Desire, Event, Vision:
Forms of Intersubjectivity in the Nineteenth-Century Russian Novel

by

Zachary Samuel Johnson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Abstract

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This dissertation contends that the philosophical problem of the existence of other people constitutes a central preoccupation of the nineteenth-century Russian novel, a problem that its authors worked through not only in the content of their novels but on the level of form, as well. At the heart of this study, which examines the emergence of the Russian realist novel in the years between 1850 and 1880, is the following question: How is the Russian understanding of the modern self (subjectivity) related to the formal aesthetic features of the Russian novel?

I focus on three novels – Ivan Turgenev’s *Rudin* (1856), Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Demons* (1872), and Lev Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1873-77) – in order to account for relations between subjectivity and form in the nineteenth-century Russian novel as well as these authors’ various conceptualizations of the human subject. In each of the novels I identify a mediating concept that unites that novel’s most conspicuous formal features to its (implicit) understanding and representation of intersubjectivity. In *Rudin, Demons,* and *Anna Karenina,* these concepts are desire, event, and vision, respectively. My chapters describe how these concepts exert a decentering force on the subject, interrupting the subject’s ability to take efficacious action, to engage in self-conscious rational reflection, and ultimately to make meaning of his or her life. At the same time, these forces of desire, the event, and vision also bind subjects together, constituting the intersubjective structures that my close readings seek to describe.

Methodologically, my dissertation stages a dialogue between twentieth-century theories of the novel and the nineteenth-century Russian novel, in order to articulate the relationship between the categories of subjectivity and form. Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in questions of form within novel studies, particularly with respect to the novel’s role in the formation and representation of the human subject. My dissertation contributes to this current turn towards form, marking out a place for the nineteenth-century Russian novel. Approaches to the novel in the field of Slavic studies, for historical as well as ideological reasons, have not fully benefitted from the challenges as well as insights offered by contemporary novel theory; post-structuralist theories represent a particularly conspicuous gap this dissertation seeks to fill.
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A Note on Transliteration

Transliterations follow the Library of Congress system, except when an anglicized name has been well-established (e.g. Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Zhukovsky, Mandelstam). The scholarly apparatus, however, follows the LOC system.
Introduction

“Philosophy, before Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic, altogether ignored the existence of other people as a philosophical problem that changed the very nature of philosophizing; as for literature…”

— Fredric Jameson, “The Experiments in Time”

This dissertation contends that the philosophical problem of the existence of other people constitutes a central preoccupation of the nineteenth-century Russian novel, a problem that its authors worked through not only in the content of their novels but on the level of form, as well. At the heart of this study, which examines the emergence of the Russian realist novel in the years between 1850 and 1880, is the following question: How is the Russian understanding of the modern self (subjectivity) related to the formal aesthetic features of the Russian novel?

I focus on three novels – Ivan Turgenev’s *Rudin* (1856), Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Demons* (1872), and Lev Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1873-77) – in order to account for relations between subjectivity and form in the nineteenth-century Russian novel as well as these authors’ various conceptualizations of the human subject. In each of the novels I identify a mediating concept that unites that novel’s most conspicuous formal features to its (implicit) understanding and representation of intersubjectivity. In *Rudin, Demons*, and *Anna Karenina*, these concepts are desire, event, and vision, respectively. My chapters describe how these concepts exert a decentering force on the subject, interrupting the subject’s ability to take efficacious action, to engage in self-conscious rational reflection, and ultimately to make meaning of his or her life. At the same time, these forces of desire, the event, and vision also bind subjects together, constituting the intersubjective structures that my close readings seek to describe. These concepts represent the particular ways in which the existence of other people constitutes both a problem and a solution for the Russian conception of the modern subject.

The Russian novel, in comparison to its Western-European counterpart, is not singular in its representation of both a social world and a character’s interiority.¹ And yet what is perhaps distinctive about the artistic projects of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy is not only these authors’ interests in developing both a social world and their characters’ interiority, or their pursuit of “impossibly large ideas,”² but the ways their novels fused these three strains, and in so doing inscribed into their novels an implicit philosophy of the subject, a theory of the relationship between a character’s interiority and the external world.

My study begins with Turgenev’s 1856 novel *Rudin*, which can be read as a critique of Russian identity and its representation: the problem of the representation of Rudin’s subjectivity becomes the “subject” of the novel. Turgenev’s problematizing of

¹ George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* arguably does the same, and boasts nearly as many characters as the typical Russian novel.
the identity of his hero can be extended to the identity of the Russian novel itself, still in its early stages of development in the mid-1850s. Turgenev’s *Rudin* is also, arguably, the first Russian novel that could be formally recognized as such with respect to the generic conventions established by the European novel, and consequently it inaugurates the period of high Russian realism on which this study focuses. Of my three authors, Turgenev was the only one to receive formal philosophical training in German Idealism, making his *Rudin* a logical starting point for an articulation of the Russian novel’s implicit theory of the social. The representation of the subject that we encounter in *Rudin* is that of the (Hegelian) desiring subject seeking recognition.

In comparison with *Rudin*, the philosophical and aesthetic stakes are even higher in the novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. In a manner similar to Rudin’s, the characters of Stavrogin and Anna could both productively be approached as instances of subjects whose desires exert a decentering force on their conscious attempts to understand themselves and the worlds in which they find themselves, interrupting their abilities to express themselves coherently through speech and writing. Given that my study seeks not only to elucidate the Russian novel’s understanding of the human subject, but also relate that understanding to specific novels’ formal features, the concept of desire alone is not sufficient to describe this relationship in Dostoevsky’s *Demons* and Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, which both offer more complex negotiations of the relationship between subjectivity and form. In *Demons* characters are brought together by an event but in such a way that disrupts their individual agency; the event is also a central narrative category that comes under scrutiny in the novel. In *Anna Karenina*, double-vision, one of the narrator’s rhetorical figures for Anna’s experience as a decentered subject, manifests itself as one of the novel’s key organizing principles, the means by which, I argue, Tolstoy arranges, presents, and inflects the material of his story-world. My study thus moves from the formally less complex novel *Rudin*, to the mature artistic achievements of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, in order to illustrate the complexity of the Russian novel’s implicit theory of the subject.

Methodologically, my dissertation stages a dialogue between twentieth-century theories of the novel and the nineteenth-century Russian novel, in order to articulate the relationship between the categories of subjectivity and form. Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in questions of form within novel studies, particularly with respect to the novel’s role in the formation and representation of the human subject. My dissertation contributes to this current turn towards form, marking out a place for the nineteenth-century Russian novel. Approaches to the novel in the field of Slavic studies, for historical as well as ideological reasons, have not fully benefitted from the challenges as well as insights offered by contemporary novel theory; interpretations inflected by post-structuralist theories represent a particularly conspicuous gap that my dissertation fills. The staging of this dialogue requires that some “cultural translation” take place, given that the social, historical, and philosophical conditions underwriting both the novels from which a theory derives and the theories themselves do not necessarily obtain in the case of the nineteenth-century Russian novel.

Shared by both the nineteenth-century Russian novelists and twentieth-century novel theorists alike is the grounding in the German Idealist tradition. Questions regarding the source of the subject’s identity and coherence, its consciousness of “its own
impulses and motives,” its “control of the meaning of its words or the consequences of its actions” – all commonly associated with psychoanalytic and deconstructive approaches to subjectivity – in fact take their bearing from German Romanticism and are central to Romantic aesthetics.³ This latter aesthetic tradition was instrumental to the rise of the novel in Russia, as is evident in such works as Pushkin’s Evgeny Onegin (1823-1831) and Lermontov’s A Hero of Our Time (1840).

The philosophical understanding of the subject, as it is employed in this study, is “the conscious or thinking subject, as self or ego, as that to which representations are attributed or predicated (the subject as the subject of representation).”⁴ This modern conception of the subject, which begins with René Descartes’ cogito, undergoes a crucial revision in the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel, whose Master/Slave dialectic,⁵ found in the fourth chapter of his Phenomenology of Spirit, describes how the existence of other people constitutes a problematic necessity for the subject who strives to achieve self-consciousness.

Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic articulates the dynamics of intersubjectivity, the process by which one self-consciousness achieves recognition in its encounter with another self-consciousness: “Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self.”⁶ In order to achieve recognition through the other, self-consciousness must lose itself in the other. This evacuation of the self occurs for both subjects, who both find themselves in the other, where the completion of this dialectical movement requires that each self-consciousness return the other through an act of recognition. I read this loss or evacuation of the self as a form of decentering that facilitates the intersubjective relationship between the two self-consciousnesses. Self-consciousness’s capacity for evacuation, projection, and identification enables these intersubjective relations.⁷

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⁷ The notion that the decentering of the subject occasions intersubjective relations, or that decentering is a prerequisite for an intersubjective dynamic, is implicit in Judith Butler’s reading of Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic in her study Subjects of Desire, specifically the ecstatic nature of that encounter: “Self-consciousness comes out of itself when faced with the Other, where ‘ausser sich’ in German not only denotes coming out of oneself but ecstasy as well as anger.” A similar description occurs in her later work, Giving an
The works of novel theory that my dissertation draws on, when viewed in their historical progression and intertextual relationships, evince a shift in their interest from descriptions of the formal techniques by which an author represents subjectivity to attending to how novels formally organize the relationships between characters. What unites the theories I draw upon is their conceptual debt to Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic.

Henry James and Georg Lukács, two founding theorists of novel theory at the beginning of the twentieth century, both offer conceptions of the novel as an art form that is structured around the consciousness of its hero. In his prefaces, James speaks of his novels as built around “centers of consciousness” and Lukács, in his seminal 1920 study, *The Theory of the Novel*, presents the outer form of the novel as biographical. The narrative arc of a nineteenth-century European novel borrows from the shape of biography its sense of scale, “natural” beginnings and endings, causality and temporal openness. This openness stands in paradoxical tension with the teleological understanding of historical time that imbues the biographical events of an individual life with meaning, even if this meaning is limited by the delineated life of that individual, and therefore not fixed or finalized, or, to use Lukács’s own terminology, not “totalized.”

8 He famously describes the novel as arising in an historical and philosophical moment “in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.”

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*Account of Oneself*: “if we are to follow *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was.” See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 48; and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 27. Similar formulations of the Hegelian relationship between decentering and intersubjectivity also occur in psychoanalytic accounts of Hegel, and post-structuralist recuperations of the ethical subject, in which the subject’s defining features are precisely its openness and even its “vulnerability” to the other. What for Butler has mixed connotations, both ecstasy and anger, the psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden casts beautifully as a process fundamental to human flourishing: “Human beings have a need as deep as hunger and thirst to establish intersubjective constructions (including projective identifications), in order to find an exit from unending, futile wanderings in their own internal object world” (193). Thomas Ogden, “The Analytic Third: Implications For Psychoanalytic Theory And Technique,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 73.1 (2004): 167-195, 193. Simon Critchley, in his discussion of Levinas, observes: “It is because the self is sensible, that is to say, vulnerable, passive, open to wounding, outrage and pain, but also open to the movement of the erotic, that it is capable or worthy of ethics.” Critchley, “Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity?” 64.


What is common to Lukács’s and James’s notions of what constitutes the defining features of this genre as it emerges and develops over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that they see novelistic narrative techniques as representing the tension between a perceiving subject and the objective, historical world. The novel’s most distinctive formal feature – Free Indirect Discourse – which lexically and stylistically fuses the voice of an “omniscient” third-person narrator with the voice of a character – might be seen as a formal solution to the philosophical problem of the division between subject and object, a merging and fusion of these two voices that overcomes this opposition as it strains towards a meaningful conception of the world that is seemingly bound to a single subject’s consciousness and associated point of view.  

While we occasionally encounter novels that are constructed around a single center of consciousness or single biographical subject, particularly in the sub-genre of the Bildungsroman, most novels have many main characters; Russian novels, perhaps especially, allot narrative attention to multiple characters’ thoughts and life events. The question then becomes – How might one offer a formal description of the novel that registers these multiple, and therefore necessarily relative centers of consciousness, producing a conception of the novel that acknowledges its concern both for the life of a social collective as well as for the life of the individual? Such novel theorists as Fredric Jameson, René Girard, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and most recently Alex Woloch, in various but related ways approach the novel with this question in mind. Two intertwined lines might be traced here. The first begins with Jameson’s groundbreaking study The Political Unconscious, in which his reading of Balzac’s “La Vieille Fille” combines formalist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist theory to identify and analyze what he calls the novel’s “character system,” a concept that Alex Woloch inherits and develops into a full-fledged theory of the novel in his recent The One vs. The Many. The second

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10 For foundational formulations of this technique see Ann Banfield, Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); and Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction (Princeton, N.J., 1984).


12 Jameson writes: “We will want to suggest that the ‘decentering’ of Balzacian narrative, if that is not an anachronistic term for it, is to be found in a rotation of character centers which deprive each of them in turn of any privileged status. This rotation is evidently a small-scale model of the decentered organization of the Comédie humaine itself. What interests us in the present context, however, is the glimpse this turning movement gives us into the semic production of characters, or in other words into what we call a character system.” Jameson, The Political Unconscious, 161. Woloch defines two new
line originates with René Girard’s *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, which presents a theory of triangular desire that Eve Sedgwick develops and inflects through the lens of gender studies in her *Between Men*. The theories of Jameson and Girard are both explicitly indebted to Hegel. These theorists offer approaches to the novel that attend to how authors structure the interrelations between characters, the ways in which characters find themselves bound to and dependent upon one another, and how novels deal with what Jameson calls the philosophical problem of the existence of other people, which according to Jameson was “altogether ignored” in philosophy and artistic representation before Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic.

In his “Experiments in Time,” Jameson adopts a modernist methodological focus in his reading of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, but argues for this approach’s applicability to canonical realist novels of the second half of the nineteenth-century. This approach allows him to overcome a “fundamental misconception” about these novels: “What was wrongly identified as self-consciousness or reflexivity of the individual self (now increasingly endowed with that private or personal reservoir entitled the Unconscious) can on closer inspection be seen to be a minute and microscopic negotiation with the shock and scandal of the Other, a reverberation of muffled reactions back and forth as with the dance of insects confronting one another and attempting to gauge degrees of danger or attraction, if not neutrality.”

Jameson’s methodological shift corrects a misrecognition that mistakes descriptions of intersubjective exchanges for those of an individual psyche. My readings of *Rudin, Demons*, and *Anna Karenina* take up this methodological focus in order to describe how these novels formally register these relationships, a shift from the question of novelistic subjectivity to intersubjectivity.

This dissertation’s close readings describe the intersubjective structuring of the novelistic space on the levels of character, plot and narration. The methodology that I develop here could be described as “psychological formalism,” which examines how representations of interpersonal relationships among a novel’s set of characters register in the formal features of that novel.

Chapter 1, “Recognition and Desire in Turgenev’s *Rudin*,” offers an in-depth analysis of Turgenev’s first novel, *Rudin* (1856), arguing that the notion of the desiring

narratological categories: “the character-space (that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole) and the character-system (the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces – differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure – into a unified narrative structure).” Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 14.

13 In a chapter titled “Master and Slave,” René Girard writes: “The two themes of *Phenomenology of Mind* which particularly interest contemporary readers are the ‘unhappy consciousness’ and the ‘dialectic of master and slave.’ […] That original synthesis, impossible in Hegel’s system, is precisely what the novelistic dialectic permits us to glimpse.” Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 111-12.


15 Ibid.
subject enables a productive reevaluation of the most prolific literary type of the
nineteenth-century Russian novel, the western-educated Russian Superfluous Man.
Rudin’s oratory gifts accentuate his social superfluity – he is a phrasemonger whose
words never translate into deeds. My reading of Rudin maintains that the superfluous man
is necessary not only for the formal composition of Turgenev’s novel, but also for the
social universe which this novel represents, and that, moreover, the social critique of this
type, which primarily responds to his inability to make a positive and practical
contribution to society, paradoxically exposes his social and formal necessity. In arguing
this, my reading challenges and complicates the current understanding of the superfluous
man in the scholarly literature.

Turgenev, I argue, problematizes his hero’s identity in two specific ways. Firstly,
the narrative technique I term “enigmatic focalization” accesses one mind in order to
register the opacity of another, thereby making/letting the reader repeatedly experience
the confusion of the characters who interact with Rudin; and when the narrator does
represent Rudin’s thoughts, it is primarily to report Rudin’s own confusion and
uncertainty. Secondly, the narrator chooses to suppress Rudin’s direct speech at precisely
those moments when Rudin is speaking most eloquently, when his speech is most
powerfully affecting his listeners. At the same time, the narrator questions the origin of
Rudin’s words, whether their source is his “soul” or “some higher power.” Turgenev’s
techniques of enigmatic focalization and suppression of (Rudin’s) direct speech disrupt
any continuity between external and internal representations of this character, producing
a hero who is defined by a gap or absence. Into this container the other characters project
their own desires, a projection that, in turn, allows them to productively misrecognize
Rudin as a romantic rival against whom they can act. This projection of desire is one
form that intersubjectivity assumes in this novel. These acts, in turn, propel the plot
forward.

Rudin’s superfluity traditionally rests on the idea that he is a man of words but not
of deeds. My analysis offers a reevaluation of this notion, proposing that Rudin’s
superfluity results from his vexed relationship to language, which Turgenev implicitly
presents as constituted by a gap, conceptually quite similar to Derrida’s concept of
différance. Rudin’s superfluity, I argue, should also be conceived of in Hegelian terms, a
philosopher whose thinking exerted a profound influence on the early Turgenev, and of
whose philosophy Turgenev offers an explicit, if only superficial, critique in Rudin. I
argue that Hegel’s entwined concepts of desire and recognition structure the relationships
between characters and characterize the narrator’s representation of Rudin’s
consciousness. This chapter concludes by showing how the narrator’s continual
questioning of Rudin’s identity also activates the reader’s desire to answer the question
the characters ask all along: Who is Dmitry Rudin?

My second chapter, “The Subject and the Event in Dostoevsky’s Demons,” begins
by asking a question that continues to vex readers of Dostoevsky’s Demons – what
constitutes the formal unity of this novel? One early critical response registered the
frustration of reading this unruly novel, parodying Dostoevsky’s artistic practice with the
following formula: “a million characters and their universal destruction at the novel’s
end.” Dostoevsky’s personal friend and literary critic Nikolai Strakhov described the
public’s response more kindly: “the public’s impression at this point is one of confusion;
they don’t see the point of the story, and they are getting lost amidst the multitude of characters and episodes that to them are not connected.” The desire to locate the novel’s artistic unity in its hero, or even a set of main characters (of which in this work there are nearly thirty), while perfectly reasonable given the generic expectations of novelistic form established by nineteenth-century Western European models and upheld by twentieth-century theorists, is, one might argue, fated to result in such confusion in the case of Dostoevsky’s Demons. Drawing on evidence from Dostoevsky’s notebooks and letters, as well as a close analysis of the novel, this chapter argues that the concept of the event (sobytie) both serves as a formal organizing principle for the novel and mediates the categories of form and subjectivity in Demons.

The concept of the event, I suggest, displaces the hero as the novel’s organizing principle, a formal choice that mirrors the theoretical conception of the relationship between the subject and the event in the novel, whereby the event functions to decenter the subject. The novel’s narrator seems preoccupied with a particular type of event – the dénouement, or razviazka in Russian. Etymologically, both nouns describe the act of “untying,” and both are calques of the Greek term lusis employed in Aristotle’s famous definition of tragic plot in his Poetics: “Every tragedy has its tying and untying.” Dostoevsky implicitly defines an event as that which not only exceeds the expectations of the subject, but also produces effects in excess of a subject’s intention.

My close reading of the novel uncovers an elaborate system of morphological puns on razviazka that plays with the notion of a fate that “binds” (sviazat’) the characters even as they attempt to bind one another both figuratively and literally. These bonds create the inter-subjective relations between characters. My analysis of this systematic punning reveals how the concept of the event mediates the relationship between form and subjectivity in Demons, and in fact reconfigures these categories. With respect to form, Dostoevsky offers a theoretical extension of and implicit commentary on Aristotle’s categories. More specifically, that complexity of the novel that confused the early reading public and finds contemporary critics making claims of formal excess, I recast as a variation on Aristotle’s “complexity” defined in the Poetics: Dostoevsky’s tragic “reversals” serve to link or knot the narrative categories of fabula and sjuzhet. My reading reverses the negative aesthetic valence of complexity in relation to Dostoevsky’s novel, showing it to be intentional and patterned. This chapter concludes by situating Dostoevsky’s conception of the event in relation to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin, discussing how Dostoevsky inflects this concept through novelistic, philosophical, and religious-redemptive frameworks.

Chapter 3, “Subjectivity and Double-Vision in Anna Karenina,” examines the role of vision in the representation of intersubjectivity in Anna Karenina. As scholars have noted, the concept of vision is central to Tolstoy’s poetics. My chapter examines how Levin and Anna look at the world, how their ways of looking change as the novel progresses, and how these shifting modes of perception are imbricated in Tolstoy’s representation of subjectivity.

My elaboration of the relationship between vision and subjectivity draws upon Martin Jay’s notion of vision in modernity as a double concept that encapsulates both physical acts of seeing with the eye and figurative acts of seeing with the eye of the mind, what Jay calls rational contemplation. The simile of the eye of the soul occurs in Plato’s
Republic, which Tolstoy expands to describe the psychic decentering Anna experiences as a result of her affair with Vronsky: “She felt that everything was beginning to go double in her soul, as an object sometimes goes double in tired eyes.”\(^\text{16}\) This chapter shows how descriptions of Levin’s and Anna’s visions of the world combine literal seeing with contemplation.

The principle of seeing double that afflicts Anna’s soul vision is also, this chapter argues, the novel’s most conspicuous formal feature: the novel’s formal organizing principle is double vision. Consciousness, as it is represented in Anna Karenina, also has this double structure, which is detectable in Tolstoy’s descriptions of characters in the act of perceiving the world, in which the famous Tolstoyan dialectics of the soul, I argue, manifest themselves in a dialectics of seeing. Levin’s vision of the sky in the final chapters of the novel, offers one key example in which what he sees in the sky above is his own dichotomized consciousness: “Don’t I know that it is infinite space and not a round vault? But no matter how I squint and strain my sight, I cannot help seeing it as round and limited, and despite my knowledge of infinite space, I am undoubtedly right when I see a firm blue vault, more right than when I strain to see beyond it.” However, while Levin appears to be consciously reflective of the subjective nature of his perceptions, Anna, as the novel progresses, shows a growing inability to engage in self-conscious reflection on her vision of the world to the extent that she eventually fails to recognize herself in a mirror. If Levin’s newly acquired mode of seeing allows him to imbue his life with meaning (which I argue occurs as a consequence of his “seeing God” during the lightning storm near the novel’s end), then Anna’s failure of vision produces a collapse of her interpretive faculties, whereby she becomes unaware of the degree to which her subjectivity constitutes her vision of the world around her.

The chapter concludes by offering two theoretical interventions: the first shows how Tolstoy innovated conventional techniques of narrating consciousness in his representation of faith as a fusion of the minds of author and character, a technique I term “free indirect vision.” Free indirect vision offers a variation on the two narrative techniques of free indirect discourse and focalization that traditionally describe how novels present unmarked representations of consciousness. If free indirect discourse refers to a syntactically unmarked fusion of the languages of author/narrator and character, and focalization captures the experience of seeing the world through a given character’s eyes, then free indirect vision describes a technique whereby the objective field of perception and the subjective act of perception balance between identity and difference.

The second utilizes Leo Bersani’s concept of the Aesthetic Subject, which proposes a different, non-projective, mode of the subject’s being in the world that he describes as correspondences of forms “that are free of both an antagonistic dualism between human consciousness and the world it inhabits and the anthropomorphic appropriation of that world.”\(^\text{17}\) Borrowing the concept of the Aesthetic Subject, we might


\(^{17}\) Leo Bersani, “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject.” Critical Inquiry 32:2 (Winter
read Anna’s subjectivity as “an effect of external reality,” whereby she not only receives from the world the material that will be fashioned into her particular fantasy of reality, but also borrows the form of that world. This framework offers another way of thinking about the subject’s presence in the world, a mode of Tolstoyan intersubjectivity that explains how it might be possible for individuals to share dreams.

Finally, my dissertation’s coda reverses the analytical procedure of its three main chapters, which explores how novelistic form was deployed to represent the subjectivity, arguing that Georg Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* bears the form of a novel, specifically a Bildungsroman whose hero, “epic literature,” follows a difficult path from childhood to maturity, ending in a crisis. Critics have long wondered whether Georg Lukács’s influential *The Theory of the Novel* is best understood as a work of literary theory. One scholar calls it “a novel or a fantasy”; another reads it for biographical connotations, such as the notorious “transcendental homelessness,” evoking Lukács’s own condition as an exile at the time of historical catastrophes. The intellectual historian Galin Tihanov describes Lukács’s theory as “the story of the genre” that places the novel within the framework of “the story of the world,” told “from the standpoint of a particular philosophy of history.” Expanding on these suggestive remarks, Lukács, by figuring the genre of the novel as a life-stage of a biographical subject, implies the extent to which his definition of novelistic form derives from the concept of the biographical subject.

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Chapter 1

Recognition and Desire in Turgenev’s *Rudin*

“I have said somewhere it is the unwritten part of books that would be the most interesting.”
– Thackeray, *A Letter*¹

“Let the psychologists explain this contradiction.”
– Turgenev, “First Love”

“The Mother of the useful arts is necessity; that of the fine arts superfluity and abundance. As their father, the former have understanding, the latter genius, which is itself a kind of superfluity, that of the power of knowledge beyond the measure required for service of the will.”
– Schopenhauer, “On the Inner Nature of Art”

Introduction

Rudin is considered one of the best examples of the Russian superfluous man, espousing principles and ideas that he is unable to substantiate with his actions. Turgenev’s first novel, *Rudin* (1856), has been seen as offering a critique of speech as rhetoric, a critique of empty words, of words (*slova*) that fail to become deeds (*dela*).² Diverging from this standard reading, this study argues that Rudin’s words and speeches *do* produce effects, that his speech acts are efficacious deeds that do something in the world of the novel. Moreover, the intentions that govern these acts remain unknown to the novel’s characters, including Rudin himself, as well as to the narrator and reader. The novel draws together characters, narrator, and reader in order to speculate about the nature of Rudin’s intentions and consequently about his identity. Extending scholarly critiques of Rudin’s rhetoric, this chapter also seeks to illuminate the social and linguistic conditions that attend the moments when speech fails Rudin, when Rudin is depicted as least transparent to himself and the reader. Examining these moments will illuminate the aesthetic values that motivate Turgenev’s narrative techniques for representing subjectivity.

