a matter of fact, though, the story line is nothing more than material for plot formation.

In this way, the plot of *Eugene Onegin* is not the love between Eugene and Tatiana but the appropriation of that story line in the form of digressions that interrupt the text. One sharp-witted artist, Vladimir Milashevsky, has proposed to illustrate this novel in verse by focusing chiefly on the digressions (the "little feet," for instance) and, from a purely compositional point of view, this would be quite appropriate.

The forms of art are explained by the artistic laws that govern them and not by comparisons with actual life. In order to impede the action of the novel, the artist resorts not to witches and magic potions but to a simple transposition of its parts. He thereby reveals to us the aesthetic laws that underlie both of these compositional devices.

It is common practice to assert that *Tristram Shandy* is not a novel. Those who speak in this way regard opera alone as true music, while a symphony for them is mere chaos.

Tristram Shandy is the most typical novel in world literature.

Chapter 8

Bely and Ornamental Prose

1

The particular elements constituting literary form are more likely to clash than to work in concert. The decline or decay of one device brings in its train the growth and development of another device.

The celebrated progression in literary history from the epic to the lyric and, finally, to the drama is not so much a succession of organic forms as a succession of canonizations and displacements.

A writer's philosophical worldview is his working hypothesis. However, if we address the issue more precisely, we might wish to add that a writer's consciousness is nonetheless determined by literary form. The crises of a writer coincide with the crises of literary genres. A writer moves within the orbit of his art.

When an ideology, lying as it must outside the boundaries of the work of art, invades the writer's domain without that craftsmanship which alone can justify it, then the results cannot be considered art.

Such was the case when Andrei Bely set out to create his anthroposophical epopee, or epic. The attempt to create a literary work which would correspond to some extrinsic worldview can succeed only with much difficulty, if at all. This is so because a work of art distorts such a correspondence in accordance with its own laws.

Not surprisingly, the author himself may have a hard time recognizing his own work.

Blok, on the other hand, began *The Twelve* with street talk and racy doggerel and ended up with the figure of Christ. Unacceptable to many, this Christ was for Blok rich in content. Though taken aback himself, Blok insisted to the end of his days that *The Twelve* came off exactly as it was supposed to.

The "Christ" finale serves as a kind of closing epigraph, in which the riddle of the poem is unexpectedly solved.

"I don't like the ending of *The Twelve* either," said Blok. "I wanted a different ending. After finishing it, I was myself astonished and wondered: Why Christ, after all? Do I really need Christ here? Yet, the more I looked at it, the more clearly I saw Christ. And so I jotted down in my notebook: Looks like I'll have to go with Christ. With Christ and none other."

Is this an ideological Christ?

Here is an excerpt from a letter by Blok to Yury Annenkov:

> Concerning Christ: He is no small, cowering figure bringing up the rear of a parade like a dog. He is not the kind to carry a flag at the back of a parade and then to be seen no more. "Christ Carrying a Flag"—that both is and isn't the Christ I have in mind. Do you know that when a flag is whipped about by the wind, we inevitably imagine someone huge and enormous standing in some relationship to it. That is, he doesn't just hold the flag or carry it. (Oh, how words fail me!)

In other words, we may understand the Christ theme in the following way: Wind. The wind rips the banners. The wind in turn calls forth the flag, and the flag, finally, calls forth someone enormous bearing a certain relationship to it. It is precisely at this point that Christ appears on the scene.

Of course, there is no denying that "he is Christ and none other" by virtue of the poet's stock of imagery, but the fact remains that he was called forth by the compositional pattern of these images (i.e., by the wind and by the flag).

It is hard, indeed, to write any piece of literature that corresponds to anything as such, whatever it be. This is so because art is not the shadow of a thing but the thing itself. A work of art makes for a poor accompanist.

One of the peculiar features of the anthroposophic theory to which Bely subscribed is its teaching of the multilayered nature of all phenomena. For example, a group of five anthroposophs (any five will do) headed by Steiner is not only a group. It is, in addition, a rose. A rose that corresponds in all its parts to a real rose. And so the world turns out, after all, to be multileveled, replicating itself in each of its parts. In its anthroposophic version, it resembles a series of shadows cast by one object placed before several sources of light.

In his epopee, Andrei Bely undertook the task of creating a multileveled structure that would vindicate the teachings of anthroposophy. The "swarm" and the "form" in *Kotik Letaev,* the crucifixion serving as a secondary level in *The Baptized Chinaman*—all of this fulfills the anthroposophic program.

Bely's works turned out well enough (though only in part), but the anthroposophic business, on the other hand, fared quite poorly. Feeling a need for secondary motivation, Bely uses linguistic techniques and the consciousness of a child to connect the two planes of swarm and form, world and consciousness, in *Kotik Letaev.* Overpowered by the literary material, the anthroposophical theory only served to intensify and consolidate the metaphor leitmotivs.

Instead of a multileveled anthroposophic work, what results is ornamental prose. The relationship between the two planes becomes thoroughly complicated, and a "realistic resolution" is therefore introduced. (See the case of "Lion" below.) At times Bely himself takes a rather humorous view of the collision of these two planes.

In the example later, where Aunt Dottie represents both herself and "Eternity," she is depicted with a carpet-beater in her hand. Eternity, therefore, is represented by this carpet-beater, too. In doing this, Bely does not give meaning to eternity nor does he symbolize it. Instead, he transfers the attributes from one metaphor leitmotiv to another. By means of this device he establishes a semantic disparity. In the struggle between anthroposophy and the device called forth by it, the device has devoured the theory. The ornamental prose of Andrei Bely has taken its place beside similar works by Leskov, Remizov, et al., that arose out of circumstances unique to them.

Andrei Bely is the most fascinating writer of our times. All of contemporary Russian fiction bears the stamp of his work. If we were to compare Bely to smoke, then we could go one step further and compare Boris Pilnyak to the shadow of smoke.

Andrei Bely was a prolific author who wrote in a wide variety of genres. He is the author of *The Silver Dove, Petersburg* and *Kotik Letaev,* the first volume of his epopee. I don't think that he himself knows just what this epopee consists of. Sometimes he says that the *Symphonies, Petersburg, The Silver Dove* and *Notes of an Eccentric* are all "medallions of an immense tale." He adds that *Notes of an Eccentric* is merely a preface to this epic. Now Andrei Bely tells us that he, Andrei Bely, wants to write like a simple cobbler. Having renounced the novel, he asks himself the following question in the name of the reader: Just what is this thing that you are offering us? It's neither a tale nor a diary, but disconnected bits of memories and "leaps."

Nonetheless, there is no need to exaggerate the validity of an author's pronouncements concerning himself. Often on such occasions, a writer addresses not his craftsmanship but the ideological position to which he is sympathetic. For example, in discussing his literary influences, an author will often point not to his own teacher but to some other writer, someone, you guessed it, who resembles him the least. Pilnyak, for instance, dedicates his work not to Andrei Bely but to Alexei Remizov.

2

Dresden, my friends, is absolutely gorgeous.

High atop a mountain overlooking the fields of Saxony, cherry trees blossom each spring. The trees are blue, as blue in the brilliant sunshine as forest scenery in the theater. Such stage sets are usually painted blue instead of green. And the blue fields of Germany are also blue in the spring air. Or, rather, they appear blue, while the viewer remembers them green. Leaping off from the mountain's wall of limestone below, the Elba River rushes on to Hamburg, dull as a kitchen knife.

And on that very mountain, which goes by the name of Cherry Mountain, or, then again, perhaps Deer Mountain (be sure to look it up, if you are ever in Dresden), there is a garden.

Every tree in this garden rests against a form fashioned out of iron rods. The tree is bound firmly to this form by its branches. The forms in question depict either a woman in a skirt or a soldier saluting in a peakless cap. The tree too is saluting, attached as it is to the iron form. A man might scream from the sheer horror of it all. At times this recalls Andrei Bely, who, like the saluting tree, is bound to the theory of anthroposophy. Bely feels duty-bound to write about Rudolf Steiner, his mentor, to discard his own mask and point out all of the anthroposophic hues in Blok.

Bely felt compelled to bind Blok to the iron trellis too. And yet Blok was a free man. Beginning his poetic career by quoting from Solovyov, Blok in due course came to write *The Fair Show Booth,* where he took an ironic view of his own mysticism.

For Blok, mysticism and sunrises, satirical doggerel and gypsy revelry—all of these are fair game for art.

Bely, though, reproaches Blok severely for his betrayal and laments the fact that he, Bely, a stranger to anthroposophy at the time, had been unable to show Blok how to live and write.

And yet Bely himself wrote his *Symphonies* from an ironic point of view. And even as we speak, Bely is adapting certain parts of his *Petersburg* for the vaudeville stage.

Lev Trotsky said somewhere that when engaging in polemics a man should maintain his emotional distance. He should know. He has been polemicizing for a long time.

An artist must maintain an emotional distance. He must not allow himself to be arm-twisted. He must adopt an ironic attitude toward his material and not let it get to him. Same as in boxing or fencing.

In my opinion, the reason for Andrei Bely's current failure lies in his unironic, incoherent exclamations on behalf of Rudolf Steiner. People are saying that Steiner's Johannes Building, whose columns were carved by Andrei Bely himself, has burned to the ground, and that the Jesuits are to blame. It is also rumored that Steiner is rebuilding this Johannes Building on a foundation of concrete. If it were up to me, I'd roll about four hundred pounds of dynamite into the basement of the building, cover the explosives with stone, run a Bickford fuse from it and show Steiner how to blow a building to smithereens. Why? Because a writer should never be yoked to a trellis and forced to salute.

Let Steiner have his Johannes Building. Still, art itself does not admit any tethers, and Andrei Bely simply wasted his time in Dornach.

Of course, if Steiner has recovered, then long live Dornach!

The art of the novel refuses to swallow the bait of anthroposophy. Bely's work represents an attempt on the part of anthroposophy to devour craftsmanship. Well, it was craftsmanship instead that devoured anthroposophy and continues to feed off it as if it were dung.

From his point of view, Andrei Bely wants to discard his mask, to make a clean break with the device itself, to renounce form, even while writing his epopee. A more objective assessment, though (and he himself has suggested it), would call for him to renounce his *Notes of an Eccentric* and to return to the novel form.

Still, don't fall for theatrical posturings. Beneath an actor's mask you'll find greasepaint.

Andrei Bely was no simple cobbler when he wrote *Notes of an Eccentric.* No sirree!

On the contrary, he even
played
such
tricks
as
depicting
a
German
mine
about to explode against the side of the ship on which he was traveling home. A cobbler is hardly capable of such art.

Notes of an Eccentric contains one of Bely's most complex structures. The compositors who set this "cobbler's" angular patterns, columns, and zigzags in type said that they had never faced such a complex task of composing in their life and demanded overtime pay.

In *Notes of an Eccentric* we observe a complex structure. Based on autobiographical materials with time shifts, this tale involves whole series of comparisons—metaphor leitmotivs connected to the original metaphor by means of puns.

