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The Prison-House of Language

A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism

BY FREDRIC JAMESON

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II

The Formalist Projection

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Preface

THE HISTORY OF thought is the history of its models. Classical mechanics, the organism, natural selection, the atomic nucleus or electronic field, the computer: such are some of the objects or systems which, first used to organize our understanding of the natural world, have then been called upon to illuminate human reality.

The lifetime of any given model knows a fairly predictable rhythm. Initially, the new concept releases quantities of new energies, permits hosts of new perceptions and discoveries, causes a whole dimension of new problems to come into view, which result in turn in a volume of new work and research. Throughout this initial stage the model itself remains stable, for the most part serving as a medium through which a new view of the universe may be obtained and catalogued.

In the declining years of the model's history, a proportionately greater amount of time has to be spent in readjusting the model itself, in bringing it back into line with its object of study. Now research tends to become theoretical rather than practical, and to turn back upon its own presuppositions (the structure of the model itself), finding itself vexed by the false problems and dilemmas into which the inadequacy of the model seems increasingly to lead it. One thinks, for example, of the ether or of collective consciousness.

At length the model is exchanged for a new one. This momentous event has been described by some of the thinkers with whom this book is concerned as a kind of *mutation* (itself an excellent example of the metaphoric applica-

THE UNIQUE claim of the Russian Formalists is their stubborn attachment to the intrinsically literary, their stubborn refusal to be diverted from the "literary fact" to some other form of theorization. Thus, whatever the ultimate value of their systematic thinking, literary criticism cannot but start where they started, and the most consequent Marxist attacks on them, such as those of Trotsky and Bukharin never denied this initial methodological validity.[1]

The Formalists began, as did Saussurean linguistics, with the isolation of the intrinsic itself, with the disentanglement of their specific object of study from those of the other disciplines, with a systematic examination of what Jakobson called *literaturnost* (literariness), the distinguishing element of literature itself. This procedure is already dialectical in that it does not foresee any particular type of content dictated in advance, but rather seeks empirically to identify whatever specific dominant elements the individual work of art proposes, a process of identification which can be successfully completed only in correlation with the other elements of the work and indeed of the period itself. Such a definition of the central elements of the work is therefore a relational or functional one, and depends fully as much on an awareness of what the element is not, of what has been omitted from the work in question, as of what the element is. Thus the object of study of the Formalists may be plot or image-structure, but it may also be the epigraphic habit

[1] See Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York, 1957), p. 180: "The methods of formal analysis are necessary but insufficient." Except for names and titles already in print, Russian words have throughout been transliterated according to the Library of Congress system without diacritical marks.

of the nineteenth-century novelists, or the name scheme of their characters: whatever starting point happens to meet the eye, to foreground itself, to push itself forward insistently into the field of perception. In this way the method begins by warning against itself and against its own too mechanical application.

As with Saussurean linguistics also, the first moves of the Russian Formalists had to be negative, and were aimed at disentangling the literary system from other extrinsic systems. These attacks and polemics can be sorted out into three general categories: (1) those on the idea of literature as the bearer of a philosophical message or of philosophical content; (2) those which attempt to analyze literature genetically, or, as we would now say, diachronically (biographically, through a study of sources, etc.), as in Alexander Veselovsky's attempt to show the origins of various motifs of the folk-tale in religious rituals and primitive beliefs, wherein the work is dissolved into heterogeneous elements analyzed from a non-literary point of view[2]; and, finally, (3) in the polemic against what is perhaps the most "literary" of these positions, the tendency to resolve the literary work into a single technique or a single psychological impulse—here the Formalists have in mind a formula

[2] See Eichenbaum, "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" in *Literatura (Teoria, Kritika, Polemika)* (Leningrad, 1927), p. 129, or in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1965), p. 117: "Veselovsky explained epic repetition as a mechanism for the original performance (as embryonic song). But an explanation of the genetics of such a phenomenon, even if true, does not clarify that phenomenon as a fact of literature. Veselovsky and other members of the ethnographic school used to explain the peculiar motifs and plots of the *skaz* by relating literature and custom; Shklovsky did not object to making the relationship but challenged it only as an explanation of the peculiarities of the *skaz*—he challenged it as an explanation of a specifically literary fact. The study of literary genetics can clarify only the origin of a device, nothing more."

like that of Belinsky, for whom poetry is "thinking in images."

(In a narrow sense this third target is part of an attack by the Formalists on the preceding generation, dominated by Symbolism. But in a broader way it is directed against all undialectical literary research, all literary analysis which as naively as pre-Socratic philosophy seeks to isolate some ultimate and changeless element beneath the multiplicity of literary appearance: some ultimate essence of literature, whether irony or metaphor, paradox or peripety, tension, *Erhabenheit*, "high seriousness," or whatever.)

The American New Critics share only the first two of these three polemic aims. Since they have so often been compared with the Formalists, it is perhaps well to recall some basic differences. Clearly enough the two movements reflect a more general historical shift in the literary and philosophical climate with the passing of the nineteenth century. This shift, often described as a reaction against Positivism, varies according to the composition of the national and cultural situation in which it takes place, and according to the character of the dominant ideology against which the younger writers rebel.

Thus, while both the American and the Russian critical movements are contemporaneous with a great modernistic literature, although both arise in part as an attempt to do theoretical justice to that literature, the Formalists found themselves to be contemporaries of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, revolutionaries both in art and in politics, whereas the most influential literary contemporaries of the American New Critics were called T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. This is to say that the familiar split between avant-garde art and left-wing politics was not a universal but merely a local, Anglo-American phenomenon.

Yet even this is itself but the reflection of a more profound historical and cultural divergence between the two movements. The New Critics, following mentors like Irving Babbitt and Charles Maurras, explicitly repudiated English Romanticism and its radical tradition and returned for their models to Metaphysical and Cavalier poetry. The Formalists, however, merely attacked the utilitarian and social tradition of the criticism of Pushkin and his generation, reserving the latter as a privileged object for their own characteristic type of literary analysis and reevaluation. Thus the Formalists are rather inclined to reclaim for their own purposes, rather than to renounce, this great formative period in Russian literature, one characterized by political as well as literary upheavals, in which most of the great writers were in sympathy with the abortive Decembrist revolt, "that famous pause in Russian history on the square in front of the Petersburg Senate."[3]

Such sympathy has formal consequences for literary criticism as well: the privileged narrative models available to the New Critics were the Elizabethan verse drama and Dante's *Commedia.* For them, therefore, the specific problems of narration are blurred and mingled with more properly verbal or poetic problems: what is analyzed is the moment in which a character comes to poetic speech, or in which in Dante a situation or a destiny is suddenly fulfilled and crystallized in a single verse. Pushkin, however, is the inventor both of modern Russian poetry and of modern Russian story-telling, not just of verse and of its transposition to a poetic art prose of some kind, but of two wholly different literary modes, each of which follows its own intrinsic formal laws. The example of Pushkin is therefore ever present to the Formal-

[3] Yury Tynyanov, *Death and Diplomacy in Persia* (London, 1938), p. 224.

ists as a double lesson: that verse and prose narration follow rigorously different laws, but that in another sense these laws, that of poetic language or syntax, and that of prose narration or plot, may be thought of as forming parallel and analogous, although wholly dissimilar, systems. At any rate, in all these ways, in their attitudes toward history, in their attitudes towards literary history, and in their attitudes towards that internal literary diachrony which is narration and plot, the Formalists may be seen to have a far more positive and dialectical attitude than the American New Critics.

Not that the Russian Formalists can be thought of as having a single position, a single literary doctrine; yet their work was a collective one, and possesses a unity of development in time. "The *Opojaz* [Society for the Investigation of Poetic Language]," Tomashevsky tells us, "never was a regularly constituted group with a list of members, a meeting place, laws. Yet during the most productive years it had an appearance of organization in the form of a kind of committee of which Viktor Shklovsky was president, Boris Eichenbaum his aide-de-camp, and Yury Tynyanov the secretary."[4] Like other literary schools, the German Romantics or the Surrealists, the Opajaz seems to have developed a doctrine of *Geselligkeit* to justify its own collective unity. Shklovsky himself has much in common with the directors of other literary movements in analogous moments of fusion and formation, with Pound, with Friedrich Schlegel, with Breton: a union of seminal ideas, intellectual impudence, and a fragmentary artistic performance which results in the canonization of the fragment as a genre, whether explicitly in Schlegel and in the Surrealists' discontinuous view of

[4] Boris Tomashevsky, "La Nouvelle école d'histoire littéraire en Russie," *Revue des études slaves,* Vol. VIII (1928), p. 227, n. 1.

lived experience; or implicitly in the ideogrammatic practice of the *Cantos*, and in Shklovsky's single-sentence paragraphs and deliberate interpolation of heterogeneous anecdotes and materials. At the same time, the idea of the Opajaz or the Formalist group of critics, is itself a narrow and misleading one, inasmuch as Shklovsky also worked closely with Mayakovsky and later on with Eisenstein, and was, along with other Formalists, closely associated with the novelists of the "Serapion Brothers group," whose literary practice reflects Formalist ideas. Thus an ultimate evaluation of Formalism as a concrete literary phenomenon will bring it much closer to genuinely creative movements such as German Romanticism or Surrealism than to a purely critical doctrine like that of the American New Criticism.

Shklovsky's own doctrine is both the starting point for Russian Formalism and the source of its own internal contradictions. We will see how a coherent literary theory was impossible without Shklovsky's initial contribution, and at the same time ultimately workable only at the price of eliminating the distinctive marks left on it by Shklovsky's personality.

1

1. The initial task of the theory is the isolation of the specifically literary fact itself. The title of Shklovsky's most important book, *The Theory of Prose*, serves as a manifesto: a theory of poetry already having been developed, the intention is to break new ground, to apply what has been discovered about poetry to a hitherto unexplored domain, namely the short story and the novel itself. The theory of poetry had been based on an absolute separation of poetic language from the language of everyday communication, a distinction already formulated by Mallarmé in a characteristic economic figure:

"Un désir indéniable à mon temps est de séparer comme en vue d'attributions différentes le double état de la parole, brut ou immédiat ici, là essentiel.