Two major monographs converge on the question of Turgenev’s philosophical treatment of language in *Rudin*, arguing for the ways in which this novel offers a critique of rhetoric, privileges silence over speech, and demonstrates the limits of language to

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arrest its referent. Although both studies address the question of form in Turgenev’s novels, both retreat from this question in their respective analyses of *Rudin*. An overview of Turgenev scholarship reveals that Turgenev’s implicit philosophical skepticism concerning language’s inherent limitations is reflected in the stylistic features of “measure, moderation, and restraint.” Robert Louis Jackson offers this triptych in his article, “The Root and Flower,” whose title derives from a well-known statement made by Turgenev in a letter to the writer K. N. Leont’ev concerning his artistic practice: “The poet should be a psychologist, but a secret one: he should know and feel the roots of phenomena, but present these phenomena only in their blooming or withering” [Поэт должен быть психологом, но тайным: он должен знать и чувствовать корни явлений, но представляет только самые явлений – в их расцвете или увядании]. Turgenev the artist, for whom “[n]ature provides a model for art and the artist precisely in her equilibrium, her restraint, her Olympian tranquility and objectivity,” “feels the roots” but depicts the flower. Jackson suggests that the theme of restraint also characterizes

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4 Allen spends little time on *Rudin*, limiting herself to commenting on the significance of the novel’s topology as a formal organizing principle. Victor Ripp and Richard Freeborn before him, similarly identify Turgenev’s deployment of space as a formal organizing principle for his novels. Victor Ripp, *Turgenev’s Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980); Richard Freeborn, *Turgenev: The Novelist’s Novelist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960). Costlow (*Worlds within Worlds*, 12), on the other hand, states that “Turgenev elaborates a novelistic form that depends less on the complexities of plot than on the revelations of conversation—and his first novel, *Rudin*, is in this regard a crucial guide to what conversation in Turgenev is all about.” Costlow, *Worlds within Worlds*, 12. Having stated her interest in form, she goes on to abandon this category as I will employ it here, instead assembling a convincing argument about Turgenev’s critique of language, the evidence for which derives from the novel’s content; that is explicit statements made by Rudin, the other characters, and the narrator about language.


7 Jackson, “The Root and the Flower,” 167. Significantly, Jackson’s study is a comparative analysis that presents Dostoevsky’s artistic practice as a foil for Turgenev’s; Dostoevsky, as an artist, is intent on examining the root, even if that means uprooting the flower, while Turgenev is more restrained. Anatoly Batiuto also quotes this letter, commenting on how frequently it is evoked in Turgenev scholarship; see *Turgenev-romanist* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972), 178. Like Jackson’s, Batiuto’s discussion of this quotation occurs in the context of his comparison of Turgenev’s methods of psychological analysis to those of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Anxiety concerning
Turgenev’s narrative treatment of his characters, and other scholars have noted that Turgenev’s narrators often exhibit the epistemological limitations of a keen observer or voyeur. Restraint, as an aesthetic principle, then, would seem to offer a point of convergence between style and the representation of a character’s subjectivity or interiority.

This relationship between the representation of Rudin’s subjectivity and Rudin’s narrative form, of which Turgenev’s style serves as one manifestation, constitutes the primary object of this chapter. Turgenev’s penchant for “silence,” “distance,” and “restraint” seems reactionary, like a resistance against some more basic impulse that the artist attempts to master, a resistance perhaps productive of form itself. Some critics do identify corresponding countervailing forces, such as the inherent mendacity of language or the trauma inducing psychic excess of an underlying Dionysian reality. This study, however, proposes that the concept of desire better explains the formal features of Turgenev’s first novel. The concept of desire offers one nexus, perhaps the central nexus, between form and subjectivity in Rudin. Desire as encountered in Rudin should not be reduced to its erotic manifestations, although it is certainly present in this form, but emerges more generally as desire for social recognition. Erotic desire and desire for recognition are not unrelated in Rudin, but, as I will argue, the confusion felt by the novel’s characters, including Rudin, as well as the condemnation of Rudin in which this confusion results, can be explained through the disarticulation of these two modes. This complex entanglement of erotic desire and desire for social recognition depends upon a socio-political impulse, almost bourgeois in its thirst for property, that surreptitiously arrogates the erotic.

Turgenev’s status relative to these giants of Russian literature seems to permeate Turgenev scholarship, which, perhaps, finds its origin in Merezhkovsky’s statement about Turgenev. See Allen’s Beyond Realism, 2-4; Freeborn’s The Novelist’s Novelist (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 129; and Jackson’s “The Turgenev Question,” The Sewanee Review, 93.2 (Spring 1985), 300-309.

8 In his analysis of Sportsman’s Notebook Jackson writes: “Turgenev’s approach is almost cinematographic: what the reader learns about the characters is almost entirely what the narrator sees and hears. […] The narrator, significantly, often emerges in his Sportsman’s Notebook as a voyeur.” Jackson, “The Root and the Flower,” 171.

Allen reads Turgenev’s narrative distance from his characters as a prescriptive model of “self protection,” as an implicit prescription to readers concerning how to avoid psychic entanglement with individuals who would potentially traumatize the self. Freeborn writes: “It is instinctive to Turgenev to hide himself. His attitude towards his fiction is one of sympathetic detachment, almost – though never quite – indifference.” Freeborn, The Novelist’s Novelist, 48.

9 These key terms belong to Costlow, Allen, and Jackson, respectively.

10 Costlow and Allen, respectively, discuss these first two forces, while Jackson, it seems, does not explicitly posit a reactionary force, finding Turgenev’s restraint the definition of good form. Allen offers a fascinating, if not entirely convincing, theory of the Apollonian form-giving impulse in Turgenev’s novels.
Other studies of the novel, while attending to issues of narrative form and Rudin’s problematic identity, do not take into account the centrality of desire for the poetics of this novel, most frequently reading Rudin for the social questions it raises concerning the problem of the Russian Superfluous Man. 11 This study also analyzes the social and narrative aspects of the superfluous man, arguing for the importance of desire for our understanding of this type in Rudin.

On the levels of plot and action, the novel clearly concerns itself with the orchestration of desire among its cast of characters. The opening scenes announce this theme with the introduction of the “secretly voluptuous” [втайне сластолюбив] 12 Pandalevsky and his back-to-back failed flirtations with provincial lady Alexandra Pavlovna Lipina, and then a young peasant girl. The novel’s second chapter paints another picture of strained flirtation, this time between Natalya, the novel’s heroine, and the faithful if also somewhat socially inept Volynstcev. Natalya is the daughter of Darya Mikhailovna Lasunskaya, the despotic aristocratic landowner who rules the country estate where the majority of the novel’s action occurs. The Lasunskys (Natalya has two younger brothers) spend summers on their country estate, where Darya “kept open house – in other words, she received men, especially bachelors; the provincial ladies she was unable to endure” (12, 247). Volynstcev, who is in love with Natalya – the novel does not indicate for how long, giving this state of unfilled desire a frozen or static quality – is a local member of the provincial gentry who lives nearby with his sister, Alexandra Pavlova. Although Alexandra is a “provincial lady,” she does not seem to suffer Darya’s contempt. The narrator himself saves Alexandra from this contempt through his orientation toward her. Darya and Alexandra represent two poles of mature “femininity” in the novel, which is structured by an implicit hierarchy concerning both the expression of male desire and desire’s appropriate objects: Darya’s “open house” might be contrasted with Alexandra’s smaller social circle, the latter is not always to be found in

11 Freeborn’s classic study does discuss the formal significance of the love plots in Turgenev’s early novels, reading Turgenev’s first three novels (Rudin, A Nest of Gentry, and On the Eve) as “preliminary sketches for that perfection of novel-form which Turgenev achieved in Fathers and Children.” Within Freeborn’s teleological framework, Fathers and Children achieves this formal perfection, in part, for the way it harmoniously fuses multiple love stories with ideological and social issues. Freeborn makes an insightful observation regarding Rudin’s formal failing in this regard, remarking on its generic similarity to the short story: “The two episodes of [Rudin’s] arrival and departure are almost separate stories. During the gap of two months separating the two episodes it must be assumed that Natalya falls in love, for she is in love by the beginning of the second episode. However, Turgenev has made no effort to illustrate this process. This is a weakness that shows the extent to which Turgenev had been unable, as yet, to achieve the special form demanded of the novel.” See Freeborn, Turgenev, 75, 131, 60.

the drawing-room scenes of the former, and if the novel offers some judgment of Darya’s sexual practices it exults Alexandra’s marriage to the landowner Mikhailo Lezhnev, occurring at the novel’s end, as the ideal, prosaic form and fulfillment of this desire. In a similar manner, Alexandra herself, according to the narrator, represents the ideal object of male desire: “Of Alexandra Pavlovna the entire province of *** said with one voice that she was lovely, and the province of *** was not mistaken. Her small, straight, very slightly upturned nose was enough to drive any mortal man out of his mind […]. Could one have desired (zhelat’) anything more?” (8, 242). Remarkably, the novel’s conclusion witnesses three marriages and one “renewing of vows” in addition to the death of its hero, producing a hybrid comic-tragic ending.

As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, desire in Rudin plays a central thematic role as well as functioning as a form-giving principle, operating on the levels of style, character system, and plot. The following sections argue that Rudin’s relationship to language, Rudin’s narrative representation, and the structure of the novel’s plot all evince the presence of a desire that resists being totally or explicitly named and that consequently manifests itself on these various formal levels of composition. At the heart of the novel lies the enigma of Rudin’s identity, which the novel circumscribes. Turgenev’s narrative restraint means that he will perhaps say too little rather than risk saying too much in answer to the questions that he poses to his reader. If the reader wants to “know and feel the roots of phenomena,” he must, like the author, carefully attend to their “blooming and withering.” The organic figure of “blooming and withering” depicts liminal stages that demarcate a center, the being of a phenomenon that Turgenev elects not to represent directly.

This chapter borrows a definition of the subject from Judith Butler’s study of subject formation in The Psychic Life of Power:

the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a place holder, a structure in formation. Individuals come to occupy the site of the subject (the subject simultaneously emerges as a ‘site’), and they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language. The subject is the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency.13

Butler’s definition implies that an individual may possibly exceed the category of the subject: that is, the being of the individual does not find full expression in language. Paradoxically, the individual does not come into being apart from the subjugation that results from the individual’s coming to occupy such a position in language. Without this subjection to language and its attendant social norms the individual will not “enjoy intelligibility,” he or she will not achieve a “recognizable”14 social existence. Turgenev’s novel explores how Rudin, as implied individual, fails to achieve social recognition, or

14 Ibid., 20.
rather is recognized in such a way that precludes an apprehension of his identity. This chapter explores the social and narrative productivity of this (mis)recognition and its relationship to desire, beginning on the level of syntax with the ellipsis.

_Ellipsis, Turgenev’s?.._

“Punctuation is not a proper object.”
--Jennifer DeVere Brody, _Punctuation_

There are 657 ellipses in Turgenev’s short (131-page)\(^\text{15}\) novel: an average of just over 5 per page. What logic governs the ellipsis in Turgenev’s _Rudin_? To whom or what does the ellipsis belong? Much of _Rudin_ consists of dialogue. The novel implicitly presents writing as a technique that not only represents but critiques speech, while the representation of speech gives rise to a form of punctuation that perhaps does not totally belong to the category of speech: the ellipsis as a device belongs to writing as such, and does not have a strict equivalent in speech. As a mark of punctuation, it functions to duplicate the cadences and rhythms of speech, to signal pauses in speech, but it is a mark that potentially exceeds this function in and through its graphical instantiation. Most strikingly, in _Rudin_, the ellipsis becomes one way to represent desiring subjects.

Let’s begin by reading some pauses. The novel’s second chapter depicts a conversation that takes place between Natalya Lasunskaya, the novel’s heroine, and her suitor, Sergei Volyntsev. “Volynsev, Natalya, and Mlle Boncourt found their way into the very remotest part of the garden” (20):

“And what have you been reading?”
“I’ve been reading… a history of the crusades,” Natalya said, with a slight hesitation.

Volynsev looked at her.

“Oh!” he said at last. “That must be interesting.”

– А что вы читали?
– Я читала… историю крестовых походов, – проговорила Наталиа с небольшой запинкой.

Волынцев посмотрел на нее.

– А! – произнес он наконец,– это должно быть интересно. (20-1, 256)

Here we have an ellipsis with a pause and a pause without an ellipsis. This passage offers an implicit definition of ellipsis, “showing” it in action and then “telling” what it means: a pause or “hesitation” (zapinka) in speech. But why, then, does Natalya hesitate? If anything, the doubling of the ellipsis and its narrative description draw extra attention to this gap. The Russian “zapinka,” which also describes a stammer in speech, derives from

\(^{15}\) Page count is from Turgenev, _Polnoe sobranie sochinenii_, vol. 5.
the root p/n and is related to the verb *pnut*’—“to kick”; *zapinka*’s closer relative, the verb *zapinat’sia* applies both to stumbling in speech and literal stumbling (as in “*zapinat’sia o kamen*”—to strike against a stone).  

What does Natalya bump into here, what causes her to stumble?  

Syntactically, the ellipsis (momentarily) takes the place of the grammatical direct object, the “what” that Natalya has been reading. There is no evidence that she is lying to Volyn’tsev, but there is some evidence that she is selective in the truth she tells. Much of Natalya’s fuller introduction, which comes later in Chapter 5, consists of a description of her reading habits:

> [E]very morning Natalya had to read history books, travel books, and other edifying works—in Mlle Boncourt’s presence. […] But Natalya also read books the very existence of which Mlle Boncourt did not suspect: she knew the whole of Pushkin by heart… (43, Turgenev’s ellipsis)

One answer that might fill the gap of Natalya’s ellipsis would then be “Pushkin.” But this would be to expose her secret reading practices. She is probably more interested in keeping these practices concealed from her governess than from Volyn’tsev; recall that the latter “followed [the two] at a slight distance” into the garden. In either case, the ellipsis functions not quite as lie but as a means of keeping a secret through the suppression of speech, as a surface representation of a depth that is not spoken about but only referenced. This ellipsis thus represents subjectivity or interiority, but it does so only by gesturing to its existence in the gap of Natalya’s representation of herself through speech that is then, itself, represented by Turgenev’s writing. And yet Volyn’tsev’s double response to Natalya’s answer also registers the awareness that something is withheld, a withholding that implicitly gestures towards that which is withheld, namely Natalya’s subjectivity or interiority which registers as her secret. Significantly, the interpretive attempt to fill the gap of the ellipsis has only duplicated this gap: “she knew the whole of Pushkin by heart…” *This* ellipsis, at least syntactically, belongs to the narrator, while also referencing the same object, Natalya’s subjectivity. The narrator exercises his omniscience to tell us Natalya’s secret, but it is a secret that will not be fully divulged. What does it mean that Natalya knows “the whole of Pushkin by heart…”? An overview of the treatment of Turgenev’s ellipses by other scholars will help answer this question.

Scholars who have noticed Turgenev’s penchant for the ellipsis agree on its intended effect: to invite the reader to “penetrate” a character’s subjectivity, and

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16 *The Dictionary of the Modern Russian Literary Language* gives the following definition: “Зацепляться, задевать ногой; спотыкаться.” Turgenev also uses this noun to describe a character’s gait in *Spring Torrents*: “Походочка с запинкой, голос с пришепеткой, улыбка как у ребенка.” *Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka v semnadtsati tomakh* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel’s’tvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950-1965), 4:766.

17 In order to differentiate Turgenev’s ellipses from my own, my textual excisions will appear with square brackets (e.g., […]) while the ellipses in Turgenev’s text will appear without brackets.
subsequently provide the emotional content to which the ellipsis refers.\(^1\) One Soviet study argues that the ellipsis represents one manifestation of Turgenev’s narrative economy, remarking that even a phrasemonger such as Rudin, when compared to the heroes of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, appears to have taken a vow of silence.\(^2\) Concerning Turgenev’s novels more generally the scholar observes: “The text of Turgenev’s novel literally swarms with pauses and omissions [умолчаниями]. The device of the long pause or the suppressed statement after which the train of thoughts, feelings, and experiences not always even named but understandable to the alert reader is hidden—this is a favorite means of psychological characterization for Turgenev and one he employs frequently.”\(^3\) The ellipsis summons the reader to project him or herself into characters, providing them with emotional content. Iakov K. Grot’s nineteenth-century Russian grammar, which catalogues the general rules of punctuation binding on the Russian language during the period when Turgenev wrote *Rudin*, offers a definition of the ellipsis that also implies an interpretive act: “the ellipsis marks an unfinished thought, a significant reflection, or powerful emotion” [Многоточием, т.е. тремя и более точками сряду отмечается либо неконченная мысль, либо многозначительное размышление или сильное чувство].\(^4\) In the case of the novel, the ellipsis asks a reader to finish a character’s thought or guess at the content of his inner emotional state. But in order to interpret the ellipsis, the reader must posit a subject to whom the ellipsis belongs, who has a mind that can engage in thought or “contemplation” [размышление], and a heart than can be moved by a “powerful emotion.” In *Rudin*, this intimate formal function of

\(^1\) “Turgenev frequently uses phrases, half-sentences, incomplete speech, and punctuation indicating ellipsis. He thereby suggests many intangible thoughts and emotional movements, and permits the reader to penetrate a little more deeply into the mind of the characters.” Ralph E. Matlaw, “Turgenev’s Novels: Civic Responsibility and Literary Predilection” in *Russian Thought and Politics*, edited by Hugh McLean, Martin E. Malia, and George Fischer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), 262.

\(^2\) Ibid., 201. Donald Fanger’s translation of Anatoly Batiuto’s “умолчание” as “ellipsis” is telling. Etymologically, umolchanie describes an activity expressed by the verb umolchat’: “to pass over in silence.” The Oxford Russian-English Dictionary 2nd Edition, ed. Marcus Wheeler and B. O. Unbegaun (London, Clarendon Press, 1992), 840. See Fanger’s “The Influence of Dostoevsky and Chekhov on Turgenev’s Fathers and Sons” in *The Poetics of Ivan Turgenev* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, 1989), 24. Batiuto’s quotation is taken from his analysis of the ellipsis in Turgenev’s novels. His description of the graphical ellipsis as a “passing over in silence” is already an interpretation which implies that the function of the ellipsis is to represent speech. Fanger’s translation returns our attention to the signifying mark on the page that Batiuto reads as a silence. If anything, this example demonstrates how the ellipsis serves as a point of contact between writing and speech (while perhaps not properly belonging to either), when it occurs within quotation marks that designate reported speech.

\(^3\) Ia. K. Grot, *Russkoe Pravopisanie* (Sanktpeterburg, Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, 1900), 115.
the ellipsis coincides with the romantic contexts of the conversations in which it occurs with great frequency. Returning to the garden conversation between Natalya and Volyntsev, we see that the ellipses cluster around the topic of unspoken desire.

“Yes. Soon I shall be sending your horse to you. It’s almost completely broken in now. I want it to start at a gallop, and I’ll see that it does.”

“Merci… But I feel ashamed [мне совестно]. You are breaking it in yourself… they say that is very hard…”

“In order to afford you the slightest satisfaction [удовольствие], you know, Natalya Alekseyevna, I am ready… I… and not simply trifling matters like this…”

Volyntsev stopped short in confusion [Вольнчев замялся]. Natalya gave him an amicable glance and again said: “Merci.”

“You know,” Sergei Pavlych went on after a long silence, “that there is not a thing… But why am I telling you this? For you know it all.”

At that moment a bell rang in the house.

“Ah! la cloche du diner!” Mlle Boncourt exclaimed. “Rentrons!”

“Quel dommage,” the old Frenchwoman thought to herself as she clambered up the steps of the balcony after Volyntsev and Natasha—quel dommage que ce charmant garçon ait si peu de ressources dans la conversation—”—which could be translated into Russian as: “You’re good-looking, my dear fellow, but a bit on the feeble side [ты, мой милый, мил, но плох немножко]” (21, 257)

More than once Volyntsev seems almost ready to confess his love (“I am ready… I… and not simply trifling matters like this…” and “there is not a thing…”), but Natalya responds only with “an amicable smile.” Volyntsev’s expression of exasperation – “But why am I telling you this? For you know it all” – betrays his ignorance concerning the functional aspect of language, which he seems to think is primarily the direct communication of information. But this is a kind of information that he seems unable to communicate directly, information that remains elliptical in his speech perhaps because an explicit confession would undermine the goal of his courtship by violating the codes that structure this aristocratic ritual.

Like Natalya’s earlier pause (zapinka), Volyntsev’s zamiat’sia (“Вольнчев замялся”) implicitly defines the ellipsis as well as describing its cumulative effect. Given that both the noun zapinka and the verb zamiat’sia denote halted or obstructed movement through physical space, Turgenev represents the negotiation of the theme of desire as the navigation of physical space, as speech working its way around desire. Instead of belonging to this or that speaking subject, desire, in this instance, might be thought of as something that organizes the space of discourse. Natalya more adroitly navigates this space, appearing less linguistically undone by the presence of desire, where her single-word response to Volyntsev, “merci,” exhibits this mastery. This one word, and its

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22 Translation of the French: “Ah, the bell for dinner!” “Let’s return!” “What a pity that this charming young man has so few conversational abilities…”
accompanying gesture, handles his confusion, as the dinner bell along with Mlle Boncourt’s opportunistic interjection aborts this failing interaction. By contrast, the verb *zamiat’šia* conveys Volynstev’s brute clumsiness in conversation, belonging, as it does, to an equine lexicon, conjuring the image of a horse stomping in place. Here Turgenev may be having some linguistic fun at Volynstev’s expense, given that the ostensible topic of this conversation concerns Volynstev’s attempts to break in Natalya’s new mare. Turgenev’s pun conveys the difficulty of speaking about desire; implicit in the representation of this difficulty is also its successful overcoming. Furthermore, it is not incidental that the discussion about breaking in Natalya’s new mare becomes a way of speaking about desire. Might the breaking in of the mare be read as a metaphor for the marriage that Volynstev is not quite able to propose? At the very least, Volynstev suggests that it is indicative of his desire to marry: “I am ready… I… and not simply trifling matters like this…” (where “this” refers to breaking in the mare). Moreover, when read metonymically, it is striking that Volynstev’s taming and training of Natalya’s mare makes her feel ashamed (“*mne sovestno*”), while Volynstev believes that this activity should give her pleasure (“*udovol’stvie*”). In this conversation Turgenev represents desire as a theme that resists linguistic signification and yet simultaneously structures discourse by means of this resistance. The sublimation of the topic of desire into an equine discussion both implies the harnessing of desire for its social utility in marriage and likens marriage to the activity of breaking in a horse. In *Rudin*, desire will continually offer linguistic resistance until it finally submits to the social subordination of marriage, a subordination that makes desire recognizable as such.

Mlle Boncourt’s inner monologue, rendered by the narrator in Boncourt’s native French, also contains an ellipsis, which curiously gets dropped by the narrator’s stylized translation of Boncourt’s French into Russian. Why does the translation erase the ellipsis? What else does it erase? In addition to signaling the depth of a subjectivity to which the narrator will only allude, circumscribing the limits of narrative omniscience, offering yet another example of the measure and restraint typical of Turgenev’s psychological characterization, the ellipsis also invites the reader to finish Mlle Boncourt’s thought for her, asks him or her implicitly, and seemingly innocuously, to assume her point of view, to speculate on the investment she might have in Volynstev’s success with Natalya. The erasure of the ellipsis thus erases the site of the reader’s identification with Mlle Boncourt. The novel, having offered this position to the reader now cedes it to the narrator, who gives a definitive statement about Volynstev, erasing the ellipsis in his translation because he has filled it; he fills it, however, not so much...

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23 The first definition in *The Dictionary of the Modern Russian Literary Language* applies to horses: “Топтаться на месте; артачиться. О лошади.” *Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka v semnadisati tomakh*, 4:670.

24 Turgenev represents her thought as reported speech, and as such the representation takes on the qualities of reported speech to the extent that it gains an ellipsis. Or perhaps a depth to her subjectivity to which the narrator will only allude? And does the ellipsis “in thought,” the cognitive ellipsis, imply that thought is simply interior speech, while simultaneously implying that there is thought that is other than speech or not speech, thought that resists representation in, by, or through language?
with the content of his explanation, that is, with the continuation of Mlle Boncourt’s thought, but rather fills it with his style.

The narrator’s translation rings like a Russian folk saying with its characteristic short-form constructions. The line, in fact, scans poetically as trochaic pentameter: ты, мои, миль, моё плох немножко (you, my dear, are sweet, but a little dense), further demonstrating its poetic quality through the assonances of the “ь”s, “и”s, and “о”s. The narrator’s translation shifts the linguistic register from aristocratic French to folk Russian, in effect replacing the aging French governess with a Russian nanny. The style fills the ellipsis, then, insofar as the translation expresses that sympathy for Volyntsev’s cause which was offered to the reader as a hermeneutic position via an interpretive identification with Mlle Boncourt’s ellipsis. In his translation of the ellipsis, which amounts to its interpretation, the narrator takes up the reader’s position and thereby implicitly offers a model of how to read the ellipsis. Here the third definition of the ellipsis offered by Grot’s nineteenth-century Russian grammar may be in operation: the expression of emotional content, namely, Boncourt’s sympathy for Volyntsev. If we are willing to concede that the ellipsis invites a reader to fill it, then here the narrator models that interpretive activity for the reader. I would like to suggest that we view this action – the production of an interpretive gap that is subsequently filled, in this case through the act of translation (which is always itself an interpretive act) – as a form of hermeneutic training for the reader. As we will see, this may not be as innocuous as sympathy for an awkward young man, but it may work to induce the reader to adopt a certain position in relation to desire and its valid objects and expressions. Volyntsev’s erotic desire makes him recognizable to the reader in a way that stabilizes his representation by anchoring it in the norms that implicitly govern his social world. In this respect, as we will see, he functions as a foil for Rudin, whose identity precludes such recognition.

The representation of Natalya reading Pushkin further suggests that Turgenev may have conceived of the ellipsis as a site for the reader’s (affective) identification with a character (or a text). In Chapter 5 we read that Natalya “knew the whole of Pushkin by heart…” (43); later, in Chapter 11, we learn that “she often told her fortune with him” (99, 339). Natalya’s fortune-telling occurs after reading Rudin’s farewell letter, which causes her to weep bitterly. Having collected herself, “she opened Pushkin at random and read the first lines that met her eye” [Вот что ей вышло] (99, 339):

Whoe’er has felt shall be disturbed
By phantom of irrevocable days…
For him no more of fascination,
For him the snake of recollection,
As by repentance he is gnawed…”

Кто чувствовал, того тревожит
Призрак невозвратимых дней…
Тому уж нет очарований,
Того змея воспоминаний,
Того раскаянье грызет…

(99, 339)
These are Turgenev’s ellipses, not to be found in Pushkin’s Onegin, but added here (and preserved by the translation of the Oxford English edition of Rudin). If what meets our eyes is a text deformed by Natalya’s reading – a graphical representation of reading – then what, by implication, meets her eyes is a projected image of herself, which the text reflects or mirrors back at her. What appears to Natalya appears to us as a representation of the act of reading. Natalya’s reading establishes an identity between her subjectivity and Pushkin’s text. These ellipses represent her pauses, her affective responses, the places where her subjectivity scores the surface of the text. This is the representation of a subjectivity whose content is filled with its object of perception: the lines of Pushkin’s verse. This is also the moment where Turgenev’s reader identifies with Turgenev’s heroine, in that her deformed text becomes ours; a moment of pure focalized interiority (within/through Natalya), but one devoid of interior content except that of Pushkin’s text and Natalya’s subjectivity, represented by the ellipses. This scene of reading depicts the identification of subject and object within Turgenev’s novel as well as producing an identification of a character with the reader.