For example, it turns out that Andrei Bely had never crossed "the frontiers of Switzerland." No, he had only crossed the "frontiers of his own self":

> Clattering along and knocking against each other, the train cars rushed along the French landscape. The wind blew into the window, and my head spun as it struck the seat before me. The gleams of electric lamps flew in and out of the car, and my waking consciousness fell apart: The boundary of my consciousness shifted. I had crossed the frontiers of Switzerland, that is, the frontiers of my consciousness.

The metaphor leitmotivs, we may affirm, exist prior to their realization in the world.

Not infrequently, this is motivated by having recourse to a device that has become a tradition in the history of novels—the dream. As a novelistic device, it serves two functions: as a form of *premonition* and as a form of *prediction.* Often a dream may lead to a definite perception of future events. Sometimes, too, a dream may simply motivate the fantastic. I shall not bother with examples. Just look in Dostoevsky.

There is no point in becoming enamored of the biography of an artist. He

writes first and looks for motivations later. And least of all should one be enamored of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis studies the psychological traumas of *one* person, while in truth, an author never writes *alone.* A school of writers writes through him. A whole age.

Let us try to formulate what it is that we see in Bely's works of the past six or seven years.

These works are autobiographic in origin or, rather, they are written as autobiographies. Plot development is rudimentary. In fact, you could say that, in reality, there is no plot at all. There is only the story line of a man who lives, reaches maturity, and grows old.

On this foundation the author has erected metaphor leitmotivs that serve as superstructures, as high-rise buildings. These structures—let's imagine them as buildings—are connected to each other by means of little suspension bridges. As the story moves along, it creates pretexts for the creation of new metaphorical leitmotivs which are connected, the moment they come into being, with the leitmotivs already in place. This is true of *Notes of an Eccentric, Kotik Letaev,* and *The Baptized Chinaman.*

The departures from this fundamental structure are effected somewhat differently in the case of Bely's *Recollections of Blok.*

The fragmentary "Arbat" (published in *Novaya Rossiya*) is constructed along simpler lines. Yet, Bely's touch is evident here, too, in the way he standardizes his imagery. So much so that in the latter part of the work Bely treats these images as if they were a kind of terminology.

The most consistent development of the two-tiered structure is to be found in *Kotik Letaev.*

3

Kotik Letaev was completed by Bely in 1917 and was evidently intended to form a part of the epopee. This epopee consists, first and foremost, of memoirs. This memoirist aspect of Bely's work has risen in prominence with each new work.

Recollections of Blok illustrates this memoiristic genre in its pure form. In special chapters devoted to an anthroposophic exegesis, Bely applies the devices used by interpreters of the church fathers to passages from Blok.

"Arbat" is pure memoir. What distinguishes this memoir, for example, from that of Koni, is Bely's peculiar use of images. Even in those passages where he most earnestly pursues his anthroposophic program, Bely fails to create an anthroposophic artifact. He succeeds only in creating a special imagistic structure.

In *Kotik Letaev,* which is almost entirely devoid of plot, the image holds complete sway. For this reason, the autobiographical works of Bely stand in sharp contrast to Dickens's equally autobiographical *David Copperfield.* In the latter we find a definite plot that involves two secrets: Grandmother's

secret (i.e., that her husband is alive) and Uriah Heep's secret (the forging of documents). Em'ly's destiny is predicted by the use of premonitions. *David Copperfield* is very well-plotted. Of course, traditional novelistic techniques of plot formation do appear in *Kotik Letaev* and in *The Baptized Chinaman.* But, like the customs of the British Parliament—where a certain Lord of the Exchequer sits on a leather bag lined with fur—literary forms may outlive their usefulness. And what's the reason for these holdovers from the past? There is only one way to find out: Consult a reference book!

Kotik Letaev is a story about a little boy. Though told in the first person, it begins before the boy's birth. For that reason Bely has selected a passage from Tolstoi as his epigraph for this work. It may serve as a kind of caveat:

> "You know," said Natasha in a whisper, "I think that when you start remembering, you really remember, you remember everything, even that which took place before you were born." (*War and Peace*)

These remembrances of the prenatal past are carried out in the following manner: A series of images is first presented. Then its point of departure from and contact with the story line is indicated. Finally, the formation of the boy's consciousness is expressed as the ravings of an infant in the throes of growth.

And now for some examples:

> Each of our thoughts is like a vortex: the ocean of existence, moving in each thought, pours into the body like a cosmic storm. Leaping up, a child's thought brings to mind a comet. There it goes, bloodying its tail as it falls into a body and then pouring itself out in a rain of blood-red carbuncles into the ocean of sensations. Between the body and the thought, the watery vortex and the fire, someone has flung a baby. And the baby is terrified.
>
> "Help!"
> "It can't be helped!"
> "Save me!"
>
> "Madam, he's growing up."
>
> There it is: the first episode of existence. The author fixes it firmly in his memory and describes it with precision. If it is as described (and it is), then we have been allowed a fleeting glimpse of pre-corporeal life through memory.

In the excerpt above, the device of "illumination" (see below) is only hinted at.

Let me quote further from the middle of the chapter entitled "On Fire." This title contains the motivation for images of delirium:

> At first there were no images to speak of, though a place had been set for them suspended before me. Soon thereafter a child's nursery opened up before me. Behind me, a gaping hole was coalescing. It then turned into the mouth of a stove (the stove was a memory of something that had perished long before, of something old. Look there! The wind is whistling through the pipe of pre-temporal consciousness). . . . An exceptionally long reptile, Uncle Vasya, was crawling towards me

from behind: a mustachioed young snake, he later split in two. One half of him would drop in to have dinner with us, while the other half I encountered later on the cover of a very useful book called *Extinct Monsters*. He was the dinosaur. They say that dinosaurs are extinct. Well, I saw them in the very first moments of consciousness.

My mother's voice forced its way into my ears: "He is on fire!" Much later they told me that I had been ill with dysentery, scarlet fever and measles precisely at the time my mother uttered that phrase.

Such also is the image of the "Lion" which Bely saw one day on Dog Square:

Among the strange images flashing before me from the haze of early childhood the oldest by far is that of the looming figure of the shaggy mug of a lion. The noisy hour had already struck. Around me I saw yellow mouths of sand. From them the shaggy mug and jaws are observing me calmly. A shout: "Here comes Lion!"

The "yellow mouths of sand" is the first detail to be "illuminated": "Much later I discovered the yellow circle of sand between Arbat and Dog Square."

Then follows the "illumination" of the Lion, a St. Bernard nicknamed "Lion" who used to hang around the square. This "illumination" took place twenty years later:

Twenty years later the fragments of my strange dreams became waking reality. Perhaps the labyrinth of our rooms was the original waking reality, while Uncle Vasya was the reptilian monster. And, perhaps, too, that altercation with Aphrosynia the cook was in reality the incident with the old woman. And the hurricanes of the red world were the stove in the kitchen, while the whirling torches were only sparks. I really don't know. Perhaps.

Later, though, in a chapter entitled "Nevertheless," Bely rejected this particular resolution. He asserted unequivocally that no such dog ever existed. All he had ever heard then was the cry: "Here comes Lion!"

And "Lion came."

Further on, he affirms the reality of the fantastical in the person of the "old woman and her rooms."

This game should not surprise us. It is customary in works of fantasy to leave behind an unresolved detail capable of spurring on the flagging mystery line.

So in Turgenev's "Clara Milich" the hero is cured of his nocturnal visions, which are attributed to an obvious case of delirium. Yet, on his deathbed, we find him holding a lock of hair in his hand, and this lock is introduced by the author without any resolution.

It is important for a writer to create a wide range of interpretations for his work, to introduce the possibility for "obscurity" (the very thing Blok was reproached for: i.e., his work was both this *and* that). For this reason the fantastic nature of a literary work is simultaneously affirmed and denied by the author.

Andrei Bely arrived at this device by way of anthroposophy. Yet, the regular appearance of Anna Pavlovna Sherer's salon in *War and Peace* plays much the same role of introducing an interpretation of the issue of war and peace that is at odds with that of the author. Unlike Bely, Tolstoi arrived at this device through considerations of a moral nature. But this business reminds me a lot of love affairs. Each case is unique. One man loves a woman for her blue eyes, while another man loves a woman for her grey eyes. The end result is one and the same: The earth is never short of children.

The world comes into being for Kotik Letaev. Dreams which until then had stretched out to infinity now cling like wallpaper to the walls of his room. Out of the sounds "Ti-da-do-di-ton-ty" emerges the name of "Aunt Dottie."

A little later Kotik hears Dottie play the piano. She taps melodically at the resonant, cold white keyboard:

Ton-ti
Ton-ti To-tin-ton-ti-to.

Subsequently, "Aunt Dottie" was constructed out of a wave of sound.

This is the way things are fashioned from sounds.

The real story line is indicated only by means of a dotted line. People and things are connected once again by sound waves.

And if Aunt Dottie is a sound wave, then Kotik's father, Prof. Letaev, is a "rumbling wave." He is connected to Aunt Dottie by sound.

Meanwhile, Aunt Dottie crystallizes into layers of being. This process of stratification began considerably earlier:

And Aunt Dottie dwindled before my eyes. She was not yet fully formed. She was not yet fully in the flesh, fully real. Rather, she rose silently before me like a mist from amongst the mirrors and slipcovers. She hovered over me . . .

And she was taking shape before me in severe majesty and in utter, empty calmness, moving forward with a carpet-beater raised high in her hand and with a familiar reflection in the mirrors and a no less familiar pensive look on her face: the thin, mute, tall, wretched, unsteady figure of my relative, Aunt Dottie, or, rather, Yevdokaya Yegorovna . . . that is, Eternity.

And that is how a relative of Kotik came to represent eternity. Somewhat later, Bely pulls the word from under the image and concludes with a pun: "I have a relative in Eternity."

Even as she assumes her real identity, Aunt Dottie, it turns out, is still associated in Kotik's mind with a drop of water in the washstand. She continues to be Hegel's "Bad Infinity."

4

It is my firm belief that a literary work, especially a long one, is not brought into being by fulfilling its task.

Yes, a task exists all right, but this task is completely altered by the technical means at the author's disposal.

The unity of a work of literature is more likely than not a myth. At least that is how I see it. And, as you know, I have written a piece of fiction or two in my time and have observed others of my generation at their craft.

Set pieces prepared in advance enter easily and conveniently into the composition of a poem. This explains the inclusion of certain set pieces in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin.*

A monolithic literary work is perhaps possible in isolated cases. It seems to me that Bely came to understand his device of materializing the image while engaged in the creative process itself. He interpreted it in the following way: At first, he simply jotted down at the end of each chapter a note to the effect that he had been ill or that he was growing at the time. Then he consolidated the device by introducing the concepts of "swarm" and "form."

Objectively speaking, "swarm" designates a leitmotiv of metaphors, while "form" stands for an object inhering in a leitmotiv secured to the story line.

Subjectively speaking, form stands for the world already formed, while swarm designates the coming into being of the world. Swarm always precedes form.

The swarm is motivated by Kotik's infantile consciousness, by his illness, etc. It is also motivated by anthroposophy, which serves to replace the "spurious" motivation of childhood.