"Narrer, enseigner, même décrire, cela va et encore qu'à chacun suffirait peut-être pour échanger la pensée humaine, de prendre ou de mettre dans la main d'autrui en silence une pièce de monnaie, l'emploi élémentaire du discours dessert l'universel *reportage* dont, la littérature exceptée, participe tout entre les genres d'écrits contemporains."[5]

The Formalists began by demonstrating that in many ways poetic speech stood to everyday language as a type of dialect, governed by its own peculiar laws, indeed often even pronounced differently (as in the sounding of the mute *e*'s, the aspiration of the initial *h*'s at the *Comédie française*). The deeper implication is that poetry is not merely a specialized part of everyday language, but constitutes a total linguistic system in its own right.

In Anglo-American criticism the model used for the separation of literary from ordinary language is based on a presupposition as to the nature of rationality, and turns on the distinction between cognitive (or referential) and emotional speech. The endless and rather futile debates on the relative value of art and science are therefore already implicit in this starting point, which gives science the edge by the very force of its terminology.

With the downgrading of epistemology, however, the dis-

[5] Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 368. Such a separation, however, apparently only isolates poetics from linguistics by distinguishing the object of the former from the object of the latter. In reality, it is precisely this initial starting point, which, making of poetic speech a determinate type of linguistic utterance in its own right (rather than a decoration, a primitive stage of language, or whatever), reintegrates the study of poetic speech into linguistics itself. The work of Roman Jakobson is the most striking proof of such a unity (see below pp. 202-203).

tinction between rational and irrational, cognitive and emotional modes, no longer seems as absolute as it once did. Phenomenology, and the existential thought that comes out of phenomenology, discards the distinction as an artificial separation, and takes its starting point precisely in the notion of the act of consciousness, in terms of which both emotions and ideas are modes of being-in-the-world. Indeed, the bias of existentialism may be said to be rather towards emotion and feeling (Heidegger's *Stimmung*) as concrete experiences and away from the abstraction of pure knowledge.

Thus where an older epistemological philosophy tended under its own momentum to imply the primacy of knowledge, and to relegate other modes of consciousness to the level of emotion, magic, and the irrational, the inherent tendency of phenomenological thought is to reunite them under the larger unity of being-in-the-world (Heidegger) or of perception (Merleau-Ponty). It is in this kind of philosophical atmosphere that the Formalist ideas of language must be understood.

2. A poetic language which is a dialect is one which attracts attention to itself, and such attention results in renewed perception of the very material quality of language itself. The new model in terms of which the Formalists will develop their theory is therefore based on the opposition between habituation and perception, between mechanical and thoughtless performance and a sudden awareness of the very textures and surfaces of the world and of language. Such an opposition, which goes beyond the conventional one of action and contemplation, of the practical and the perceptual, clearly shifts the burden of proof from literature as a concrete mode of being-in-the-world to the abstractions of the sciences.

Shklovsky's famous definition of art as a defamiliarization,

a making strange (*ostranenie*) of objects, a renewal of perception, takes the form of a psychological law with profound ethical implications. The passage from Tolstoy's journals which Shklovsky quotes in illustration is as close as he ever comes to taking an actual metaphysical or ethical position: "I was cleaning a room and, meandering about, approached the divan and couldn't remember whether or not I had dusted it. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I could not remember and felt that it was impossible to remember—so that if I had dusted it and forgot —that is, had acted unconsciously, then it was the same as if I had not. If some conscious person had been watching, then the fact could be established. If, however, no one was looking, or looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been."[6] Art is in this context a way of restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct (*automatization*, as the Czech Formalists will later call it), and allowing us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror.

Yet such purely psychological laws as are here implied are not really of the same kind as those of Potebnya (art as metaphor, metaphor as a conservation of energies) which the Formalists attacked; the latter have a content, while the new psychological mechanism with which Shklovsky replaces them only circumscribes a form. The new concept of *ostranenie* is not intended to imply anything about the nature of the perceptions which have grown habitual, the perceptions to be renewed. Its peculiar usefulness for criticism lies in the way it describes a process valid for all literature

[6] Quoted by Shklovsky in "Art as Technique" (*Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*), p. 12.

without in any way implying the primacy of one particular literary element (such as metaphor) or one particular genre over the others.

Ostranenie as a purely formal concept has three signal advantages, which go far towards explaining the paradoxical richness of Shklovsky's own practical criticism, essentially little more than an endless set of variations on this one idea. First, as we have seen, defamiliarization serves as a way of distinguishing literature, the purely literary system, from whatever other verbal modes there are. It thus serves as the enabling act which permits literary theory to come into being in the first place.

Yet at the same time it permits the establishment of a hierarchy within the literary work itself. Inasmuch as the ultimate purpose of the work of art is now given in advance —namely the renewal of perception, the seeing of the world suddenly in a new light, in a new and unforeseen way—the elements and techniques or devices (*priyomy*) of the work are now all ordered towards this end. The subsidiary devices turn out in Shklovsky's terminology to be the motivation of those essential devices which permit renewed perception in the first place. Thus in Tolstoy's *Kholstomer*, a great many aspects of social life are suddenly seen as somehow brutal and unnatural, and this essential unfamiliarity of the habitual is then motivated by the point of view of the story, which is observed, not through human eyes, but through those of a horse.

Finally, the notion of *ostranenie* has yet a third theoretical advantage in that it permits a new concept of literary history: not that of some profound continuity of tradition characteristic of idealistic history, but one of history as a series of abrupt discontinuities, of ruptures with the past, where each new literary present is seen as a break with the dominant artistic canons of the generation immediately preceding. It is a model of artistic history not unlike that proposed by Malraux in the *Voices of Silence*, except that where Malraux's theory is formulated in terms of the psychology of creation and the need for each successive generation to react against its own masters, the Formalists saw this perpetual change, this artistic permanent revolution, as being inherent in the nature of artistic form itself, which, once striking and fresh, grows stale and must be replaced by the new in unforeseen and unforeseeable manners.

At the same time, the Formalist model is more complicated than this hypothesis of perpetual change, and involves a complex system of mutations and readjustments not unlike Jakobson's model of diachronic linguistics. Literary evolution is not only a break with the dominant and existing canons; it is the canonization of something new at the same time, or rather the lifting to literary dignity of forms until then thought to be popular or undignified, minor forms until then current only in the demi-monde of entertainment or of journalism (think of the manner in which the detective story became the novel of Robbe-Grillet). To use a favorite image of Shklovsky, it is an eccentric movement, like the move of the knight in a chess game. "In the liquidation of one literary school by another," he says in a famous sentence, "the inheritance is passed down, not from father to son, but from uncle to nephew."[7]

Thus, from the basic notion of *ostranenie* an entire literary theory comes into being, first by the isolation of the

[7] Viktor Shklovsky, *O teorii prozy* (Moscow, 1929), p. 227 (or *Theorie der Prosa*, trans. G. Drohla [Frankfort, 1966], p. 164). Compare Shklovsky's *Sentimental Journey* (trans. Richard Sheldon [Ithaca, New York, 1970]), p. 233:

"New forms in art are created by the canonization of peripheral forms.

"Pushkin stems from the peripheral genre of the album, the novel from horror stories, Nekrasov from the vaudeville, Blok from the gypsy ballad, Mayakovsky from humorous poetry."

purely literary system itself; second by a model of the various relationships obtaining in that synchronic system; and, finally, as we have just seen, by a return to diachrony in the analysis of the kind of change which obtains from one synchronic state to another. Let us now evaluate these results, particularly as they bear on the question of time and history.

2

1. It is only fair to point out that the idea of art as a renewal of perception is not unique with the Formalists, but can be found in one version or another everywhere in modern art and modern aesthetics and is at one with the primacy of the new itself. Thus Proust, comparing the letters of Madame de Sévigné with the techniques of his impressionist painter Elstir, describes her style as follows:

"It was at Balbec that I realized how she makes us see objects the same way he does, following the order of our perceptions rather than explaining them first through their causes. But even that afternoon in the train, as I reread the letter about moonlight: 'I could resist the temptation no longer, I put on all my bonnets and veils, unnecessary as they are, I pace that mall, whose air is as sweet as in my own room; I find a thousand phantoms, black and white monks, nuns, several of them, grey and white, linen scattered here and there upon the ground, shrouded men leaning against the trees, etc.' I was enchanted by what a little later I would have called (for does not she depict her landscapes in the same way he does his characters?) the Dostoyevskian side of Madame de Sévigné's *Letters*."[8]

The implication that the abstract understanding (an explanation through cause-and-effect) is a kind of poor substitute for perception, that there is a kind of interference between a purely intellectual knowledge of a thing and some genuine, spontaneous, visionary experience of it, is of course basic to the whole construction of Proust's novel. It is at the same time part of a general feeling in the modern world that life has become abstract, that reason and theoretical knowledge have come to separate us from a genuine existential contact with things and the world. This is true not only in literature but also in criticism: thus Proust resembles the Formalists in the above passage not only in what he says, but in his manner of saying it. It is already a defamiliarization to compare Madame de Sévigné with Dostoyevsky; the very shock has the effect of making us see her style in a new and utterly unforeseen light, as though for the first time.

2. Yet when we examine the objects perceived, we find that on the whole they tend to fall into two general groups. Thus Swift, motivating his device by the abbreviated size of Gulliver among the Brobdingnags, has his character make the following observations: "I must confess no Object ever disgusted me so much as the Sight of her monstrous Breast, which I cannot tell what to compare with, so as to give the curious Reader an Idea of its Bulk, Shape and Color. It stood prominent six Foot, and could not be less than sixteen in Circumference. The Nipple was about the Bigness of my Head, and the Hue both of that and the Dug so varified with Spots, Pimples and Freckles, that nothing could appear more nauseous: For I had a near Sight of her, she sitting down the more conveniently to give Suck, and I standing on the Table. This made me reflect upon the fair Skins of our *English* Ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own Size, and their Defects not to be seen but through a magnifying Glass, where

[8] Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris, 1954, 3 vols.), Vol. I, pp. 653-654.

we find by Experiment that the smoothest and whitest Skins look rough and coarse, and ill coloured."[9] Such a perception is basically a way of relating to nature itself, and may be said, in its loathing and horror before the natural, to constitute a relatively metaphysical vision, in what it forces us to notice about the very bodily conditions of human life itself.