In his analysis of this moment, Hugh McLean observes that this is an instance of life imitating art, but in such a way that complicates “the old Renaissance metaphor that literature holds a mirror up to nature”: “For all their familiarity with Eugene Onegin, however, both Natalya and Rudin must be given rather bad marks on their ability to apply its lessons to life. Natalya […] surely should have learned from Tatiana’s experience that it is not a very good idea to make passionate declarations of love to a young man one hardly knows, especially in a bucolic setting.” But the lesson of Onegin is even subtler: Pushkin depicts Tatiana’s Bildung as her increasing sophistication as an interpreter of texts, and by the end of her novel fortune-telling activities have been replaced by a more sophisticated hermeneutics of interpreting “life” vis-à-vis the frameworks of the social and literary encoded conventions that condition her experience of both. In order to receive “good marks,” then, the (nineteenth-century female) reader of Eugene Onegin should not simply learn from Tatiana’s bad “life” choices, but instead notice that these choices result from a naïve identification of “life” and “literature”: an identification predicated upon a misunderstanding of how literature mirrors life that fails to recognize the mutually constitutive relationship between these two domains. But in the instance of Natalya’s reading of Pushkin, more interesting than how literature mirrors life is how literature mirrors the reading subject. Natalya’s reading blends her subjectivity with a textual object – Natalya reads herself into Pushkin’s text.

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25 It is interesting to note that McLean’s essay, which also quotes this passage from Onegin, seems to cite not Turgenev’s novel but Pushkin’s, which effectively erases the ellipses. Hugh McLean, “Eugene Rudin” in Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914, edited by William Mills Todd III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 259, 263.

It is not incidental that Natalya’s very next action is to look in an actual mirror, a gesture that parallels her reflective reading: “She stood for a moment, looked at herself in the mirror with a cold smile and, with a small, up-down movement of her head, went downstairs to the drawing room” (99, 340). The actual mirror, unlike the mirror of the text, reestablishes the division between subject and object through the doubled image of oneself as other. If the preceding moment created the experience of interiority, this is exteriority for both the reader and Natalya. We “see” Natalya seeing herself, wherein her “cold smile” evinces the affective distance between the seeing subject who takes herself as reflected object. Something has clearly transpired within Natalya, but Turgenev, significantly, does not use his narrative omniscience to tell us about it; instead, he delineates this transformation on the level of narrative form as the sequence of the identification of subject and object, followed by their sharp differentiation. The insertion of the ellipsis into Pushkin’s text enables this identification, while the image of Natalya before the mirror produces the limited omniscient, third-person position simultaneously occupied by narrator, character, and reader.

This transformation depicts the death of Natalya’s desire for Rudin, a death that births a coherent yet opaque subject, and the narrative’s representation of Natalya registers this integrity as a function of its opacity. Seeing her daughter in the drawing room after this transformation,

Darya Mihailovna felt secretly bewildered [тайное недоумение]: for the first time the thought had come into her head that she did not really know her daughter [она дочь свою, в сущности, не знает]. On hearing from Pandalevsky of Natalya’s rendezvous with Rudin, she had not so much been angry as astonished [удивилась] […] Natalya’s first replies […] embarrassed, even frightened Darya Mikhailovna. […] Natalya’s outward calm again confused her” [её сбило с толку] (99, 340).

The experienced opacity of Natalya’s subjectivity is created by the focalization through Darya Mikhailovna. Turgenev repeatedly employs this technique in Rudin, as we will see, to create for the reader an experience of the epistemological limits that constrain any individual who seeks to gain a penetrating understanding of another. Significantly, the penetration of the character’s mind that serves as the focalized or mediating term for this representation of opacity is often, if not (almost) always negative, in that those thoughts of characters’ minds to which we as readers do gain access have an apophatic, or perhaps even elliptical, quality: Turgenev’s narrator only registers the limits of knowledge, knowing only that the characters do not know, reporting only their “confusion,” “astonishment,” and “bewilderment.” As we will see, the same narrative technique that here establishes the coherence of Natalya’s subjectivity will also, paradoxically, be used to reveal the incoherence of Rudin’s. This technique, which I term “negative focalization,” penetrates one mind in order to register the opacity of another.

One of the novel’s most enigmatic descriptions of desire occurs when Lezhnev explains to his bride to be, Alexandra Pavlovna, how he and Rudin both succumbed to the follies of Hegelian philosophy during their student days in 1830s Germany. He describes how Hegelian philosophy confused his experience of desire. The passage
abounds with ellipses, almost all of which function to create a space for Alexandra’s response to Lezhnev’s anecdote.

“It was this. I… how shall I put it for you?... it does not go with my appearance… but I have always had a great capacity for falling in love.”

“You?”

“Yes. It’s odd, isn’t it? And yet it is so… Well madam, back in those days I fell in love with a very charming young girl… But why are you looking at me like that? I could tell you something about myself that is far more astonishing than that.”

“What would that something be, may one inquire?”

“Something like this. During that time in Moscow I used to keep a nightly rendezvous with… whom do you suppose? A young lime tree at the far end of my garden. I’d embrace its delicate and slender trunk and it would seem to me that I was embracing the whole of nature, and my heart would expand and thrill as though indeed the whole of nature were flowing into it… That, madam, was what I was like!... But wait! Perhaps you think I didn’t write poetry? Madam, I did, and I even composed an entire drama, in imitation of Manfred. Among the dramatis personae was a ghost with blood on its chest, not its own blood, observe, but the blood of mankind as a whole… Yes, madam, yes, I pray you, do not be astonished… But I had begun to tell you about my love. I met a girl…"

Only twice does Alexandra respond verbally to Lezhnev in this passage, and the narrator does not record any gestures or facial expressions. These ellipses are pauses in speech, and almost all of them represent a place where Alexandra seems to have responded, or a place where Lezhnev imagines that she has responded. Eight of the
eleven ellipses are followed by direct addresses to Alexandra: “Well madam,” “that, Madam,” “Yes, madam,” “But why are you looking at me like that?” Alexandra is asked to speculate about Lezhnev’s desire, and the reader shares her position.

Why does Alexandra Pavlovna find it so “astonishing” that Lezhnev could have fallen in love with a “very charming young girl”? An easy answer to this question is that given the flirtatious nature of this exchange, Lezhnev’s description of Alexandra’s “astonishment” may be playfully hyperbolic. And yet Lezhnev believes that there is something about his “appearance” [figura] that does not signify this ability to desire. Beginning with three elliptical fragments, Lezhnev’s anecdote raises the question of how to speak about identity as a function of desire. The feature of the identity he attempts to articulate does not reside on the surface to be read, but is rather at odds with this surface: the elliptical fragment “к моей фигуре оно неходит…” sets the signifying surface (моа figura) in opposition to the signified depth, which is doubly referenced and occluded by neuter pronoun ono and the ellipsis. Lezhnev’s question, “как бы это сказать?…” expresses the language’s resistance to name desire, and as a result “he will only speak briefly and in a figure.”

Discourse on desire is structured as linguistic displacement or sublimation of a desire that cannot be named.

The fragment “Я…” graphically dramatizes the paradoxical signifying status of the ellipsis as that which references subjectivity with the mark of its (linguistic) absence. Inserting structuralism’s differential bar would further demonstrate the work of the ellipsis, highlighting the relationship of signifier and signified: “Я/…” The ellipse as absence seems to achieve the status of the signified, before the ellipsis as presence reminds us that every signified is always already a signifier. What he finally describes is only his ability to achieve a state of desiring: “я всегда был очень способен влюбиться.”

Lezhnev’s description emphasizes the fluidity of desire, expressed by its variable and shifting objects. He both begins and ends his anecdote about the lime tree by reminding Alexandra that he fell in love with a girl, a proper object of desire. Lezhnev’s description of his love for the lime tree tells a story about the difficulties of differentiating oneself from one’s object of desire. This tree stands at the far end of Lezhnev’s own garden, a spatial proximity that finds an analog in the ambiguous locus and channel of nature’s flow, which simultaneously courses through the tree and Lezhnev’s heart. In Russian, stvol as both (tree) “trunk” and “ventricle” functions as a linguistic pore through which the flow of nature passes between the two. One wonders about the location of this font and whether Lezhnev “discovers” the source of this flow in the tree in order to then reappropriate it.

Lezhnev’s anxiety concerning the fluidity of desire also manifests itself in his comment to Alexandra that he “even composed an entire drama, in imitation of Manfred.” Byron’s 1817 narrative poem describes the torment that results from

committing an unspeakable sin. Freud suggests that “the essence and the secret of the whole work lies in – an incestuous relation between a brother and sister,” speculating in a footnote: “It is plausible, by the way, to connect the plot of Manfred with the incestuous relations which have repeatedly been asserted to exist between the poet and his half-sister.”

What might imitating Manfred entail?

Lezhnev’s brief description of his version of Manfred provides a potential clue: “Among the dramatis personae was a ghost with blood on its chest, not its own blood, observe, but the blood of mankind as a whole…” [В числе действующих лиц был призрак с кровью на груди, и не с своей кровью, заметите, а с кровью человечества вообще…]. Whereas there are no ghosts with blood on them in Byron’s Manfred, Lezhnev’s version bears similarities to yet another version of Manfred, a “slavish imitation” composed by a sixteen-year-old Turgenev, entitled Steno. That narrative poem does contain a ghost “covered in blood” (pokrytyi krov’iu), but this blood belongs to Steno; the ghost has extracted it from Steno’s chest. The ghost’s extraction of Steno’s blood symbolizes the ebbing away of Steno’s life; Steno slowly bleeds out, as it were, throughout the course of the poem before finally shooting himself. In addition to loss of life, spilled blood in Steno also symbolizes guilt. In Manfred, blood symbolizes both guilt and blood relations that cause guilt. At one point Manfred’s guilty conscience causes him to mistake wine for blood: “I say ‘tis blood—my blood! the pure warm / stream / Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours / When we were in our youth, and had one heart, And loved each other as we should not love.”

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28 D. L. Macdonald interprets the “special literary status of incest as the unspeakable sin” as a consequence of the Lacanian notion that the Symbolic is governed by the prohibition of incest. See MacDonald, “Incest, narcissism and demonality in Byron's Manfred” in Mosaic: A Journal For The Interdisciplinary Study Of Literature 25, (April 15, 1992): 25-38, 33.

29 Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74), 12:44 and p. 45, note 2. Scholars suggest different approaches to this biographical material. Atara Stein argues that “the prevalence of the incest theme and its narcissistic implications in the period are far more significant than the biographical concerns in this work.” See “‘I Loved Her and Destroyed Her’: Love and Narcissism in Byron’s Manfred,” in Philological Quarterly 69.2 (Spring 1990), p. 213, n. 19. Macdonald takes a different position, “suggesting that now may be time to return to the autobiographical interest, to dig a little deeper for its roots in Byron’s psyche: not only his feelings for his sister but also the still deeper feelings that drove him to such destructive and self-destructive behavior as incest.” See “Incest, Narcissism and Demonality,” 37.

30 In 1834 Turgenev wrote his own drama in imitation of Byron’s Manfred. Turgenev states that his “Steno” was a “рабское подражание байроновскому «Манфреду».” I. S. Turgenev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 6:582.

31 Turgenev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati voc'mi tomakh, 1:400.

32 Ibid., 397.

33 Ibid., 414.

with a later passage,\textsuperscript{35} provide some of the strongest evidence for the incestuous relationship between Manfred and Astarte. The closest Steno comes to making such a statement is the ambiguous: “\textit{I togda / Uznał ia devu – na prizyv liubvi / Ee dusha otozvalas’ moe. Ona / Mne po dushe davno byla rodnaia, i posle boga ia ee liubil}” (406), while the theme of incest seems to have been transposed onto the poem’s siblings. Lezhnev’s rewriting of \textit{Manfred} and his comment about the ghost may implicitly universalize Steno’s / Manfred’s / Lezhnev’s guilt: if all mankind shares the same blood, all love is incest. Given that Byron’s poem has been read as an autobiographical confession of incest, this universal experience of guilt might be seen in the textual reproductions of confessions in imitation of \textit{Manfred}, as if reading a confession of incest compels one to write one. If one recalls the broader context within which Lezhnev’s passing comment about \textit{Manfred} occurs, it is not unreasonable to interpret this reference as developing the theme of a subject’s complicated experience of desire. Although Lezhnev articulates his experience of desire in his anecdote seemingly directly, this lived experience is already a figure or metaphor for the experience of desire. Or, to put it in other words, the experience of desire, once named is always already (only) a figure of that desire.

Similar, then, to Natalya’s reading of Pushkin, Lezhnev’s imitation depicts reading as an activity that involves a “projective identification” of a reader as a means of negotiating the experience of desire.\textsuperscript{36} This projection is made possible by what a text leaves unsaid, by the way it structures its gaps. Although this gap is a central form-giving device in \textit{Manfred}, the structural integrity of Pushkin’s \textit{Onegin} suffers in the hands of Natalya, whose reading forcefully creates the gaps (the added ellipses) into which she projects herself.

From Wolfgang Iser’s “gaps” to Genette’s categories of “ellipsis, prolepsis, analepsis”; from Gayatri Spivak’s “counterfocalization” as a means of “reading” silence, and Judith Butler’s ethical “linguistic opacity” in Henry James to Catherine Gallagher’s category of “fictionality,” theorists of narrative and the novel have time and again privileged the elliptical features of novelistic fiction as sites of readerly interpretation and identification. In \textit{Rudin}, the ellipsis functions both to represent the presence and depth of a subjectivity not fully articulated as well as to structure an intersubjective dynamic between character(s) and reader. The ellipsis marks a site of the reader’s introjection, producing a

\textsuperscript{35} Here Manfred describes his lover: “She was like me in lineaments—her eyes, / Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone / Even her voice, they said were like to mine.” Byron, \textit{Manfred}, 35.

\textsuperscript{36} Projective identification “is the more traditional Kleinian view of projection in which part of the self is attributed to an object. Thus part of the ego – a mental state, for instance, such as unwelcome anger, hatred or other bad feelings – is seen in another person and quite disowned (denied) in oneself. Klein also thinks that good feelings and attributes of the self are attributed to another person and she includes the attribution of both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ qualities in her definition of the term ‘projective identification.’” Elizabeth Bott Spillius’s entry in \textit{The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought}, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 455.
seemingly innocent identification with Mlle Boncourt’s investment in the marriage of Natalya and Volynstsev. This unmarked identification, however, may mask a different system of desire into which the reader has been perhaps unknowingly conscripted.

In his study “Discourse in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin implies a connection between the syntactical phenomenon of the ellipsis in Turgenev’s prose with his concept of heteroglossia and the narrative technique of free indirect discourse.

In Turgenev, social heteroglossia enters the novel primarily in the direct speeches of his characters, in dialogues. But this heteroglossia, as we have said, is also diffused throughout the authorial speech that surrounds the characters, creating highly particularized character zones [zony geroev]. These zones are formed from the fragments of character speech [polurech’] from the various forms for hidden transmission of someone else’s words, from scattered words and sayings belonging to someone else’s speech, from the invasions into authorial speech of others’ expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations). Such a character zone is the field of action for a character’s voice, encroaching in one way or another upon the author’s voice.

Here Bakhtin formulates an implicit definition of the ellipsis and its structural position or function vis-à-vis heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia enters the novel in the direct speech of Turgenev’s characters because “each character’s speech possesses its own belief system, since each is the speech of another in another’s language.”

Heteroglossia, as a constituent feature of language, produces the author’s experience of alterity, the experience that a character of his or her own creation could occupy a position of relative otherness via the variety of voices made possible by language. In the passage quoted above, Bakhtin also describes what he calls “character zones.” The notion of the character zone offers a topographical view of heteroglossia, and it is here that Bakhtin presents an oblique functional definition of the ellipsis in Turgenev’s novels: “These zones are formed […] from the invasions into authorial speech of others’ expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations).”

The ellipsis, an expressive indicator, forms the character zone through its invasions into authorial speech. Bakhtin’s writing in the essay abounds with such martial metaphors, and here, to explicate his topographical model along with its metaphor of the battlefield, would be to locate the ellipsis on the boundary of the character zone, to see that the ellipsis constitutes that boundary, at least in part, through its violation. In this description the ellipsis “belongs” to the character (it is located within the quotation marks that designate the character’s speech), but it also represents the means by which the character’s voice “encroaches” upon the author’s voice, and as such can be thought of

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38 Ibid., 315.
39 Bakhtin’s understanding of ellipsis as an “expressive indicator” coincides with the definition found in Grot’s grammar.
as a site that structures the intersubjective relationship between author and character, a blurring of these two subjectivities.

Such an understanding of the narrative structure of novelistic discourse is isomorphic with Dorrit Cohn’s “narrated monologue” or “free indirect discourse” as it is defined more generally in narrative theory. Significantly, Bakhtin implicitly identifies Turgenev’s ellipsis as one site of the convergence between author and character. What enables Bakhtin to draw together syntax and narrative form is the figure of the subject as a “voice.” Such a figure renders the defining features of the subject analyzable in linguistic terms. Implicit, then, in Bakhtin’s analysis of Turgenev’s heteroglossia is the notion that the ellipsis represents a site of intersubjectivity. In Bakhtin’s description, the ellipsis belongs to a character, that is, it would be situated within the quotation marks designating a character’s direct speech, but it also represents the gap or breach in that speech that allows for an invasion into authorial speech. The ellipsis appears to be a distortion of a character’s speech, but one that is protective, that gains access to a subjectivity without speech. The ellipsis gains access to a character’s subjectivity in a way that does not violate that character’s subjectivity or interiority in the act of representation. Descriptions of Turgenev’s narrative technique as “measured” or “restrained” can not only be stated more precisely as the “negative focalization” discussed earlier, but might also be understood in relation to the philosophical concept of tact: a narrative distance between narrator and character that “avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person.”

Taking up this concept in the next section, we will see that Turgenev’s tact can just as easily put into question the unity of a character’s subjectivity as it can function to preserve and protect it.

Recognizing Rudin

Rudin’s characterization is typical of Turgenev’s heroes. Having set the stage, here Darya Mikhailovna’s estate, Turgenev introduces a stranger who will become his hero. Unlike Turgenev’s minor characters, whose introductions usually include physical descriptions accompanied by biographical details, major characters, for the most part, initially receive only physical descriptions. Rudin’s characterization evolves through his interactions with the other characters and is supplemented by his university acquaintance, Lezhnev, who reveals biographical information about him. Some critics argue that Rudin’s characterization “is finally resolved” and his character revealed through his interactions with Natalya. However, these analyses of Rudin’s character (in both senses of the word)

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41 See Freeborn, *Turgenev*, 53-54 and 57-59; Ripp, *Turgenev’s Russia*, 129-133. Costlow argues that Rudin remains “ambiguous and chameleonlike, both in authorial presentation and in the evaluations of characters within the novel.” Costlow, *Worlds within Worlds*, 19-20. For a more recent narratological account of characterization in Turgenev’s novels, which considers the visual images produced by Turgenev’s descriptions, see Willem G. Weststeijn, “The Description of the Appearance of Characters in Turgenev’s Novels (in
do not fully consider the complexity of the concept of desire for either Rudin or the novel.

This chapter casts the question of Rudin’s characterization (a formal consideration belonging to the narrative level of the sjuzhet) and Rudin’s identity (a social category adhering to the level of the fabula) as two instances of a more general philosophical category of recognition. An account of the interrelationship between recognition and desire will complicate both our understanding of Rudin and the formal narrative techniques by which he is represented.

The questions of how this novel registers on a formal narrative level the relationship between recognition and desire as well as how it relates desire and language, give rise to another set of oppositions that are also entangled. First, Turgenev’s narrative paradoxically treats Rudin as lacking both an inside and an outside. Secondly, Rudin seems to say too much while still not being able to say enough about desire. The formal techniques deployed by the novel to represent Rudin display, as we have seen, the complicated relationship between language and desire. The narrative’s representation of Rudin often restricts itself to a position focalized through a listener who can only speculate about Rudin’s thoughts and emotions (i.e., about his interior state) another instance of the negative focalization discussed above. However, in a surprising parallelism, just as Rudin’s interior monologues remain largely inaccessible to the reader, so do his “exterior” monologues. The most eloquent moments of Rudin’s speeches are not reported directly, but instead summarized by the narrator. The narrator seems less interested in the contents of Rudin’s speeches than in the effects these speeches produce on the other characters:

Only Pigasov remained at a distance, in the corner, beside the fireplace. Rudin spoke intelligently, warmly, sensibly; displayed much knowledge and reading. None of them had expected to find in him a man out of the ordinary… He was so mediocrelly dressed, there was so little gossip about him. They all found it strange and incomprehensible that such a very clever man could suddenly appear in the middle of the country like this. All the more did this increase the surprise and, it may be said, charm with which he affected them all, starting with Darya Mikhailovna… […] Alexandra Pavlovna, if truth be told understood little of what Rudin had been saying, but was very astonished and pleased; her brother also marveled; Pandalevsky kept an eye on Darya Mikhailovna, and felt envious; Pigasov thought: “For five hundred rubles I could get you an even better nightingale!”… But most affected [поражены] of all were Basistov and Natalya. Basistov was almost short of breath; he had sat all the time with his mouth open and his eyes a-goggle—and listening as he had never listened to anyone in all his life, while Natalya’s face was covered in a scarlet flush, and her gaze, motionlessly fixed on Rudin, darkened and shone at the same time.

Один Пигасов оставался в отдалении, в углу, подле камина. Рудин говорил умно, горячо, дельно; выказал много знания, много начитанности.

particular Fathers and Sons),” in Turgenev: Art, Ideology and Legacy, ed. by Robert Reid and Joe Andrew (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010).
Reactions to Rudin’s speech serve to characterize and distinguish among the characters. Neither Basistov, who “was almost short of breath,” nor Natalya, whose “face was covered in a scarlet flush,” get any sleep the night of Rudin’s first speech, so greatly affected they are by his words. The effects of his words are so powerful as to physically displace Pigasov to the corner as well as to incite his envy, a result of Darya Mikhailovna’s evident fascination with Rudin. Even Alexandra Pavlovna is “very astonished and pleased.” Moreover, the illegibility of Rudin’s speech does not serve to undermine but rather to intensify this effect. This illegibility results from the discrepancy between Rudin’s appearance and his speech. His verbal sophistication does not coincide with his dress, a discrepancy echoed in Rudin’s initial introduction, where the narrator remarks: “The thin sound of Rudin’s voice was at variance with his physical stature and broad chest” [Тонкий звук голоса Рудина не соответствовал его росту и его широкой груди] (23, 258). Associating the tonal features of a voice with a speaker’s identity, this description helps establish a discrepancy between spirit and body (inside and outside) that undermines the perceived coherence of Rudin’s identity.

If reactions to Rudin’s speech characterize and distinguish the other characters, then these reactions also make visible various vectors of desire, which externally register, for example, in how Pandalevsky “kept an eye on Darya Mikhailovna, and felt envious,” or in Pigasov’s dismissive appraisal of Rudin’s eloquence. These vectors form the legs of an erotic triangle, where Rudin rivals Pandalevsky and Pigasov for Darya’s attention. Less explicit though also present is the beginning of another triangle comprised of Volyntsev (who is identified here only as Alexandra’s brother) and Natalya. The description of Rudin’s second speech similarly emphasizes the effect his words have on the other characters:

He was able, by striking certain strings of the heart, to set all the others indistinctly chiming and trembling. His listeners did not understand what was being talked about; but that listener’s chest would rise high, veils would part before his eyes, and something radiant would start to blaze ahead of him.
Rudin’s speech incites an indistinct desire in his listeners. This effect, flowing along a channel independent from that of the semantic content of Rudin’s speech, registers as bodily affect (heaving chests), while the figure of the “chiming and trembling” heart strings plays on the sensual qualities of sound. The description of Rudin’s speech borders on the hyperbolic in its invocation of a mystical, ecstatic experience: veils part and radiant lights blaze before the listener’s eyes. In addition to the erotic, desire here takes the form of prophetic expectation.

The focalization of Rudin’s speech through a “listener” elides a direct report of his speech, which is not understood by those in attendance in any case. In fact, the illegibility of Rudin’s speech only increases the effect his language has on his listeners. This focalization, which functionally suppresses Rudin’s “exterior” monologue, finds a parallel in the narrator’s reluctance to represent Rudin’s interior state. The narrator, characters, and reader are left to speculate collectively about the identity of this speaker, a speculation expressed implicitly as a question of Rudin’s relationship to language: “He did not search for words: they came to his lips obediently and freely of their own accord, and every word seemed to flow straight from his soul, aflame with all the ardor of conviction” [Он не искал слов: они сами послушно и свободно приходили к нему на уста, и каждое слово, казалось, так и лилось прямо из души, пылало всем жаром убеждения] (32, 269, my emphasis). This is an instance of free indirect discourse, where the shift from the narrator’s to a character’s point of view is signaled by the parenthetical “seemed” (kazalos’). But this free indirect discourse is also an instance of negative focalization, where one mind is penetrated in order to establish the opacity of another. In this sentence the authority with which the narrator describes Rudin’s relationship to language becomes increasingly qualified. The narrator arrives at a position similar to the other characters: he can only guess at the origin of Rudin’s words, but he concludes that Rudin is successfully effecting his intention in this speech act, that language is obedient to Rudin. Instead of Rudin’s direct speech, the narrator reports the experience of that speech, a narrative choice that doubly removes the reader: the reader is denied access to Rudin’s interiority as well as his “exteriority,” that is his direct speech. By way of contrast with the conjecture that Rudin’s words seem to originate in his soul, a few lines later the narrator again speculates about Rudin’s relationship to language: “it seemed, some higher thing, surprising even to himself, appeared to be speaking through his mouth…” [казалось, его устами говорило что-то высшее, для него самого неожиданное...] (32, 269, my emphasis, English translation modified). And, at the termination of Rudin’s speech, the narrator observes: “Rudin stopped and lowered his eyes with a smile of involuntary confusion” [Рудин остановился и потупил глаза с улыбкой невольного смущения] (33, 270). The longer Rudin speaks the less control he appears to have over language.
Adopting the epistemological position of listener allows the narrator to problematize Rudin’s relationship to his own speech, consequently raising the question of the relationship between a speaker’s intention and language. At stake here is the relationship of a subject to his or her own speech and the challenge of recovering or recognizing the subject of that speech. Rudin’s illegibility makes it all the easier for the other characters to misunderstand him in a way that will suit their own designs. The narrator’s earlier comment that “there was so little gossip about him” \([о нем так мало ходило слухов] (28, 264)\) almost functions as an invitation to fill this gap.