The appearance of the swarm, the loosening of plot structure, and a shift in favor of the image have brought into being a school of writers known as the Ornamentalists.

Contemporary Russian prose is to a large extent ornamental in character. That is, the imagery prevails over the plot. Certain Ornamentalists like Zamyatin or Pilnyak show Bely's direct influence, while others like Vsevolod Ivanov show no influence at all. Still others show the influence of Pilnyak and Zamyatin. Yet, this Ornamentalism has emerged on the literary scene less as a result of literary influences than in response to the general feeling that the old form has lost its resilience.

Social pressures and ideologies may be beneficial to the artist by spurring him on to change his form and to give it artistic expression in his subsequent work.

And now concerning the swarm and form in Bely:

> The very first moments of my existence were a "swarm." "Swarm, swarm everywhere—the whole world is a swarm" became my first philosophy. I was swept up in a swarm first and only later did I begin describing wheels with the old woman. The wheel and the sphere were the first to crystallize out of the swarm.
>
> That which had crystallized had become for me form: Wheeling round and round I came out eventually through a hole leading into a pipe, and so on.

While Papa is emerging out of the swarm, the bullheaded man turns into Doctor Dornovov and Aunt Dottie arises out of her sound wave.

Objects arise out of words. Sometimes the swarm is presented as a pun motivated by a child's perception. For instance:

> Mama kept repeating: "Yezheshikhinsky."
> "What's that?"
> "He's ended up in the gutter."

This is confirmed by someone's voice: " 'Yezheshikhinsky is spilling his guts.' "

The misfortunes of Yezheshikhinsky, who had wandered off into some tunnels and was still wandering through them to this day, occasioned Bely's first reflection on the vicissitudes of fate:

> Explanation is the recollection of euphony. Understanding is their dance. Education is the ability to fly on words. The harmony of words is a siren.

As always, we are dealing here with one of Bely's puns. The word *obrazovanie,* for example, has two meanings: (a) education (the acquisition of knowledge), and (b) the formation (of something).

Bely is astounded by the sound of the word *Kre-ml* (Kremlin):

> The "Kremlin"? What's that? I remember that I had once tasted a sweet creme-brûle. It was served in the form of a cookie mold with projecting ledges. I also remember that someone once showed me a "Kremlin" at Sevostjanov's Pastry Shop. These were projecting ledges of pink turrets made of fruit-drop. And I suddenly realized that the *kre* stood for the strength of the projecting ledges in the Kremlin [*Kreml'*] in cream [*krem*] and fortress [*krepost'*], while the *m* and *ml* stood for softness [*mjagkost'*] and sweetness [*sladost'*] and only then did they show me in the distant blue sky the rosy, firm, sweet towers of the Kremlin.

At times Bely uses the realized metaphor or the literal meaning of the word:

> "Valerian Valerianovich Bleshchensky . . ."
> "What's that?"
> "He's a burned-out drunk!"
> And Valerian Valerianovich Bleshchensky stands before me . . . consumed in flames. He is no better than a log, a puppet made of wood: the wooden puppet staring out of the barbershop window.

The swarm dominates the first two chapters of *Kotik Letaev.* Once the leitmotivs are firmly established, the author turns to the story line. The images here do not appear out of nothing. Rather, each protagonist—Papa, Doctor Pfeffer, the nanny—has its own leitmotiv. Kotik's habits—squinting, the sensation aroused in him by the gruel and even his sitting on a special baby armchair—are each furnished with its own leitmotiv. The moment they are mentioned in the text, they call forth their leitmotivs. As events in the domain of form, they are merely hooks to which the swarm is secured. The moment a new detail becomes swarm, it extends through the entire novel. Accompanying the leitmotivs in the

story line, the swarm supports the literary work like a lining:

> I know how to squint my eyes, to look at my nose. And the patterns slip away.
>
> I look out from my bed at the bouquets of flowers on the wallpaper. I know how to squint my eyes, and the walls, flying over to my nose, slip away.
>
> I know how to squint my eyes, to look at my nose. The walls slip away.

Squinting is no frivolous game. Rather, it is a displacement of things, an overthrowing of form, a transition, a return to swarm. At times, the relationship between swarm and form is intentionally paradoxical. The infant on the chamberpot is really an ancient Orphist. His meal has betrayed him, and so he contemplates the ancient serpents and beholds the metamorphoses of the universe.

Bely is concerned here with the second motivation for his work (the first one being anthroposophy), but he fails to sustain its verisimilitude. His little boy sees, in great detail, the inner structure of a human skull. He sees hemispheres and constructs leitmotivs that, instead of realizing the metaphor, deprive the word of substance.

The general structure of a literary work allows one and only one of its tasks to gain dominance. The anthroposophic work written by Bely at the very height of his anthroposophic obsession turned more and more into autobiography.

5

The Baptized Chinaman continues *Kotik Letaev* and partly duplicates it. If we look at the story line, then the beginning of one work seems to overlap with the end of the other. From this point of view *The Baptized Chinaman* may be considered a second edition of *Kotik Letaev.* Andrei Bely's feelings concerning this work were, in fact, quite ambivalent.

The Baptized Chinaman, according to Bely, is a form of spiritual milk, of "food for the neophyte." But don't believe a writer. His worldview is quite separate from his literary work and should be considered as no more than an appendix to it. A poet often renounces verse in verse, while a novelist renounces fiction in fiction. Even in the cinema a hero will reply on the screen (I myself have seen this), "How beautiful! Just like in the movies." The creation of an illusion, its consolidation, and its dismantling are all devices of art. Objectively speaking, we may suppose that *The Baptized Chinaman* partially replaced *Notes of an Eccentric* and partially displaced *Kotik Letaev* in the author's inner struggle. One thing is certain: *The Baptized Chinaman* concedes nothing to the "neophyte."

By its structure, *The Baptized Chinaman* captures our attention by the fact that its memoirist character is even more pronounced than before: it is richer in events. Kotik's parents, developed apart from and existing independently of their son, now dominate the stage. The swarm has been dispersed. Perhaps it is in connection with this that the language of this work has changed its character: the imagistic difficulties associated with *Kotik Letaev* yield place here to difficulties associated merely with the use of dialect. It is no longer the image but the word that is enstranged.

In order to bring out this density, let me offer some examples taken from two different pages:

> Beyond the window, where the fog is, a pewter haze fell like a flurry of snowflakes, welded into drops, and a drizzle fell: Yes, a drizzle. A thaw is whirling down from the water-drinking gutters.
>
> And he would hurl obscenities, grin from ear to ear and show his gums (of course Grandma called them by a different name). He would cackle, gurgle, cough and utter a wild indecency.

Bely himself understands the dictionary meaning of his language perfectly well. For example, consider the following:

> I once overheard Grandma say: "He wore a barley cap!"
>
> And just what is a "barley cap"? Well, you can scratch your head all you want, but you'll never find it there. Try an unabridged!

It is curious how seriously the author relates to the word and with what specificity he uses it.

Kotik is being crucified. The quarrel raging between father and mother assumes cosmic proportions. Still, the word is brought into relief because it is part of the game of craftsmanship, that is, it is taken seriously. And here no miracle will help.

The swarm is gone, replaced by the world that has come into being. Yet, as an artist intent on maintaining the disparity of things, Bely needed a different version of our world. This different world is presented in this work by a generalizing of phenomena.

In *Kotik Letaev* the father grows to become a Socrates, a Moses, and the quarrel between papa and mama becomes an eternal quarrel. The tragedy of the protagonists is that each is struggling over "something uniquely his or her own." This at first seems a joke but, much later, it turns out to be quite fundamental. Bugaev (Bely's father) is presented in his ordinary, comic state, and therefore so much the more convincingly does the "something uniquely his own" in him lag behind the leitmotiv of Socrates and Confucius with whom he is associated.

Nonetheless, this "something uniquely one's own" was first spoken by Henrietta Martinova, the backward German nanny, in reference to a certain German.

This nonsensical phrase seemed, like a sign, to contain some hidden meaning. In fact, though, it has no meaning. Its alleged secret turns out not to exist at all, even though it is applied to Kotik's father and mother and to Aphrosim (who has a tendency to turn into Immortality). To complete the

leitmotiv and deepen the mystery, it is even applied, finally, to two griffins on someone's doorway.

The mechanical application of an expression to a leitmotiv or concept by means of griffins is bound up with traditional mysteries. Here the mystery is given under the guise of nonsense or "obscurity" (i.e., a purely verbal confusion), for which Blok was reproached (by Bely himself). This confusion was, perhaps, necessary for art, but it did not lead to anthroposophy.

The canonization of the image leitmotivs and epithets running throughout Bely's works already begins in *The Baptized Chinaman.* The protagonists are persecuted by their corresponding leitmotivs. Often an image is comically realized and not once but several times, changing each time through the use of puns:

> Uncle Vasya owns a medal and a cockade conferred upon him for bravery in battle. He has been nominated for a medal. Instead, for five years now he has been screaming and hollering, and to this day he is still trying to get his foot in the front door of the Imperial Treasury Department.
>
> "How is that?" Well, it's not so simple if you are a rock, but quite easy if you are a strip of felt.
>
> "How is that? You mean bent over like a hunchback?"

Bely then proceeds to realize the metaphor "bent over" by describing how Uncle Vasya bent over three times, shoved his head between his legs and pulled his handkerchief from under his coattails with his teeth. In order to complete the realization of this metaphor, this entire excerpt is set by Bely in an angular column in the middle of the page. The column bends like a hunchback.

Uncle Vasya's revolt and drunkenness is depicted by denying this second leitmotiv, by a repudiation of the realized image:

> And Mama played—
>
> And the events of life, dislodged and swept away, fluttered in the nothingness of the sounds. Once again a tall man comes towards us across the years. It's Uncle. He rises on his thin stilts, on his legs and walks forever away from us along the white roofs. He disappears into the sky and from there he begins railing at us from heaven: "Yes, I am tired of bending over like a hunchback. Enough is enough!"
>
> "I am tired of trying to get my foot in the front door of the Treasury Department!"
>
> "Here is the strip of felt and here are some stones. Let others try to shove their way in!"
>
> "I'm tired of wearing out my life as a clerk. It's a useless profession!"
>
> "I'm leaving you!"

I've deliberately extended this excerpt in order to show the relationship that exists between the images: the playing of Kotik's mother is associated with her "roulade" leitmotiv, while the final phrase generalizes "Uncle Vasya."

The playing itself is presented later in the form of a little girl, but still later she turns into Understanding.

In the conventional novel the protagonists' association with objects in the story line takes the limelight. If the hero was accompanied by anything, it was usually by an object, and at times this object played a role in the plot, serving as one of the connecting threads in the plot.

In Andrei Bely, though, it is not objects but images that are connected. The epopee is an enterprise of major scope.

6

Recollections of Blok may not be an epopee, but it is not far off. Most likely, it is material for an epopee.