During the same period, however, and particularly in France, analogous literary techniques of defamiliarization are being put to rather different political and social ends. We recall the Persians who visit the court of Louis XIV in the declining years of the latter's reign in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, seeing its more grotesque and improbable aspects from the outside, without preconceptions. In the same way the various visitors from outer space or from the untouched forests of the new world in Voltaire's *contes philosophiques* prove to be more than adequate media for perceiving and enregistering the structural peculiarities of European life. The following passage from La Bruyère, however, somewhat earlier chronologically, may stand as the most striking example of such defamiliarization: "One sees certain ferocious animals, male and female, scattered over the countryside, black, livid, and burned by the sun, bound to the soil which they dig and turn over with unconquerable stubbornness; they have a sort of articulate voice, and when they stand up they exhibit a human face, and in fact they are men. They retire at night into dens, where they live on black bread, water, and roots; they spare other men the toil of sowing, tilling, and harvesting in order to live, and thus deserve not to be without the bread

[9] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (in *Selected Prose Works* [London, 1949]), pp. 189-190. A useful historical survey of the techniques of defamiliarization (the author calls it "negative allegory") may be found in Dmitry Ciżevsky, "Comenius' Labyrinth of the World," *Harvard Slavic Studies*, Vol. 1 (1953), esp. pp. 117-127.

which they have sown."[10] This horrifying text, one of the first explicit descriptions of the peasantry in modern French literature, no longer directs our attention to the natural and metaphysical conditions of human life, but rather to its unjustifiable social structure, which we have come to take for granted as something natural and eternal, and which therefore cries out for defamiliarization. This application of the techniques of *ostranenie* to the phenomena of social life is contemporary with the dawn of historical consciousness in general.

No doubt these two forms, the metaphysical vision and the social critique, are not as mutually exclusive as we have made out; very often, as in such a recent and striking example of the technique as Sartre's *Nausea*, they are interrelated, and we find examples of both.[11] Yet it is clear that each tendency moves to absorb the other to its own profit. Thus, in this early novel, the force of Sartre's critique of bourgeois society is blunted by his preponderantly metaphysical and apolitical vision of the absurdity of all human life. It is however equally clear that neither mode is ultimately reconcilable as a description with Shklovsky's concept of literature; for either implies the primacy of a certain type of content, either metaphysical or social. For Shklovsky, the latter is merely a pretext for the renewal of vision in any way possible: thus Swift's misanthropy is merely the "motivation" of his concrete technical effects on

[10] Quoted in Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (trans. Willard Trask [Princeton, New Jersey, 1968]), p. 366.

[11] Metaphysical: "I forgot it was a root. Words had vanished, and with them the meanings of things and their uses, all those feeble pointers that men had traced upon their surface. I was sitting hunched up, all alone with this knotty black utterly raw mass which frightened me" (*La Nausée* [Paris, 1962], p. 179). Social: "In the churches, by candle light, a man standing in front of kneeling women drinks wine" (*La Nausée*, pp. 63-64). For examples from Sartre's other works, see my *Sartre: the Origins of a Style* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1961).

a sentence-by-sentence basis; so is the social irony of Voltaire and Montesquieu; so is Sartre's ontology. The priorities are reversed; everything—personality, social consciousness, philosophy—exists to permit the coming into being of the literary work itself.

There is, however, yet another way to pose the problem; and it is particularly instructive to compare the theory of Shklovsky with that of Bertolt Brecht which bears the same name: the theory of the so-called "estrangement-effect" (where the German *Verfremdung* literally means estrangement, like Shklovsky's Russian equivalent). The originality of Brecht's theory was to have cut across the opposition between the social and the metaphysical in a new way, and to throw it into a completely different perspective. For Brecht the primary distinction is not between things and human reality, not between nature and manufactured products or social institutions, but rather between the static and the dynamic, between that which is perceived as changeless, eternal, having no history, and that which is perceived as altering in time and as being essentially historical in character. The effect of habituation is to make us believe in the eternity of the present, to strengthen us in the feeling that the things and events among which we live are somehow "natural," which is to say permanent. The purpose of the Brechtian estrangement-effect is therefore a political one in the most thoroughgoing sense of the word; it is, as Brecht insisted over and over, to make you aware that the objects and institutions you thought to be natural were really only historical: the result of change, they themselves henceforth become in their turn changeable. (The spirit of Marx, the influence of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, is clear.) At the same time, this genuinely historical vision returns even upon the metaphysical perceptions themselves, until then seemingly permanent, lending them also the value of an effect rather than a cause.

Thus, in this context, the passage of Swift quoted above would result from the social deformation of sexual desire and reflect its social character in the preference for fair skin, and so forth.

Shklovsky's doctrine itself, by seeing literary change as a uniform mechanism the same at all times and all places, no doubt keeps faith with the existential situation of literary production (for at any given point, there is really only one change that counts), but at the same time ends up turning diachrony into mere appearance and undermining any genuine historical awareness of the changing of forms. Yet, as we have seen, it is not hard to restore genuine history to Shklovsky's model if we turn our attention from the history of works to the history of perception itself, if we try to account for the specific types and determinate modes of mystification or of perceptual numbness which the individual work of art is an attempt to dispel.

3

1. The problem has yet another dimension, which involves what we may call internal, rather than external, diachrony. Alongside the question of the meaningful succession in time of the various concrete historical examples of defamiliarization in literature, there is the problem of the relationship, within a single work of art, of the defamiliarization technique to the movement and change of events and objects in time. Thus the opposition between poetry and prose reappears as a distinction between the making strange of a single simultaneous image and the treatment of a series of events, or in short of plot or narration itself.

It would seem that for Shklovsky the two processes are different only in their scope and not in their essential mechanisms. Both—the perception of an object and the percep-

tion of an action—involve a kind of lingering in time, a kind of handling and slow turning about on all sides: "Why does Ovid, who made an *Art of Love* out of love itself, advise us to take our pleasure in leisurely fashion? The path of art is a tortuous path, on which your feet feel each stone, a path that winds back and forth. Word goes together with word, one word rubs against the other like a cheek against another's cheek. Words are separated from words, and instead of a single complex, an automatically pronounced expression that shoots out like a chocolate bar from a dispenser, there comes into being a word as sound, a word which is purely articulated movement. Ballet similarly is movement which you feel, or better still, a movement so constructed that you have to feel it as such."[12]

Thus the techniques for plot defamiliarization and those of lyric are analogous, as macrocosm to microcosm. Better still, in an implied metaphor with language and with the sentence, one which will become explicit with the Structuralists, the basic way of seeing any object anew is "to place the object in a new semantic row, in a row of concepts which belong to another category."[13] This can be done by leaving off the name and merely describing the object in its empirical inertia; or by rendering it from some unusual angle, from over a great distance; or microscopically as in the passage from Swift quoted above; in slow motion, as with many of the gestures or indeed with the basic action itself in *Tristram Shandy*; by juxtaposing the object with a different object which causes hitherto unnoticed properties of the first to stand out sharply (Pound's ideograms); by tampering with conventional expectations of cause-and-effect (as in Sartre's analysis of fantastic literature); and so forth.

[12] *O teorii prozy*, pp. 24-25 (*Theorie der Prosa*, pp. 28-29).
[13] *O teorii prozy*, p. 245 (*Theorie der Prosa*, pp. 184-185).

Most, but not all, of these techniques can be transferred to narrative plot (the fable or *sujet*), where the principal categories of defamiliarization turn out to be retardation, composition by steps (i.e., decomposition of the action into episodes), double-plotting (including the interpolation of heterogeneous anecdotes and stories), and, finally, the "baring of the device" (the deliberate attracting of the reader's attention to the basic techniques of narration itself, a category in a somewhat different class from the previous ones, which we will consider by itself in the next section).

I hesitate to point out the degree to which these categories or techniques lose their strangeness when reformulated in cinematographic terms, where they are abundantly familiar as montage, cross-cutting, and so forth. There is for one thing something self-defeating in the attempt to recast a theory of defamiliarization in older, more habitual terminology; for another, it is just as likely that Eisenstein, from whom these concepts derive, was influenced in his theoretical speculations by Viktor Shklovsky, long a collaborator of his, rather than the other way around. What is mainly significant about the parallel with the movies as a narrative form is that it implies a preexisting separation between form and content. The "fable" of the movie is given in advance, either someone's idea, the book to be adapted, or indeed the footage already shot. Then it is edited, selected out, put together in the appropriate sequence. We will see shortly whether this initial internal separation implied by the very idea of a "technique" does not ultimately limit what Shklovsky can do with narration in general.

The problem is not unlike the one raised in connection with Saussurean linguistics. We have seen that Shklovsky can deal adequately with the basic literary unity in terms of something like the sign in language. For him, this is that moment in which a habitual perception is suddenly re-

newed, and we see a thing freshly in a kind of perceptual tension with our older mode of thinking about it, experiencing both identity and difference at the same instant. Yet after the problem of the sign comes the problem of syntax, and the question is hardly a specious one, particularly if we recall Lukács' notion that narration is our basic way of coming to terms with time itself and with concrete history.

2. The problem of plot is thus not solved by the above enumeration of techniques or devices. There remains the second and more difficult question of their organization, the ultimate question, in short, of the totality of the work: "What is necessary in order for a story to strike us as *complete*?"[14] To put it another way, one of the basic requirements for any theory of plot must be that it contain some means of distinguishing that which is not plot, that which is incomplete, that which does not work. An adequate definition must function negatively as well as positively, just as the theory of generative grammar is required to reject nonsentences as well as to produce genuine ones.

In this context Shklovsky's attention to non-stories, such as the unfinished anecdotes in Le Sage's *Diable boiteux*, is revealing, for it allows us to try out different versions of the same anecdotal material, to feel which versions sound complete and which fall flat. Thus, for instance, the addition of a final atmospheric landscape picture to Gogol's *Ivan Ivanovich & Ivan Nikiforovich* completes what might otherwise have seemed as pointless as an anecdote in Lesage. Indeed, it seems to me that it is at this price that such concepts as that of qualitative progression, developed by Kenneth Burke or Yvor Winters,[15] cease to be mere classificatory concepts or moral judgments and win genuine structural value.

[14] *O teorii prozy*, p. 63 (*Theorie der Prosa*, p. 63).

[15] See Kenneth Burke, "Lexicon Rhetoricae," in *Counterstatement* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 123-183, and Yvor Winters, "The Experimental School in American Poetry," in *In Defense of Reason* (New York, 1947), pp. 30-74.