The gap is constitutive of Rudin’s characterization and identity. The narrator implicitly asks of Rudin, “Who was speaking there?” Whereas Turgenev, as we shall see, associates this problematic relationship between the subject and language only to certain social “types,” the Russian superfluous man central among them, post-structuralist theories of subjectivity suggest that this gap, the linguistic non-coincidence of the subject with itself, affects all speakers. One such formulation comes from Judith Butler:

> That I am born into a language does not mean that it speaks me as if I am its ventriloquization, but it does speak as I speak, and my voice is never fully or exclusively my own. Indeed, I speak and listen, and then later ask, “Who was speaking there?” And the answer may not be conclusively given. That the speech act is not governed by the intention by which it is animated does not mean that there is no intention, only that the intention does not govern. That the intention does not govern does not mean that it does not sometimes orchestrate and effect its intention, only that if it does, it is lucky.\(^42\)

Although multicultural exchange establishes the context for Butler’s description of the linguistic difficulties that attend the speaking subject, it is a reading of Henry James’s \textit{Washington Square} that makes her “philosophical” and “political point.”\(^43\) Butler’s question – “Who was speaking there?” – expresses in its form the non-coincidence of the speaking subject with herself. The gap between voice and identity – which undermines the assumed integrity, wholeness, and self-presence of the speaking subject – is conveyed by the formal indexical features of this utterance: the verbal past tense “was” and the adverb “there.” The formal features of the gap that constitute the subject are figured here as temporal and spatial distance, but this “distance” is still only a figure for the gap that is constitutive of language itself, at least according to the post-structuralist framework within which Butler is working. Her statement “I speak and I listen, and then later ask” captures the experience of simultaneously speaking and listening that, according to Derrida, becomes the implicit meaning of being, of presence itself, of self-presence.


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 206.
within the metaphysical tradition from Plato to Saussure.\textsuperscript{44} The “asking later,” the figure of temporal distance, arguably attempts to render palpable the trace structure of language: the \textit{d\textsuperscript{iff}fr\textsuperscript{ance}} that structures speech no less than writing. Rudin is apprehended primarily through the traces of his language. As we have seen in the initial examples of Rudin’s speeches, and will see again, it is precisely this experience of his own voice, the experience of hearing himself speak that the novel’s narrative representation denies Rudin at the same time that it explicitly interrogates his relationship to language and the coherence of his identity by questioning the origin of the words that issue from his mouth.

To these theoretical descriptions of the speaking subject could be added Bakhtin’s concept of “living heteroglossia.” If Butler expresses the simultaneity of two intentions in the speech act: “[a language] does speak as I speak,” Bakhtin describes the experience of the speaking subject as caught in linguistic force field: “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal and centripetal forces are brought to bear.”\textsuperscript{45} These countervailing forces constitute the “living heteroglossia” in which the utterance participates, where the centripetal forces of a “posited” [\textit{zadan}] “unitary language” strain against “the centrifugal stratifying forces” of social and historical heteroglossia. “And this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of the utterance to no less a degree that its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of a unitary language.”\textsuperscript{46} If social heteroglossia, as defined by Bakhtin, manifests itself in Turgenev in the ellipsis, living heteroglossia governs Rudin’s speech as it is represented by Turgenev’s narration: the syntactical gap becomes a metaphysical gap, which is constitutive of language. This is not the only meaning of the ellipsis in \textit{Rudin}, but an example of the coincidence of the literal ellipsis with the ellipsis as a figure for the being of the speaking subject. Further examples will help solidify this point, but they will also, in the case of Rudin, suggest that there are certain conditions under which a speaker’s intention is less likely to “be lucky.” It is when Rudin attempts to articulate his desire(s) that his linguistic intentions fail. This inability to articulate desire means that Rudin will remain socially unrecognizable to the novel’s other characters.

Rudin’s first and last meetings with Natalya address the problematic coupling of desire and recognition. During their first meeting, the narrator again suppresses a direct report of Rudin’s speech, describing instead its form and summarizing its content. Rudin “asserted […] that the only people who remain uncomprehended are those who either do not know what they want or who do not deserve comprehension” [Он уверял, что … непонятными остаются только те люди, которые либо еще сами не знают, чего хотят, либо не стоят того, чтобы их понимали] (44, 283). In this moment, Rudin seems unaware that he is speaking about himself. But more importantly, Rudin’s statement to Natalya suggests that recognition depends upon the legibility of desire. That

\textsuperscript{44} This heritage is termed “phonocentrism.” See Jacques Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}, translated by Gayatri Spivak, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 11-12.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
person who does not know what he or she wants will not be understood, which implies that a subject’s ability to articulate his or her desire, making it legible to an Other, conditions the recognition of the subject: desire makes recognition possible insofar as it functions as the vehicle of recognition.

The problem of self-recognition and desire later returns in Natalya and Rudin’s famous last meeting on the dam. Rudin’s thoughts, which have until now remained mostly opaque to the narrator, and consequently to the reader, are momentarily illuminated, but only to convey that Rudin does not know what he desires: “Rudin, the clever, perspicacious Rudin, was not able to say for certain whether he loved Natalya” [Рудин, умный, проницательный Рудин, не в состоянии был сказать наверное, любит ли он Наталью] (82, 321). Being able to say is a figure of speech that expresses self-knowledge as a function of the ability to verbally articulate one’s internal state. This might be the novel’s best description of the experience of desire: a condition whereby the state of being in it potentially precludes an articulation of it. The inability to articulate one’s desire means that one will not be recognizable.

The omission of Rudin’s reported speech, combined with the narrator’s choice to report only Rudin’s confusion, together render Rudin’s identity opaque in a manner uncharacteristic of an eponymous novelistic hero, in that he lacks both an “inside” and an “outside.” Taking into consideration that the graphical ellipsis can both signify the omission of reported speech and communicate affect (according, as we recall, to Grot’s grammar), we see that the narrator’s substitution of his summary for Rudin’s reported speech produces the same effect: both erase direct speech in order to fill that space with affect. The reader is thus left to speculate about both Rudin’s interior (his subjectivity: thoughts, motives, emotional states) and his exterior (what he actually says, the expression that subjectivity achieves). This double omission demonstrates the interdependency of these oppositional terms as they operate in novelistic characterization more generally. The realist omniscient narrator records speech and gesture, external signs that would hypothetically be available to any keen observer, while simultaneously offering selective access to a character’s inner life. The reader, then, continually participates in the creation of a character through a dialectical negotiation that attempts to balance and synthesize these interior and exterior features of a character. The manner of Rudin’s representation frustrates the reader’s attempts to create a coherent image of a unified human personality by omitting key segments of his speech and refusing to describe his inner states.

Speaking to Lezhnev of his study in Germany, Rudin explains how the nature of his desire eluded even himself: “in those days I had no clear perception of what I wanted, I grew intoxicated on words and believed in phantoms; but now, I swear to you, I can speak out loudly, in front of everyone, about what I want” [Точно, я тогда ясно не сознавал, чего я хотел, я упивался словами и верил в призраки; но теперь, клянусь тебе, я могу громко, перед всеми высказать всё, чего я желаю] (122, 364). But, ironically, Rudin still doesn’t know: “I want to attain a goal that is near, bring at least some benefit” [хочу достигнуть цели близкой, принести хотя ничтожную пользу] (122, 364). The circularity of this statement borders on the tautological: to say one desires a goal is to say one desires an object of desire. The statement “I want to attain a goal that is near” tells us little about the nature of the goal, desire’s object, except that it is “near,”
that is, seemingly achievable. But to say one desires a goal (цель) is to substitute one signifier for another in such a way that the referent remains elusive.

While the novel renders Rudin’s desire illegible and his identity unrecognizable, the other characters differently problematize his relationship to language, chastising Rudin for talking too freely about love. According to Lezhnev: “Rudin’s words remain mere words and never become actions—and yet these same words may disturb and destroy a young heart” [слова Рудина так и останутся словами и никогда не станут поступком — а между тем эти самые слова могут смутить, погубить молодое сердце] (55, 294, translation modified). Undermining the novel’s supposed opposition of words and deeds, Lezhnev is in fact troubled by the power of words to do things in the world. Mlle Boncourt’s criticism of Rudin’s social etiquette when it comes to the topic of love is defamiliarized as a negative focalization that likens her to a horse: “Rudin talked about love readily and often. At first, upon hearing the word ‘love,’ Mlle Boncourt had started and pricked up her ears, like an old regimental steed at the sound of a bugle, but after a while she became used to it and would merely tighten her lips and take a pinch of snuff now and then” [Рудин охотно и часто говорил о любви. Сначала при слове: любовь — м-le Boncourt вздрагивала и навастривала уши, как старый полковой конь, заслушавший трубу, но потом привыкла и только, бывало, съежит губы и с расстановкой понюхает табаку] (53, 291). Mlle Boncourt is prepared to defend the aristocratic virtue of her charge, intuitively though only partially understanding in Rudin’s Russian what the rest of the characters have yet to recognize: namely, that for Rudin the word “love” is one like any other, and that its pleasures remain linguistic: “Рудин охотно говорил о любви” (291). Here the adverbia l expression of desire applies not to an object but to speaking. Rudin tells Natalya, “Up to now I have not yet sufficiently assessed for myself the tragic significance of love” [Я до сих пор еще не довольно уяснил самому себе трагическое значение любви] (53, 291), while Mlle Boncourt, in proper aristocratic fashion, pursing her lips and inhaling her snuff, bides her time, perhaps intuiting that Rudin’s courtship of Natalya will most likely meet a timely semi-tragic end. She has, after all, been in Russia for the last forty years, long enough to witness the workings of the provincial aristocratic machine, the gears in which Rudin repeatedly finds himself caught. And finally, when Rudin calls on Volyntsev in order to inform him that he and Natalya love one another, Volyntsev explicitly condemns Rudin’s lack of tact in matters of the heart:

“Forgive me, dear sir,” Volyntsev said quietly, turning around and taking a step back. “I am prepared to render full justice to your intentions, that is all very fine, I will even say exalted, but we are simple people, do not guild our gingerbread, are not able to follow the flight of such great minds as yours… What to you appears sincere, to us seems importunate and lacking in modesty… What for you is plain and clear, for us is intricate and obscure… You make a boast of that which we conceal; how, then, are we to understand you? Forgive me: nor friend can I consider you, nor hand will I offer you… That is petty, perhaps; but then I myself am petty.”
-- Извините меня, милостивый государь, -- промолвил Волынцев, обернувшись и отступив шаг назад, -- я готов отдать полную справедливость вашим намерениям, всё это прекрасно, положим даже возвышенно, но мы люди простые, едим пряники неписаные, мы не в состоянии следить за полетом таких великих умов, каков ваш... Что вам кажется искренним, нам кажется навязчивым и нескромным... Что для вас просто и ясно, для нас запутанно и темно... Вы хвастаетесь тем, что мы скрываем: где же нам понять вас! Извините меня: ни другом я вас считать не могу, ни руки я вам не подам... Это, может быть, мелко; да ведь я сам мелок.

(77, 316, Turgenev’s ellipses, my emphasis)

Volyntsev’s ellipses demonstrate his tact even as he accuses Rudin of lacking this faculty: “You make a boast of that which we conceal,” references the reason for Rudin’s visit, but only obliquely. Volyntsev’s rhetorical question – “где же нам понять вас!” [how, then, are we to understand you!] – registers his offense but more importantly betrays his misapprehension of what Rudin desires: Volyntsev’s recognition of him as a social equal. Rudin, in other words, desires the social recognition that would afford him the position of a suitor, something Volyntsev will not grant him. Rudin receives neither a handshake nor a challenge to a duel (Lezhnev convinces Volyntsev that he’s not worth it), a double denial that underscores Rudin’s status as a social outsider.

The concept of tact, as formulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer, implicitly articulates a relationship between “social” and “philosophical” categories and can illuminate Rudin’s vexed relationship with the categories of language and desire: that is, saying too much about desire – a social violation – and not being able to say, or name, the object of desire – a philosophical problem of the intrinsic limits of language when the referent is desire. Conceiving of Rudin’s character in these terms, I would like to suggest, may elucidate why the novel’s characters do not understand Rudin. Gadamer writes:

By “tact” we understand a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice. Hence an essential part of tact is that it is tacit and unformulable. One can say something tactfully; but that will always mean that one passes over something tactfully and leaves it unsaid, and it is tactless to express what one can only pass over. But to pass over something does not mean to avert one’s gaze from it, but to keep an eye on it in such a way that rather than knock into it, one slips by it. Thus tact helps one to preserve distance. It avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person.47

The violation of tact is not saying what should not be said, but rather attempting to say what cannot be said: “it is tactless to express what one can only pass over.” Tact, thus, articulates an implicit relationship between the social and philosophical domains, and the norms that structure these domains, since it interprets the violation of a social norm as

47 Gadamer, Truth and Method, 16.
evidence of an ontological limit intrinsic to language itself. In other words, the attempt to speak that which exceeds the limits of a discourse constitutes a violation of tact.

Gadamer’s concept of tact elucidates the seeming contradictions that characterize Rudin – saying too much about desire while simultaneously not being able to name this referent – reconfiguring this double critique as a singular consequence of desire’s vexed relationship to language. Gadamer’s notion of tact furthermore suggests that the gap, or in the case of Turgenev’s novel, the ellipsis, is the structural center of discourse. Tact acknowledges what cannot be said, but this “does not mean to avert one’s gaze from” what cannot be said, but “to keep an eye on it in such a way that rather than knock into it, one slips by it.”

Desire appears to be one of the topics guarded by tact. We might recall the conversation between Natalya and Volynstev analyzed earlier, which takes place deep in the garden, reading the pauses in their conversation, pauses signaled by ellipses, as their attempts to negotiate the topic of desire. Recall, also, that the etymology of the Russian word for an oral pause or stammer, zapinka, carries with it the notion of bumping into something. In this way, the ellipses may already mark the site of a violation of tact, but in such a way that the ellipsis only traces the boundary of what cannot be said, it only recognizes a silence that, like a sentinel, guards the intrinsically unsayable. And we might ask if Gadamer’s formulation of tact does not, in fact, offer evidence for Judith Butler’s assertion, though surely it is not hers alone, that desire is structured like language itself, by a constituent gap, and that ultimately: “Desire designates that opacity without which language cannot work.”

Might we understand the narrator’s reluctance to penetrate Rudin’s mind as the operation of tact? To what extent are Turgenev’s ellipses tactful? And might we conceptualize the narrator’s treatment of Rudin as elliptical? Tact, as Gadamer conceptualizes it, “avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person.” The American Oxford Dictionary defines the ellipsis as “the omission from speech or writing of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues.” But such a definition, at least on one level, sets itself against the category of the elliptical as I have developed it and as it is implicit in Gadamer’s notion of tact: what goes unsaid is possibly understood from context but certainly not superfluous. In fact, just the opposite would sometimes be true. The ellipsis does not only live on the periphery of discourse as that which is extra, left over, and unnecessary, but can occupy its constituting center. In this way, we might extend this chapter’s epigraph from Thackeray, adding that “the unwritten part of books would be [not only] the most interesting” but also the most central. Desire that cannot be directly named indeed occupies the structural center of Turgenev’s novel. Even more interestingly, this consideration of the relationship between tact, superfluous, and desire suggests that the superfluity which defines the superfluous man in Turgenev’s Rudin may not be a static

48 Paradoxically, tact itself has the very status of being “unformulable.” One cannot say what constitutes tact except that it dictates what cannot be said, presumably starting with itself. How, then, does one acquire this faculty? Bildung, according to Gadamer, would be the short answer.
category as it has been defined in criticism ever since Turgenev coined the term, but rather that what appears superfluous may in fact be useful. I will conclude my reading of Rudin by reconsidering the nature of Rudin’s superfluity, arguing that he is not only formally necessary for Turgenev’s novel, but structurally central for the maintenance and stability of the social system represented in the novel.

**Triangular Desire: Reconsidering Superfluity in Rudin**

Rudin is a 35-year-old bachelor (холостой) without a vocation. This disharmony with the world, failure in love and work, describes the basic characteristics of the Russian Superfluous Man. Critics have argued that Rudin’s superfluity differs from his best-known idling predecessors, Onegin and Pechorin, in that he faces a different set of historical and social circumstances – a shift effected, in part, by the Crimean War. One of the first critics to correlate the evolution of the superfluous man with these social and historical shifts was Nikolai Chernyshevsky. He writes, on the one hand, that “Белтов еще не находит никакого сочувствия себе в обществе и мучится тем, что ему совершенно нет поля для деятельности.” “[P]евность трудиться, трудиться неутомимо,” “но эта ревность мало принесла пользы, потому что у Рудина недоставало практического такта, не было умения взяться с надлежащей стороны за дело.” Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v pintnadtsati tomakh (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’tvo khudozhestvennoi literaturey, 1948), 4:699.

In both cases superfluity results from the disharmony between the individual and the world, but with a key difference. For Belтов, the cause of this disjuncture is attributed to the external world: there is “no field for his activity.” For Rudin, superfluity results from an internal disjuncture – Rudin has “zeal” (ревность), but lacks “tact,” which is acquired, according to Gadamer, through the process of Bildung.

In Russian тakt is associated with measure and restraint, those features which Turgenev’s narrator possesses. Rudin’s plans in love and work fail because he lacks tact, and he lacks tact because he has not undergone the subject-forming process of Bildung. But a cruel, exclusionary logic is here at work, for, as Boris Gasparov points out, in the age of Russian realism, marriage becomes a decisive step in the subject’s Bildung: “The experience of love consummated in the marital union symbolically certifies the hero as capable of attaining a marriage, so to speak, between his inner potential and its realization.

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50 See Ripp, *Turgenev’s Russia*, 91. For a summary of the debates among Turgenev’s contemporaries concerning Rudin’s status as a superfluous man, see Otto Boele, *Erotic Nihilism in Late Imperial Russia: The Case of Mikhail Artsybashev’s Sanin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 30.


in day-to-day labor.”53 The radicals of the 1860s, as Irina Paperno demonstrates, in an attempt to put into practice the concepts of Hegelian idealism, imbued marriage with such a philosophical significance.54 The logic of this vicious circle would seem to determine a priori that Rudin will be superfluous.

The various meanings of the Russian word for bachelor – “холостой” – also capture the link between the superfluous man’s two primary failings, implicitly associating being “unmarried, single; bachelor” with being “idle,” ineffective, or even impotent (the Russian expression for a misfired pistol is “холостой выстрел”). The verb derived from this same root, “холостить,” which in the dictionary finds itself perhaps uncomfortably close to the bachelors (“холостые”), means to castrate.55 We know that Darya Mikhailovna has “an open lifestyle,” meaning that she likes “to receive men on her estate, especially bachelors” [жила открыто, то есть принимала мужчин, особенно холостых] (12, 247). To be a bachelor, to be vocationally ineffective, to be (symbolically) castrated – “the bewildering nature of society”56 as it is represented in Rudin establishes a symbolic equation between these various etymological interrelations, where the aristocratic social system over which Darya presides transforms one form of superfluity into another.

The novel seems self-consciously aware that Rudin is a type, even referring to him in these terms. Lezhnev recognizes that he represents a type and invokes “gentlemen of the Pechorin school” in describing Rudin’s familial relations. Rudin is found posturing throughout the novel, having adopted the role of the dissipated society man in the manner of Eugene Onegin. In their first meeting in the garden Rudin and Natalya enact a familiar scene from Pushkin’s novel in verse, complete with a conversation about the boredom of country life and in need of rest (43-44, 281).57 The novel’s epilogue also records Rudin’s pontification on this subject, where he complains that fate has granted him such abilities but no arena for their practical exercise (122, 364). His letter to Natalya written after their break, in addition to containing the verse copied from Eugene Onegin, “Blessed is he who in his youth was young…” [Блажен, кто смолоду был молод…] (97, 337), further reiterates this tired theme:

Yes, nature has given me many things; but I will die without having done anything worthy of my powers, without leaving behind me any beneficial trace. All my riches will be wasted: I shall not see the fruits of my seeds. I lack… I

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54 “The association between marriage, reality, and activity grew out of a combination of the Hegelian concept of realized love (in Belinsky’s words, deistvitel’nyi brak) and the conventions of the social group from which the majority of the new men originate.” Irina Paperno, Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 90.
55 Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka, 17:366.
56 This formulation comes from Ripp’s Turgenev’s Russia, 93.
57 The narrator’s remark that Natalya “knew the whole of Pushkin by heart…” prefaces this scene.
myself cannot say just what it is I lack… I probably lack that without which one cannot set the hearts of men in motion, nor take possession of a woman’s heart; and dominion over minds alone is both precarious and useless.

Да, природа мне много дала; но я умру, не сделав ничего достойного сил моих, не оставив за собою никакого благотворного следа. Всё мое богатство пропадет даром: я не увижу плодов от семян своих. Мне недостает… я сам не могу сказать, чего именно недостает мне… Мне недостает, вероятно, того, без чего так же нельзя двигать сердцами людей, как и овладеть женским сердцем; а господство над одними умами и непрочно и бесполезно.

Rudin’s statement that he “shall not see the fruits of [his] seeds” conveys the romantic and the vocational failings characteristic of the superfluous man. Rudin realizes that this condition is predicated on a lack, the articulation of which is almost poetic in its chiastic arrangement on the page, “недостает мне… Мне недостает” [“lack I… I lack”]; the ellipsis occupies the center of this articulation of being, which he associates with the topic of desire, the ability to set men’s hearts in motion, and possess women’s. He bemoans the limit set upon his abilities to only “lord over” [gospodstvo nad] their minds as “useless,” not realizing that the lack at his center makes him an excellent container for the desires of the other characters.

Whereas traditional scholarly approaches to this type have been concerned with social and historic-political evaluations, an investigation of Rudin’s narrative function and the means of his representation reveals the contradictions that inhere in that work’s conception of the superfluous man. In opposition to the classic understanding of this type, I argue that Rudin turns out to be immanently useful, but useful because he is instrumentalized by both the novel’s other characters as well as his author. In Turgenev’s *Diary of a Superfluous Man*, the novella that first explicitly codifies this type, the title character both facilitates romantic unions by acting as a rival suitor and produces the narrative of these unions in diary form. After the proposal to the heroine, the narrator implicitly yet unconsciously speaks to this double function:

58 See David Patterson for a summary of these approaches. Patterson also proposes a formal study of the superfluous man, inflecting his reading of this type through Mikhail Bakhtin’s opposition of dialogical and monological utterances, arguing that the speech of the superfluous man is monologic, which is another way of understanding this type’s narcissistic behavior in matters of the heart. David Patterson, “The Superfluous Man’s Superfluous Discourse” in *Language and Style: An International Journal* 20.3 (1987 Summer): 230-241. A recent article by Anna Schur departs from these traditional approaches, arguing that the superfluous man “suffer[s] from a (proto)-postmodern malaise whose manifestation is the dissolution of the autonomous, essential self that exists independently of language.” Although Schur does not discuss Rudin, her conclusions do overlap with some of my own. Anna Schur, “From Turgenev to Bitov: Superfluous Men and Postmodern Selves,” *Russian Literature* 65.4 (2009): 561-578, 561.
Seeing that Bizmyonkov had apparently said to Liza precisely what I had intended to say to her, and she had given him precisely the reply I was longing to hear from her, there was no need for me to trouble myself further. Within a fortnight she was married to him. The old Ozhogins were thankful to get any husband for her.

Now, tell me, am I not a superfluous man? Didn’t I play throughout the whole story the part of a superfluous person? The prince’s part... of that it’s needless to speak; Bizmyonkov’s part, too, is comprehensible... But I – with what object was I mixed up in it?... A senseless fifth wheel to the cart!... Ah, it’s bitter, bitter for me!.. (59)

Так как Бизьменков, вероятно, сказал Лизе именно то, что я намерен был ей сказать, и так как она отвечала ему именно то, что я бы желал услышать от нее, то мне нечего было более беспокоиться. Через две недели она вышла за него замуж. Старик Ожогины рады были всякому жениху.

Ну, скажите теперь, не лишний ли я человек? Не разыграл ли я во всей этой истории роль лишнего человека? Роль князя... о ней нечего и говорить; роль Бизьменкова также понятна... Но я? я-то к чему тут примешался?.. что за глупое пятое колесо в телеге!.. Ах, горько, горько мне!..59

About the roles of the other two suitors there is nothing to say, an absence symbolized by the ellipsis. But the ellipsis also signals the superfluous man’s inability to say anything about his own role, a blindness inherent to his position at the center of the social and narrative dynamics that he paradoxically enables and produces. Once the marriage to Bizmyonkov is secured, he can cease courting Liza. In one sense he has failed to achieve his goal, but in another sense this cessation of activity is possible, even necessary, because the social and narrative systems have achieved their goals through him: Liza’s marriage exhausts this narrative. What the superfluous man fails to see is how his courtship of Liza has set into relief the actions of the other suitors, forcing out the prince and rendering his double, Bizmyonkov, an attractive, if not the only possible, option. In the first-person form of the diary, the superfluous man’s narrative productivity is straightforward. In the third-person form of the novel, Rudin’s narrative productivity and social utility gain in complexity.

Rudin’s functions on both a social and formal/narrative level are contained within his very name, which derives from the Russian “orudie,” meaning a “tool, instrument, or implement,” a status which Rudin longs to attain.60 In one of the novel’s more ironic moments, Rudin discusses the notion of “orudie” explicitly. As I have argued, it is rare that the narrator reports the content of Rudin’s speech; this is one of those moments, coming at the end of his second soliloquy in Darya Mikhailovna’s drawing room. Those

59 I. S. Turgenev, Полное собрание сочинений, 5:229.
60 Costlow notes, “Hegelian terminology arguably gives Rudin his name.” Costlow Worlds within Worlds, 145, n. 11. Rudin is also related etymologically to ruda, an “ore” or “mineral,” although this etymological link makes less sense in the context of the novel.
words directly quoted by the narrator can be seen as the excess of Rudin’s speech in that they do not, precisely because they are not suppressed, contribute to the utopian power of Rudin’s language over the other characters. In other words, reported speech becomes secondary to speech’s primary function for Rudin, which is the excitation of desire. It is also important to note that this second speech results from an argument about Hegel between Pigasov and Rudin.

Rudin concludes his speech by recollecting “a Nordic legend.” He then offers a summation of this little story about a bird:

Precisely: our lives are swift and insignificant; but all that is great is accomplished through human beings. The consciousness of being the instrument of those higher powers must come to stand in place of all man’s other joys: in death itself he will find his life, his nest…

Rudin stopped and lowered his eyes with a smile of involuntary confusion.

Точно, наша жизнь быстра и ничтожна; но всё великое совершается через людей. Сознание быть орудием тех высших сил должно заменить человеку все другие радости: в самой смерти найдет он свою жизнь, свое гнездо…

Рудин остановился и потупил глаза с улыбкой невольного смущения.

