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Theory of Prose



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Chapter 1

Art as Device

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And Richard Avenarius writes:

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

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

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

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

For that reason we have to consider the question of energy expenditure and economy in poetry, not by analogy with prose, but on its own terms. If we examine the general laws of perception, we see that as it becomes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So also in the third act:

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

Or in the fourth act:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The bear agreed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To this device of enstrangement belong also constructions such as "the pestle and the mortar" or "the devil and the infernal regions" (*Decameron*). Concerning enstrangement in the form of psychological parallelism, see my next chapter on plot formation. Here let me say only, what is important in psychological parallelism is for each of the parallel structures to retain its independence in spite of obvious affinities.

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

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

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

stil nuovo," the language of Daniel, with its dark style and difficult forms, still nuovo," the language of Daniel, with its dark style and difficult forms, *presupposing difficulties in pronunciation*. Yakubinsky has demonstrated in his article the law of difficulty for the phonetics of poetic language, particularly in the repetition of identical sounds. In this way, therefore, the language of poetry may be said to be a difficult, "laborious," impeding language. In certain isolated cases, the language of poetry approaches the language of prose, but this does not violate the principle of "difficulty." Pushkin writes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

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

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

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

Why does the recognition scene in the plays of Menander, Plautus and Terence take place in the last act, when the spectators have already had a presentiment by then of the blood relationship binding the antagonists, and when the author himself often notifies us of it in advance in the prologue? Why is it that in dance a partner requests "the pleasure of the next dance" even after the woman had already tacitly accepted it?

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

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

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

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

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