Yet if the various devices of defamiliarization resembled the relationship of words to expected or unexpected contexts, if narrative sequence is in general something like a sentence, it would be more accurate to say that for Shklovsky the completed narrative, the story that works and has a point, is analogous to word play. For the tying up or unravelling of the knot is like the coincidence of two verbal series in the pun. It is like popular etymology in reverse, and Shklovsky shows how a good many primitive stories originate as a form of popular etymology (how such-and-such got its name, and so forth). Deceitful prophecies or oracles ("if Croesus attacks the Persians, a mighty empire will fall!") have a similar function in their unexpected resolutions, which strike the mind as a combination of two heterogeneous series; many fairy tales are also constructed along these lines (the unexpected solving of a riddle, performing of an unperformable task). On the most abstract level one may define such plot-resolution as an appearance of multiplicity (involving at least two semantic rows) suddenly and unexpectedly reunited back into unity: the word "unexpected," however, which may seem to be the operative one, is in reality already given in advance within the definition, for we must first be convinced of the initial resistance, the initial multiplicity, and at that point any prestidigitation which brings unity out of it will perforce be unexpected by us.

The resolution need not, however, be completely spelled out: "A special form is that of the story with the 'negative ending.' Yet first I'd like to explain this term. In the words *stola, stolu*, the vowels *a* and *u* constitute the endings and the root *stol-* the stem. In the nominative singular the word *stol* has no ending, yet in comparison with other forms of

the declension we perceive this absence of an ending as the sign of a case: we can call it a 'negative form' (a term of Fortunatov) or in Baudouin de Courtenay's terminology a 'zero degree.' We find these negative forms very often in the short story, particularly in those of Maupassant. For example: a mother visits her illegitimate son, who has been brought up in the country. He has become a loutish peasant. In despair, she runs off and falls in the river. The son, not knowing who she is, poles the river and fishes the body out. The story ends at that point. Unconsciously the reader perceives the story against the background of the traditional story that does have an 'ending.' Moreover (but this is more an opinion than a thesis) the French novel of manners at the time of Flaubert very often uses the technique of the uncompleted action (as in *L'Éducation sentimentale*)."[16]

3. It is as an analysis of plot that we may examine one of the richest Formalist investigations, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* of Vladimir Propp. Propp's initial stimulus is not unlike Shklovsky's in that he reacts against the treatment of isolated content in folk-tales, in particular against the Aarne system of the classification of motifs,[17] in which tales are separated according to whether their principal characters are animals, ogres, magical figures, humorous figures, and so forth. He does not have much trouble showing that a given story may be the same whether the figure in question is a wolf, a dragon, a witch, an ogre, or even an object of some kind.

Thus Propp establishes a distinction between horizontal and vertical which is a little like the Saussurean categories of the syntagmatic and the associative on the one hand, and

[16] *O teorii prozy*, pp. 73-74 (*Theorie der Prosa*, pp. 68-69).

[17] See, for a description of the Aarne classification, Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York, 1967), pp. 413-427.

the Shklovskian distinction between the basic device (the actual defamiliarization) and the motivation on the other. The story line is considered as a series of abstract functions; the form taken by the various functions—the shape and identity of a given character or a landscape, or the nature of the obstacles—is unessential and derives its content from the cultural and historical context. It is like the concept of motivation insofar as the character of Baba Yaga would be an adequate justification for malignancy in the eyes of a Russian audience, where listeners from another culture would more adequately understand a dragon, a troll, or whatever.

Let us look more closely at Propp's basic story line, this long winding molecule of episodes which reminds one of a twelve-tone row, or, to anticipate Structuralist tendencies, some complex code patterned into the brain cells themselves. The basic tale begins with either injury to a victim, or the lack of some important object. Thus, at the very beginning, the end result is given: it will consist in the retribution for the injury or the acquisition of the thing lacked. The hero, if he is not himself personally involved, is sent for, at which point two key events take place.

He meets the donor (a toad, a hag, a bearded old man, etc.), who after testing him for the appropriate reaction (for some courtesy, for instance) supplies him with a magical agent (ring, horse, cloak, lion) which enables him to pass victoriously through his ordeal.

Then, of course, he meets the villain, engaging him in the decisive combat. Yet, paradoxically enough, this episode, which would seem to be the central one, is not irreplaceable. There is an alternate track, in which the hero finds himself before a series of tasks or labors which, with the help of his agent, he is ultimately able to solve properly.

Propp underscores the mutually exclusive character of these two sequences: either a villain or a series of tasks, but not both at once.[18]

The latter part of the tale is little more than a series of retarding devices: the pursuit of the hero on his way home, the possible intrusion of a false hero, the unmasking of the latter, with the ultimate transfiguration, marriage and/or coronation of the hero himself. Propp's own research ends with the establishment of this basic chain of episodes, which is to that degree an empirical discovery, and has the force of an existing fact.[19] I think, however, that given a formal point of view, which aims at determining how a particular story is felt to be complete, it will not be difficult to draw a few more general conclusions.

No doubt, as we have pointed out, the ending of the story is already implicit in its beginning (injury → retribution, lack → acquisition), so that it would seem to be enough for the story to proceed to its own ending and then stop. This abstract schema is, however, not that of the story or anecdote, but of the wish-fulfillment. It is enough to reflect on the pointlessness, the almost ungeneralizable individuality, of the wish-fulfillment as something told or communicated to realize that as such it can only be a non-story; that, although the structure of the wish may be a necessary precondition for the coming into being of a story, it is not a sufficient one.

At this point, we may recall Arthur Danto's definition of historical narration, as any form of "causal" explanation of how a given state of affairs *A* turned into a given state of

[18] Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* (Austin, Texas, 1968), pp. 101-102 and 108-109.

[19] Hence Propp's comment on Shklovsky's proposition that the "tale is collected and laid out according to laws still unknown." "This law," he observes with finality, "has been determined." (*Morphology of the Folk Tale*, p. 116, n. 6.)

affairs *B*. The type of causal explanation used is important only in the sorting out of the various types or genres of history: theodicy, chronicle, ethical history, economic history, history as the deeds of great men, and so forth. The center of gravity of the narrated events lies not in the fact of the change, but in the explanation of the change, in the middle term which modulates from one state to the other (and Danto explicitly assimilates this to the dialectical process).[20] In this light it becomes clear what is lacking in the abstract schema of the folk-tale which we have given: the donor. The donor is therefore the element which explains the change described in the story, that which supplies a sufficiently asymmetrical force to make it interesting to tell, and which is therefore somehow responsible for the "storiness" of the story in the first place. Thus, the satisfaction and the completeness of the tale comes not from the fact that the hero manages to rescue the princess in the end, but rather from the means or agent given him to do so (a bird who tells him the right word to say to the witch, a magic cloak that lifts him to the tower, and so forth). This is to say something a little more than that what interests us in a story is the how rather than the what: what Propp's discovery implies is that every How (the magical agent) always conceals a Who (the donor), that somewhere hidden in the very structure of the story itself stands the human figure of a mediator, even in those more sophisticated forms in which he is concealed beneath more rational motivation.

We may restate the necessity for the existence of a donor in yet another way by pointing out the fact that in the beginning the hero is never strong enough to conquer by himself. He suffers from some initial lack of being: either he is simply not strong enough or not courageous enough, or

[20] Arthur C. Danto, *The Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, England, 1965), pp. 236-237.

else he is too naive and simple-minded to know what to do with his strength. The donor is the complement, the reverse, of this basic ontological weakness.

So it is that in the folk-tale, in the hero's story, an Other is implied, but not quite where we expected to find it: not in the form of the princess, for she can be replaced with a ruby or a feast or any other desirable object (and indeed she is basically herself little more than a desirable object, a combination of sensual beauty and the possibility of wealth and power); not in the form of the villain either, for reasons we will examine shortly. The basic interpersonal and dramatic relationship of the narrative tale is therefore neither the head-on direct one of love nor that of hatred and conflict, but rather this lateral relationship of the hero to the ex-centric figure of the donor.[21]

When we come now to the problem of the villain, it seems to me that the solution is given in that equivalence and mutual exclusion of the two systems which Propp stresses without interpreting it: the implication being that we are dealing with two modes of a single phenomenon, two faces of the same basic situation, which can take the form either of malignant threats and injury from a conscious agency or of a series of difficult and perplexing tasks. Interpersonal competition or work: Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* has, I think, given us the clue to this equivalence, which reflects the primary reality of a world of scarcity, a world in which not only can I not fulfill my own basic needs without work, but in which my very existence is a threat

[21] René Girard's hypothesis (in *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* [Paris, 1961], trans. *Desire, Deceit, and the Novel* [Baltimore, Maryland, 1965]) that in modern society desires are not natural but learned, that the story the novel tells is the learning of desire from some mediator or third party, can be reformulated in terms of the donor and of his ontological support of the hero as it is here described.

to the existence of others as well.[22] There is a basic Manichaeism of the world of scarcity, and it is scarcity which causes the Other to appear before me as a primal enemy. This alternance and indeed equivalence of back-breaking labor and of intense distrust and hostility to the stranger or the Other in general is what the narrative sequences of the fairy tale reflect. It is worth recalling in this context Ernst Bloch's idea that where myths reflect the warriors and the priesthood, the fairy tales are the narrative expressions of the poorer classes.[23] (Clearly, in more sophisticated art products more complicated combinations are possible. Thus, in the medieval romance, the alternate sequences of a set of tasks and of the struggle with the Other are united in the institution of the tournament.)

4. What I have tried to show is that the empirical discovery of a given set of functions cannot constitute an adequate explanation of the folk-tale as form, as completed narrative.[24] Just as we have shown how the syntagmatic dimension, in Saussure, the horizontal sequence of functions in the sentence, tended to be reabsorbed into the associative or synchronic dimension, in which a sentence was understood as just one manifestation of the countless other possible manifestations of a given syntactical formation or unit, so here also it would seem that there can be no genuine law of the story or of the folk-tale unless the diachronic sequence of narrated events, the syntax of narration, is somehow transposed into a synchronic structure. This is what the rather Hegelian analysis we have given of Propp

[22] See my *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1971), esp. pp. 233ff.

[23] See "Zerstörung, Rettung des Mythos durch Licht," in *Verfremdungen*, Vol. I (Frankfurt, 1963).