(32-3, 270, Turgenev’s ellipsis)

The conclusion to Rudin’s second speech is ironic because Rudin, as usual, does not realize that he is speaking about himself. Perhaps there was never a time when Rudin was “perspicacious”; an understanding that renders almost cruel the narrator’s later gibe about Rudin’s inability to discern the nature of feelings for Natalya (“Clever perspicacious Rudin…”). The formal construction of the novel seems premised on a perverse notion of the individual’s reconciliation with the outside world, where the “consciousness” [soznanie] of this reconciliation belongs to the “perspicacious” reader alone. The perverse reconciliation at work here will take place between the individual, Rudin, and the social world, Darya Mikahailovna’s coterie, from which he feels estranged, although there will be no “joy,” because there is no “consciousness of being the instrument of those higher powers” (my emphasis). This reported speech only confirms the suspicion of the narrator and other characters regarding Rudin’s identity, discussed earlier, as it demonstrates the distance between subject and language. This illegibility finds itself bound up in his social eligibility in a very literal sense: he is not desirable or suitable as a partner in marriage.

If, as Franco Moretti suggests, “work in the Bildungsroman creates a continuity between external and internal, between the ‘best and most intimate’ part of the soul and the ‘public’ aspects of existence,” then *Rudin* might be considered an anti-Bildungsroman. For not only does Rudin’s work fail to achieve such a continuity, but it is precisely this continuity that the novel’s narration disrupts in its representation of its hero.

What I am suggesting here is a redefinition of Rudin’s superfluity as not only a failed *Bildung* but as that which is left over after he has been used up. Turgenev’s novel has great need and makes great use of Rudin as superfluous man. The social body metabolizes Rudin’s undefined desire, the (by)product of which is, perhaps, true superfluity. Rudin will become a victim of the same instrumentalizing preposition “*cherez ludei*” (through human beings) that occurs in his own discourse on the good.

The closest Rudin gets to the consciousness of being an instrument, an experience to which he ascribes joy, occurs after he is compelled to leave Darya Mikhailovna’s estate, having elicited a confession of love from Natalya, which he did not find himself in a position to reciprocate. He understands that he has been used by a “higher power.”

Rudin went out. By now he knew from experience that people of high society do not even give up someone who is no longer necessary to them, but simply drop him: like a glove after a ball, like the wrapper of a piece of candy, like a lottery ticket that has not won.

In this moment Rudin momentarily glimpses his function within the society that has so confounded him. All of these images capture elements of high society even as they depict a process of evacuation of a center, an emptying out of the significant contents. The progression of glove, to wrapper, to lottery ticket traces a trajectory of increasingly abstract contents: the absent hand becomes the consumed candy, finally turning into the losing lottery ticket that has no inside or outside per se, but is simply the signifier of a void or a lack coming to supersede hope and potentiality – an image of the precarious nature of all symbolic capital. The description “Inside he felt very bad” (95) invokes once again the “inside” that the previous description so effectively evacuated, tentatively undoing this emptying out, perhaps in preparation for the novel’s final symbolic evacuation of its hero on the collapsing barricades of 1848 Paris.

The novel makes use of Rudin with the machinery of the erotic triangle. The centrality of the erotic triangle should come as no surprise to those familiar with Turgenev’s life and work; the primary architecture of *Rudin* is the erotic triangle, of which there are three central manifestations: Rudin-Natalya-Volyntsev, Rudin-

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62 A number of actors can be seen to occupy this position of a “higher power” depending on the narrative perspective. On the narrative level of the story, Rudin, arguably, has something like the Hegelian *Geist* in mind when he speaks of the pleasures of being used. Also on the level of story, the social system that makes use of him in a way that he does not intend and which he does not experience as pleasurable could be referenced here. Finally, on the level of discourse, a meta-narrative interpretation of this higher power would be to see it as a reference to the author himself.
Alexandra-Lezhnev, and Rudin-Darya-Pandalevsky. All three men imagine Rudin to be a rival, irrespective of Rudin’s erotic interest in the women they seek to court. Making a rival of Rudin takes the form of a projective identification, in that, for example, having projected his desire for Alexandra into Rudin, Lezhnev is able to act on that desire. In this way Pandalevsky, Lezhnev, and Volynstev all implement their amorous designs, resulting in the production of two marriages and one “renewing of vows.” The renewing of vows takes place between Darya and Pandalevsky, who are bound by a relationship of patronage, but who also find their desire stagnant or “frozen” at the novel’s opening. The language of frozen desire comes from the novel’s final chapter where Lezhnev, after Rudin’s expulsion, reflects on Rudin’s function in the context of Darya Mikailovna’s estate. “We have all grown intolerably sober-minded, indifferent, and inert; we have fallen asleep, we have frozen, and therefore we should thank the man who even for a moment can stir us and warm us!” [Мы все стали невыносимо рассудительны, равнодушны и вялы; мы заснули, мы застыли, и спасибо тому, кто хоть на миг нас расшевелит и согреет!] (107, 348). Lezhnev’s statement indirectly admits the use to which he has put Rudin, attributing the agency of this warming or stirring action to Rudin and his rhetoric. But, as we have seen, the narrative representation of Rudin’s speech does not allow the reader so easily to attribute the effects of Rudin’s speech to Rudin’s intentions.

We have already seen that the effect of Rudin’s speech has been to warm those hearts in attendance at Darya’s estate, setting off a chain reaction in which the men in their turn are stirred to action, anticipating, as Lezhnev will admit to Alexandra Pavlovna in this same conversation, that he earlier “slandered” (48) Rudin because “I was afraid that he might turn your head” [я тогда боялся, как бы он тебе голову не вскружил] (109, 350). The state of frozen desire that Lezhnev names explicitly might also easily be applied to that moment in the garden between Natalya and Volynstev. Rudin’s emergence as a rival helps facilitate that marriage as well for he not only adds jealousy to Volynstev’s desire (50), but his failed courtship of Natalya also reopens the possibility of a social position to which Volynstev will indeed gain access. Darya’s ironic exclamation after learning of Rudin’s “failure” expresses Rudin’s ineligibility: “‘Let us admit, he is clever, he is a genius!’ she said. ‘But what does that prove?’ That after this any man can hope to be my son-in-law?”’ [--Положим, он умен, он гений! -- говорила она, -- да

63 We might recall Turgenev’s semi-autobiographical “First Love” (Pervaia liubov’, 1860) as well as lifelong romance with Pauline Viardot. Freeborn notes that in Rudin, “there had been a suggestion of triangular form about the central love-story (Rudin-Natalya-Volynstev), but the Rudin-Natalya relationship had been the most important relationship in the fiction, paralleled by the love-story between Lezhnev and Alexandra Lipina” (73). He does not make the connection I argue for here that sees Rudin as a rival for Lezhnev. The most extended treatment of the love triangle in Rudin, that I have encountered, is contained in Dawn D. Eidelman’s George Sand and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Love-Triangle Novels (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994). Like Freeborn, Eidelman only identifies the single triangle, and in general her reading of Turgenev’s novel seems to be limited by the scope of her argument, which seeks to map Sand’s Horace onto Rudin.
что же это доказывает? После этого всякий может надеяться быть моим зятем?] (93, 333). Darya’s exclamation makes explicit the operative social laws that the other characters intuitively understand – that Rudin is not a suitable suitor; at the same time, her statement implicitly circumscribes the social position of “her son in law.”

Two key theoretical works, those of René Girard and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, examine how the love triangle produces form in the nineteenth-century novel. Reading Rudin through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s Between Men elucidates Rudin’s bewildering behavior while complicating the image of the superfluous man we find in Turgenev’s first novel, demonstrating the necessity of this type for both the novel and the society it represents. Sedgwick offers a retooling of Rene Girard’s notion of triangular desire, which “trace[s] a calculus of power that [is] structured by the relation of rivalry between two active members of an erotic triangle.”64 Her project applies Girard’s abstract model of “male-male-female erotic triangles” to the particular social and historical context of nineteenth-century England, elucidating the structural dynamics by which men “traffic in women” in order to solidify the male bonds that maintain and transmit patriarchal power.65

Sedgwick’s theory requires some modification before it can be productively applied to the case of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy. Like Sedgwick’s reading of the nineteenth-century English novel, which offers evidence for the way patriarchy “capitalizes” on desire to maintain and reinforce its hegemony, the aristocratic system depicted in Rudin also structures desire, subordinating it to economic and political ends: namely the maintenance of the gentry social system. Unlike the system illuminated by Sedgwick’s reading of the English context, where the trafficking in women solidifies the male homo-social bonds that help maintain the power structure of patriarchy, Turgenev’s gentry are perhaps more perversely progressive, trafficking in both women and superfluous men.66 Rudin as a glove, candy wrapper, and losing lottery ticket are all figures of this use to which he is put by the other characters: a use that, implicit in these figures, evacuates Rudin of his identity.

Rudin’s behavior toward his rival suitor Volyncev ultimately confounds both men, as well as the other characters in Turgenev’s novel. Reexamining Rudin’s behavior through the framework of the social and political structures that make use of libidinal energy reveals the possible reason behind his visit to Volyncev, who reproaches Rudin for his indiscretion regarding matters of the heart:

> “Believe me, I know my own value [цена]: I know how little worthy [достоин] I am to replace you in her heart.” […]
> “It is pleasant for us to think that our secret is in your hands…”

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65 Ibid., 25.
66 Interestingly, Darya Mikhailovna, “the lioness from the capital” who wields total power on her estate, exhibits sexual behaviors that might more traditionally be coded as masculine: serial sexual partners, “keeping” men, and “permitt[ing] herself such liberties in conversation that it was a matter for horror!” (12-13).
Volyntsev gave a forced laugh. “I thank you for your power of attorney [доверенность]!” he exclaimed. “Though, I pray you to observe, I did not want to know your secret, not to betray my own, and you are dealing [распоряжаясь] with it as though it were your own property [добро]. But then, of course, you speak as if for two persons [как бы от общего лица]. Am I therefore to suppose that Natalya Alexeevna is privy to your visit and the purpose of that visit?” (76, 316-17, my emphasis)

Volyntsev’s economic language of value (“цена” and “достоин”) and the organization of property (“распоряжаясь, как своим добром”) provides the verbal texture for this exchange between suitors, while his sarcastic rejoinder about the “power of attorney,” as well as his reference to Rudin’s speaking on behalf of Natalya as assuming the position of the “общее лицо” intimates the legal nature of this transaction. Rudin desires not so much a bond with Natalya as the social position vis-à-vis Volyntsev that this bond would implicitly establish, a position that would be symbolically secured by his marriage to Natalya. Such a reading makes sense of Rudin’s apathy concerning Natalya’s proposition that they elope, which would be to gain Natalya as wife, but potentially lose her estate. Even a critic as shrewd as Victor Ripp has found the nature of Rudin’s desire confusing. In his analysis of the novel he lets slip, “Moreover, Natalia’s proposal to elope is one that no genuinely feeling man would decline” (129). Rudin’s question – “And what did your mother say?” (82) – expresses the aristo-social68 nature of his desire, which seeks to establish a relationship with his rival Volyntsev through Natalya.

Volyntsev, in his turn, finds himself tempted to participate in the social ritual of rivalry initiated by Rudin, telling Lezhnev, “I shall challenge this clever fellow to a duel” (88). Lezhnev, more insightful than his friend, plays his own erotic triangle (which consists of Rudin and Alexandra Pavlovna) off Volyntsev’s, who happens to be Alexandra Pavlovna’s brother. Instead of challenging Rudin to a duel, Lezhnev proposes that he and Volyntsev go away together. “Yes; but who would we leave my sister with?” (89). Lezhnev’s solution, to bring her along, which is accompanied by a picture of the pleasures all three will enjoy together, maintains the ambiguity of his motives: to whom is he actually proposing and why? The arrival of a letter from Rudin announcing his decision to leave the country renders all of these plans unnecessary, immediately precipitating Lezhnev’s proposal to Alexandra. Significantly, the novel’s concluding chapter offers two juxtaposed scenes, the first of which finds the cast of characters, minus Rudin, enjoying a bottle of “Château Lafitte” (105). “The first days of May were at hand. On the balcony of her house sat Alexandra Pavlovna, not Lipina now, but Lezhneva”


68 This rephrasing of Sedgwick’s key term is meant to accommodate the operation of this desire in the Russian context. See note 62.
[Настали первые дни мая. На балконе своего дома сидела Александра Павловна, но уже не Липина, а Лежнева] (102, 342). Turgenev emphasizes both that the balcony belongs to Aleksandra and that her name has changed, thereby underscoring the exchange in property and referencing the new context of belonging for Alexandra herself.

Victor Ripp’s analysis, which also addresses the symbolism of space, is worth quoting at length for the specific way it takes for granted the significance of this exchange of property:

To a degree, indeed, topology stands in for explanation. Residence in the nobility enclave, whatever the minor drawbacks, is its own reward; and improper behavior is sufficiently punished by banishment from this favored realm. Thus when the hero, Dmitri Rudin, is exposed as a poseur, his penalty is that he must leave the estate. Two scenes in chapter 12, which takes place several years after Rudin’s forced departure, serve to map out the emotional landscape of the novel. The first is a gathering on the veranda of Rudin’s old friend Lezhnev.69

This gathering is on the new “veranda of Rudin’s old friend Lezhnev.” Ripp, in his description of this scene, refers to the veranda as belonging to Lezhnev; Turgenev, in the novel, tells us that the party is gathered not on Lezhnev’s veranda but rather on Aleksandra’s. Ripp’s slip, which grants Lezhnev ownership of the balcony/veranda, operates according to basic transitive logic: if Aleksandra possesses the balcony, and Lezhnev possesses Aleksandra, then… This covert logic is indicative of the nature of the transactions in capital that my analysis seeks to reveal, where “topology [indeed] stands in for explanation,” as Ripp completes the symbolic transfer that Turgenev registers in the change of name, implicitly transmitting the property deed to Lezhnev.

A different contractual system than that of marriage, namely patronage, governs the erotic bond that unites Pandalevsky and Darya Mikhailovna. She “kept an open house—in other words, she received men, especially bachelors” (12, 247), and Pandalevsky’s initial introduction offers only a slightly veiled depiction of the nature of this relationship: “In general, ladies in their middle years were keen to provide patronage for Konstantin Diomidych: with them, he knew how to seek, how to find. Even now he was living in the home of a rich landowning woman, Darya Mikhailovna Lasunskaia, in the capacity of an adoptive son or boarder. He was very affectionate, obliging, sensitive, and secretly voluptuous” [Вообще дамы средних лет охотно покровительствовали Константину Диомидычу: он умел искать, умел находить в них. Он и теперь жил у богатой помещицы, Дарьи Михайловны Ласунской, в качестве приемыша или нахлебника. Он был весьма ласков, послушлив, чувствителен и втайне сластолюбив] (7, 241-42). Apart from telling us that he is “secretly voluptuous,” the narrator’s linguistic play in his description of Pandalevsky’s activities – “he knew how to seek, knew how to find” – where the language of the first clause derives from the discourse of patronage, while the second plays on the biblical idiom, implicitly suggests the erotic entanglement and opportunities afforded by this relationship.

Given his socially subordinate status within the aristocratic system of Darya’s estate, Rudin perhaps presents the greatest threat to Pandalevsky’s position, and like all the other male rivals, Pandalevsky experiences envy and jealousy as a result of Rudin’s arrival (28, 26), going so far as to fear him and seek his favor (50). At the same time, “Rudin understood very well that she was courting him, almost fawning on him [Rudin]” (34, 271), and later he even admits as much in his letter to Natalya (97). It takes a little more than two months for Rudin to successfully supplant Pandalevsky for the remainder of his stay, while never fulfilling Pandalevsky’s erotic duties. Midway through the novel, having assumed this position, Rudin attempts to leave “under the pretext” of having exhausted his finances, but Darya will not permit it, instead giving him five hundred rubles (50, 288). Accepting this money solidifies his role as Darya’s client or favorite. At the same time, “Everyone in Darya Mikhailovna’s house submitted to Rudin’s caprice: his slightest wishes were fulfilled. The order of the day’s pursuits depended on him. No partie de plaisir was arranged without him” (51, 289). That Rudin is simultaneously a prisoner of Darya’s estate, or court, and as a result of her favoritism temporary ruler over it, evinces the paradoxical power balance of this relationship of patronage.

Rudin is not the first and probably not the last bachelor to pass through Darya’s estate. In a telling comment to his sister, Volynstev remarks “The time will come when she will part with him, too – Pandalevsky is the only one she will never part with – but for the moment he is king” (Придет время, она и с ним расстанется, -- она с одним Пандалевским никогда не расстанется,--но теперь он царит) (47, 285). Pandalevsky most actively works to thwart Rudin, spying on the conversations between Rudin and Natalya and reporting this information back to Darya – the action that most significantly contributes to Rudin’s ejection. Pandalevsky divulges this information behind closed doors, “completely put[ting] her mind at rest. This was something at which he was skilled” (Пандалевский ее успокоил совершенно. Это было по его части) (100, 341). Rudin’s participation in this triangle does not so much solidify the bond between Darya and Pandalevsky as reinvigorate their mutual attraction. Both Darya and Rudin find themselves as objects of the novel’s social critique, insofar as both their lives are governed by the pattern of what we might describe as a “recognition compulsion.” Rudin’s multiple “scenes,” of which his stay at Darya’s estate is just one more example, intersect with Darya’s yearly trips to her manor, where her own erotic scenes are staged. The novel might be diagramed as the single point of intersection of these two circles of repetition, where the cyclical nature of both Rudin’s and Darya’s lives evidences their superfluity in the classic understanding of this term. At the same time, however, as we have seen, Rudin’s superfluity is productive on a larger scale, where his arrival and ejection produce the next generation of the gentry’s marriages.

The superfluous man – as a subject position – occupies the social and formal center of Turgenev’s novel: Rudin agitates Natalya’s desire, as well as all of the novel’s potential rivals, irrespective of whether or not their love objects themselves desire Rudin; this, in turn, generates or taps into a more general anxiety about desire as such. Rudin’s
undefined desire (or talking about/around desire) works as the catalyst that starts the social machine which then, in an effort to structure desire, to make it productive, to suppress the anxiety about what constitutes its proper object, and, most importantly, to stabilize a shifting social system, marries off all the novel’s couples.

The plot of *Rudin* traces two basic, but coordinated arcs: the novel goes from static singles to married couples; Rudin is absent, present, and then absent again. His presence as a rival puts the men into action. His absence marks the impossibility of attaining the object of desire that Rudin only talked about, but which the women believed he would satisfy with himself. The novel’s other men fill this need that Rudin only brought into focus. Implicit in all of this are the almost frozen conditions that mark the novel’s opening: the men desire the women, but not in a way that is evident or effective (for they too have the potential of superfluity in the more traditional sense), and Volynstev, though he has clearly pined for Natalya for some time cannot consummate his love. The aristocratic society of Darya Mikhailovna’s estate needs Rudin to survive, for the function he performs, and puts him to work. When he attempts to leave halfway through the novel, they will not allow it, instead lending him money, which further places him under their control.

The graphical ellipses mark the gap at the center of Turgenev’s discursive universe, a gap that is thematically associated with and structurally homomorphic to desire. Turgenev’s techniques of negative focalization and suppression of (Rudin’s) direct speech disrupt the continuity between external and internal, producing a hero who is also defined by a gap or absence. Into this container the other characters project their own desires. This projection, in turn, allows them to recognize Rudin as a rival against whom they can act. In *Rudin* the superfluous man is not simply “superfluous,” occupying both the social and formal center of Turgenev’s first novel. Turgenev’s novel and the society he set out to represent have great need and make great use of Rudin as superfluous man.

Critics disagree as to whether Rudin’s death is ultimately superfluous and are divided on the meaning of the novel’s ending – whether it condemns or exonerates Rudin.70 Instead of considering Rudin’s final act in these social and ethical terms, I want to conclude by addressing the narrative significance of this act, asking what kind of closure it provides for the novel. Before the reader joins Rudin on the barricades, she has already been offered multiple signs of novelistic closure: the three weddings that signal the conclusion of a comedy. Adding the hero’s death to these tokens of novelistic closure seems excessive, and yet there is something in the novel’s final one-line paragraph, arguably the best line in the entire novel, that promises to satisfy the reader’s “narrative desire”71: “This ‘Polonais’ was – Dmitri Rudin” [Этот "Polonais" был -- Дмитрий Рудин] (126, 368). This final line returns us to the enigma at the center of the novel – Rudin’s identity – and to the question of linguistic and social recognition, offering the utopian promise of the possibility of recognizing Rudin at the same time that it

demonstrates the failure of this recognition. This line describes the misrecognition that apparently results from linguistic circumstances – the French insurgents fail to understand Rudin’s Russian – but Rudin’s misrecognition was a problem even in his native land. The Parisian context deceptively portrays the misrecognition of Rudin’s identity as a perfectly natural linguistic failure, one which we would like to believe could be easily resolved. The lesson of the novel would suggest otherwise.

If Rudin’s unstable social identity makes him vulnerable to the instrumentalizing amorous designs of the other characters, then Rudin’s unstable narrative identity makes him useful for the production of the novel’s plot, generating the tension which the reader’s narrative desire seeks to resolve. But Rudin’s final act and dramatic death provide a form of closure devoid of content – that is, they do not answer the question of Rudin’s identity. To recognize Rudin as not a “Polonais” is a negative form of recognition that defines him by what he is not, a mode of recognition which establishes an identity through linguistic and logical difference. Death, the event that almost universally signifies closure, here, paradoxically, keeps in infinite suspension the question of Rudin’s identity. The voice that speaks the novel’s final words “knows” Rudin but paradoxically speaks (“Polonais”) that knowledge from the linguistic point of view of the French insurgents who misrecognize him. This final line speaks with a voice that transcends death and yet refuses or is unable to fix its hero’s identity. It is a voice marked by the free indirect discourse characteristic of the European realist novel that, in attempting to resolve the question of its hero’s identity, leaves us with another: “Who was speaking there?”
Chapter 2

The Subject and the Event in Dostoevsky’s Demons

“The plot is the source and the soul of tragedy.”
– Aristotle, Poetics

“There have been tragic novels going on here.”
– Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky, Demons

“He began to think – and the further he thought into it, the gloomier he became and the more astonishing ‘the whole event’ became in his eyes.
‘But…but what sort of event is it, anyhow?’ he tried to protest, not trusting himself. ‘Is there anything in it that remotely resembles an event?’”
– Dostoevsky, The Eternal Husband

Fragmentation and Unity in Demons

What constitutes the formal unity of Dostoevsky’s Demons? This question continues to occupy Dostoevsky scholars. We can begin by saying what does not. It is not the hero and his biography that the early Lukács theorized as occupying the formal center of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Nor is it a collection of main characters around whom the novel’s action would seem to revolve. Nor is it the historical event of the Nechaev murder that served as a catalyst for the novel. These assertions about where the novel’s formal unity is not to be found echo the reception of the novel by Dostoevsky’s contemporaries. In a letter of 12 April 1871, Nikolai Strakhov criticized Dostoevsky’s novel for its formal excess: “But the public’s impression is thus far vague; they don’t see the point of the story and are getting lost in the multitude of characters and episodes, whose connection isn’t clear. […] If the fabric of your stories was simpler, they would produce a greater effect” [Но впечатление в публике до сих пор очень смутное; она не видит цели рассказа и теряется во множестве лиц и эпизодов, которых связь неясна. […] Если бы ткань ваших рассказов была проще, они бы действовали сильнее].¹ The journal Iskra offered a similar devaluation of the novel, parodying Dostoevsky’s method of artistic “execution”: “A million characters and their universal destruction at the novel’s end” [Миллион действующих лиц и поголовное истребление их в конце романа].² For Strakhov’s reading public, the novel is too

¹ Nikolai Strakhov to Fedor Dostoevsky, 21 April 1871, in Russkii Sovremenik, ed. M. Gorkii et. al., vol. 1 (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924): 199.
² F. M. Dostoevskii, Polnoe sobranie sochinennyi v tridtsati tomakh. Eds. V. G. Bazanov et al. (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1972- 1990) 12:260. All future citations to Dostoevsky’s PSS will be in the body of the text.
complex, rendering the connection (sviaz’) between characters and episodes “unclear.” These criticisms are well founded: the novel contains some thirty characters, over a third of whom die in the novel’s final chapters. The narrative’s shift in focus from Stepan Trofimovich, the representative of the 1840s generation whose biographical details begin the novel, to the tragic figure of Stavrogin, belonging to the generation of the 1860s, who first appears about a third of the way into the novel, further disorients a reader accustomed to novelistic plots that center around the lives of a few select characters. Even Tolstoy’s “baggy monster” War and Peace seems tightly controlled, revolving as it does around three key families, in comparison to Demons.

The concept of the connection, and not that of a character, as it occurs in the novel and Dostoevsky’s notebooks, will, as it turns out, be central to an articulation of the novel’s formal unity. And as this chapter argues, Strakhov’s implicit question — How are the episodes and characters connected? — contains its answer. One unifying theme of the novel is that it repeatedly raises this very question, a question that the chronicler implicitly attempts to answer by exploring the metaphorical potential of the text as a fabric (tkan’).

Kate Holland’s recent study, The Novel in the Age of Disintegration, offers an example of the continued interest in the question of form in Dostoevsky scholarship. She argues that Dostoevsky’s novels from the 1870s onward are characterized by two competing impulses: disorder, “an impulse towards fragmentation,” and the “impulse toward formal unity,” which “seeks to reintegrate the fragments of a world shattered by modernity.”3 Mikhail Bakhtin’s now classic Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics earlier cast this tension between unity and fragmentation in his own idiom of dialogism and polyphony: “Indeed, the monologic unity of the world is destroyed in Dostoevsky’s novels, but those ripped-off pieces of reality are in no sense directly combined in the unity of the novel; each of these pieces gravitates towards the integral field of vision of a specific character; each makes sense only at the level of a specific consciousness.”4 Implicit in the striking image of “ripped-off pieces of reality” is the a priori existence of some integral whole or totality from which these pieces have been torn. For both Holland and Bakhtin, Dostoevsky’s novels do not exhibit the unity characteristic of the monologic novel, a unity arguably closer to Lukács’s understanding of novelistic form as it is described in his early study The Theory of the Novel.5 For Lukács, whose early work on the novel greatly influenced Bakhtin,6 the novel is constructed around the biography of a

3 Holland locates the root of this opposition in Dostoevsky’s engagement with Russian modernization in the 1860s. Kate Holland, The Novel in the Age of Disintegration: Dostoevsky and the Problem of Genre in the 1870s (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 5, 11.
4 M. M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson; intr. by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 21.
hero whose represented consciousness integrates the phenomena and events of the external world, lending to it the integrated form of his own biography. Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* and Bakhtin’s monologic unity both describe a form of the novel from which Dostoevsky’s works depart.