This work evolves by means of both individual episodes as well as by the introduction of separate chapters devoted to Bely's anthroposophic interpretation of Blok. The latter chapters, consisting exclusively of passages quoted out of context, fail to take into consideration the changes in the meaning of words effected by their relationships with other words in the poem. These chapters purport, for example, to explain Blok's evolution in terms of the color modulations in his verse. This idea seems to be self-evident, but just the same it is wrong. One ought never to construe the works of a poet as a series of personal confessions held together by a kind of scouts' honor. Even a writer as given to the confessional mode as Bely is cannot succeed in unburdening his soul. That which Bely claims as a personal utterance is, in the final analysis, a new literary genre.

Even less so should we believe in the documentary character of a poet's confessions and in the earnestness of his worldview.

A poet's worldview is distorted—when the poet is indeed a professional one—by the fact that it serves as a source of material for his poems.

For that reason there is much irony in a poet's beliefs. They are, after all, full of mischief. The boundaries separating the serious from the humorous are blurred in a poet partly by the fact that the humorous form, being the least canonized and at the same time the most open to semantic disparities, lays the ground for new forms of serious art. The relationship between, on the one hand, the forms of the journal *Satirikon* and Mayakovsky's forms, and, on the other hand, between the doggerel of Russian vaudeville and the verse of Nekrasov has been brought out on numerous occasions by Formalistic critics (Osip Brik, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yury Tynyanov). Examples from Andrei Bely are less well known. His *Symphonies* border on humor, that is, the serious interpretation came later. Just the same, the new Russian literature is inconceivable without the *Symphonies.* Even those who scold Bely do so under the influence of his less than fully conscious style. As a matter of fact, Bely himself (if memory serves me right) once assured me of the "humorous" character of his *Symphonies.* He had the look of a man who had suddenly come across an astonishing illustration in the 1893 edition of *Niva.*

Apart from the anthroposophic chapters with their passages devoted to

the lilac and gold color scheme, *Recollections of Blok* reverberates with the quarrels between Blok and Bely. These quarrels were most likely quite real and could not be reduced to a mere matter of style. Yet, we must make certain concrete reservations. In the good old days a writer would not have washed his dirty linen in public (Lvov-Rogachevsky believes that this is because writers in the old days would never have stooped that low). From the facts available to him, each writer decides for himself which ones he'll use in his novel and which ones he'll forego. For example, Chekhov never published his notebooks during his lifetime, and yet for us they are interesting in and of themselves. Gorky, on the other hand, is publishing his notebooks, while Chekhov's tales now seem rather stale. There is a tale about a peasant and a bear who worked as a team. Splitting their yield fifty-fifty, they agreed that one of them would get the roots, while the other took the green leaves. Well, the cunning peasant outsmarted the bear: When he sowed rye, he offered the bear the roots, and when he sowed turnips, he offered the suspicious bear the green leaves. Literature, too, has its root-lovers as well as its leaves-lovers, and the focus of the literary moment shifts continually from one camp to the next. Nowadays writers are sowing their turnips, as memoir literature; "the raw material of writers' notebooks" is riding high in the public's esteem.

This quarrel between Blok and Bely (apart from certain factors unknown to us that have not been elucidated in this book) is described in these *Recollections* in a way that implies that Bely was always a Dresden tree, while Blok never was. True, Bely, Aleksandr and Lyubov Blok and S. M. Solovyov formed a community that claimed the right to install a "Mama" on the throne of Orthodoxy as a counterpart to the Catholic "Papa" in Rome. The charter of this society, however, was meant as a kind of joke, as a parody. It is also true that Bely considered the wedding of Aleksandr and Lyubov Blok an event of epochal significance, with controversy raging as to whom Lyubov really represented: Some said Beatrice; others said Sophia. Meanwhile, the very formation of this coterie, which Bely views anthroposophically, was a deliberate act of parody.

The sessions of this coterie were repeatedly interrupted by jokes, improvisational skits and pure caricature:

> We could have used the *Golden Carpet* of Apollo: We played the fool as we acted out what we would probably have looked like to the uninitiated. S. M. Solovyov would usually begin the buffoonery. And we would appear in these parodies performed in our presence like a sect of "Blok acolytes," under the searching eye of the conscientious Professor of Culture from the thirteenth century. Given the name of Lapan by Solovyov, this fictitious professor raised the abstruse question of whether a sect such as ours had ever really existed at all.*

*Bely may be playing on po*krov* (root meaning: "to cover"), the Symbolist image for the cover or veil (suggested by J. Hellie). "Appolonov" may refer not only to Apollo but also to the Apollonian hedonistic sect (suggested by J. Winston). The Fink reprint of Bely's works has *nuzhem* for *muzhem.* "Thirteenth" may be typo for "twenty-second." [Trans. note]

And so the philosophical idea existed in this milieu in a form bordering on parody. Blok's retreat from Lapan's commandments, as depicted by Bely, never took place in reality but rather between the covers of these *Recollections.* For the Bely of 1922, Lapan was the fountainhead of truth.

Blok's ironic, playful treatment of mysticism in *The Fair Show Booth* was interpreted by Bely as an act of betrayal. Blok used his raw material much more freely than Bely (that is, until the writing of *The Twelve*). He simply couldn't bear Bely's friends (such as Ellis, for instance), not to mention the whole anthroposophical business itself. Turning away from the book to address the public directly, Bely reproaches fate in tragic tones:

> Later I told Blok: Through anthroposophy I discovered the very thing which had been closed to us during those years. But it was too late. Blok had been singed because he stood before the Gates earlier than anyone else.

Sometime later, Bely said:

> We gave ourselves over to the ray of light. We reached out and grasped the light like children, but the light turned out to be a flame. And we were burned by it. . . . Blok is now asleep forever, while I hobble along like a cripple along a path of redemption that has opened up too late for me.

Bely's habit of using nearly every word as a springboard for the Infinite appears to the contemporary reader to belong to the generation of 1901. It could be read as a new interpretation of swarm, but in the dosages presented here it is intolerable. How many times is it necessary for Bely to mention that "humanity" comes from "humus"?

A far more interesting compositional device is employed by Bely throughout the *Recollections of Blok:* Objects are presented from two points of view, that of Bely and that of Blok. This proves especially effective in the passage in which Bely, after describing his meeting with Blok in great detail, follows it with a hypothetical description of the selfsame scene by Blok.

In addition, the device of an image leitmotiv has experienced a renewal, compositionally speaking, and especially so in the chapters devoted to D. S. Merezhkovsky. It is here that we meet with Merezhkovsky's celebrated "pompom" slippers as well as with Priozhkov (the publisher with whom Merezhkovsky was carrying on negotiations at the time). Pirozhkov is first described, then confirmed, then simply mentioned, and suddenly he has become "an image": "Kind and ever so worldly, Merezhkovsky makes his entrance. You would have thought it was Pirozhkov who has just arrived." The work is far from perfect. Bely keeps looking for "fantastical landscapes heard silently from behind the word." However, it is the memoirs that are most successful, and among them it is the humorous pages bristling with occasional caricature that are most accessible.

I cannot say for sure what relationship "Arbat" bears to *Recollections of Blok.* In appearance a sequel to *Recollections,* this work nevertheless

evinces a totally different tone: It is clearly documentary in its orientation. And yet "Arbat" cannot easily be relegated to the genre of memoirs. It is artistically conceived from beginning to end. Proper names are utilized to create a difficult form. The work seems to have been written in dialect, a dialect with solid motivation behind it. Moreover, written in periods that roll on for two pages at a time, it teems with references to facts that turn into image leitmotivs.

The higher level of the work is presented by interpreting the happenings on Arbat Avenue as a microcosm of the world.

Thus, "the light from Vygodchik" refers to the light in the Vygodchik store. Seeing this light, Bugaev (Bely's original name) utters his first word: "Fire." Yet, "the light from Vygodchik" represents at the same time "light in general," while the proper names on the Arbat are nothing less than a peculiar form of substitution for the image leitmotivs.

Like a race of people divided into those with long heads and those with short heads, the Symbolist movement was split down the middle by an old controversy. Essentially, it involved the following question: Was Symbolism merely an aesthetic method or was it something more?

All of his life, Bely championed the second alternative (i.e., that Symbolism is much more than just art).

This controversy is apparently being laid to rest. We hear little in this latest work by Bely about anthroposophy. Anthroposophy has played itself out after creating a new attitude to the image and after introducing an original two-tiered conception of a literary work.

Poincaré, I believe, once said that mathematicians routinely remove the scaffolding which enables them to build their structures in the first place. Well, Bely has begun to remove his scaffolding. His prose today is not simpler than yesterday's, but its new form is now conceived along thoroughly aesthetic lines. It will take its honored place in the Russian prose of today.

Bely's attempt to live in accordance with the principles of anthroposophy shall forever cast a shadow over his personal life. Yet, it sometimes happens that human culture has need of such misfortunes in the same way that a novel may need to separate its heroes in order to brake the action of its plot.

Chapter 9

Literature without a Plot: Rozanov

1

In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* we come across "A Confession of a Beautiful Soul." The heroine of this work says that there was a time when the beauty of an artist's work would affect her in the same way that the beauty of a book's type affects others: "A beautifully printed book is positively gorgeous, but who reads a book for its type?"

Both the heroine and Goethe knew that anyone who spoke this way understood nothing about art. And yet such an attitude is as characteristic of the majority of contemporary art scholars as slanted eyes are for the Chinese.

This view, already laughed off the musical stage and recognized as provincial in the fine arts, still causes quite a stir in the literary world.

In considering the so-called form of a literary work as a kind of covering which we must penetrate, the contemporary theoretician of literature reminds us of the man who tried to mount a horse but ended up overshooting it.

A literary work is pure form. It is neither thing nor material, but a relationship of materials. And, like every relationship, this one too has little to do with length or width or any other dimension. It's the arithmetic significance of its numerator and denominator (i.e., their relationship) that is important.

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. The history of literature progresses along a broken path. If we were to arrange all of the literary saints canonized since the seventeenth century along one line, we would still fail to produce a single line of descent that might allow us to trace the history of literary form. On the one hand, what Pushkin wrote about Derzhavin [that he "thought in Tartar," not Russian—Trans.] is neither witty nor true. On the other hand, Nekrasov does not take the Pushkin tradition as his point of departure. Among prose writers Tolstoi quite obviously did not take his cue from Turgenev or from Gogol, while Chekhov, most certainly, did not have his origin in Tolstoi. These ruptures in literary history take place for reasons that have nothing to do with chronology.

No, the real point is that the legacy that is passed on from one literary generation to the next moves not from father to son but from uncle to nephew. Let us at first develop this formula. In each literary epoch there exists not one but several literary schools. They exist in literature in a state of simultaneity. However, one of them represents a canonized crest in its evolution, while the other schools coexist without such canonization in a state of obscurity. At the time of Pushkin, for example, the tradition of Derzhavin lived on in the verse of Kyukhelbeker, and similarly, the tradition of Griboedov existed alongside the tradition of Russian vaudeville verse and other such traditions as that of the adventure novel in Bulgarin.

Pushkin's tradition did not survive him. Instead, his example was followed by the disappearance of highly gifted children and geniuses from the literary scene.