[24] This is essentially the critique of Lévi-Strauss in "La Structure et la Forme," *Cahiers de l'Institut de science économique appliquée*, No. 99 (March, 1960).

aims at doing—reducing the individual events to various manifestations of some basic idea, such as that of otherness, or of work, and ultimately reducing those ideas to some central notion on which they are all partial articulations, so that what at first seemed a series of events in time at length turns out to be a single timeless concept in the process of self-articulation.

This almost spatial unity was already implicit, in a different form, in Shklovsky's plot analyses, and in the very idea of defamiliarization that underlay them. Defamiliarization was originally a method derived from lyric or at least lyrical perceptions, and in its application to plot it retains traces of its relatively more static origins.[25] Only pre-existing things—objects, institutions, units of some kind—can be defamiliarized; just as only what has a name to begin with can lose its familiar name and suddenly appear before us in all its bewildering unfamiliarity. The abundant examples of the technique which Shklovsky finds in Tolstoy do not therefore really tell us anything about the novel as a form, for they are fragmentary and static perceptions and rely on that which is already conventionally given in Tolstoy's society. Thus opera can be shown to be peculiar and improbable, unreal, only on condition that we are already familiar with it as a conventional institution and because we already take it for granted. So with all the other possible objects of *ostranenie*: battle (Stendhal, Tolstoy), marriage

[25] It is only fair to point out that for Shklovsky perception as such is not static but dynamic: "To make an object into an *artistic* fact, it has to be removed from the series of real-life facts. To do that you have to 'put it in motion' the way Ivan the Terrible 'passed his troops in review.' You have to tear the thing from the row of habitual associations in which you find it. You have to rotate it like a log in the fire" (*O teorii prozy*, p. 79 [*Theorie der Prosa*, p. 75]). Yet it is precisely this movement inherent in the static perception of lyric which in the present context allows the movement of the story's events to be assimilated to it.

(*The Kreutzer Sonata*), middle-class etiquette (*Nausea*), work (Chaplin's *Modern Times*). The fact that we have names for these objects indicates that we already, in advance, think about them in a unitary, atemporal way, as objects of one kind or another.

Thus synchronic thought secretly reintroduces itself back into the study of diachrony. It is for this reason, I think, that Shklovsky's method is incapable of dealing with the novel as such, and applies only to the short story. He was never able to view the novel as anything but a syncretic form, an artificial amalgamation. In this respect the essay on *Don Quixote* is particularly revealing. In it Shklovsky sets out to demolish the "myth," the "philosophical content," of Don Quixote himself. The novel does not exist, he shows us convincingly enough, in order to project this figure; rather, the figure of Don Quixote is invented and gradually elaborated in order to hold together the plot and to lend a unity to what would otherwise fall apart into a collection of unrelated anecdotes and episodes. (So in a similar way we might say that Hamlet's madness is a technical device designed to hold Shakespeare's various plot strands, derived from heterogeneous sources, together in an apparent surface unity; thus what looks like content turns out to be motivation.) As true as this may be, it comes with all the force of that genetic criticism which Shklovsky had just devoted his energies to refuting: for the origins of *Don Quixote*, its "making," ought not to have anything to do with its unity and with whatever makes it feel like a complete thing.

We may put this in a somewhat different way by saying that Propp's study lacks a generic dimension. It nowhere includes the possibility of defining the form of the folk-tale, its essential "laws," in terms of those other forms which it is not; or indeed of opposing the very concept of a form with laws to that of one which structurally lacks them. Lévi-

Strauss, in his series of *Mythologiques*, is more consequential when he feels the need to come to terms with narrative objects on the very border line between myth and something else, objects which have already begun to empty of their "internal organizational principles. The structural content [of such narrative substances] is dispersed. For the vigorous transformations of genuine myths we now find feeble ones substituted. . . . The sociological, astronomical and anatomical codes whose functioning we hitherto observed out in the open now pass beneath the surface; and structure sinks into seriality. This degradation begins when oppositions turn into mere reduplications: episodes succeeding each other in time, but all formed in the same pattern. It is complete when reduplication itself takes the place of structure. The form of a form, reduplication receives the dying breath of structure itself. Having nothing more, or so little, left to say, myth now survives only by repeating itself."[26]

It is significant that Lévi-Strauss correlates the transformation with a vaster changeover in the very feeling of temporality itself. The myth as a strict form thus proves to be the reflection of a solar periodicity which expresses itself in the longer rhythms of the year or the season; while the breakup of myth may be timed to the coming into being of a shorter lunar time, one which shows monthly or even daily rhythms. When we add to this the observation that Lévi-Strauss is as hostile to the novel as he is to the historical (or "hot") society from which the latter issues as a diachronic form, then it seems to me that we are able to form a more adequate picture of the relationship between synchrony and the strict formality of myth or folk-tale, and diachrony and the precarious formal solutions of the novel.

We may assume as axiomatic—in this for the moment

[26] Lévi-Strauss, *L'Origine des manières de table* (Paris, 1968), p. 105.

more faithful to the spirit of Lukács' *Theory* than to that of Shklovsky—that the novel as a form is a way of coming to terms with a temporal experience that cannot be defined in advance or indeed dealt with any other way. In a genuine novel, in other words, there cannot be any name for the basic subject matter in question; there cannot be any preexisting conventional substance on which defamiliarization is able to act. To put it another way, we can name only the things that happen to other people; our own lived experience, our existence, our feeling of the passage of time, are all too close to us to be visible in any external or objective way; they form the privileged object of the novel as narration, for it is at one with the evocation of just such incomparable, nameless, unique experiences and sensations.

It follows that there are no preexisting laws that govern the elaboration of the novel as a form: each one is different, a leap in the void, an invention of content simultaneous with the invention of the form. It is because the short story or the myth or tale, on the other hand, are characterized by a specific and determinate type of content that their laws can be the object of investigation. Thus law depends in some sense upon synchrony; and we have seen how short stories or folk-tales have a kind of atemporal and object-like unity in the way they convert existence into a sudden coincidence between two systems: a resolution of multiplicity into unity, or a fulfillment of a single wish. This is to say that where we can easily identify the non-story, that which fails to correspond to the intrinsic laws of the story as a form (just as we can identify the non-sentence), the novel has no opposite in this sense, for it is not a genre like tragedy or comedy, like lyric or epic, like the folk-tale or the short story, and the novels which do exist in the world are not exemplars of some universal, but are related to each other according to a historical rather than a logical and analytical

mode. (Those sub-varieties of the novel which do have laws—I am thinking, for instance, of the detective story or the historical novel—are evolutionary oddities and dead-end streets rather than illustrations of any general tendency.)

Yet another way to express this basic difference between the novel as a diachronic phenomenon and the tale as an embodiment of synchrony would be to recall the teachings of Poe, whose "Philosophy of Composition" has so much in common with Shklovsky's method of bracketting the work. For Poe, the lyric and the short story must be in their very essence short, must hold on a single page or take less than an hour's reading; and this is not an accidental but a substantive requirement. They are both, in a sense, ways of surmounting time, of translating a formless temporal succession into a simultaneity which we can grasp and possess; and if from this point of view the novel is unjustifiable, it is on account of the endless prospect of genuine time unfolding that it promises.

Yet Shklovsky's investigations of the short story are not altogether fruitless for a theory of the novel itself. They show us what it is the novel must negate; they help us see the novel as a way of surmounting and transcending its initial starting point in the anecdote. The novel may thus in this sense be said to be a short story cancelled and lifted up (*aufgehoben*) into a higher and more complex form, carrying the laws of the latter within itself as a kind of inner environment which the organism is called upon to negate. It is instructive to note how many great modern novels—*Ulysses* and *The Magic Mountain* come at once to mind—began by taking the form of a short story in the mind of their creator. At any rate it seems to me that it is only at some such price, at the cost of holding together in the mind such utterly distinct and even antithetical methods as those of Lukács in the *Theory of the Novel* and of Shklovsky in

his *Theory of Prose*, that a genuinely dialectical concept of narration might be achieved.

The Formalists were, however, able to grasp at least one aspect of the novel's form correctly: that was its ending, the point at which *durée* and diachrony break off, and which can therefore momentarily be seized in synchronic terms. "The novel," says Eichenbaum in his essay on O. Henry, "is characterized by the presence of an epilogue: a false conclusion, a summary in which perspectives of the future are opened, or in which the subsequent destinies of the main characters are told (see Turgeniev's *Rudin*, or *War and Peace*). This is why it's natural for the twist ending to be so rare a phenomenon in the novel (and where you do find it, it is merely a sign of the influence of the short story itself). . . ."[27]

4

1. The above are some of the synchronic limitations built into the concept of *ostranenie*; there is also about it a profound ambiguity which we have not yet touched on. *Ostranenie* can apply either to the process of perception itself, or to the artistic mode of presentation of that perception. Even granting the nature of art as defamiliarization, it is never clear in Shklovsky's writings whether it is the content or the form itself which is defamiliarized. All art, in other words, seems to involve some kind of renewal of perception; but it is not true of all art forms that they attract attention to their own specific techniques, that they deliberately "bare" or reveal their own "devices." Moreover, it is at this point that description slips into prescription: given the perceptual model Shklovsky started with—its association of perception with defamiliarization on the one

[27] Tzvetan Todorov (ed. and trans.), *Théorie de la littérature* (Paris, 1965), p. 203.

hand, and motivation with habituation or inertia on the other—it is not hard to see why he leans towards an art in which the "motivation" is utterly suppressed, an art which takes itself for its own subject-matter, and presents its own techniques as its own content.

The archetype for such a self-conscious literature is Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which in a much-discussed sentence Shklovsky described as "the most typical novel in world literature."[28] I believe that above and beyond the impudence, this sentence is to be taken literally: *Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel because it is the most novelistic of all novels, taking as its subject-matter the very process of story-telling itself. The degree to which narrative technique is the content of *Tristram Shandy* can be gauged by comparison with the conventional first-person novel in which there is a distinction between actor and author, between hero and memorialist, between "Marcel" and "Proust." In Proust, the intrusion of the author remains abstract; we never see this second, reflective "I" directly, because it is through his mind that we are looking at the younger figure. In *Tristram Shandy*, every time we try to concentrate on the time of the content, of the actual events narrated, the life of Tristram himself, the sentences lead us back to their own time, the time of their writing ("I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no farther than to my first day's life—'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it—on the contrary,

[28] *O teorii prozy*, p. 204 (*Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, p. 57).