In the case of *Demons*, at least, Dostoevsky makes this opposition between fragmentation and unity a thematic principle of the novel itself. His characters are cognizant of the fragmented nature of their reality and are trying to produce narrative forms that will reintroduce a unity, wholeness, or sense of totality to their experience of the world. Not only do the competing impulses of fragmentation and unity characterize the formal structure of *Demons* but the novel stages this tension as a hermeneutic problem for the reader. This opposition constitutes one of the novel’s primary themes.7

Readers and characters, including the first-person narrator, all struggle to give form to the fragments of this fictional world, an activity that can be conceived of as the attempt to impose narrative closure on a world that ultimately resists such closure by virtue of its intrinsic fragmentary excess. The reader’s interpretive struggle is anticipated and modeled by those of the characters, whose various artistic projects, their *acts of narration*, strive to meaningfully organize their world’s *realia*.

Consider, for example, Liza’s “literary activity”8 to catalogue a year’s events [происшествия], such that they would constitute a “combined totality” [совокупность] (128, 10:103). “[T]he choice could be limited only to events that more or less expressed the personal moral life of the people, the personality of the Russian people at a given moment” [Можно многое выпустить и ограничиться лишь выбором происшествий, более или менее выражающих нравственную личную жизнь народа, личность русского народа в данный момент] (128, 10:104); “but with the choice only of those things that portrayed the epoch; everything would be included with a certain view, a direction, an intention, an idea, throwing light on the entire whole, the totality”

7 If Bakhtin develops his theory of the polyphonic novel in order to grasp the principle of artistic unity operative in Dostoevsky’s novels, Holland concludes her analysis of *Demons* by correlating the impulses of unity and fragmentation with the genres of epic and novel, respectively; that is, she maps the tension between unity and fragmentation onto the category of genre. The question of genre, central to these three figures, is not something this chapter directly addresses. That being said, the question of how Dostoevsky’s conception of the human subject relates to the formal features of *Demons* indirectly speaks to the generic question Lukács raises in his conclusion to *Theory of the Novel*, where he asks whether Dostoevsky “novels” should rather be considered “new epics.” Dostoevsky’s representation of the intersubjective bonds that produce collective subjects (one focus of this chapter) might be seen as evidence for Lukács’s speculation that his novels constitute new epics.

Shatov and Liza cannot state precisely which tendency would allow them to select facts such that their compilation would achieve a representative whole or “totality.” Initially doubting the project’s success, Shatov comically transposes the philosophical question concerning the principle of selection that would produce a totality in terms of the book’s materiality: “Instead of many pages there will be a few fat books, that’s all” [Вместо множества листов будет несколько толстых книг, вот и всё] (128, 10:103). Liza hotly rejoins: “There should be one book, and not even a very fat one, she insisted. But even supposing it were a fat one, still it would be a clear one, because the main thing was the plan and the way the facts were presented” [Книга должна быть одна, даже не очень толстая, — уверяла она. Но положим хоть и толстая, но ясная, потому что главное в плане и в характере представления фактов] (128, 10:103-4). Liza’s desire that the work “should be one” might also be read as “[a desire to] constitute a unity.” Similarly, the problem of the right tendency is also transposed onto the activity of publishing the work. Shatov remarks: “It’s a huge matter. One cannot invent something all at once. Experience is necessary. Even when the book is published, we’ll still hardly know how to publish it” [Дело это — огромное. Сразу ничего не выдумаешь. Опыт нужен. Да и когда издадим книгу, вряд ли еще научимся, как ее издавать] (129, 10:104). The act of publishing the book comes to be invested with the semantic closure signified by the concept of a published book, the implicit assumption about which is that it constitutes a unified whole. The paradox of not knowing how to publish the book even after it has been published becomes a restatement of the problem of the guiding tendency of selection that would produce a work characterizing the totality of Russian life.

That Liza’s phrase “limited only” [ограничится лишь], which describes her principle of selection, is also employed by the chronicler to describe his own narrative technique further suggests that Liza’s “literary activity” offers a foil for the chronicler’s. Early on in the novel, the chronicler interrupts his narrative of Varvara Petrovna’s plans to marry Stepan Trofimovich to her ward, Darya, commenting: “As a chronicler I limit myself simply to presenting events in an exact way, exactly as they occurred, and it is not my fault if they appear incredible” [Как хроникер, я ограничиваюсь лишь тем, что представляю события в точном виде, только так, как, они прошли, и не виноват если они покажутся невероятными] (10:55-56). The chronicler’s act of limiting takes narrative objectivity as its goal, but how limiting the presentation of an event achieves this goal is not entirely clear. It seems almost paradoxical that circumscribing the description of an event would present it more objectively. More importantly, the event, for both Liza and the chronicler, constitutes a basic building block of narration; that both

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9 A similar statement appears a few pages earlier: “But I will speak of these curious events later; now I will confine myself to the fact that […]” [Но обо всех этих любопытных событиях скажу после; теперь же ограничусь лишь тем (…)] (64, 10:54)
talk about the act of narrating in shared terms invites us to consider how the novel at this moment offers a meditation on its compositional principles. The act of limiting might be thought of as describing the movement of fabula to sjuzhet, as producing a sjuzhet by cutting or chiseling away from the continuous block of temporal experience that we presuppose the fabula to be.

Marya Timofeevna offers another example of a character engaged in narrative production. The expression of her madness, the logic by which she distorts reality, effectively reorders a fabula’s events, consequently producing a sjuzhet. While introducing the chronicler to Marya, Shatov remarks, “she always mixes up time” [всегда время перепутывает] and “certainly remakes it all in her own way” [наверно переделала всё по-своему] (143, 10:115, translation altered). While the story she tells Shatov and the chronicler begins with her reading cards, her telling of the future quickly turns to the past: “she suddenly mixed up the cards, ‘It’s the same thing I said once to Mother Praskovya” [Это самое я матері Прасковьє раз говорю] (144, 10:115). But this recollection subtly reestablishes its future orientation and concludes by assuming the form of an apocalyptic vision (145-6, 10:117).

Much like Liza’s almanac, Shigalyov’s book project proposes a “system of world organization”; his project also has similar problems. Not only is it unfinished, but his “conclusions directly contradict the original idea” (402, 10:311). When introducing his work at a meeting of revolutionaries, Shigalyov names those utopian visionaries whom he considers himself to have surpassed: “Plato, Rousseau, Fourier, aluminum columns – all this is fit perhaps for sparrows, but not for human society” [Платон, Руссо, Фурье, колонны из алюминия всё это годится разве для воробьев, а не для общества человеческого] (402, 10:311). The item in the list not quite like the others, the aluminum columns, references the “Fourth Dream of Vera Pavlovna” from Chernyshevsky’s What is to be Done? (the columns adorn the crystal palace). Significantly, the last reference is to a novel. Shigalyov’s book, itself not a novel, performs one key function of the realist novel – the construction of an integrated world system. As the example of Chernyshevsky’s novel demonstrates, mimesis need not govern the artistic tendency that produces a realist novel. The novel can also represent the “reality” that, in Chernyshevsky’s case, the author wants to realize, even participating in the ideological production of this reality. Arguably, not only “utopian” novels perform this ideological work. Fredric Jameson describes one of the “tasks” of the nineteenth-century realist novel as “producing as though for the first time that very life world, that very ‘referent’ […] of which this new narrative discourse will then claim to be the ‘realistic’ reflection.”10 Shigalyov’s book exemplifies the ideological work performed by the nineteenth-century realist novel. It is with this understanding of the novel in mind that Pyotr’s response to Shigalyov’s book might be understood: “‘You see gentlemen,’ he raised his eyes a bit, ‘I think all these books, these Fouriers, Cabets, all these “rights to work,” Shigalyovism – it’s all like novels, of which a hundred thousand can be written. An aesthetic pastime. I understand that you’re bored in this wretched little town, so you fall on any paper with writing on it’” [Видите, господа, — приподнял он капельку глаза, — по-моему, все

эти книги, Фурье, Кабеты, все эти «права на работу», шигалевщина — всё это вроде романов, которых можно написать сто тысяч] (405, 10:313).

This moment not only describes how the realist novel might constitute the reality it purports to represent but offers a demonstration of that operation. “Shigalyovism” “denotes a form of socio-political demagogy and posturing with a tendency to propose extreme measures and total solutions” (727). Pyotr claims that the inhabitants of this provincial town are vulnerable to these works because they are bored, and the dissemination of his revolutionary tracts exploits this vulnerability. It is not only boredom that renders them susceptible to these circulating narratives, but the town’s peripheral geographic position vis-à-vis the capital and the events occurring there that seem to govern the course of the nation. The anxiety of living on the margins expresses itself in one revolutionary’s response to Pyotr: “‘Excuse me, sir,’ the lame man was twitching on his chair, ‘though we are provincials, and are most certainly deserving pity for that, nevertheless we know that so far nothing so new has happened in the world that we should weep over having missed it’” [Позвольте, — задергался на стуле хромой, — мы хоть и провинциалы и, уж конечно, достойны тем сожаления, но, однако же, знаем, что на свете покамест ничего такого нового не случилось, о чем бы нам плакать, что проглядели] (405, 10:313-14). This dismissal of world history seems emblematic of the Russian national psyche of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was burdened by the anxiety that Russia lacked both history and culture, and that the enlightenment and reformation had both passed them by. Part of the appeal of Pyotr’s revolutionary scheme, then, exploits this insecurity that world history has passed Russia by, that nothing has happened in Russia “that we should weep over having missed it,” but that something might, namely a world-wide socialist revolution. This logic, which implies Russia’s provinciality vis-à-vis the West, potentially privileges the Russian provincial point of view which sees that nothing has happened, that no events have occurred. These provincial revolutionaries are longing for an event, and in Demons Dostoevsky may be suggesting that the province is in fact where events can occur thanks, in part, to its spatial remove from the seat of the governing political subject. In other words, Dostoevsky figures geographically the decentering force of the event on the subject.

All of these, what we might call, subjects of narration – Liza, Marya, Shigalyov11 – find themselves caught in a double-bind: their narrative acts seek to create a narrative characterized by formal integrity and wholeness at the same time that the object of their various narratives contains the “embryos” (zarodyshi) of fragmentation and disorder. Is the subject’s experience of reality as fragmented or striving towards fragmentation a consequence of subjectivity itself? That is, do the epistemological limitations inherent in the subject’s position in the world preclude the apprehension of a totality, which may exist “out there”? In this case, the narrative subject’s desire to create a narrative totality by reorganizing the fragments of reality would paradoxically serve to create the experience of a fragmented reality. The acts of narrative selection that circumscribe and delimit the represented world, giving more attention to one character, scene, or detail

11 Varvara Petrovna and Pyotr Stepanovich might easily be added to the list of characters who are self-consciously engaged in the production of narratives.
over another, can be seen as tearing these objects of narration [Bakhtin’s “ripped out pieces of reality’”] out of the imagined or projected totality within which they are situated in order to meaningfully resituate or recontextualize them within a narrative totality.

The figure of the “embryo of disorder” is employed by the novel’s narrator-chronicler in his description of Yulia Mikhailovna von Lembke’s Dionysian fete: “According to the program, the festive day was divided into two parts: the literary matinée, from noon till four, and then the ball, from nine o’clock on through the night. But this arrangement itself concealed embryos of disorder” [Праздничный день по программе был разделен на две части: на литературное утро, с полудня до четырех, и потом на бал, с девяти часов во всю ночь. Но в самом этом расположении уже таились зародыши беспорядка] (463, 10:355, translation modified). The embryos of disorder (besporiadok) hidden within the ordering (rasporiazhenie) of the day’s events become evident not only in the catastrophic events of arson and murder, but also through the narrator’s punning: the fete’s ushers (rasporiaditeli) are responsible for the disorder (besporiadok): “The intention,” writes the chronicler, “was clear, to me at least: they were as if hastening the disorder” [Намерение было ясное, для меня по крайней мере: как будто торопились беспорядком] (473, 10:363).

My attention to the lexical units of rasporiaditel’ (usher) and besporiadok (disorder) are prompted by the novel’s characters. Take, for example, the chronicler’s description of Stepan Trofimovich’s mental state just before his fateful meeting with Varvara Petrovna: “My poor friend was so arranged (nastroen), or, better said, so deranged (rasstroen) that he was immediately crushed (srazilo) by this circumstance” [Бедный друг мой был так настроен или, лучше сказать, так расстроен, что это обстоятельство тотчас же сразило его] (167, 10:120). The “crushing” circumstance (which translates the verb srazit’ and not razdavit’ applied to Shatov) consists of Varvara Petrovna’s tardiness to a prearranged meeting that is supposed to decide Stepan’s fate – his marriage to Varvara’s ward, Darya, Shatov’s sister.

In a conversation that occurs a few pages earlier, Shatov offers the striking metaphor of how the “idea” of socialism affected him: “Stepan Trofimovich was right to say that I’m lying under a stone, crushed but not crushed to death, I’m just writhing – it’s a good comparison” [Степан Трофимович правду сказал, что я под камнем лежу, раздавлен, да не задавлен, и только корчуся; это он хорошо сравнил] (138, 10:111). It is the “professor” and philologist of sorts, Stepan Trofimovich, who has earlier offered Shatov this morphological distinction between the participles razdavlen and zadavlen.

Translations of this punning phrase “раздавлен, да не задавлен” are forced to compromise between either preserving the common root of the two participles (dav from the imperfective verb davit’, “to crush”) in the translation “crushed but not crushed to death” (Pevear and Volokhonsky 138), or rendering the semantic effect of the perfectivizing prefixes with two different but (in Russian) morphologically related verbs: “crushed but not squashed” (Maguire 153). Given that the novel’s tragic dénouement consists of Shatov’s murder, we might see the novel’s plot as suspended between these two prefixes, its trajectory traced by the movement from raz- to za-.

An implicit comparison between prefixes is invited in Part 2 of the novel. During an intimate discussion with Darya about his amorous attachments, Stavrogin also draws attention to the prefixes raz- and bez- in his circumlocutionary references to Lizaveta
Nikolaevna and Marya Timofeevna as razumnaia and bezumnaia, respectively: “‘You won’t ruin the other woman … the insane one [bezumnuiu]?’ / ‘I won’t ruin the insane ones [bezumnux], neither the one nor the other, but it seems I will ruin the sane one [razumnui]: I’m so mean and vile, Dasha, that it seems I really will call you “in the final end,” as you say, and you despite your sanity [razun], will come. Why are you ruining yourself?’” [--Вы не погубите другую... безумную? / -- Безумных не погублю, ни той, ни другой, но разумную, кажется, погублю: я так подл и гадок, Даша, что, кажется, вас в самом деле кликну «в последний конец», как вы говорите, а вы, несмотря на ваш разум, придете] (292, 10:229). Stavrogin’s desire to “ruin” (pogubit’) the “reasonable” one through an illicit sexual union, simultaneously implies that desire will overcome reason (even Darya “несмотря на [её] разум, придёт”) and perhaps even destroy it.

All of these instances feature the prefix raz-, which seems to proliferate throughout the novel. In explicitly foregrounding such a distinction between prefixes the novel may be baring one of its devices. This prefix – connoting separation, destruction, and dissemination – reads as a linguistic inscription of both the characters’ partially incoherent or fragmented subjectivities and of the fragmented world that comprises the content of their experience.

The primary meaning of the prefix raz- expresses on the level of morphology the novel’s thematic of fragmentation and destruction, a world that appears to be coming apart at the seams. The oft-quoted statement of Dostoevsky’s narrator in Notes from the House of the Dead applies equally well to the world of Demons: “Reality strives towards fragmentation” [Действительность стремится к раздробленню” (4:197).] In Demons, fragmentation (razdroblenie) describes both the story world as well as the revolutionary desire to destroy the social systems that structure that world by, for example, upending the institution of marriage or the dissemination of revolutionary tracts (razbrasyvat’ proklamatsii). The formal excess of the novel, with its nearly 30 “main” characters and numerous side plots, enacts on the level of form the “fragmentation of reality” that it purports to represent. Strakhov’s reading public was looking for the novel’s formal unity in its characters and episodes, but what if the compositional principle of the novel is to be found elsewhere?

The Event as the Novel’s Formal Center

Demons is arguably not structured around a single protagonist, or even a select few. Categories of major and minor characters seem to break down in this novel, and traditionally other lines of inquiry have been taken in attempts to describe its formal

properties. If not a hero, what is the primary object of the novel’s narrative attention? The challenges of narration constitute the subject matter of the novel’s first sentence: “Embarking on a description of the very strange events that recently occurred in our town, which until then had not been notable for anything, I am compelled, owing to my lack of skill, to begin in a rather roundabout way, namely, with a few biographical details about the talented and much esteemed Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky” (13).

The novel’s first line flags the difficulties of narration, implicitly acknowledging the novel’s dependence on biographical form, as well as foregrounding the opposition of fabula and sjužhet. In this novel, the success of story-telling seems to depend solely on the narrator’s skill. If the chronicler’s announcement of his lack of skill postpones the beginning of the “chronicle,” it simultaneously marks the beginning of the novel. The novel, in opposition to the chronicle, will be as much “a description of the strange events” (странные события) that constitute the chronicle as it will be about the act of chronicling, the act of narration.

The chronicler’s reliance on biographical form is accepted reluctantly, and for good reason. The central object of narration is the “strange events,” not any one protagonist, but the narrator struggles to begin a narrative about strange events without appealing to a biographical subject. In an earlier draft of the novel, the narrator states more explicitly that the object of his narrative is not a hero but an event: “I am not describing a city, an environment, daily life, people, responsibilities, relationships […]. I

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consider myself a chronicler of a single private, curious, unexpected event, which occurred among us suddenly, and which recently seized all of us with astonishment” [Я не описываю города, обстановки, быта, людей, должностей, отношений […] Я считаю себя хроникером одного частного любопытного события, происшедшего у нас вдруг, неожиданного в последнее время и обдавшего всех нас удивлением] (11:240).

At the center of the narrative’s attention lies an event (sobytie), the primary object of description. What happens to a narrative that is not anchored by a hero, when it attempts to dispose of that biographical form which Georg Lukács identifies as central to the novel’s formal aesthetics? And does it make sense to have an “event” without a subject? To describe an event as “curious,” “particular,” and “unexpected” presumes a subject or subjects to whom these states could be attributed; in this case, that subject is collective. The evaluation of Dostoevsky’s novel as formally loose may be a function of seeking to anchor its formal coherence in the biography and psychology of a hero. Taking the concept of the event as the narrative’s central preoccupation and object of attention, and not any one character, sets the novel’s formal principles into greater relief. In Demons, Dostoevsky seems to be more invested in exploring the question of how events happen than in who perpetrates them and why. In what follows, I will argue that the concept of the event occupies the formal center of Demons, and that it exerts a decentering force on the characters. In this way, the form of the novel thematizes the relationship between the subject and the event.

The first chapter of Bakhtin’s Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics provides a survey of the critical literature that addresses the question of unity in Dostoevsky’s novels, suggesting repeatedly that the concept of the event is integral to understanding this formal unity. He begins with a critique similar to Strakhov’s: “Dostoevsky’s world may seem a chaos, and the construction of his novels some sort of conglomerate of disparate materials and incompatible principles for shaping them”; but such an assessment of Dostoevsky’s art, Bakhtin argues, results from a “monologic visualization and understanding of the represented world”; not surprisingly, it is Bakhtin’s polyphony that enables one “to understand the profound organic cohesion, consistency and wholeness of Dostoevsky’s poetics.” If polyphony consists of “the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other,” then it is the event that organizes the interrelationships among these individual consciousnesses:

Every thought of Dostoevsky’s heroes (the Underground Man, Raskolnikov, Ivan, and others) senses itself to be from the very beginning a rejoinder in an unfinalized dialogue. Such thought is not impelled toward a well-rounded, finalized, systemically monologic whole. It lives a tense life on the

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14 Russian has two words for the English event: sobytie and proisshestvie. In almost all instances, what I call an event in the novel refers to sobytie. Although sobytie is used to define proisshestvie, sobytie describes a “social fact of life,” which, when used in the plural, implies a connection or unity among these facts. Slovar’ sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo iazyka (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR) 11:1118, 14:25.
15 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 8.
borders of someone else’s thought, someone else’s consciousness. It is oriented toward an event in its own special way and is inseparable from a person.16

Bakhtin describes the mechanics of the intersubjective relationships between Dostoevsky’s characters: a character’s thought is never entirely his own in that it “senses itself to be […] a rejoinder,” and it is the event that orients these thoughts, that structures the interactions of these multiple consciousnesses. Bakhtin concludes his introduction by stating that “[t]he unity of the polyphonic novel – a unity standing above the word, above the voice, above the accent – has yet to be discovered.”17 “Until now” is probably implicit in these concluding remarks. But throughout his introduction Bakhtin also suggests that the event organizes the interactions between the individual consciousnesses that populate the polyphonic novel.18 According to Michael Holquist, Bakhtin conceived of the duality of self and other “in terms of the need to share being,” where “Bakhtin’s term for the distinctiveness of human existence is sobytie bytiia [literally, the event of being], a pun implying that such existence is both a coexisting (sobytie) and an event (sobytie).”19 Much of the work of this chapter is to examine in detail how the event in Demons structures the intersubjective relationships among the novel’s characters, elaborating on some of Bakhtin’s suggestive claims about the centrality of the event for Dostoevsky.20

The Chronicler seems particularly interested in a specific kind of event – the “razviazka” – which is usually translated as dénouement, and like its French counterpart translates literally as an “untying.” The French dénouement is a calque of the Greek lusis, and comes to us from Aristotle’s description of the plot structure of the tragedy in the Poetics.21 Like the French dénouement, which is literally an “untying” – from nouer, “to

16 Ibid., 32, Bakhtin’s emphasis.
17 Ibid., 43.
18 For discussions of the event in Dostoevsky see ibid., 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 21, and 26.
20 Arguably, Bakhtin’s conception of the intersubjective relationship between self and other derives, at least in part, from Hegel. Bakhtin’s concluding remarks on carnivalization, for example, implicitly invoke Hegel’s Master-Slave dialectic: “Everything must be reflected in everything else, all things must illuminate one another dialogically.” “A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without another consciousness.” An in depth engagement with Bakhtinian concept of the event would require a chapter of its own. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 177. For Hegel’s influence on Bakhtin see, also, Galin Tihanov’s The Master and the Slave.
21 See Stephen Halliwell’s translation of as well as monograph devoted to Aristotle’s Poetics. The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary (London: Duckworth,
tie” – the root of the Russian *razviazka, viaz*, denotes a ligature, knot, or connection, while the prefix *raz-* denotes the undoing of this connection, the untying of this narrative knot.

The chronicler describes a number of events in the novel as *razviazki*. The first instance occurs early in the novel, in the backstory of the quasi-romantic relationship between Stepan Trofimovich and Varvara Petrovna. The two meet nightly in a garden gazebo “pouring out their feelings and thoughts to each other” [изливая друг пред другом свои чувства и мысли] (17, 10:17). Eventually Stepan begins to suspect that Varvara may be expecting a proposal, which one evening he nearly offers. Moments after they have parted ways, as if divining his unfulfilled intentions, Varvara appears at Stepan’s door like a “hallucination” and utters: “I will never forgive you for that!” [Я никогда вам этого не забуду!] (19, 10:18). The narrator describes the effect of this event on Stepan: “But despite his fancy about the hallucination, he seemed every day of his life to be waiting for the sequel, and, so to speak, the denouement of this event. He did not believe it could have ended just like that! And if so, what strange looks he must sometimes have given his friend” [Но, несмотря на мечту о галлюцинации, он каждый день, всю свою жизнь, как бы ждал продолжения и, так сказать, развязки этого события. Он не верил, что оно так и кончилось! А если так, то странно же он должен иногда поглядывать на своего друга] (19, 10:19). Like the Aristotelian conception of the untying, in this instance the *razviazka* functions to resolve a previous event, Varvara’s curse, which functions as a “tying up” (*zaviazka*). The threatening, but more importantly ambiguous, nature of Varvara’s statement leaves Stepan in suspense, where the adverbial phrase “so to speak” (tak skazat’) suggests that the *razviazka* is a narrative figure for Stepan’s experience of expectation. How will this event resolve itself or this narrative knot be untied? Stepan’s anticipation of a future event informs his daily experience, leaving him in a position of passivity. As other examples will illustrate, the state of expectation is repeatedly associated with the concept of the *razviazka*. This *razviazka* achieves partial resolution in the novel’s final chapters, where the mutual affection between the two is openly acknowledged as Stepan lies on his deathbed.

“The event that occurred on our way was also of a surprising sort” [происшествие, случившееся с нами дорогой, было тоже из удивительных] (434, 10:335). This line opens chapter 10:1, which describes the rioting of the factory workers. The chronicler catalogues three different stories circulating among the public, all of which attempt to explain how these seventy workers assembled, and how this assembly transformed itself into a “riot.” This transformation is both an “event” and a collective action, an event that draws together individuals, creating a collective subject. Attempts to narrate the intention of this collective subject founder. The question is how were the...

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22 The specific deed for which he will not be forgiven remains ambiguous. Is Varvara angry that he even “thought” of proposing? Or is she angry that he thought of proposing but then didn’t? Given the nature of their relationship, probably both. The chronicler comments: “Inscrutable, even to this day, are the depths of the feminine heart” [неисследима глубина женского сердца даже и до сегодня] (18, 10:18).
workers incited to riot. The chronicler implies that Lembke’s response to the workers contributes to their transformation in a rioting mob.

“Hats off!” he said, breathlessly and barely audibly. “On your knees!” he shrieked unexpectedly – unexpectedly for himself, and it was in this unexpectedness that the whole ensuing denouement [razviazka] of the affair perhaps consisted. It was like coasting down a hill at the winter carnival: can a sled that is already going down stop in the middle of the hillside? As ill luck would have it, Andrei Antonovich had been distinguished all his life by the serenity of his character and had never shouted or stomped his feet at anyone; and such men are far more dangerous if it once happens that their sled for some reason shoots off downhill. Everything went whirling around in front of him.

“Filibusters!” he screamed, in an even more shrill and absurd way, and his voice cracked. He stood, still not knowing what he was going to do, but knowing and sensing with his whole being that he was now certainly going to do something.

If the event dispossesses or decenters Lembke, it also, paradoxically grounds him in a different experience of himself that is still characterized by an unexpectedness accorded to a split subject: he doesn’t know what he is going to do, but he does know, and perhaps more significantly, “senses with his whole being that he was now certainly going to do something.” The paradox of the event is that the moment when Lembke is dispossessed of himself is simultaneously the moment when he experiences the unity of his being, all his being is brought together under the adjectival pronoun “svoi,” where the instrumental case implies that this unified being is the means or the instrument by which von Lembke knows and senses that he is going to act. The image of the sled shooting off down a hill captures the momentum of the event, which cannot be fully controlled. Stepan Trofimovich and the chronicler are both present at the riot, and the chronicler repeats this image to describe Stepan’s reaction to the whipping of the factory workers and even some of the bystanders: “I had a presentiment that his sled had also shot off downhill. And indeed I found him already at the very center of the event” [мне почему-то предчувствовалось, что и у него санки полетели с горы. И действительно, он отыскался уже в самом центре события] (445, 10:343).
What happens next is not clear and the chronicler offers his conjectures, as well as summarizing the various narratives produced after the fact. An overabundance of narratives results from the occurrence of this “event,” and another definition of an event might be that it produces an excess of narratives, some of which contradict each other. The potentiality of the event lives on after the event has already occurred in the multiplicity of narratives that it produces – another story can always be told about it, it can always be re-contextualized in such a way that it is tied to other causes and effects.