At this very same time, however, new literary forms are emerging out of the lower stratum of society to replace the old ones. The old forms, no more consciously felt than grammatical forms are in speech, have lost their artistic character to assume an official status that precludes sensation. The new line of development breaks in on the old and the vaudeville showman Belopyatkin becomes Nekrasov (work of Osip Brik), Tolstoi, a direct descendant of the eighteenth century, creates a new novel (Boris Eikhenbaum), Blok canonizes the themes and the rhythms of the "gypsy song," while Chekhov introduces the alarm clock into Russian literature. Finally, Dostoevsky raises the devices of the cheap novel to the level of a literary norm. Each new literary school is a new revolution, something in the nature of a new class.

Of course, this is only an analogy. The defeated "line" is not annihilated, it does not cease to exist. It is only dethroned, pushed aside from its dominant position on the crest and submerged beneath it. Still, it continues to move forward, always poised for a resurrection as the eternal claimant to the throne. In reality, the matter is made much more complex by the fact that the new ruler does not usually represent a pure restoration of the previous form but rather includes features of other younger schools as well as the features inherited from its predecessor on the throne. But now in an official capacity.

Now let us turn to Vasily Rozanov for more digressions.

In my earlier essay on Rozanov I touched only upon his three latest books: *Solitaria* and the two volumes of *Fallen Leaves* (first and second "bundles").

Intimate to the point of offense, these works naturally reflect the soul of their author. But I shall endeavor to prove that the soul of a literary work is none other than its structure or form. Using my formula to the effect that the "content" (the soul is meant here) of a literary work is equal to the sum of its stylistic devices, permit me to turn to a passage from Rozanov:

> Everyone imagines the soul is a kind of being. But why couldn't it be music? And so they look for its "properties" (the properties of an object). But why couldn't it just have form? . . . (*Fallen Leaves*)

An artifact has a soul that is very much like a form, like the geometric relationship of masses. The choice of material for a work of art is also accomplished along formal lines. This material is chosen for its significant, felt dimensions. Every epoch has its own Index, its own list of themes forbidden because of their obsolescence. For example, Tolstoi imposes his own Index, which forbids him to write about the romantic Caucasus or about the moonlight. Here we meet with a typical banning of Romantic themes. In Chekhov we see something quite different. In his juvenile work entitled "What We Encounter Most Often in Novels and in Tales and so on," Chekhov enumerates stereotypical venues:

> Rich uncle, liberal or conservative depending upon circumstances:
> His exhortations are not quite as useful for the hero as death.
> Auntie is in Tambov.
> A doctor with a worried face offering hope in a crisis often carries a cane with a knob and is also often bald.
> The dachas on the edge of Moscow and the mortgaged estate in the south.

As you can see, a prohibition is imposed on certain typical, everyday "situations." This prohibition is made, not because there is a shortage of doctors to announce that the crisis has passed, but because this situation has become stereotypical.

It is possible to renew a cliché by emphasizing its conventionality. And here success is possible by playing with banality. But such success is unique. Let me illustrate from Heine:

> The rose, the lily, the sun
> all of whom I once loved in love's ecstasy

(There is further a play on rhymes: alleine-eine-kleine-seine-reine = krof'-lyubof', radost'-mladost'.)

But the outlawed themes continue to exist outside the literary canon in the same way that the erotic anecdote exists to this very day or in the way that repressed desires exist in the psyche, revealing themselves unexpectedly in dreams. Domesticity as a theme, the domestic attitude toward things, and the theme of infidelity were never or almost never brought up in "high society" literature. Still, it existed elsewhere, such as in the genre of letters: "I'm kissing you in the children's room behind the screen. You are wearing a grey bonnet—" Tolstoi writes his wife (29 November 1864). In another passage he says:

> And so Seroyosha put his face on the oilcloth and cried "agu?" I shall go and see. You astonished me by saying that you sleep on the floor. But Lyubof' Alexandra said that she too "slept on the floor," and I understood. I like it and then again I don't like it when you imitate her. I would like for you to be essentially as good a person as she is.
>
> Day after tomorrow on the nursery oilcloth floor, I shall embrace you, my slender, prompt, sweet wife. (December 10, 1864)

As time passed, Tolstoi's material and device lost their luster and degenerated into a cliché. Being a genius, Tolstoi had no disciples. And without posting a new list of forbidden themes, his art went out of use. At that moment ensued what happens in marital life when the feeling of distinction between husband and wife is blurred. In the words of Rozanov:

> The cogs rub against each other without engaging. The shaft stops, and the work grinds to a halt, because the machine as a system of reciprocating units has ceased to exist.
>
> This love, which has, of course, died, can never be resurrected. From this it follows that before the midnight hour has tolled, acts of infidelity flare up as in a final attempt to revive love. Nothing so differentiates, estranges lovers as betrayal. The other cog, not yet effaced, comes to life and engages with a cog lying opposite it. (*Fallen Leaves*)

The shifting movements represent just such a betrayal in literature.

It is a well-known fact that the greatest works of literature (I'm speaking here only of prose) do not fit into the framework of a particular genre. It is difficult to determine precisely what *Dead Souls* represents (i.e., what category to classify it under). *War and Peace* and *Tristram Shandy,* in spite of their nearly total lack of a framing story, may be called novels for the very reason that they violate the laws of a novel. The purity of a genre (for example, of the genre of "pseudo-classical tragedy") is understood only in opposition to a genre that has not yet been canonized. But the canonized novel lends itself to self-parody and modification perhaps more than any other genre. In accordance with the canon of the eighteenth-century novel, I would like to permit myself a digression.

Concerning digressions. There is a chapter in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* that is placed by the author after a description of a fight. In it Fielding describes a conversation between himself and an actor. This chapter is announced as being "of no other use in this history, but to divert the reader" (book 3, chap. 10).

Generally speaking, digressions play three roles:

The first role consists of permitting the introduction of new material into the novel. So, for example, the speeches of Don Quixote permit Cervantes to introduce into the novel a variety of critical and philosophical materials.

Of far greater significance is the second role played by digressions, that is, of braking the action, of holding it back. This device is widely used by Sterne. In Sterne's hands this device consists essentially of a plot motif developed by either one of the characters or by the introduction of a new theme (as for example the story of the hero's aunt and her coachman).

Toying with the reader's impatience, the author repeatedly reminds him of the deserted hero. Nonetheless, he does not return to him after the digression, and reminding the reader serves only to renew the reader's expectation.

In a novel involving parallel intrigues, as in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* or in the novels of Dostoevsky, the interruption of one action by another is utilized as material for digression.

Thirdly, digressions in literature also serve the function of creating contrast.

This is what Fielding has to say about it:

> And here we shall of Necessity be led to open a new Vein of Knowledge, which, if it hath been discovered, hath not, to our Remembrance, been wrought on by any antient or modern Writer. This Vein is no other than that of Contrast, which runs through all the Works of the Creation, and may, probably, have a large Share in constituting in us the Idea of all Beauty, as well natural as artificial: For what demonstrates the Beauty and Excellence of any Thing but its Reverse? Thus the Beauty of Day, and that of Summer, is set off by the Horrors of Night and Winter. And, I believe, if it was possible for a Man to have seen only the two former, he would have a very imperfect Idea of their Beauty. (*Tom Jones,* book 5, chap. 1)

I believe that the above passage sufficiently elucidates the third role performed by digressions, that is, the creation of contrasts.

In gathering his book, Heine selected his chapters with great care, changing their order when necessary, in order to create just such a contrast.

2

Let us now return to Rozanov.

The three volumes by Rozanov examined here represent a totally new genre, an extraordinary act of betrayal. Social and topical essays, presented as autonomous fragments, contradict each other at every point. A biography of Rozanov and scenes from his life as well as photographs, etc., have also been included.

These books are not entirely formless, since we see in them a certain constancy in the device used in their formation. For me these books represent a new genre, a genre that resembles, above all, the parodistic novel, that is, with the weakly expressed framing story (the main plot) and without a comic tinge.

Rozanov's work represents a heroic attempt to go beyond the confines of literature, "to speak without words, without form," and the work has turned out splendidly, because it has given birth to a new literature, a new form.

Rozanov introduces culinary themes into literature for the very first time. Such domestic themes had, admittedly, made their appearance earlier: the sight of Lotte cutting bread in *Werther* was for its time a revolutionary phenomenon, just as the name "Tatiana" was in Pushkin's novel. But the family hearth, the quilt, the kitchen and its smells (i.e., aside from satire) had never appeared in literature before.

Rozanov introduces these themes without reservation, for example, in an entire series of fragments:

My kitchen account-book rivals Turgenev's letters to Viardot. This book, of course, is a very different kind of thing, but the axis of the world runs through this book just as much as through Turgenev's, and, basically, it is just as poetical.

What effort and what care has gone into this kitchen ledger! And with what trepidation has the writer made his entries, lest the pen step over the lines! And what a sense of satisfaction when all of the columns tally perfectly.

And here is another passage:

I love tea, and I love to mend a cigarette (where it has been torn). I love my wife and my garden on my dacha. (*Fallen Leaves*)

Or consider, for example, the following passage motivated by nostalgia:

Just the same I shake out the cigarette butts. Not always, but if one half of the cigarette or even less has been left unsmoked, I will shake them. "You have to make use of them, you have to use the leftover tobacco." But I earn twelve thousand rubles a year and so naturally I don't need this. So why do I smoke? Maybe it's my old sloppy way of using my hands (as a child), or maybe it has something to do with my boyhood years. Why do I love my childhood so much? My tormented and disgraced childhood. (While collecting cigarette butts from my ashtray, shaking out the tobacco, and then mixing it with fresh tobacco.) (*Fallen Leaves*, bundle 2)

Among the things created in the new way we witness a new image of the poet: "Licking my lips I stare at the world with goggled eyes. That's me. Isn't that pretty? Oh well, what is one to do?" Or again: "These are golden fish playing in the sun but they are placed in an aquarium filled with slimy dung. And yet I'm not suffocating. This may not seem true to life. And yet it is" (*Solitaria*).

Rozanov introduces new themes. But why? Not because he was a special person, although he was a man of genius and therefore special. With the death of the old forms and in accordance with the dialectical generation of new forms and acquisition of new materials, Rozanov was faced with a vacuum. The artist in him yearned for new themes.