I am just thrown so many volumes back")[29] and the time of our reading ("It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rung the bell, when Obadiah was order'd to saddle a horse, and go for Dr. Slop, the man-midwife; so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough," etc.).[30]

Moreover, even when we are able to witness the content directly, without such authorial interference, we are made to realize the incommensurability of words to experience, of models to lived existence, by the manner in which gestures are drawn out in slow motion until their microscopic notation becomes intolerable, in which segments of events are fragmented to the point where the infinite divisibility of all human experience in time seems a demonstrable fact.[31] In such wise *Tristram Shandy* may be considered the first dialectical picture of models: showing how reality can be infinitely expanded or contracted, depending on the way it is told; holding between the two infinites of the "life" that you name and sum up in the title, and the pure "instant" which is the last indivisible unit of narratable human time itself.

Tristram Shandy thus takes its place, for the Formalists, as a predecessor of modern or avant-garde literature in general: of that "literature without subject-matter" of which Shklovsky takes Rozanov as his exemplar, but with which

[29] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (New York, 1935), p. 191.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[31] E.g., "As my father's India handkerchief was in his right coat pocket, he should by no means have suffered his right hand to have got engaged: on the contrary, instead of taking off his wig with it, as he did, he ought to have committed that entirely to the left; and then, when the natural exigency my father was under of rubbing his head, called out for his handkerchief, he would have had nothing in the world to have done, but to have put his right hand into his right coat pocket and taken it out;—which he might have done without any violence, or the least ungraceful twist in one tendon or muscle of his whole body." (*Ibid.*, p. 105.)

we are familiar enough as the plotless novel in general (indeed, Shklovsky uses the word "sujet" as the general equivalent of plot). Rozanov illustrates the resolution of the novel back into its raw materials, into a kind of linguistic collage, made up of journal entries, newspaper clippings, letters, entries noted on stray envelopes and scraps of paper, and so forth. From the point of view of content, he may be seen as a kind of Russian equivalent of Pirandello or Fernando Pessoa, with his multiple personalities (he was a conservative columnist under his own name for the *Novoe Vremya*, a liberal columnist under a pseudonym for the *Russkoe Slovo*). It is worth noting that for Shklovsky, even this ideological content is not primary, but only the result of the form which calls it into being: " 'Yes' and 'no' stand together on the same sheet of paper—a biographical fact is lifted to the rank of a stylistic one. The 'black' Rozanov and the 'red' one are there for artistic contrast, as is the opposition between the 'dirty' and the 'pure' Rozanov."[32]

It is hardly necessary to observe the ways in which Shklovsky's own literary practice follows this program: the memoir-like raw materials, with their interpolated stories, their digressions, their authorial interventions; the history of these works as deliberate collations of various manuscripts at various times in Shklovsky's life; the style, a kind of fragmentation into paragraphs, heavily relying on the newspaper-like shock of the one-sentence paragraph ("the 'style' of Viktor Shklovsky," complained Gorky, "the short and dry, the paradoxical phrase"),[33] the silences of understatement and ironic restraint, already a devaluation of "content" within the content itself. In the light of these works, one is tempted to consider the doctrine of defamiliarization itself as a kind of "motivation" for Shklovsky's own particular techniques.

[32] *O teorii prozy*, pp. 234-235 (*Theorie der Prosa*, p. 173).
[33] Richard Sheldon, *Viktor Borisovič Shklovsky: Literary Theory and Practice, 1914-1930* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1966), p. 50.

We have called this slippage from defamiliarization in the content to defamiliarization in the form an ambiguity in Shklovsky's thinking, but it is not clear whether the ambiguity is an inadvertent or a deliberate one. Certainly the key sentence of the *Theory of Prose* leaves the matter more in doubt than ever: "Art is a means of re-experiencing the making of objects, but objects already made have no importance for art."[34] Are we to assume that all forms of art exist only to "bare their own devices," only to give us the spectacle of the creation of art itself, the transformation of objects into art, their being made art? (But in that case, only so-called "modern" art has any value, or rather even traditional art is really secretly modern for Shklovsky in its essence.) Or are we to assume some more metaphysical implication, namely that the very act of perception is itself a making of the object in question, and that to re-perceive an object anew is in a sense to become conscious of our own "making" activity? One is reminded, in that context, of Vico's doctrine that man only understands what he has made. But, characteristically, Shklovsky does not conclude; he is temperamentally allergic to metaphysical assertions.

2. It is instructive to compare this ultimate form which defamiliarization takes for Shklovsky in the "baring of the device" with the irony of the German Romantics, which in many ways resembles it. Romantic irony is something far vaster in its implications than the conventional authorial interventions associated with the term. For the most part, indeed, such interventions are merely drawn back into the content and reabsorbed in it: the work of art, immaterial, cannot be rent or wounded, but heals over again effortlessly

[34] *O teorii prozy*, p. 13: "Iskusstvo est sposob perezhit delanie veshchi, a sdelannoe v iskusstve ne vazhno."

without a trace, and the intervening "author" becomes simply one character or persona among others.

The larger concept of irony is at one with the general spirit of idealism itself, and Friedrich Schlegel explicitly appeals to contemporary science to justify it. It involves the gradual obliteration of Vico's distinction between history (which man, having made, can understand) and nature (which, as the result of God's creation, is utterly alien to us); the gradual feeling that we share in the non-human as well, or rather that the I and the not-I are subsumed together under some greater more all-encompassing entity on the order of a transcendental ego or an absolute spirit; that human consciousness therefore rediscovers seeds of itself in everything that it contemplates. Of this metaphysical idealism, then, the work of art clearly becomes the tangible symbol: not so much in the way its author reveals himself through the surface of creation, but precisely in the way in which he is concealed behind it, as half-veiled presence, half-transparent opacity:

> The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
> And in the narrow rent at every turn
> Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree. . . .[35]

[35] Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book Six, vv. 624-637.

Irony thus characterizes our relationship to the work of art insofar as, knowing that the surface before us is an imaginary representation and the result of someone else's labor, we nonetheless consent to lose ourselves in it as though it were real, a state halfway between hallucination and cold, unamused withdrawal. In the same way, irony governs our relationship to the external world, for there is something paradoxical about an object, or a world in general, which is by definition external inasmuch as we have to have a relationship to it, but which is at the same time of the same substance of ourselves insofar as we can have a relationship to it.

The Surrealists, with their notion of *le hasard objectif* and their feeling for the ruses of desire—the way it crystallizes itself in the fascinating objects of the outside world, the way the unconscious projects itself into the signs and bric-a-brac of that immense *marché aux puces* which is the industrial landscape—are perhaps the closest formally to this older romantic idea.

By comparison Shklovsky's doctrine seems to have more in common with artisanal production. Like Pound, his insistence on technique seems to reflect a nostalgia for an older handicraft culture; his premium on technical know-how to be a way to give art and literature the solidity of a manual skill, like cobbling or pottery. (If further proof were necessary, one would have only to look at his pride at his technical performance in an armored car division in World War I, or at his glee at showing up Maxim Gorky's faulty knowledge of flax cultivation later in the twenties.)[36] If there seems an occasional similarity between Formalist analyses and Aristotelian literary methods, it is indeed to be attributed to this common model of art as craft or skill.

The same shift in emphasis from the ontological to the

[36] *Sentimental Journey*, p. 270; Sheldon, *Viktor Borisovič Shklovsky*, p. 51.

technical can be witnessed in the kind of emphasis placed on folk materials, crucial to both Romanticism and Formalism alike. The juxtaposition of the Grimms and Propp is here emblematic, for the recourse to the folk-tale, to the popular imagination, stands in both for the return to something elemental and original in the strictest sense; but for the Romantics this something was diachronic, where for the Formalists it was structural: the original language, the original sources of story-telling, as opposed to the fundamental structures of discourse and basic laws of plot revealed in their ultimate simplicity. For the spirit of the Formalist enterprise, imagine the New Critics with collective enthusiasm taking apart the nursery rhymes of Mother Goose!

3. The originality of the Formalists' idea of technique is to be found in its inversion. For Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians, everything in the work of art exists for some ultimate purpose, which is the characteristic emotion or peculiar pleasure of the work itself as an object consumed. For the Formalists everything in the work exists in order to permit the work to come into being in the first place. The advantage of this approach is that whereas ultimately the Aristotelian analyses end up outside the work (in psychology and the extra-literary problems of the conventionality of emotion), for Shklovsky such emotions as pity and fear are themselves to be considered constituent parts, or elements of the work in the first place. Take the following discussion of feelings in *Tristram Shandy*:

"Sentimentality cannot be the content of art if for no other reason than that art has no separate contents in the first place. The representation of things from the 'sentimental point of view' is a special method of representation, similar to their representation from, say, the point of view of a horse (Tolstoy's *Kholstomer*) or from that of a giant (Swift).

"In its essence art is beyond emotion . . . unsympathetic—or beyond sympathy—except where the feeling of commiseration serves as material for the artistic structure. But even there, in considering the feeling one must consider it from the point of view of composition, just as in trying to understand a motor one must look at the drive-belt as a detail in a machine—from the mechanic's point of view—and not from the point of view of a vegetarian."[37]

This radical inversion of the priorities of the work of art is a critical revolution analogous to Saussure's disconnection of the referential, or to Husserl's bracketting in phenomenology; its intent is to suspend the common-sense view of the work of art as mimesis (i.e., possessing content) and as source or purveyor of *emotion*. The advantage of this bracketting is to constitute a system of intrinsically literary elements or facts: we saw how Aristotelianism tended to pass outside a purely literary system in the consideration of such problems as the normal psychological reaction of the suffering of a perfectly good man, or of a perfectly wicked man. In the same way, esthetic positions which presuppose content in the work of art tend to shift from the literary to the philosophical and social and lose sight of the purely literary functionality of a given fact in a literary work, whatever value the same element may have in another system.

Nowhere are the advantages of the Formalist position more apparent than in Boris Eichenbaum's classic essay on "The Making of Gogol's *Overcoat*," which he sees as an elaborate literary mimesis, as a transposition on the level of sophisticated artistic techniques, of the gestures and story-telling procedures of the traditional *skaz*, or oral yarn (the

[37] *O teorii prozy*, p. 192 (or "A Parodying Novel: Sterne's Tristram Shandy," trans. by W. George Isaac, in *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Traugott [Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968], p. 79).