The narrator uses this term again to describe the collective expectation of those present in Varvara Petrovna’s drawing room in the scandalous scene that concludes part 1 of the novel. On this fateful Sunday, Stepan is expected to propose to Varvara Petrovna’s ward, Darya, who is pregnant with Stavrogin’s child. This day also witnesses the first appearance of Stepan’s son, Pyotr Stepanovich, and the unexpected return of Stavrogin from abroad. In addition to Stepan Trofimovich’s expected proposal, the socially inappropriately present of Marya Timofeevna – the handicapped, holy fool whom Stavrogin secretly married abroad – helps create the narrative tension experienced by those present in Varvara’s drawing room, as they speculate about her identity and her connections with those present.

We were all silent, awaiting some denouement (развязка). Shatov would not raise his head, and Stepan Trofimovich was in disarray, as if it were all his fault; sweat stood out on his temples. I looked at Liza (she was sitting in the corner, almost next to Shatov). Her eyes kept darting keenly from Varvara Petrovna to the lame woman and back; a smile twisted on her lips, but not a nice one. Varvara Petrovna saw this smile. And meanwhile Marya Timofeevna was completely enthralled: with delight and not the least embarrassment she was studying Varvara Petrovna’s beautiful drawing room – the furniture, the carpets, the paintings on the walls, the old-styled decorated ceiling, the big bronze crucifix in the corner, the porcelain lamp, the albums and knickknacks on the table.

What binds the characters in this scene together are their crisscrossing gazes. Similarly to Turgenev’s drawing room, these gazes evince a web of intersubjective relationships between the characters. The tension of this scene results from a shared narrative.

(159-160, 10:127)
anticipation, the possible disclosure of Marya’s identity, the expectation that the various bonds that tie these characters to one another will be elucidated – for instance, that Varvara Petrovna is sitting before her daughter-in-law. A few pages earlier the chronicler anticipates this climatic drawing-room scene in more explicitly narratological terms:

That “tomorrow’s day,” that is, the same Sunday on which Stepan Trofimovich’s fate was to be irrevocably decided, was one of the most portentous days in my chronicle. It was a day of the unexpected, a day of the unraveling (razviazki) of the old and the raveling up (zaviazki) of the new, a day of sharp explanations and of a still greater muddle. In the morning, as the reader already knows, I was obliged to accompany my friend to Varvara Petrovna’s, at her own stipulation, and by three in the afternoon I had to be at Lizaveta Nikolaevna’s, in order to tell her – about what I did not know, and to assist her – in what I did not know. And yet it all resolved itself in a way no one could have imagined. In short, it was a day of surprisingly converging accidents.

In keeping with the passage from the notebooks where the narrator explicitly states that the primary object of narrative attention will be a description of events and not the characters who participate in them, this moment seems primarily interested in describing the narrative mechanics of a particular day around which the various characters orbit and by which they are drawn together only to be once again thrown back into the world. The subjective states of “meaningfulness,” “unexpectedness,” “elucidation,” and “confusion” are syntactically and grammatically attributed to the day, but will affect all those present.

For Dostoevsky, the activities of tying and untying find themselves entangled. The event is figured as a narrative knot. “This was […] a day of unknotted(s) of the old and knotting(s) of the new, of acute explanations (or interpretations) and thickets of confusion.” The parallelism that structures this sentence associates untying with the act of interpretation and tying with experience of confusion. The literal meaning of putanitsa – a tangle – extends the metaphor of narrative knotting, rendering the state of confusion as being tied up.

Translation altered. Stylistically, with its anaphora of contrasting elements, this passage may nod to the opening lines of Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*.
This passage offers a description of what we might call a Dostoevskian “event” – turning points or hinges in the plot that exceed expectations, that lie outside the realm of anticipated possibility. The event, as it is here described, thrives on the paradoxes that inhere in any narrative act. The homodiegetic narrator simultaneously occupies the two temporal positions of past experience and present narration. The phrase “‘tomorrow’s’ day […] was” captures this double position whereby the narrating subject is split, simultaneously looking both forward and backward. The narrative position of the chronicler looks back from the moment of writing to the moment of the event, but when he looks forward again, it is not into the future that he is yet to experience, but the future that he will have already experienced. Afterwards he can see the split, the divergence between the future he expected, which did not come about, and the future that lies outside of expectation.

If we recall that the chronicler, according to Liputin, is “a young man of classical education,” we might see in this passage the chronicler’s self-conscious emplotting of the events of his chronicle as offering a variation on Aristotle’s well-known definition of tragic plot found in chapter 18 of the Poetics (first published in Russian in 1854):

For every tragedy there is a complication and a dénouement: the complication consists of events outside the play, and often some of those within it; the dénouement comprises the remainder. By the “complication” I mean everything from the beginning as far as the part which immediately precedes the transformation to prosperity or affliction; and by “dénoeumement” I mean the section from the start of the transformation to the end.

In this definition of tragic plot, Aristotle names two types of events – the desis and the lusis – the complication (zaviazka) and denouement (razviazka), or, literally the tying and untying. Aristotle suggests that some of the tying-up occurs “outside of the drama.” Some of the zaviazki occur outside the narrative frame, but the event can be untied within the frame. Aristotle’s description of the relationship between the events of “tying” and “untying,” according to J. Hillis Miller, belies “a strange but entirely necessary paradox”: “The whole drama is ending and beginning at once, a beginning/ending which must always presuppose something outside of itself, something anterior or ulterior, in order

24 I take this observation about the chronicler’s biography from Ralph E. Matlaw, “The Chronicler of the Possessed: Character and Function,” Dostoevsky Studies, 5:1984, 40.
either to begin or to end, in order to begin ending.”  

This insight may explain the beginning of *Demons*, which announces the difficulty of knowing how and where to begin the description of an event. Miller argues that the images of “knotted” and “unknotted” – that is the concepts of *zaviazka* and *razviazka* – are so interdependent that it is impossible to disarticulate the two.  

If Miller’s deconstruction of this binary leads him to see these two opposing activities as a single concept, it is striking that another critic, Dostoevsky’s contemporary Nikolai Chernyshevskii, argues the opposite: “The false conception about the necessity of the connection (sviaz’) between the untangling and the tying was the source of the false conception about the essence of tragedy in contemporary aesthetics” [Фальшивое понятие о необходимости связи между развязкою и завязкою было источников журналисты о сущности трагического в нынешней эстетике]. This statement comes from Chernyshevsky’s 1854 review of the first Russian translation of Aristotle’s poetics. His assertion concerning the false nature of the connection between the *zaviazka* and *razviazka* constitutes a key example of the polemic over what that Chernyshevsky works out under the guise of a review of Ordynsky’s translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. His review affords him the opportunity to assert the hierarchy of “real life” over “art,” and he uses the review to reiterate the aesthetic ideology developed in his dissertation.  

Aristotle privileges poetry over history because the former foregrounds the inner connections between events. The conceptual understanding of history in the nineteenth century, according to Chernyshevsky, does represent the inner connections that bind together events and, consequently, there is no need to artistically remake (peredelat’) the historical event in order to draw out this connection. Chernyshevsky’s position appears naïve for not acknowledging that representations of “real life” and “history” are also subject to the same narrative operations employed by novelists to artistically remake events. The events of “real life” are synonymous with the events that history records, which are not “remade,” which is to say that they constitute the unmediated real. Chernyshevsky reverses the art/life binary, arguing that history now does the work that art once did, work for which Aristotle valued poetry over history for the way it makes visible the inner connections between events.  

The subjects of narration discussed earlier offer examples of how those same operations that the novelist employs to remake reality also govern the writing of historical narrative. Dostoevsky would also seem to disagree with Chernyshevsky regarding the relationship between the *razviazka* and the *zaviazka*. When Chernyshevsky states that the connection (sviaz’) between these concepts is false, he is arguing against the etymology of the Greek and the Russian. Dostoevsky’s implicit position in *Demons* is that the shared root of these words suggests a conceptual interrelationship. The description of “‘tomorrow’s’ day,” which I suggest may offer a revision of Aristotle’s  

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28 Ibid., 6.  
30 Ibid., n. 1, 2:842.
definition of the plot of the tragedy, is situated between the moments where characters 
run on the prefixes raze and zare (the first pun occurs a few pages before the description of 
“tomorrow’s” day,” the second immediately after). The next section examines the puns 
on the root viazh that the chronicler employs to represent how the event of the razviaszka 
binds characters to one another. The force of the event limits their agency and the extent 
of their effective will as well as enabling the flow of affect between characters that results 
in their intersubjective bonds.

Binding Characters

Stavrogin’s first encounters with Fedka are described in chapters two and four of part 2 
of the novel, “Night Continued.” These two meetings occur before and after Stavrogin’s 
visit to his wife, Marya Timofeevna. In the second meeting Stavrogin implicitly 
contracts with Fedka for the murder of his wife, an arrangement that is tacitly agreed upon, as he 
later admits to Darya, when Stavrogin tosses a wad of rubles into the mud for Fedka to 
collect. During the encounter, however, this arrangement is not entirely clear. Moreover, 
in the negotiation with Fedka, Stavrogin does not appear to be entirely conscious of his 
desire to murder his wife. We find him muttering to himself, having just left the 
Lebyadkin residence on the outskirts of town:

“A knife, a knife!” he repeated, in unquenchable spite, striding broadly over mud 
and puddles without looking where he was going. True, at moments he wanted 
terribly to laugh, loudly, furiously; but for some reason he controlled himself and 
restrained his laughter. He came to his senses only on the bridge, just at the spot 
where he had previously met Fedka; the very same Fedka was again waiting for 
him there, and, seeing him, took off his cap, gaily bared his teeth, and at once 
began jabbering about something, perkily and gaily. Nikolai Vsevolodovich at 
first walked past without stopping, and for some time did not even listen at all to 
the tramp, who again tagged (uviazavshegoshia) after him. He was suddenly 
struck by the thought that he had completely forgotten about him, and forgotten 
precisely at the time when he was repeating every moment to himself: “A knife, a 
knife!” He seized the tramp by the scruff of the neck and, with all his pent-up 
anger, dashed him against the bridge as hard as he could. For a moment the man 
thought of putting up a fight, but realizing almost at once that he was something 
like a straw compared with his adversary, who, moreover, had attacked 
unexpectedly – he quieted down and fell silent, without offering the least 
resistance. On his knees, pressed to the ground, his elbows wrenched behind his 
back, the sly tramp calmly waited for the denouement (razviaszka), apparently not 
believing there was any danger at all.

«Нож, нож!» -- повторял он в неутолимой злобе, широко шагая по грязи и 
лужам, не разбирая дороги. Правда, минутами ему ужасно хотелось 
захохотать, громко, бешено; но он почему-то крепился и сдерживал смех. 
Он опомнился лишь на мосту, как раз на самом том месте, где давеча ему
встретился Федька; тот же самый Федька ждал его тут и теперь и, завидев его, снял фуражку, растабарываться. Николай Всеволодович сначала прошел не останавливаясь, некоторое время даже совсем и не слушал опять увязавшегося за ним бродягу. Его вдруг поразила мысль, что он совершенно забыл про него, и забыл именно в то время, когда сам ежеминутно повторял про себя: «Нож, нож». Он схватил бродягу за шворот и, со всею накопившееся злобой, из всей силы ударил его об мост. Одно мгновение тот думал было бороться, но, почти тотчас же догадавшись, что он пред своим противником, напавшим к тому же нечаянно, -- нечто вроде соломинки, затих и примолк, даже нисколько не сопротивляясь. Стоя на коленях, придавленный к земле, с вывернутыми на спину локтями, хитрый бродяга спокойно ожидал развязки, совершенно, кажется, не веря в опасность.

(278-79, 10:219-20)

The occurrence of the noun razviazka in this passage at first appears hardly worth noting. Besides confirming the idea that this concept is associated with expectation (озидал), it seems to be only a way of saying that Fedka is wondering what will happen next. What will Stavrogin do to him? There is a difference, however, between wondering what Stavrogin will do and wondering how an event will unfold. In the case of the latter, the resolution of an event does not depend totally on the agency of the participants involved. Here Fedka is on his knees in the mud, arms wrenching behind his back, a position of powerlessness. Knowing he is outmatched, that he is comparatively a “straw,” Fedka wisely chooses not to respond to Stavrogin’s physical attack with physical force. And yet he seems to know something else as well: “the sly tramp calmly waited for the denouement, apparently not believing there was any danger at all” [хитрый бродяга спокойно ожидал развязки, совершенно, кажется, не веря в опасность]. Apart from the two wills that clash here is the force of the event itself, or perhaps more accurately, the event(s) that have preceded this event, the “tying up” for which this moment is an “untying.” Given that Stavrogin has physically bound Fedka, razviazka might be read as a pun — Fedka calmly awaits a resolution to this interaction but is also waiting to be untied. By tying up Fedka, Stavrogin is only, as it turns out, making good on a threat, repeated three times in their first encounter a few pages earlier, “to bind” (sviazat’) Fedka if he continues to hound him (10:205-06). But Stavrogin’s physical binding of Fedka may also echo how Fedka has already bound himself to Stavrogin: “Nikolai Vsevolodovich at first walked past without stopping, and for some time did not even listen at all to the tramp, who again tagged [uviazavshegoia] after him” [Николай Всеволодович сначала прошел не останавливаясь, некоторое время даже совсем и не слушал опять увязавшегося за ним бродягу] (my emphasis). The shared root viaz in uviazavshiisia and razviazka, which denotes binding, recreates on the level of narrative representation the same knotting of past events, subjective wills, and causal forces that render this

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31 In Dostoevsky’s fictional worlds, the description of Fedka as “придавленный к земле,” literally pressed against the earth, may paradoxically be read as a position of power.
interaction between Stavrogin and Fedka worthy of the appellation razviazka. Fedka, perhaps, does not fear Stavrogin because he realizes that there are other forces besides those of physical strength at work here. “[Fedka] was not mistaken. Nikolai Vsevolodovich had already taken off his warm scarf with his left hand, to tie his captive’s arms, but suddenly, for some reason, abandoned him and pushed him away. The man jumped to his feet at once, turned around, and a short, broad cobbler’s knife, which instantly appeared from somewhere, flashed in his hand” [Он не ошибся. Николай Всеволодович уже снял было с себя, левой рукой, теплый шарф, чтобы скрутить своему пленнику руки; но вдруг почему-то бросил его и оттолкнул от себя. Тот мигом вскочил на ноги, обернулся, и короткий широкий сапожный нож, мгновенно откуда-то взявшийся, блеснул в его руке] (279, 10:220).

Fedka has not reconsidered attacking Stavrogin. This knife, which “instantly appeared from somewhere,” will kill Marya Timofeevna, but here represents Fedka’s offer of services. This knife is also, in a phantasmagoric way, that which Stavrogin evokes as the subchapter opens – “nozh, nozh” – itself a reference to the interaction he has just had with Marya, who, in a state of delirium, imagines that Stavrogin has snuck into her room with a knife to kill her.

Returning from Marya’s, Stavrogin’s first sight of Fedka on the bridge seems to register an unconscious association between Fedka and this knife: “He was suddenly struck by the thought that he had completely forgotten about him, and forgotten precisely at the time when he was repeating every moment to himself: ‘A knife, a knife!’” [Его вдруг поразила мысль, что он совершенно забыл про него, и забыл именно в то время, когда сам ежеминутно повторял про себя: «Нож, нож»]. Stavrogin is struck by the thought that he cannot hold these two thoughts, Fedka and the knife, simultaneously in his mind. This is not quite the conscious realization that Stavrogin wants to kill his wife and knows how he might do it, but only the possible recognition that he cannot (yet) think this thought. Perhaps Stavrogin’s inability to think explains his violent physical outburst whereby he hurls Fedka against the side of the bridge. But this physical force is also, arguably, a futile gesture of resistance to the binding cords of the events in which Stavrogin finds himself entangled. The narrator’s omniscience is such that it describes the mechanics of a kind of psychological repression, but stops short of telling us something about Stavrogin that he himself does not know. Furthermore, we do not know, and the narrator chooses not to speculate about why Stavrogin changes his mind and unbinds his captive, only that he did it “suddenly for some reason” (но вдруг почему-то). If Fedka is not the more powerful character in this interaction, he is, at least, the more cunning. For all of Stavrogin’s physical strength, his actions are only reactions to the provocations of both internal and external stimuli.

Fedka has been prompted by Pyotr Stepanovich, who is attempting to “bind” Stavrogin by implicating him in his wife’s murder. Later in the novel, Stavrogin divines Pyotr’s intentions and confronts him: “By binding me with a crime you think, of course, you’ll be getting power over me, right?” [Связав меня преступлением, вы, конечно, думаете получить надо мной власть, ведь так?] (415, 10:320). It is logical that by implicating Stavrogin in his wife’s murder Pyotr will gain power over him, which he might choose to exploit by threatening to expose him to the authorities. But Pyotr’s game, as the novel demonstrates, is a dangerous one, for he also risks implicating himself as the
possessor of such knowledge. The question then becomes one of how to minimize the backlash of denouncing a fellow conspirator.32

Pyotr employs the same strategy in his attempt to bind the four (Erkel, Liputin, Lyamshin, and Shigalyov) together with Shatov’s murder, a plan he suggests to Stavrogin before the fact: “Well, and finally the main force – the cement that bonds it all – is shame at one’s own opinion. There is a real force!” [Ну и наконец, самая главная сила – цемент, всё связующий, – это стыд собственного мнения. Вот это так сила!] (385, 10: 299). Stavrogin renders these insinuations explicit, angering Pyotr: “get four members of a circle to bump off a fifth on the pretense of his being an informer, and with this shed blood you’ll immediately tie them together in a single knot. They’ll become your slaves, they won’t dare rebel or call you to accounts. Ha, ha, ha!” [подготовьте четырех членов кружка укокошить пятого, под видом того, что тот донесет, и тотчас же вы их всех пролитою кровью, как одним узлом, свяжите. Рабами вашими станут, не посмеют бунтовать или отчетов спрашивать. Ха-ха-ха!] (385-86, 10:299).

Note the repetition of the verb “to bind,” “sviāzat’,” and that Stavrogin extends the metaphor “like tying a knot,” an appropriate figure of speech for describing the process of binding the four through the murder. Dostoevsky himself uses the figure of binding to describe the relationships between Stavrogin and Pyotr, writing on 27 December 1870, the following note under the heading “Very important”: “The Prince and Nechaev are tied [sviazyvaiut] to each other by mutual secrets which they accidentally share” [Очень важное: Князь с Нечаевым связывают взаимность тайн случайная.] (333, 11:260).

The mutual secrets include Pyotr’s knowledge of Stavrogin’s marriage to Marya (Pyotr acts as a witness), and Stavrogin’s infatuation with Liza, with whom Pyotr arranges a liaison on behalf of Stavrogin.

Figures of binding, utilizing the root viāz, also describe the relationships among the novel’s other characters: “Varvara Petrovna was attached [to her son] no less than to Stepan Trofimovich” [Варвара Петровна была привязана [к сыну] не менее как к Степану Трофимовичу] (40, 10:34). Implied in a love triangle with Nechaev and Shatov, Stepan Trofimovich “knew how to bind his pupil to himself” [умел привязать к себе своего воспитанника] (40, 10:35, translation altered). The novel questions the nature of Stepan Trofimovich’s relationship with his students: “But the chief pedagogue remained Stepan Trofimovich. In fact, he was the first to discover Dasha. […] Again I repeat: it was remarkable how children took to him” [Но главным педагогом был все-таки Степан Трофимович. По-настоящему, он первый и открыл Дашу. […] Опять повторю, удивительно, как к нему привязывались дети!] (71, 10:59). The meaning of the verb otkryt’ (to discover) is here ambiguous, but may have a sexual connotation, as it arguably does in the narrator’s early description of Stepan Trofimovich’s relationship with Stavrogin: “More than once he awakened his ten- or eleven-year-old friend at night only to pour out his injured feelings in tears before him, or to reveal some domestic secret to him, not noticing that this was altogether inadmissible” [Он не раз пробуждал своего десяти- или одиннадцатилетнего друга ночью, единственно чтоб излить пред ним в слезах свои оскорбленные чувства или

32 Here, as an example, we might recall the verbal dance Pyotr engages in with von Lembke when he slyly denounces Shatov.
открыть ему какой-нибудь домашний секрет, не замечая, что это совсем уже непозволительно] (40, 10: 35). We are even told that Stepan Trofimovich falls in love (vliubilsia) with Liza during the period of their tutorials, when she is between the ages of eight and eleven years old. One wonders if these erotic relational bonds are not like Pyotr’s mode of binding, “cemented by shame,” and if perhaps the subject formation of these troubled adults might be understood as the decentering sexual excess of the other that, in Jean Laplanche’s recuperation of Freud’s seduction fantasy, inaugurates the subject. What Stepan Trofimovich does “naturally,” Pyotr does by conscious manipulation, but in both cases bonds between characters are cemented through the power of shame. Perhaps Stavrogin intuits Pyotr’s techniques because he has been subject to the binding effects of shame in his relationship with Stepan.

Acts of binding proliferate in the scene of Shatov’s murder, which constitutes one of the novel’s most significant denouements. On 8 October 1870 Dostoevsky writes to Katkov: “One of the most important incidents in my story will be the murder of Ivanov” (29:1:141). The chronicler describes the night’s tragic events as razviazki (10:385). After the fete, Pyotr Stepanovich gathers the four together to plot Shatov’s murder. “Our people were excited. They had been struck by the events [proissheshtviia] of the past night and, it seems, had gone cowardly. The simple but systematic scandal in which they had so zealously taken part so far unravelled [razviazalsia] for them unexpectedly” [Наши были возбуждены. Происшествия прошлой ночи их поразили, и кажется, они перетушили. Простой, хотя и систематический скандал, в котором они так усердно до сих пор принимали участие, развязался для них неожиданно].

33 Susanne Fusso discusses this possibility in her analysis of the novel’s excised chapters “At Tikhon’s”: “It is implied early in the novel that Stavrogin’s tutor, Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovenskii, initiated him into the practice [of masturbation] during nocturnal visits. Fusso, Discovering Sexuality, n. 30, 172.

34 This retrospectively Nabokovian theme returns not only in Stavrogin’s confession but throughout Dostoevsky’s works. As Simon Karlinsky eloquently put it: “And it was none other than Nabokov who in Lolita gave the world a full-scale treatment of a subject around which Dostoevsky circled like a cat around a saucer of hot milk in novel after novel only to recoil from it in horror.” “Dostoevsky as Rorschach Test” in Feodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment, ed. by George Gibian (New York; London: Norton, 1989), 618 (originally published in The New York Times, June 13, 1971).

ends, as it were, an event that is also described as a “razviazka” (564, 10:431). The phrase “systematic scandal” may be the chronicler’s acknowledgement of his own punning on rasporiazhenie, rasporiaditel’, and the besporiadok they induce.

Pyotr Stepanovich’s meeting with the four, as well as the scene of the murder, continue the motif of tying. Pyotr reasons with the four, arguing that after the night’s catastrophe Shatov will inevitably denounce them: “Now you’ve untied him with this fire” [Теперь вы этим пожаром его развязали] (548, 10:415). The pun here is, of course, that the event of the fire has already been described by the chronicler as an “untying” (razviazka). At the same time Pyotr asserts that if they fail to kill Shatov and he does denounce them, he will not be “bound to them” [Не подумайте, что я уже так с вами связан...] (550, 10:421, Dostoevsky’s ellipsis); but on the next page, the narrator tells us that he, in fact, is “bound” like all the rest: “they kept his hands tied” [они ему руки связывали] (552, 10: 422). Binding here describes how Pyotr is subject to the events that he and the others have set in motion, evidence of the way that knowledge implicates those who attempt to use it as power over others. Amazingly, at the same time that Pyotr plots Shatov’s murder,37 that is, when his “fate was sealed” (“судьба Шатова решена” [551, 10: 421]), Shatov has the following dream: “Gradually he dozed off into a momentary, light sleep, and in his dreams had something like a nightmare; he dreamed he was on his bed all tangled up in ropes, bound and unable to move” [Мало-помалу он забылся на миг легким сном и видел во сне что-то похожее на кошмар; ему приснилось, что он опутан на своей кровати веревками, весь связан и не может шевелиться] (566, 10: 432). As we will see, Shatov’s dream portends his death, the scene of which abounds with verbs of tying and binding, but we might also interpret Shatov’s vision as indicative of his textual status, that is, being entangled in a complex narrative web, a victim of Dostoevsky’s “plotting.”

The scene of the murder itself is replete with actions of tying:

Tolkachenko and Erkel, coming to their senses, ran to the grotto and instantly brought two stones […] already prepared – that is, with ropes tied tightly and

36 “Of course, there could be no doubt that the death of the robber Fedka contained nothing at all extraordinary in itself, and that such denouements precisely happen most often in careers of that sort, but the coincidence of the fatal words that ‘Fedka had drunk vodka that evening for the last time,’ with the immediate justification of the prophecy, was so portentous that Liputin suddenly ceased to hesitate. The push was given; it was as if a stone had fallen on him and crushed him forever” [Разумеется, не могло быть сомнения, что в смерти разбойника Федьки ровно ничего не было необыкновенного, и что таковые развязки именно всего чаще случаются в подобных карьерах, но совпадение роковых слов: "что Федька в последний раз в этот вечер пил водку", с немедленным оправданием пророчества было до того знаменательно, что Липутин вдруг перестал колебаться. Толчок был дан; точно камень упал на него и придавил навсегда] (564, 10:431).
37 “Somewhere between seven and eight in the evening (it was precisely the time when our people were gathered at Erkel’s […]”) [Часу в восемь вечера (это именно в то самое время, когда наши собрались у Эркеля] (566, 10: 432).
This “strange thing” [odna strannost’] exhibits the characteristics of a Dostoevskian event: occurring suddenly, completely unexpected, and surprising almost everyone. Pyotr has been hard at work tying up Shatov’s corpse, whose murder he thought would metaphorically tie up the four. But while cords binding the stones to Shatov’s body hold, the metaphorical knot has already begun to loosen. The irony or reversal of this episode is that while the characters are frantically engaged in acts of tying, the chronicler offers this moment as one of the novel’s greatest dénouements, one of its most significant “untyings.” Liamshin, emitting an inhuman animal-like shriek (605, 10:461), throws himself upon Pyotr Stepanovich. He has to be tied up: “Meanwhile, Tolkachenko tied his hands with a leftover end of rope” [Толкаченко между тем связал ему руки оставшимся концом веревки] (605, 10:462). The untying of Pyotr’s knot continues as the novel’s final chapters record the apprehension and arrest of the four.