Rozanov found his theme. A whole category of themes, themes of everyday life and of family life. Objects stage periodic uprisings. In Leskov, for example, a "great, powerful, truthful" language emerged, a thoroughly new Russian, the fanciful language of the petty bourgeois and hangers-on. Rozanov's revolt was broader in nature. The objects demanded a halo. Rozanov gave them a halo and glory to boot:

Of course there had never been an example of this before . . . and I think it inconceivable for it to ever recur in the history of the universe. So that at the very instant when tears rolled down my cheeks and my soul was rent asunder, I perceived with the unmistakable ear of a listener that they roll in a literary way, musically. Go ahead and record them, I thought, and so for that reason only I recorded them. (*Solitaria*)

I would like to elaborate on two related passages:

If you give something, but come up short, you feel depressed. Even if it is a gift. (Spoken to the little girl at the railroad station in Kiev, whom I wanted to honor with a gift of a pencil. I waited too long and the little girl and her grandma left.) But the little girl did return and I gave her a pencil, which she had never seen before, as a gift. And I could hardly explain to her that this was in exchange for the "miracle." I felt so good and so did she. (*Solitaria*)

The ventilator in the little corridor whistled tediously, if not crudely. I almost broke down in tears. Yes, I want to go on living just so I can hear it. What really matters is for someone, a friend, to live. And the thought occurred to me: Is it really true that he [a friend] will not be able to hear the ventilator in the next world? And the longing for immortality seized me so violently by my hair that I nearly fell on the floor. (*Solitaria*)

It is the very concreteness of his horror that constitutes Rozanov's literary device.

In order to demonstrate the conscious use of domesticity as a literary device in Rozanov, I shall call your attention to one graphic detail from his books. Surely you remember the family photos inserted in the two volumes of Rozanov's *Fallen Leaves*. These pictures produce a strange, unusual impression on the reader.

If we look closely at these pictures, it will become clear to us why this is so: the photos are printed without any border, unlike the custom in book illustrations of the past. The grey background of the photos extends to the very edge of the page without any inscription above or below the picture. Taken together, all this produces the impression not so much of a book illustration as of a genuine photograph placed in a book. That this reproduction was arrived at consciously is proven by the fact that only certain family photographs have been reproduced by this special means. On the other hand, illustrations of an official character are printed in the usual way with margins.

It is true that the photograph depicting the author's children is printed with margins. However, we find here a curious inscription:

Mama and Tayna (standing on her knees) in the front garden on Pavlov's street in St. Petersburg (Peter's side). Next to them stands little Nesvetevich, a neighbor. Yfemov's house, apartment two.

What is characteristic of this inscription is the precise, documentary nature of the family's address, in the manner of the police. This, too, represents a definite stylistic device.

Under no circumstances should the reader infer from my comments on Rozanov's domesticity that Rozanov was "pouring out" his soul to the reader. No, he had assumed the "confessional mode" as a device.

3

In *The Dark Face, The People of the Moonlight* and in *The Family Question in Russia,* Rozanov came out as a social journalist on the offensive, as an enemy of Christ.

Such were his political views. True, he wrote in one newspaper as a black man and in another newspaper as a red one. But this was done under two different surnames, and each type of article was strong-willed and dynamic and demanded its own special energy. The coexistence of these two types in one soul was known to him alone and represented a purely biographical fact.

In his three latest books, Rozanov has undergone a major change. In fact, he has changed thoroughly from top to bottom.

"Yes" and "No" coexist simultaneously on the same page. A purely biographical fact is raised to a matter of style. Black and red Rozanov(s) create an artistic contrast similar to that of dirty and divine Rozanov(s). His very "prophecy" has changed its tone, has lost its proclamatory character. Now his prophesy has taken on a domestic tone going nowhere:

> My prophecy is not meant for the Russians, and my domestic affairs concern me and no one else. Besides, they are of no significance to anyone, being in fact nothing more than a detail for my biography. December 14, 1911.

From this (its literary character), the "I do not want to" represents an absence of will to action on the part of Rozanov. The physical dimensions have become part of his artistic material, good and evil have become the numerator and denominator of a fraction, and the value of this fraction is zero.

I would like to offer a number of examples from *Fallen Leaves* to illustrate this "I do not want to" of Rozanov:

> I have no interest in self-realization. I feel an absence of any and all external energy, of the "will to live." I am the least self-realizing person in the world.
>
> Do I want to play a role? Not in the slightest.
>
> Do I want my teachings to be widely disseminated? No. It would provoke a great deal of agitation, and I love peace and quiet so much . . . and sunset and the silent evening chimes.
>
> I could fill the world with crimson puffs of smoke . . . but I don't want to. [*People of the Moonlight—if you insist!*] March 22nd, 1912. And everything would go up in flames . . . but I do not want to. May my grave be peaceful and away from everybody else's. (*People of the Moonlight,* same date)

There was one thing he felt like doing, one thing he never doubted in all of this, and that was to "record it"!

> Every movement of my soul is accompanied by an *utterance.* And every utterance I want to unfailingly *record.* That is an instinct. Is it not just such an instinct that literature sprang from?

All of these "I do not want to"s are written in a special book, in a book placing itself on an equal footing with the Holy Scriptures. I would like to call attention to the fact that the alphabetical index to *Solitaria* and *Fallen Leaves* (both volumes) is compiled in the manner of the *Symphony,* an anthology of passages from the Old and New Testaments arranged in alphabetical order:

> *Ab*raham was called forth by God, but I myself called forth God. (*Solitaria,* p. 129)
> *And* I could not shake the petty shopkeeper from my soul. (*Fallen Leaves,* p. 40)
> *Au*tonomy of the university. (*Fallen Leaves,* bundle 1, pp. 240 ff.)

I have taken pains to show that these three books of Rozanov constitute a literary work. I have also indicated the nature of one of its predominant themes (i.e., the theme of the everyday world, of ordinary life, the hymn to private life). This theme is not used in its pure form, but rather it is utilized to create contrasts.

The great Rozanov, dashing off his holy scripture like a firebrand enveloped by flames, also loves to smoke a cigarette after a bath and to write a chapter on the theme of "One Ruble, Fifty Kopeks." Here we enter into the domain of a complex literary device.

"Just look, she delights in sorrow, being so elegantly naked," writes Anna Akhmatova. In this passage it is important to note the contradiction between the words "delights" and "sorrow" and again "elegantly" and "naked" (not elegantly dressed but elegantly naked).

In Mayakovsky, we find whole works constructed on this device, as for example, "The Four, Heavy as a Blow." Here are a few fragments:

> If I were poor as a billionaire
> If I were as little as the great ocean.

This device is known as an oxymoron. We may attribute to it a broader range of meaning.

The title of one of Dostoevsky's tales, "The Honest Thief," is undoubtedly an oxymoron, but the *content* of this tale is also an oxymoron as it is *deployed in the plot.*

In this way we arrive at an understanding of the oxymoron in the plot. Aristotle says (though I'm not quoting him as Holy Writ):

> But the poet should seek a plot which involves the sufferings that arise among family or friends, for example, when a brother kills a brother or a son a father, or when a mother kills a son or a son a mother, or when he intends to kill, or does something else of that along these lines.

The oxymoronic character of this passage lies in the paradoxical opposition of kinship and enmity.

Many plots are constructed on the basis of an oxymoron, for example: the tailor kills the giant, David kills Goliath, a frog kills an elephant. The plot in these cases plays the role of justifying, motivating and developing the oxymoron.

This role of "justifying life" appears also in Dostoevsky. I have in mind Marmeladov's prophecy concerning the drunkards at the strange trial.

The creative work and peaceful words spoken by Rozanov against the background of "One Ruble, Fifty Kopeks" and his opinion on how to shut the damper represent one of the most beautiful examples of an oxymoron.

This effect is augmented by yet another device. In this case, contrasts are achieved not only by a change of theme but also by *an incongruity between a thought or experience and the place which serves as its background.* There are two fundamental ways of creating a literary landscape: a landscape that is attuned to the action of the plot or a landscape that conflicts with it.

Examples of landscapes in harmony with the plot are legion among the Romantics. A good example of a conflicting landscape may be found in the description of nature in "Valerik" by Lermontov or in the description of the sky above Austerlitz by Tolstoi. Gogol's landscape (in his later works) represents a somewhat different phenomenon: Plyushkin's garden doesn't conflict directly with Plyushkin himself. Rather it enters as an element into the lyrical and lofty aspect of the work, and this entire lyrical aspect serves as a counterpoint to the "satirical" aspect of the work. Besides, Gogol's landscapes are "phonetic," that is, they serve as a motivation for phonetic structures.

Rozanov's "landscape" belongs to the second, conflicting type. I'm speaking of those notes located at the end of his entries, where Rozanov informs us of their place of composition.

Some of these passages were written in a bathroom. Thoughts of prostitutes would come into his head as he walked behind Suvorin's coffin, the article on Gogol was thought out in the garden experiencing stomach pains, while many other entries were either "written" in a coach, or else were ascribed by Rozanov to such a time.

This is what Rozanov himself has to say about this matter:

> The place and circumstances concerning the newly given thought are indicated everywhere with absolute precision in order to refute the fundamental idea of sensualism that *nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerat in sensu* ["there is nothing in the intellect that was not first known through the senses"]. On the contrary, I have observed in my life that what takes place in the intellect is in stark, complete contrast with what is experienced through the senses. Furthermore, I have observed in general that the mind and the flow of sensations do naturally collide, repel, and work against each other. Although they coincide and flow parallel to each other at times, this happens only occasionally. As a matter of fact, the life of the mind has its own channel, its own independent channel, and chiefly, it has its own source, its own impetus unique to itself.
>
> And where does this impetus come from?
>
> From God and from birth.
>
> The discrepancy between the inner and outer life is known of course to everyone, but, in the final analysis, I have felt this discrepancy from my earliest years (thirteen-fourteen) with such force (and distressingly, and insofar as my "work" and "career" are concerned, so utterly harmful and destructive) that I remained in a state of perpetual astonishment in the face of this phenomenon (the extent of this phenomenon). And being in the habit, at that point in my life, of writing down pretty much everything that "struck and astonished me," as well as everything that I liked or didn't like, I proceeded to record this one, too.
>
> Have made no changes whatsoever concerning the time or circumstances of these recordings that might have gone against the "nature of things."
>
> So much for the intellectual view of the matter. These recordings of time and place, however, also have a moral motivation behind them. Of this, later.

All of this commentary is printed in *Fallen Leaves after* the list of errata. Here we see a device commonly used by Rozanov: the placing of material in an unusual place.

What interests me here is Rozanov's view of the possible contradiction between the place of action and the action itself. His instructions regarding the authenticity of place are less interesting, because it was he who made the decision concerning indications of locality in the first place (not all fragments have been thus documented; rather, only the majority). The mere affirmation of the documentary character of something, already used by Abbé Prévost in *Manon Lescaut,* is another device frequently used by Rozanov. It is given its most popular form in the following comment: "If I had written a novel, then the hero would have done this and that, but since I'm not writing a novel . . ." and the novel moves forward. I suggest a comparison with Mayakovsky:

> It is impossible to say in verse
> Whether we can lick the fiery pans
> with the well-groomed tongue of a poet.

And so on and so on.

Generally speaking, when an author suggests that he is abandoning literature, he is actually introducing a motivation for a new literary device.

4

Now I shall endeavor briefly to delineate the plot schemata of Rozanov's *Solitaria* and of the two volumes of *Fallen Leaves.*

Several themes are presented. Of these the most important are: (1) the theme of "the friend" (concerning his wife), (2) the theme of cosmic sex, (3) the theme of the opposition newspaper and of the revolution, (4) a literary theme with articles on Gogol, (5) biography, (6) positivism, (7) Judaism, and (8) a major introductory episode containing letters and other things.