Russian equivalent, as the Formalists were fond of pointing out, of the American tall tale or the stories of Mark Twain). The techniques of the *skaz*—we would call their ensemble its style—are the primary element in this work, and we may summarize the paradoxical presuppositions of the method as follows. It is not because Gogol wishes to present a certain type of content that he appropriates to himself the style of the *skaz*. Rather, he wishes to create a literary style based on the *skaz*; he wishes to speak in a certain kind of voice, and, given that initial starting point, then looks around for the appropriate material, anecdotes, names, details, to use in it, to set it off properly, to allow the story-telling voice its full range of intrinsic effects. But if this is the case, then a number of hotly debated questions fall to the ground at once. There can, for instance, no longer be any question of a struggle between Romanticism and Realism in Gogol. The point is not to decide whether the "realistic" elements (St. Petersburg, poverty, the little people) take predominance over the grotesque or romantic elements (the ghost at the end, the character of Akaky Akakievich himself). Rather, the dominant style of the *skaz* requires both for its sudden alternations and contrasts. Moreover, the story is no longer fit for the propagation of philosophical or psychological truths. We can no longer speak of a literature of the common city people inaugurated by Gogol, or of the psychological innovations and insights transcribed by the author; these are little more than optical illusions of content, mirages of "truths" or "insights" given off by the operation of the artistic process itself.

In his essay on "Tolstoy's Crises" Eichenbaum extends his method even further, showing how in a sense Tolstoy's religious conversion itself could be considered a "motivation of the device," in the manner in which it provided new raw material for an artistic practice on the point of exhaust-

ing itself. (We have seen a similar inversion of priorities in Shklovsky's treatment of Rozanov.) It is perhaps inevitable that the inversion of the method, which began by denying the rights of psychological, biographical, and philosophical analyses, would end up absorbing them into it, drawing them, along with the author's entire life and experience, considered now as mere preparation for its production, back within the work of art itself.

With such bracketting, we are at the very heart of the Formalist method itself. This is perhaps the moment to express one's astonishment that in the fifteen years since the publication of Victor Erlich's definitive English-language survey of Formalism, this movement has had so little impact on American critical practice. Perhaps the habits of specialization run so deep that Formalism is still obscurely felt to be the spiritual property of Slavicists; perhaps the constructivistic approach of the Formalists is no longer seasonable in a country in which literary construction itself seems to have joined a long list of extinct or vanishing handicrafts and other skills. Yet Formalism yields insights which are structurally unique and unlike those afforded by the traditional "methods."

Let us choose, for a demonstration of the specificity of the Formalist procedure, Dante's *Paradiso*. The content of this poem may be taken as the ultimate which a writer has attempted to express, either as a vision of quintessential reality, or as a language which sets itself the task of fixing the inexpressible. Yet the events of *Paradiso* are, when juxtaposed with those of the other canticles, curiously self-referential. I do not only mean by that the absence in them of any genuine resistance or stubbornness in the matter itself —an absence which they share with other forms of science fiction, whether the sublime and theological, as in Milton or Wyndham Lewis, or the everyday interplanetary kind,

and whose result is a kind of double pretense on the part of the writer that he is straining to render with precision a "world" which he has himself just finished inventing out of whole cloth.

In the earlier canticles the thoughts of Dante the character, his questions to Virgil and to the sinners, and their questions of him, just as frequently dealt with the reality of earth itself, and of individual destinies past and to come —a reality which lay outside or beyond the confines of the journey recounted. Now, however, the overwhelming preoccupation of the traveller is with the order of the realm before him and the nature of paradise itself: the content of *Paradiso* may therefore be said to be the order of an order. And even this order is itself but a figure or appearance:

> Qui se mostraron, non perchè sortita
> sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno
> de la celestïal c'ha men salita.[38]

What Dante sees and travels through is therefore but a kind of celestial projection, in the cartographical sense. The souls are themselves in reality all gathered together in the Empyrean, in an indistinguishable beatitude, which is thus articulated into hierarchy and gradations of the blessed as though to conform to the temporal and differentiating categories of Dante's earthly mind and experience; or, what amounts to the same thing, as though to make themselves accessible to Dante's narrative language as it moves in time.

In this context, therefore, the much-admired line of Piccarda Donati, "E'n la sua voluntate è nostra pace"[39] assumes a somewhat different significance. Ordinarily taken to ex-

[38] Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia, Paradiso*, IV, vv. 37-39: "They are shown here, not because they have really emerged from their proper place [in the Empyrean], but to provide a visual embodiment of heaven's lowest circle."

[39] *Paradiso*, III, v. 85.

press the abdication of the will and the release of the soul in submission, the verse forms part of an example of such submission and is intended to explain why the souls in the lower circles of paradise feel no longing to mount higher in the realms of the blessed. The famous verse is thus a way of motivating the diversity of *Paradiso*, of generating difference out of apparently identical raw material and of multiplicity out of the primal unity of beatitude.

On a theological level the problem to be solved is the reconciliation, in Christianity, of individualism and ultimate spiritual transfiguration in a situation in which other religions have foreseen a kind of dissolution of the soul into the divine substance or else a kind of beatific extinction. It would not be difficult to show how in one way or another every episode in *Paradiso*, every discussion, every encounter, every reaction—Charles Martel's account of the genetic diversity of mankind; the emblematic juxtaposition of St. Francis and St. Dominic; the long excursus on the relationship between Solomon's secular wisdom and that afforded by grace; the Eagle, through whose throat so many thousands speak with a single voice; the very justification for the creation of the angels themselves, as perhaps the purest example of God's almost gratuitous reproduction of his own substance—function in their divers ways as the ground and explanation of their own diversity.

In political terms the problem becomes that of the reestablishment of the Empire, as that order which will supercede the moral anarchy of nascent Italian capitalism and permit a harmonious exercise of humanity's varied talents within the unified figure of the state itself. It has often been pointed out how the *Commedia* becomes more and more explicitly political as it moves from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*.

Yet from the point of view of Formalism, all such ap-

parent content, whether we choose to express it in theological or political terms, is itself but an optical illusion projected by the peculiar structural problems of the text itself as they find their ongoing resolution in its composition. The formal problem which Dante faces in *Paradiso* is in other words that of telling the story of the timeless in time, of recounting identity in the language of difference, of allowing unity to come to voice through multiplicity. The solution is just as unexpected. Even while Dante the character interrogates the order of paradise and attempts to understand how it can have gradations, Dante the poet continues his poem and carries it forward. We may therefore say that the content of *Paradiso* turns out to be a series of investigations of how paradise could have content; that the events of the poem are "nothing more" than a series of dramatizations of the pre-conditions necessary for such events to be conceivable in the first place. The subject of the poem is its own coming into being. Such a formula is no doubt implicit in the Formalist approach, even though it remained for their successors in French Structuralism to give it programmatic expression as such.[40]

There is, no doubt, something inherently and we may say structurally exasperating about such an analysis to the degree that it systematically refuses content, and indeed aims at translating all such proposed content back into projections of the form. Husserl's bracketting was an analogous suspension of common-sense experience, which sets in again with all its daily force and evidence after the parenthesis is closed. But the Formalists are reluctant to close it.

The implication is that a work only seems to have a ref-

[40] The reader may find it instructive to compare this pastiche of Formalist analysis with Philippe Sollers' Structuralist interpretation in "Dante et la traversée de l'écriture," *Logiques* (Paris, 1968), pp. 44-77.

erent, or to intend a determinate content. In reality it speaks only of its own coming into being, of its own construction, under the determinate circumstances or formal problems in the context of which that construction takes place. Such a point of view is to a certain degree, I believe, itself an optical illusion, projected by the Formalist procedures, and I will deal with this type of projection at greater length when we come to the analogous moment in Structuralism.

Yet I believe that there is a certain sense in which this is so, and in which all literary works, at the same time that they speak the language of reference, also emit a kind of lateral message about their own process of formation. The event of the reading, in other words, only partially obliterates that earlier event of the writing upon which, as in a palimpsest, it is superposed. Such is, I think, the social basis of Formalism as a method, insofar as the work is work solidified, the product the end-result of production.

4. At the same time, in Formalist practice the paradoxical reversal we have been describing results in a peculiar devaluation of its own starting point. Its premise had been that the literature of the "baring of the device," the literature which defamiliarized its own techniques, was, with a few exceptions such as *Tristram Shandy*, a peculiarly modern one which in this way radically distinguished itself from that older literature in which the devices were deliberately concealed. Yet it would now seem as though the "baring of the device" were characteristic of all literature, for now ultimately all literary structures may be understood as taking themselves for their own object, as being "about" literature itself. At this point, then, the specific and unique structure of literary modernism turns out to be no more than the basic structure of literature in general.

We may state this contradiction in another, more defini-

tive way by pointing out that the idea of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization is and must always be a polemic one: it depends on the negation of the existing habits of thought or perception and is to that degree bound to them and dependent on them as well. It is in other words not a coherent concept in its own right, but a transitional, self-abolishing one. This is as clear in Formalist criticism as anywhere else, where the force of the revelation depends on your having previously believed in "content," and is gauged against your implicit shock at seeing the philosophical or psychological implications of Gogol, or *Don Quixote* brutally discarded in favor of a purely artistic, artisanal model. This is indeed not true only of Formalism but of much of the theoretical apparatus of modernism in general: of a theory like Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, for instance, which was addressed to a public unaccustomed to the garish stylizations of German expressionism. But for generations which have been raised on modernistic and stylized art and decoration and for whom such stylization needs no defense and seems utterly natural, an inner tension and dynamism seems to have gone out of the polemic.

The same contradiction pursues Shklovsky in his own personal literary production and is perhaps responsible for that peculiarly historical form of the Hegelian unhappy consciousness which has been his. For he took the "baring of the device" to be the specifically contemporary mode of defamiliarization and technical renewal in literature, thus absolutely identifying his own unique personal and historical situation with the new itself. But the "tragic sense of life" implicit in the Formalist idea of perpetual artistic change, of an artistic permanent revolution, demands a kind of consent to change and to the inevitable wearing out of once-new procedures: in short, to one's own death. The logical development would be the weariness of the public with the

kind of self-conscious art practiced by Shklovsky and motivated by his theories; yet the "baring of the device" is not just one technique among others, which can be replaced, but rather the coming to consciousness of art as defamiliarization in the first place. So if it goes, the entire theory goes with it; and what gave itself as universal law proves with the turning over of the calendar to have been nothing more than the ideology of the day in disguise.