Such a wealth of themes is not unique. We know of novels with quadruple and even quintuple intrigues. The mere device of breaking up a plot into a

number of interweaving themes had been used as early as the eighteenth century by Sterne.

Of the three books, *Solitaria* represents a perfection entirely unto itself.

The introduction of new themes is carried out as follows: A fragment of a given situation is presented without any explanation whatsoever. We do not understand what is going on before our eyes. Then follows its unfolding, as if we were watching the solution to a riddle. The theme of "the friend" (concerning Rozanov's wife) is very characteristic of this procedure. At first mentioned only in passing, it is subsequently woven into the heart of the work by nuances of various sorts. A human being emerges before us piece by familiar piece, but only much later do these fragments coalesce to bring forth a coherent biography of Rozanov's wife. This biography may be reconstructed by copying out all of the notes concerning her in the theme of "the wife." The unsuccessful diagnosis by Bekhterev also appears first as a simple reference to the surname "Karpinsky":

> Why didn't I call Karpinsky.
> Why didn't I call Karpinsky.
> Why didn't I call Karpinsky. . .

Only later are we given an explanation for this in the story of the neurological diagnosis that failed to take into account the "reflex of the pupils." So also with "Byzov." First we're given his surname; then his image is fully developed. By resorting to this device, Rozanov introduces a theme not out of a vacuum, as in a collection of aphorisms, but by a gradual preparation or build-up, and the character or his situation *runs like a thread through the entire plot.*

These interweaving themes constitute those threads that, appearing and then disappearing, create the warp and woof of this literary work. In developing the second part of *Don Quixote,* Cervantes uses the names of people mentioned in the first part, for example, Ricote the Moor, a neighbor of Sancho.

We observe in certain themes a curious accumulation of fragments. For example, in the literature theme there is, in addition to some fragments, a fully developed essay on Gogol. And so at the end of the second part all of Rozanov's juxtaposed allusions are concentrated in one full entry. It is written in journalese and set against the book's cosmic finale concerning the universal breast.

In general, the fragments in Rozanov follow each other in accordance with the principle of juxtaposition (i.e., playing off one theme against another, setting off one plane against another). More specifically, this means that everyday existence alternates with the theme of the cosmic. Thus, for example, the theme of the "wife" alternates with the theme of Apis.

We thus see that the three books of Rozanov represent a certain compositional unity of the novelistic type, but without the connecting part played by motivations. Let me offer an example. Novelists frequently introduce poems into their works, as, for instance, in Cervantes, in *A Thousand and One Nights,* in Ann Radcliffe and occasionally in Gorky. These poems represent specific material that bears a certain relationship to the prose of the work. In order to introduce them into the text, different kinds of motivation are employed: they are either epigraphs, or else they are the creations of the leading or secondary protagonists of the novel. The first one lays bare the device, while the second one represents a plot motivation. In essence, however, it is one and the same device.

We know, for example, that Pushkin's "The Upas Tree" and "There once lived a wretched knight" could have served as epigraphs to individual chapters of Dostoevsky's *Idiot.* When we encounter these poems in the body of the work, we find them recited by characters of the novel. In one of Mark Twain's novels we discover epigraphs taken from the sayings of the leading character of the work, *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar.* So too in Vladimir Solovyov's *Three Conversations,* where it is stressed that the epigraph on Pan-Mongolism was written by the author himself (as brought out in a certain gentleman's answer to a question posed by a certain lady).

In precisely the same way, the genealogical relationships among the characters of the novel, often poorly established and utterly capricious (see Werther's patrimony or Mignon's family ties in *Wilhelm Meister*), are merely a motivation for the construction of the novel, for the device of its compositional juxtaposition. At times, what is to be motivated is established only with great difficulty, such as a dream. And at times it is established humorously. The dream motivation is typical for Remizov. In Hoffmann's *Kater Murr* the plot-shifts and the entanglement of the parodistic story of the cat with the story of the man are motivated by the fact that the cat pissed on its master's papers.

Solitaria and *Fallen Leaves* may be called novels without motivations.

And so, what is characteristic of them, thematically, is the canonization of new themes, while, compositionally, they are characterized by a laying bare of the device.

5

Let us consider the sources for these new themes in Rozanov and new tone. On the first level, as I have already said, we find the genre of letters. This relationship is emphasized by Rozanov himself in his individual instructions:

> Instead of nonsense in the form of tales it would be better to discard from the journal this latest form of fiction and instead . . . Well, it would be better to publish some *deed or cause:* a work of science, deliberations (of some society) or philosophy. However, it is often better to reproduce a suitcase of old letters in individual books. Tsvetkov and Gershenzon would have found them good fishing. And a reader, at least a few serious people, would have read it deeply and thoughtfully. (*Fallen Leaves*)

Rozanov did in fact make an attempt at introducing letters "in the raw" into literature by publishing the letters of his schoolmates in the second part. They represent the most impressive section in the book and go on for forty pages.

The second source for the themes is the newspaper, and, in spite of Rozanov's convention of intimacy, we come across newspaper articles quoted in their entirety. His very approach to politics is journalistic. These little feuilletons feature the typical feuilleton device of expanding an individual fact into a fact of universal significance. This expansion is presented by the author in its completed form.

But the chief feature attesting to Rozanov's dependence on newspaper style is the fact that half of his book is taken up with social journalistic material.

Perhaps the very abruptness of transition in Rozanov, the lack of motivation for the relationship of the parts, occurred first as a result of newspaper technique and only later was appreciated for its stylistic possibilities. Apart from the canonization of the newspaper as such, it is interesting to observe in Rozanov a strong awareness of himself as a successor to a younger generation of Russian writers.

If Leskov's genealogy has its source in Dal and Veltman, then Rozanov's genealogy is even more complex.

First of all, he makes a complete break with the official tradition of Russian social journalism and spurns the legacy of the 1870s. And yet, at the same time, Rozanov is a deeply literary man. In his three books he mentions one hundred and twenty-three writers. Still, the fact remains that he is constantly drawn to younger, lesser-known writers, to Rtsy, to Shperk, to Gavarukhe-Otrok. He even says that fame interests him mainly because it gives him the opportunity to bring fame to these obscure writers:

> How vast is my literary activity in comparison with Rtsy and Shperk! How many books indeed have I not already published!
>
> But no laudatory reviews in the press, no words of praise in the newspapers have ever given me the kind of quiet, good sense of pride as friendship has (and I felt it) of these three men (and from Shperk I received love).
>
> But how fickle is the destiny of literature: Why are they so unknown, rejected, forgotten? Having a premonition of his fate, Shperk used to say: "So have you read (apparently) Gruber? No? I would desperately love to find something by him. *I am in general drawn* to writers who are obscure, who have remained unnoticed. What sort of people were they? And you're overjoyed when you encounter in them an unusual idea ahead of its time." How simple and deep and true this is.

There is no doubt about Rozanov's relationship with this younger offshoot of writers. The very title of his book *Fallen Leaves* recalls Rtsy's *The Falling of the Leaves.*

Rozanov was the Pushkin of this movement, but, instead of coming before them, he came after them (Pushkin, too, in the opinion of Stasov and Rozanov, followed rather than preceded his school):

> Pushkin's connection with the literature that succeeded him was in general problematic. There is one little-noticed feature in Pushkin, and that is that by the nature of his spirit his face was turned to the past and not to the future. The great harmony of his soul and precocious intellect, which had already shown its clarity in his earliest works, came from the fact that he essentially represented the culmination in himself of a gigantic intellectual and spiritual movement beginning with Peter the Great and ending with himself...

In his splendid *Notes on Pushkin* Strakhov demonstrates by an analysis of the great poet's style that, for the most part, no "new forms" make their appearance in Pushkin. He attributes this to Pushkin's modesty and "humility," to his refusal to seek originality in matters of form.

Pushkin built anew. There was as yet no need to overthrow a canon, since there was as yet no canon strong enough to be overthrown. This is proven by the literature dominant in Russia in his time and in the generation immediately before him.

The same holds true for Sterne. No one understood the English novelist's way of complicating the plot structure nor the way he playfully undermined it. Karamzin "imitated" Sterne by writing works whose structure was simple, indeed downright infantile. *Sterne was appreciated in Russia only thematically,* while Germany saw a strong affinity between his principles of composition and its own Romantic movement; that is, it discovered that its new Romantic literature, however independent, "rhymed" with Sterne's achievement.

Rozanov became the canonizer of the younger school of writers at a time when the older school was still mighty. In short he represents an uprising.

It is worth noting that not all the features of this older art, which had been playing a pitiful, uncanonized role before Rosanov, were raised by him to artistic prominence. Rozanov borrowed from everywhere, even from the argot of thieves:

> I have not disturbed Your Excellency, Sir, precisely because I wanted to catch them red-handed. I really like this folklore. I believe there is something artistic in the language of thieves and policemen.

Rozanov is rapturous over jargon like "brandlyas." Finally, he introduces the theme of the detective novel, speaking lovingly and in great detail about the Pinkertons. On the basis of this material he builds the themes of "The People of the Moonlight" and *Fallen Leaves:*

> There are terribly interesting and lovely details. In one little book the matter concerns "the first thief of Italy." The author evidently brought his manuscript to the publisher. But the publisher, finding that *The King of Thieves* was not sufficiently enticing and fascinating for purposes of sale, crossed it out and wrote over it his publisher's title *The Queen of Thieves.* And so I read and read in anticipation, wondering when the *Queen* would make her appearance in *The Queen of Thieves.* Nowhere in the book is there any mention of her. The only thing we have is a reference to a "gentleman thief."

Here the publisher's trick is taken for an artistic detail.

There are many comments concerning Sherlock Holmes, especially in the second volume:

> My children, it is harmful for you to read Sherlock Holmes. And, removing the bundle clandestinely, I set about to greedily devour Sherlock Holmes myself. Each volume comes in forty-eight little pages. Now the Syversky–Petersburg Express is flying past like a dream. Still, I can't help feeling that I am sinning as I read these tales of the great sleuth till three or four in the morning. Horrifying stories!

As you can see, the theme here too is first named without being developed. It is developed in the second volume, where whole episodes are presented conceptually. There is an episode in the first part of *Fallen Leaves* that is very characteristic of Rozanov: here Sherlock Holmes is not so much presented as adumbrated. The whole meaning of this device lies in the heightening of the material and in the enstrangement of the marriage question.

For instance, consider the following passage:

> "Wicked, envious witch, that keeps lovers apart. You horrible witch! And you dare to bless marriage?"
>
> . . . a domestic story in Sherlock Holmes's "The Blue Tattoo" and "In the Subterranean Vein." A bride is under obligation to return to the hooligan who had cut her husband's throat, taken possession of his documents and abandoned her for America. By a stroke of ill luck, this hooligan also bears a striking resemblance to his victim. In accordance with Church law, the ruffian is forced to give up the bottle, while the aristocratic lady reluctantly becomes his wife.*

It is not the ideas that are important here but the device. Every man sees things differently.

But not all of the material has undergone, as I have already said, a transformation. Part of it has remained unprocessed. There are elements in Rozanov's works which echo the sentimental verses of Nadson, a decadent poet of an earlier generation. These elements do not lend themselves well to modification. Such, for example, are the following half-verses:

> Silent, dark nights,
> The fear of a crime,
> The anguish of loneliness
> The tears of despair, fear and the sweat of work.
> It is you, oh Religion . . .
> Who are a help to the hunchbacked, help to the weary,
> The faith of the sick man.
> These are your roots, oh Religion,
> Eternal, miraculous.

Or

*These stories are not by Arthur Conan Doyle but are pastiches of uncertain origin. Cf p. 98, note. [Trans. note]

> Dim little star, pale little star
> You burn before my eyes continually alone
> You are ill and you tremble,
> Soon you will turn into darkness utterly forever.

Here's an example from prose:

> What do you like?
> I like my nocturnal dreams, I love to whisper to the facing wind.

These themes, no less than the composition, are felt as banal. Evidently the time of their resurrection has not yet come. They are not yet "bad" enough to become good. We are dealing here with a continual change in perspective, with the presentation of things anew, against the backdrop of new material and a new setting. Rozanov's images are organized in precisely the same way.

6

The image-trope represents an unusual way of naming an object, that is, naming it with an unusual name. The purpose of this device is to place the object in a new semantic category, a category of concepts of a different order (e.g., a star is an eye or a woman is a grey duck). Thus, the image is expanded by a description of the object under comparison.

We may compare the image with a syncretistic epithet (i.e., an epithet defining, for instance, sound concepts by means of auditory concepts and vice versa—for example, the mellow chime, the brilliant sounds). This device is often found in the works of the Romantics.

Auditory sensations are mixed up with visual ones. Yet I do not think that there is any real confusion here. What we have instead is a device that places an object in a new category by expelling it from an old one. It is interesting to examine Rozanov's imagery from this point of view. Here, for example, is what he has to say concerning this phenomenon. Rozanov's brief comment follows Shperk's analysis:

> Children are distinguished from us by the fact that they perceive everything with a kind of powerful realism which is inaccessible to adults. For us "chair" is a piece of "furniture" but a child knows nothing of the category "furniture," and "chair" is such a huge and living object for him as it cannot be for us. From this it follows that children delight in the world infinitely more than we do.

Much the same can be said for the writer who violates the category by withdrawing the "chair" from the "furniture."

Chapter 10

Essay and Anecdote

Greece has not left us a theory of the novel, although it has left us both novels and novelistic schemata, part of which is still alive to this very day. Still, little respect was paid to this genre. Although in existence for centuries before, the novel was deemed outside the scope of theory.

The same was true of Russian literature, where the only theory of the novel available, perhaps, was to be found in the translator's preface. The novel and tale were long considered to be a genre outside the scope of theory.

This is the position in which plotless prose finds itself today. Its specific gravity today and its historic significance are very great. Nearly the entire work of the Encyclopedists, of Russian social journalism, of the essay and of a whole array of works by the so-called Russian belletrists lies outside the scope of the plotted genre.

Nevertheless, even without a genealogy, this genre exists. True, quantitatively speaking, the purely aesthetic part predominates over its novelistic part. Still, this genre calls for new discoveries.

A plot is a picklock, not a key. Plot schemata conform closely to the social reality that they put into shape. The plot distorts the material by the very fact that it selects it, and on the basis of rather arbitrary criteria. This is especially noticeable in the history of Greek literature, whose themes focus on the conflicts obtaining in a specific number of families. The formal causes for this focus were already pointed out by Aristotle. The anecdotes which we shall now relate concerning our contemporaries have their origins in the depths of the ages.

When Count von Rantzau died, *Izvestiya* recalled one of his successful repartees. Someone had apparently alleged that his family had descended from an illegitimate line of the Bourbons. Parrying this charge, he replied simply that it was his father, and not his mother, who had carried on a friendly liaison with the Bourbons (i.e., implying that his accusers are, in actual fact, his illegitimate relatives). This schema repeats with precision the elegant conversation which the immortal George, the English Milord, had carried on at the home of "Elizabeth's mother."

The anecdotes that friends tell each other are of a similarly honorable origin. The anecdotes recorded by Pushkin came out later under the title of "Ukrainian Anecdotes," while the famous anecdote about the Jew who had

obligated himself to teach the elephant how to speak—hoping that either the elephant will die, or the shah will die, or the Jew himself will die—was told, according to Bolotov, by Catherine the Great, who, however, did without the Jew.

A plot schema with a resolution is a rare thing in anecdotes. This is an accidental affliction of the material itself, which connects with the schema only at one point. Such a resolution is as rare as goldfish with transparent tails and telescopic eyes.

Sometimes a historic fact has nothing whatsoever to substantiate it and immediately becomes an anecdote. There is, for example, the story by Leo Tolstoi called "What For?" concerning the Pole who fled from Siberia in a coffin, in which the bones of his children allegedly were found. Connoisseurs of Tolstoi point to Maksimov's *Siberia and Forced Labor* as the source of that story. As a matter of fact on page 356 of that book you will find an account of that story indicating the surname of the woman who was the subject of this story, Migurskaya. There is also a reference to the fact that the story is told in greater detail by Dal in his story "The Fantastic in the Real and the Real in the Fantastic."

Such stories do exist in the complete works of Dal. The incident concerning the Pole is printed in the second volume (it was published beforehand in *Patriotic Notes* in 1846). You will find it on page 94. The schema for this anecdote is exactly the same as in Tolstoi (i.e., the couple is betrayed by the cossack). The hero has no surname and the entire conversation ends in the following way: "So you are saying that you witnessed that incident . . ." This is remarkable not only because this incident is strange, but also because it involves someone else's speculation. Who has read the little book by Kotzebue, *The Most Remarkable Year of My Life?* Kotzebue tells all this in the form of speculation as to how his wife should cart him back with her.

If you look in Kotzebue's little book, you will find this entire story in it, but in the form of speculation, in the guise of a dream of flight:

> I wanted to build a wooden partition in my big room and to set up a makeshift wardrobe in the corner behind it. I then wanted to live quietly and contentedly with my wife. After about two months of this apparent tranquility, I was to gradually feign illness and, at long last, madness. This too would have lasted several months. And I wanted one dark evening to put on my sheepskin coat and hat on the shore of Tubla, by an icehole, and then silently to steal away home and hide in the wardrobe which would be open at the top. My wife would raise the alarm. They would look for me. They would find my coat. Obviously he has drowned in an icehole, they would say. The letter I would leave behind would confirm this fact. My wife would be in despair. She would lie awake in bed by day and feed me at night. This incident would be reported to Tabalsk and from there to Petersburg. Once there, this report would be laid aside and they would forget about me. After a certain period of time my wife would recover a bit and ask for travel expenses for passage to Liflyandia, which could not be refused her. She would then buy a big rolling *kibitka* wagon in which a

man could lie at leisure. And it's really true. This is the only vehicle which could accommodate this daring exploit.

This story by Kotzebue, which makes no mention of a coffin, has not yet been played out. When we consider certain details, though, such as the flight that takes place precisely in the winter, the sheepskin coat by the icehole and so forth, we realize that what we have before us is not the working over by the writer (Tolstoi) of extra-literary fact but rather the adapting of a literary invention (by Kotzebue, for instance) to a certain locality using a different surname, the recording of this legend and the renewal of its literary life.

This case is very typical. Even if we take into account the register of criminal acts, we see that the same incidents are worked over continually by writers. For example, I know of an anecdote from the eighteenth century concerning a jeweler who was brought to a psychiatrist. This anecdote makes the psychiatrist the customer and the jeweler the patient who rants and raves constantly about diamonds. Because it shapes and selects, the plot plays a deformational role. Similarly, in order to create a type, it is also necessary to assign existing facts to a specific hero in a different context. And again we deform these facts.

At the present time the inertia associated with the plot has been brought to light with special force while the deformation of the material has reached new extremes. Our notion of the class struggle takes the atypical form of a struggle within the bosom of a family, although, generally speaking, the family is more often than not homogeneous in our literature.

The schema of "Two Brothers," motivated by "White and Red" instead of "Good and Evil," perpetuates the rather worn-out anecdote about Cain.

But we simply cannot repudiate the plot, including the story line based on the circular pattern of the hero's fate. The hero plays the role of a godson in a photograph or as chips of wood floating on the river current. That is, he vastly simplifies the mechanism for focusing attention. In cinematography, for example, the feature movie plot uses its material more intensively than the documentary movie. Of course, we could also say in reverse that plot squeezes out material.

The question arises today: What should replace the role of plot in prose? A fundamental change would be brought about by shifting the point of narration, either spatially, as in the case of journeys, or temporally, as in the case of memoirs. There is in our literature, however, a pure interest in material and in the conventional method of moving from fact to fact.

Of course, we must stipulate that even memoirs have been subject to the powerful deformational influence of the devices of art. The beginning of Balaktovsky's memoirs shows more than a trace of *Gil Blas,* while Vinsky's memoirs with his direct reference to Shandyism show, of course, the influence of Sterne. The influence of the English writer on Zhikharev's memoirs is very great.

The contemporary feuilleton represents an attempt to integrate the material not by means of the hero but by means of the narrator. This is a form of denovelization of the material. The feuilletonist does this by transferring his work to a different plane, that is, not by manipulating his plot, but rather by comparing big things with little things, by locating the point of intersection between them in a certain word or by relating a certain incident that has happened in the West and comparing it with a similar incident here.

The feuilletonist does in his work what ought to be done by every ideal editor. Of course, not only by an ideal editor but also by a real one. When we say that the novel will be squeezed out by the newspaper, we are not speaking of individual articles in the newspaper as such. No, we mean the newspaper as a genre, so to speak. The journal represents a certain literary form already in evidence in the early days of English journalism, when the editor's authorship was clearly felt.

Today's journal has lost its literary form and this is especially true of the "thick" journals. An organic personality can, however, be felt in a newspaper, provided it is not overburdened with material of an informational nature. A newspaper such as the *Red Gazette* (during its first period of existence) can definitely be appreciated as literary form. In addition, the general orientation of a newspaper is to be found not only *in* its articles but also *between* them.

It is easier nowadays for a writer of documentary prose to work with excerpts than with whole works.

The essayist of today, unfortunately, has a habit of simply coloring his material in the manner of fiction (i.e., he includes a description of the color of the sky). Yet, this is done in a useless fashion, all the more so when we consider that this color is applied from memory without any real scientific understanding of what clouds are and what they designate. But the good essayist has his standard of comparison. So Goncharov describes the exotic against the touching though feebly expressed background of Nature and the everyday life of ordinary Russians. This discovery of a fundamental point of view that drives the material forward, enabling the reader to reassemble it once again, is a far more organic device for the essayist to use than comparisons that rarely hit the mark.

The development of a literature of fact should not attempt to emulate high literature but rather to part company with it. One of its chief conditions should include a struggle with the traditional anecdote, which carries in its own nucleus all of the virtues and all of the vices of the old aesthetic method.

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