5

1. This is, however, not quite the end of the story. If the distortions resulting from Shklovsky's artistic and personal dilemma are removed from the basic force he set in motion, then there results a purified model on the order of Saussurean linguistics. It was the merit and the genius of Yury Tynyanov to have made himself the theoretician of this most lucid and mathematical reconstruction of the Formalist position.

One is tempted to explain Tynyanov's success in the same literary-historical terms in which we have accounted for Shklovsky's failure: the literary form developed by Tynyanov as a way of renewing literature was not the peculiarly contradictory and self-conscious "baring of the device" practiced by Shklovsky, but rather the selection of one technique from among others of equivalent functionality, of one form among other equally privileged forms possible—namely the adventure novel, and in particular the historical adventure novel, as a genre never fully exploited in Russian literature up to that time. Thus, by his practice of the form, Tynyanov must have been able to see himself, not as fulfilling literary history, but as taking part in but one moment of a genuinely historical succession. The content of these novels—most of them novelized biographies of writers from the Pushkin period and of Pushkin himself—is moreover the

sign of a sensibility perhaps more historical in caste than the memorializing and autobiographical impulse that prevails in Shklovsky.

Tynyanov was able to preserve the idea of system in the analysis of the individual work of art by removing the notion of technique and the distortions implicit in the artisanal model which we have discussed above. The very teleological implications of the idea of technique lead to the false problem of the status of philosophical or other content in the work of art—that is to say, whether the latter exists "in order to" produce the former, or the former "in order to" produce the latter. If, however, one abandons the idea of technique and purpose, and speaks simply of dominant and secondary elements, or of a dominant constructional principle which is simply "the promotion of one group of factors at the expense of others"[41] (or of the "foregrounding" of one set of elements, a later but most expressive term developed by the Prague Circle),[42] then at once a model is constructed which has all the advantages of the older Shklovskian doctrine and none of its drawbacks.

The new model remains profoundly dialectical in the manner in which the foregrounded or dominant techniques are perceived in a tension with the secondary or backgrounded ones. But this new version of artistic perception as a deviation from a norm has the advantage of including the norm within the work of art itself as the older elements relegated to the background; thus the latter no longer spill outside the work and over into what are ultimately social problems, i.e., the dominant tastes, the dominant literary modes of a period. In this sense, the synchronic structure of the work

[41] Yury Tynyanov, *Problema stixotvornogo yazyka* (Leningrad, 1924), p. 10 (*Théorie de la littérature*, ed. Todorov, p. 118).

[42] See Paul Garvin, ed., *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style* (Washington, D.C., 1955), esp. pp. 21-25.

includes diachrony in that it carries within itself as a negated or cancelled element those dominant modes of the immediately preceding generation against which it stands as a decisive break, and in terms of which its own novelties and innovations are understood.

2. Now for the first time this internal purity of the literary system permits the problem of the relationship to other nonliterary systems to be clearly posed. It will be that of elaborating some ultimate system of systems whose terms are not yet given (for dialectical thinking, this ultimate system of systems would be history itself, while for the Structuralists, as we will see shortly, it is language). This development, which has sometimes been described as the Formalists' attempt to conciliate Marxism, proves in reality to be but a logical consequence of their own thinking.

It is true that Tynyanov distinguishes between the evolution of a system according to its own inner laws and dynamism, and its forcible modification by the action on it of other systems from the outside; the historical and political reference is obvious. But what he is trying to describe are in reality two possible movements of relationship from one system to another: when the purely literary system, a kind of "imperialism striving towards the annexation of as large a territory as possible,"[43] absorbs elements of other systems into itself and uses them according to its own laws, then we may continue to speak of its autonomous evolution. When literature is absorbed into some other system, for whatever reason, then that evolution is bound to be suspended or even altered.

Tynyanov sees the various systems, at a given moment of history, as standing at relatively fixed distances from each

[43] Yury Tynyanov, *Arkhaisty i novatory* (Leningrad, 1929), p. 24 (*Die literarische Kunstmittel und die Evolution in der Literatur*, trans. A. Kaempfe [Frankfurt, 1967], p. 30).

other. Relationships between the most distant ones are therefore mediated by the intervening systems, particularly by those standing closest to the literary system itself, namely the system of "everyday life," and its own sub-systems of verbal expression. Thus, for instance, a society in which letter-writing is a particularly absorbing and intrinsically interesting activity offers a unique type of verbal raw material which under given circumstances was absorbed into the literary system in the form of the letter-novel. Thus, also, a society in which verbal eloquence and oratory were widely practiced and valued and formed an integral, functional part of the socio-economic structure, as in the Arab countries, as in Ireland (Joyce's *Ulysses*!), would offer a type of verbal raw material, a pre-sketched ratio of poetry to prose, a survival of tropes and rhetorical devices, not at all analogous to the situation of the word in the mass-media situation of the West. In this light we are able to reevaluate Eichenbaum's discovery of Gogol's relationship to the *skaz*, which becomes a privileged example of just such an annexation by art-prose of popular verbal elements surviving in the culture.

The Formalists do not really seem to have been willing to go much further towards a sociology of literature than this. They tended to denounce as eclecticism more explicit attempts to connect literature with the systems farthest away from it, such as the economic.[44] They were, of course, quite right to do so when the relationships and influences claimed were formulated as immediate rather than mediated and indirect: for their own system allowed for the latter,

[44] See in particular Eichenbaum's essay "V ozhidanii literatury," in *Literatura* (*Teoria, Kritika, Polemika*), pp. 291-295 ("In Erwartung der Literatur," in *Aufsätze zur Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur*, trans. A. Kaempfe [Frankfurt, 1965], pp. 53-70).

and indeed in the long run that is the only allowance necessary to make a genuine literary sociology, a sociology of forms, possible.

3. The principal difference in emphasis between this Formalist model and a genuine theory of literary content such as that of Lukács lies in the degree to which the development of the work of art is seen to be influenced by the availability of the proper raw material. Tynyanov, as a practicing novelist, was well aware of this problem, as the following comments, implicitly directed against Shklovsky, show: "Let's take the possibility of a Russian adventure novel as an example. The principle of a novel with plot arises as a dialectical antithesis to the principle of the plotless novel. But the new constructional principle hasn't yet found adequate application, it must for the moment be content with foreign materials. In order to blend with Russian materials, certain pre-conditions must first be satisfied. This requirement is not so easy to meet. Subject meets style under conditions which no one knows until after it happens. If those conditions are lacking, the new phenomenon never gets beyond the trial stage."[45]

The insistence in this passage on the enabling role of the appropriate content or raw material, as well as on the ex post facto and non-predictive nature of literary analysis, is quite consistent with such sociological and Marxist analyses as those made by Lukács of the historical novel. There also, the development of the historical novel as a form is dependent on the adequate state and availability of its raw materials. In good Formalist fashion these raw materials are not simply knowledge of the past, availability of documents, local color, etc., but rather consciousness of the past and

[45] *Arkhaisty i novatory*, p. 19 (*Die literarische Kunstmittel*, pp. 23-24).

historical sensibility, which lies ready to hand in the time of Scott and has evolved into something more brittle and less serviceable in the time of Flaubert. An adequate picture of literary evolution, in its relationship to the other extra-literary systems, is, I think, possible on this condition: that content, available raw material, be seen, not as mere inert lumber, but as that which favors or impedes the development of the literary form which makes use of it. At that point, the closest extra-literary system in question can itself be interrogated on its relationship to its own neighboring systems. Thus, to return to our earlier example, the degree to which a given society has remained oral, has retained, for instance, oratorical usages and values, is itself a function of the economic and social development of the society and can be investigated accordingly.

4. What we have been describing so far is a relatively synchronic phenomenon, the relationship, in a given moment of time or history, of the literary system to neighboring and more distant ones in the totality of experience. The picture of actual literary history, actual change, remains problematical in Formalism. Even Tynyanov retains Saussure's basic model of change, in which the essential mechanisms at work are the ultimate abstractions of Identity and Difference. But where all history is understood as the operation of a single mechanism, it is transformed back into synchrony, and time itself becomes a kind of a-historical, relatively mechanical repetition.

Let Eichenbaum, the most pugnacious and combative of the group, once more be the spokesman for this anti-diachronic tendency of Formalism at its most extreme. The following passage looks ahead to Althusser at the same time that it signals the ultimate internal limitations of Formalist doctrine and method:

"The real Lermontov is the *historical* Lermontov. To avoid misunderstanding I must stipulate that I do not by this mean Lermontov considered as an individual event in *time*—an event which we would then be simply called on to restore. Time and the comprehension of the past which goes along with it does not constitute the basis for historical knowledge. Time in history is a fiction, a convention which plays an auxiliary role. We do not study movement in time; rather, movement as such is a *dynamic* process which can neither be subdivided in any way nor ever broken off, one which therefore has nothing to do with *real* time and cannot be measured in terms of it. The study of history reveals the dynamics of events, laws which function not only within the limits of some particular given period but everywhere and at all times. In this sense, as paradoxical as it may sound, history is the science of the permanent, the unchanging, the immobile, even where it deals with change and movement. It can be scientific only to the degree that it succeeds in transforming real movement into patterns or models [*chertyozh*]. Historical lyricism, the fondness for this or that period in and for itself, does not constitute science. To study a historical event does not in the least mean to describe it in isolation, as though it had meaning only in the setting of its own time. Such is the naive historicism which impedes scientific research. The real task is not some simple *projection into the past*, but rather that of understanding the historical *actuality* of an event, of determining its role in that development of historical energy which, in its very essence permanent, neither emerges nor disappears and for that very reason operates beyond time. *A fact historically understood is one which has been withdrawn from time* [italics mine]. In history there is never any repetition, simply because nothing ever disappears but only changes shape. For this reason,

historical analogies are not only possible but indispensable, and it is the study of historical events outside the dynamics of history, as unique and 'unrepeatable' ones, having their own isolated system, which is impossible, for it contradicts the very nature of such events."[46]

[46] Boris Eichenbaum, *Lermontov* (Leningrad, 1924), pp. 8-9 (*Aufsätze zur Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur*, pp. 102-103).

III

The Structuralist Projection