In his description of the fete, the chronicler notes that Pyotr Stepanovich is not only absent from the party, but that he “refused the usher’s bow” [отказался от распорядительского банта] (469, 10:360). Recall the chronicler’s earlier puns in his description of the fete that were intended to convey how the ushers (rasporiaditeli) were responsible for the disorder (besporiadok). Pyotr Stepanovich functions as an absent cause of the night’s disorder, and although he refuses the “sign” of the usher, he fulfills its function in Shatov’s murder. The chronicler, summarizing Pyotr’s plan to kill Shatov, significantly attributes to him a single phrase: “Pyotr Stepanovich immediately picked up the question and explained his plan. It consisted in luring Shatov, for the handing over of the secret press in his possession, to the solitary place where it was buried, the next day at nightfall – and ‘taking care of it there [uzh tam i rasporiadit’siia]’” [Петр Степанович тотчас же подхватил вопрос и изложил свой план. Он состоял в том, чтобы завлечь Шатова, для сдачи находившейся у него тайной типографии, в то уединенное место, где она закопана, завтра, в начае ночи, и – «уж там и распорядиться»] (549, 10:419, emphasis added). A nominalization of the verb rasporiadit’siia occurs in the murder scene to describe Pyotr’s cold-blooded murder of Shatov: “Full efficiency
rasporiaditel'nost’ – though not, I think, cold bloodedness – was preserved only by Pyotr Stepanovich” [Полную распорядительность – не думаю, чтоб и хладнокровие, – сохранил в себе один только Петр Степанович] (603, 10:460, emphasis added).

In addition to the tying puns and the revelation of Pyotr as murderous master of ceremonies, the murder scene contains another pun, which might also be read as a tragic reversal, another example of villainous acts redounding on their perpetrators. None of the four quite expects the murder so profoundly to unnerve them, and as a result of Lyamshin’s fit Liputin fears that the former might/would betray them all: “Pyotr Stepanovich, you know Lyamshin’s sure to denounce us!” / ‘No, he’ll come to his senses and realize that if he denounces us, he’ll be the first to go to Siberia. Nobody will denounce us now. You won’t [denounce] either’” [– Петр Степанович, а ведь Лямшин донесет! / -- Нет, он опомнится и догадается, что первый пойдет в Сибирь, если донесет. Теперь никто не донесет. И вы не донесете] (608, 10:462-63). We may, however, have missed this verb a few lines earlier, where it describes the act of carrying Shatov’s body to one of the ponds in Skvoreshnikovsky Park: “they brought [donesli] the murdered man” [донесли убитого] (606, 10:462). This is the literal meaning of the verb donesti, “to carry (to, as far as),” but the pun is damning: the action they feared Shatov would carry out against them, for which they kill him, they have carried out against him.

The reader’s recognition of Pyotr is paralleled by Shatov’s: “Shatov made him out and recognized him” [мог разглядеть и узнать его] (603, 460). According to Aristotle, the best tragic plots are “complex”: “a ‘complex’ action is one whose transformation involves recognition or reversal, or both.”38 Shatov’s murder as dénouement features both. The recognition and the reversal that make up this dénouement are a result of the chronicler’s punning on rasporiaditel’ and donesti, respectively. But Shatov’s murder witnesses another reversal, a sort of implicit pun on the concept of the dénouement as an untying. A few brief theoretical remarks are necessary to appreciate the significance of this reversal as one of the novel’s key formal features.

In his “Concluding Remarks” to the chronotope essay, Bakhtin extends Aristotle’s description of plot to the case of the novel: “before us are two events—the event that is narrated in the work and the event of narration itself”; “these events take place in different times and places, but at the same time these two events are indissolubly united in a single but complex event that we might call the work in the totality of all its events.”39 Bakhtin’s notion of the event might be understood as a more flexible and capacious version of the Formalist understanding of the relationship between fabula and sjuzhet. Like Saussure’s definition of the sign, a “double entity, one formed by the associating of two terms,”40 where signifier and signified are conceptualized as two sides

38 Halliwell, The Poetics of Aristotle, 42.
of a single sheet of paper,\textsuperscript{41} fabula and sjuzhet find themselves in such a mutually constitutive relationship, inextricably bound to one another. The event, for Bakhtin, can consist of a single episode within a narrative, and in this way comprise a constitutive component of the fabula/sjuzhet relationship, or it can encapsulate the entirety of this relationship, the whole narrative complex that he calls “the text.” Bakhtin’s notion of the event displays the kind of flexibility we find in his definition of the “utterance,” a class of objects that can range from a single word to an entire novel (the novel as an utterance comprised of utterances).\textsuperscript{42} The event, for Bakhtin, exhibits the range of the utterance, but also the same paradoxical logic of causality that governs the relationship between fabula and sjuzhet. Like Saussure’s sheet of paper, Bakhtin’s event can be comprised of two indissolubly united events.

Dostoevsky’s novels are certainly “complex,” a term that can have a pejorative connotation in the mouths of his critics. This complexity describes various forms of excess: too many characters, events, and plot lines. Reading through the lenses of Aristotle and Bakhtin, we find that Dostoevsky is complex in a specific way, we see the razviazka in Demons as bearing the Bakhtinian structure of these double events, as a point of contact between the event that is narrated and the event of narration, resembling a hinge that captures the action or articulation of the Aristotelian reversal that makes for a “complex” plot. Shatov’s murder – on the level of the event of narration – functions as one of the novel’s razviazki, perhaps its most climactic, towards which the novel’s final scenes build, and the moment, to use Aristotle’s language, that witnesses “the transformation to affliction.” The murder, as narrated event, is supposed to bind the four together, where this binding is figured as “tying a knot.” But the murder is simultaneously both an untying and a tying, razviazka and zaviazka. Aristotle’s categories illuminate the particular “complexity” of this event as it consists of both a recognition – Pyotr as “usher” – and a reversal – Pyotr’s attempt to tie a knot is the untying of the plot. The chronicler’s punning turns out to point to the deep narrative logic of his tale. By returning, however, to Dostoevsky’s thematic inspiration for the novel, I hope to place these puns within the context of a redemptive vision of reality, as well as to revisit the relationship between the subject and the event, which we have explored throughout this chapter.

\textit{Chronicling History as Divine Plan of Salvation}

In a 9 (21) October 1870 letter to Apollon Maikov, Dostoevsky expresses extreme agitation about the process of writing Demons. He begins to tell Maikov that the main idea of the novel “can’t possibly be told in a letter, that’s in the first place, and second, it will be punishment enough for you if you take it into your head to read the novel when

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid., 113.
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it’s published. So why punish you two times?\footnote{F. M. Dostoevsky, Complete Letters, ed. and trans. by David Lowe and Ronald Meyer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988-1991), 279.} [Хорошо рассказать в письме никак нельзя, это во-первых, а во-вторых, довольно будет с Вас наказания, если вздумаете прочитать роман, когда напечатают. Так чего же два-то раза наказывать?] (29:1:144). Dostoevsky cannot help but “punish” Maikov, for just a few lines later, he finds himself explaining the idea of his novel, the return to the topic of which seems almost unintended and at the very least circuitous. In a diatribe against “mangy Russian liberalism” [шелудивый русский либерализм], Dostoevsky allegorizes the rejection of this liberalism by the Russian body politic with an episode from the Gospel of Luke that describes the healing of a demon-possessed man:

True, the fact also showed us that the disease that had gripped civilized Russians was much stronger than we ourselves imagined, and that the matter did not end with the Belinskys, Kraevskys, and the like. But at that point there occurred what the apostle Luke testifies to: there were demons sitting in a man, and there was Legion, and they asked Him: “Command us to enter into the swine,” and He allowed them to. The demons entered into the herd of swine, and the whole herd threw itself into the sea from a steep place and they all drowned. And when the local inhabitants came running to see what had happened, they saw a formerly possessed man already dressed and in his right mind sitting at the feet of Jesus, and those who had seen it told them how a man possessed had been healed. That’s exactly the way it happened with us. The demons went out of Russian man and entered a herd of swine, that is, the Nechaevs, Serno-Solovieviches, and so on. They have drowned or are sure to, but the healed man that the demons came out of is sitting at the feet of Jesus. That’s exactly how it had to be. Russia has vomited up that garbage she was fed on and, of course, there’s nothing Russian left in these vomited-up scoundrels. And note, dear friend: whoever loses his people and his national roots loses both his paternal faith and God. Well, if you want to know, that’s exactly what the theme of my novel is. It’s called Demons, and it’s a description of how those demons entered a herd of swine.\footnote{Ibid., 279-80, translation altered.}

Правда, факт показал нам тоже, что болезнь, обуявшая цивилизованных русских, была гораздо сильнее, чем мы сами воображали, и что Белинскими, Краевскими и проч. дело не кончилось. Но тут произошло то, о чем свидетельствует евангелист Лука: бесы сидели в человеке, и имя им было легион, и просили Его: повели нам войти в свиней, и Он позволил им. Бесы вошли в стадо свиней, и бросилось всё стадо с крутизны в море, и всё потонуло. Когда же окрестные жители сбежались смотреть совершившееся, то увидели бывшего бесноватого — уже одетого и смыслащего и сидящего у ног Иисусовых, и видевшие рассказали им, как исцелился бесновавшийся. Точь-в-точь случилось так и у нас. Бесы вышли из русского человека и ворвали в стадо свиней, то есть в Нечаевых, в Серно-Соловьевичей
и проч. Те потонули или потонут наверно, а исцелившийся человек, из которого вышли бесы, сидит у ног Иисусовых. Так и должно было быть. Россия выблевала вон эту пакость, которую ее окормили, и, уж конечно, в этих выблеванных мерзавцах не осталось ничего русского. И заметьте себе, дорогой друг: кто теряет свой народ и народность, тот теряет и веру отеческую и Бога. Ну, если хотите знать,— вот эта-то и есть тема моего романа. Он называется «Бесы», и это описание того, как эти бесы вошли в стадо свиней (29:1:145).

The pronoun “эта-то” (that), in the exclamatory clause “вот эта-то и есть тема моего романа” (that’s exactly what the theme of my novel is), is doing a lot of work. What, exactly, is its antecedent? Dostoevsky has, it would seem, unintentionally returned to the topic of his novel, where his exclamation reads as if it is as much directed to himself as Maikov. What is interesting here is how Dostoevsky makes use of the biblical passage to hit upon the theme of his novel. Although a shift in the letter’s tone clearly accompanies the retelling of this biblical episode, its syntactical and lexical deviations from the Gospel original suggest that Dostoevsky is recalling the biblical text from memory. Dostoevsky uses this passage from Luke both to allegorize his present historical moment and to figure the coming apocalypse. He begins by making the demon-possessed man “Russian,” or the Russian man almost in the mode of a literary type. Dostoevsky reads the exorcism allegorically: the swine into which Jesus casts the demons are the “Nechaevs.” Curiously, Dostoevsky takes an episode from the Gospels which was originally intended to describe a specific biographical event in the life of an historical individual and interprets it as a parable, that is, he applies an allegorical hermeneutic to this biblical material that Jesus himself models in the Gospels in his presentation and subsequent interpretation of his own parables.

Having read an historical event as a parable, Dostoevsky then recasts the event of exorcism as a bodily purge, effectively transmuting the demons – spirit entities – into the vomited food previously consumed by the Russian man. This figure of the vomiting Russian man appears to conflate the episode in Luke’s Gospel with an apocalyptic warning to the Church of Laodicea found in the Book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse in Russian:

And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witnesses, the beginning of God’s creation. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot! Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

И Ангелу Лаодикийской церкви напиши: так говорит Аминь, свидетель верный и истинный, начало создания божия: Знаю твои дела; ты ни холоден, ни горяч, о, если 6 ты был холоден или горяч! Но поелику ты тепл, а не горяч и не холоден, то извергу тебя из уст моих. Ибо ты говоришь: я богат,
разбогател, и ни в чем не имею нужды, а не знаешь, что ты несчастен, и жалок, и нич, и слеп, и наг. (653, 10:497)

This quotation from the Apocalypse comes from the novel itself, where the work of making the association between the passage from the Gospel of Luke and that from the Apocalypse is attributed to Stepan Trofimovich, who on his deathbed asks Sofya Matveeyevna, the bible saleswoman whom fate has placed in his path, to read to him from the New Testament, telling her “just so, don’t choose, something, wherever your eye falls” [так, на выбор, что-нибудь, куда глаз попадет] (653, 10:497). This fortunetelling procedure takes them to the Apocalypse and the description of Jesus vomiting out the Laodiceans because they are “neither hot nor cold” [ты ни холоден, ни горяч] (653, 10:497). Continuing this fortunetelling approach, Stepan Trofimovich “want[s] to divine our future by the book” [загадал по книге о нашей будущности] (653, 10:497).

Although the passage from the Apocalypse is new to Stepan Trofimovich, its reading prompts him to “suddenly” ask Sofya Matveeyevna to read the passage about the swine from Luke, with the final result that Stepan Trofimovich finds himself possessed, as it were, by Dostoevsky’s own idea: “And now a thought, une comparaison. […] it’s exactly like our Russia” [Теперь же мне пришла одна мысль; une comparaison. […] это точь-в-точь как наша Россия] (655, 10:499). In both Dostoevsky’s letter and Stepan’s revelation the connection between the passage in the Apocalypse and that in Luke remains implicit, but Dostoevsky’s conflation of these texts implicitly transforms the Russian man exorcised of his demons by Christ into Christ, who vomits this filth from his body. What logic underpins this equation?

Russia has become Christ. The movement from spiritual to physical purgation may further explain this equation if we consider the biblical language that describes Christ’s body as a collective subject – the Church – of which he is the head. The theme of purgation links the episode in Luke to that in the Apocalypse, a theme that might also be elucidated by considering the hybrid genre of Demons as a novel-tragedy. The novel’s main event is this cathartic purge. The cathartic purge, which the tragedy is supposed to induce in its audience, has become the very theme of the novel. Dostoevsky’s explanation of the novel both implies that at its center is an event, a change in the state of the Russian man, that both describes a specific historical event – Russia’s rejection of Western liberalism – and serves to embed that event within an apocalyptic narrative of redemption. Demons thus acquires the same textual status that he accorded to the Gospel of Luke: it is both history and prophecy. Significantly, Dostoevsky’s summary of the novel transforms dozens of characters and hundreds of scenes into a single subject – the Russian man cum Christ – and a single event – the figurative purge as exorcism. This event induces a total change of state in the subject, who is liberated from demonic possession. Might we see all of the novel’s characters as either drawn into the collective subject of the body of the Russian man or cast out of this body? The latter amounts to the loss of subjectivity or the self, a dehumanization that Dostoevsky describes as the loss of Russianness: “Russia has vomited up that garbage she was fed on and, of course, there’s nothing Russian left in these vomited-up scoundrels.”

For Dostoevsky, the event unites subjects, binding them to one another, exerting a decentering force on these individual subjects at the same time that it establishes
networks of intersubjectivity. If the events of “tomorrow’s day,” Marya’s and Shatov’s murders, or the arson all created collective subjects, then the event that Dostoevsky equates with the novel creates a single collective subject. In conclusion, I suggest that the status of the chronicler’s narrative and the novel’s concept of the event both have biblical precedents.

Walter Benjamin’s description of the chronicler in his well-known essay “The Storyteller” seems as though it had been written with Dostoevsky’s Demons in mind:

The chronicler is the history teller. [...] The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the historians of today. By basing their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation—an inscrutable one—they have from the very start lifted the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.  

At first it might seem that Benjamin’s historian better describes Dostoevsky’s chronicler. In the novel’s first line the chronicler announces that his task is to “describe” the events, which would appear to conflict with Benjamin’s definition of the chronicler, who “display[s] them as models of the course of the world,” whose narrative “web [...] is the golden fabric of a religious view,” governed by “his eschatological orientation.” But is not this slippage, or perhaps movement, between description and prescription what we find in Dostoevsky’s explanation of his novel’s theme in the letter to Maikov? There Dostoevsky first casts an historical event as an episode from the Gospel of Luke, and then maps it onto a prophecy in the form of an allegory found in the Apocalypse. Both these gestures serve to embed the historical event within a divine plan of salvation. The Gospels, arguably, are themselves generic hybrids, both histories and divine plans of salvation, whereas the Apocalypse describes that plan’s ultimate fulfillment, figuring the end of History. Dostoevsky’s concatenation of Luke and the Apocalypse fuses two salvation narratives into one. Russia is saved, and sitting at the feet of Jesus; Russia is savior, bringing about the redemption of the world. The interpretive schema that Dostoevsky applies to these New Testament passages constitutes an “anagogical” reading of scripture, the fourth level of a mode of scriptural interpretation codified in the medieval period. Anagogical interpretation derives a “political reading (collective ‘meaning’ of history).” In his summary of this system, Fredric Jameson argues that “it is precisely by way of the moral and anagogical interpretations that the textual apparatus is

46 Ibid.
transformed into a ‘libidinal apparatus,’ a machinery for ideological investment.’

Dostoevsky’s anagogical interpretation enables him to inscribe the “Russian man” into biblical narrative of redemption and apocalypse. Furthermore his almost free-associative description of his novel reveals the “eschatological orientation” that Benjamin finds characteristic of the chronicler. That Dostoevsky envisions Russia playing a salvific role in the narrative or world history is well known, and while it is interesting to track how this ideological disposition may have informed his description of Demons, my aim here is to demonstrate how it registers on the level of narrative form, how it serves as a narrative form-giving principle for the novel.

Several critics have addressed the narrative inconsistencies of the chronicler, who alternates between the first- and third-person. Surely, Dostoevsky was aware of theses lapses. If we read the lapses as intentional, might they suggest that, as Benjamin writes, the chronicler “is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world,” because he is “basing [his] historical tales on a divine plan of salvation”?

I have argued that the chronicler’s punning and his discourse on the mechanics of plot extend Aristotle’s definition of tragic plot by demonstrating the way language can register or record the dialectical kernel at the heart of tragic events; for example, the way the denunciation for which Shatov is murdered redounds on the murders. This dialectical conception of an event, which contains within it the kernel of its negation, has the potential to exert a centering force on the subject or subjects who orchestrate that event. This is the possibility that the effect of the event could not only exceed (perhaps this is always the case), but also run counter to the orchestrating subject’s intention. This dialectic kernel does not alter an event as such: Shatov is always going to be dead by the end of the novel, or before the chronicler starts writing; or, to borrow again from Benjamin’s essay, Shatov “is at every point in his life [in the novel] a man who dies at the age of [21].” What is altered is not the event itself but its potential meaning. Dostoevsky’s vision of the event in Demons, I suggest, is that any event can be cast as either redemptive or damning, and that the determination of an event occurs retrospectively and depends upon where the story ends.

The line that I borrowed from Benjamin occurs within his famous discussion of novelistic character:

48 Much has been written about Besy and the apocalypse. This theme runs throughout the novel, occurring as a topic of multiple conversations among the characters.
49 For a summary of some of these positions see M. V. Jones, “The Narrator and Narrative Technique in Dostoevsky’s The Devils” in Dostoevsky’s The Devils: A Critical Companion, ed. W. J. Leatherbarrow (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999).
51 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 100.
“A man who dies at the age of thirty-five,” said Moritz Heimann once, “is at every point of his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.” Nothing is more dubious than this sentence—but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man—so says the truth that was meant here—who died at thirty-five will appear to *remembrance* at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five. In other words, the statement that makes no real sense for real life becomes indisputable for remembered life. The nature of the character in a novel cannot be presented any better than is done by this statement, which says that the “meaning” of his life is revealed only in his death. But the reader of a novel actually does look for human beings from whom he derives the “meaning of life.” Therefore he must, no matter what, know in advance that he will share their experience of death: if need be their figurative death—at the end of the novel—but preferably their actual one.\(^52\)

Truncating Benjamin’s borrowed statement drives home the point: Shatov “is at every point in his life a man who dies.” It is the particularity of this death, and consequently the “meaning of life” derived thereby, that is significant. Every point in a character’s life is marked by his death, is remembered in the light of this death, is interpreted by his death. When Benjamin writes that the “meaning” of life is revealed in death he implies that this meaning is latent in life, perhaps paradoxically multiple meanings are latent in a life.

Benjamin’s point seems to be that what draws readers to, and even more so *through*, a novel is the desire to “experience” the death of the character, partake in it as a sort of promise that he will also obtain a particular and specific death of his own. “How do the characters make him understand that death is already waiting for them – a very definite death and at a very definite place? That is the question which feeds the reader’s consuming interest in the events of the novel.”\(^53\) The very materiality of the book with its dwindling pages helps characters convey to a reader the fixity of their fates, and the genre of the novel promises that these deaths will be given in detail. The reader’s interest in the novel’s events depends, according to Benjamin, on how they add up to this or that particular death. The word “death” might be replaced with “closure,” a substitution that slightly defangs death, but perhaps describes part of what it is in death that a reader desires – namely, the consolation of death that can only be inherited by or bequeathed to those who survive the deceased, and which comes to them in a dissipated form, as theoretical knowledge, or perhaps simply as form itself, that is, a narrative form whose content is still being accumulated by the living: the longing for death as a longing for form. But this form is still implicitly biographical, and thus the longing of Benjamin’s reader is still operating within and conditioned by Lukács’s paradigm of novelistic form (which derives from the biographical). Benjamin formulates a relationship between character and event – the two categories that produce the formal tension in *Demons*. But if it is a concept and not a character that occupies the formal center of *Demons*, what does it mean to read for form?

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 100-101.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 101, my emphasis.
If “[w]hat draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about,” then perhaps some of the discomfort of reading Dostoevsky is that we are too warm. *Demons* concludes with the image of Stavrogin hanging from a “strong silk rope” – the knot that he ties to hang himself also ties up the novel’s narrative thread. But do this and the other twelve deaths with which the novel concludes, for all the semantic closure promised by the signifier “death,” effectively tie up the loose narrative threads of the novel? “If the ending is thought of as a tying up in a careful knot,” writes J. H. Miller, “this knot could always be untied again by the narrator or by further events, disentangled or explicaded again.” The meaning of the ending remains dynamic, open to reinterpretation, and dependent upon the occurrence of future events. “Death,” he suggests, “seemingly a definitive end, always leaves behind some musing or bewildered survivor, [a] reader of the inscription on the gravestone. […] Death is the most enigmatic, the most open-ended ending of all.” In *Demons* it is the actual reader, perhaps bewildered by what motivates Stavrogin’s suicide, who wonders why so many characters had to die (including, for example, Shatov’s newborn son and his mother). This actual reader may make recourse to the excerpted scenes of Stavrogin’s confession to Father Tikhon, which were intended to conclude part 2 of the novel and to serve as that part’s dénouement.

Each of the novel’s three parts were arguably intended to build towards their respective dénouements: the scandal scene in Varvara Petrovna’s drawing room that witnesses the first appearance of Stavrogin concludes part 1; Stavrogin’s confession, part 2; and the catastrophes of arson, murder, and the suicides of Kirillov and Stavrogin, part 3. The overall structure of the novel might be conceptualized as three parts building toward three dénouements.

Stavrogin’s confession was intended to elucidate his psychology and motives, prefiguring his suicide as his rejection of Tikhon’s encouragement to repent. Throughout the novel, the chronicler’s narrative treatment of Stavrogin renders him opaque, an effect that Dostoevsky repeatedly discussed in his letters and notebooks. In an 8 (20) October 1870 letter, Dostoevsky explains to Katkov that Stavrogin’s “whole character is sketched by me in scenes, action and not by means of analysis” [весь этот характер записан у меня сценами, действием, а не рассуждениями] (275, 29:1:142, translation altered). Without the confession chapters, Stavrogin’s suicide seems unmotivated, the essence of this “tragic figure” (Dostoevsky’s words in his letter to Katkov) unclear. Readers of the English version of the novel may have been surprised to meet his death, and the novel’s end, with so many pages left to read, pages that were meant to elucidate Stavrogin’s character.

Stavrogin’s confession stands outside the novel, and as such is characterized by its pure potentiality in relation to the novel; it is the key conversation that never occurs, the event that is full of promise and possibility because it is never actualized in the story world of the novel. In the excised chapters Stavrogin brings a copy of his confession, printed abroad, for Father Tikhon to read. The most striking aspect of Tikhon’s response

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54 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 6.
is his attention not to the confession’s content, the rape of a twelve-year-old girl, but its style (slog) and its form:

“Even the form of this truly great repentance has something ridiculous in it. Oh, do not believe that you will not win!” he suddenly exclaimed almost in ecstasy. “Even this form will win” (he pointed to the pages), “if only you sincerely accept the beating and the spitting. In the end it has always been that the most disgraceful cross becomes a great glory and a great power, if the humility of the deed is sincere. It may even be that you will be comforted in your own lifetime!..”

“Даже в форме самого великого покаяния сего заключается уже нечто смешное. О, не верьте тому, что не победите! – воскликнул он вдруг почти в восторге, -- даже сия форма победит (указал он на листки), если только искренно примете заушение и заплевание. Всегда кончалось тем, что наипозорнейший крест становился великою славою и великой силой, если искренно было смирение подвига. Даже, может, при жизни вашей уже будете утешены!.. (709-10,11:27)

“It may even be...”: the future is open, and the consequences that will result from the publication of the confession are not fixed ahead of time. Tikhon’s response suggests that the same event – the publication of the confession – could have different outcomes independent of the publication itself, and this characteristic feature of an event, its potentiality, derives from the world historic event that arguably stands in the background of all of Dostoevsky’s later novels from the Idiot onward – the resurrection. Tikhon summarizes the logic of this event, and in so doing makes a programmatic statement about the nature of reality: “In the end it has always been that the most disgraceful cross becomes a great glory and a great power, if the humility of the deed is sincere.” But it is precisely Stavrogin’s lack of sincerity that Tikhon draws out of Stavrogin’s confession through his close textual analysis of the document, and it is about this lack of sincerity that he warns Stavrogin. According to the model event of the cross, “in the end” disgrace has the potential to become glory and power.

While it’s impossible to know whether the inclusion of Stavrogin’s confession would have made Demons more comprehensible to Strakhov’s early readers, it does contain a hint as to how the novel might be read. The chronicler lingers over a description of Tikhon’s library, and remarks on Tikhon’s reading of the confession: “The reading took about an hour. Tikhon read slowly and perhaps reread some passages a second time” (705). Tikhon is a close reader who is not so much interested or repelled by the shocking content of Stavrogin’s confession as much as he attends to the confession’s style and form. “Even this form,” which contains something ridiculous, “will win.” What does it mean for a form to win? The Russian pobedit’, which perhaps sounds no less strange, is more precise than the English to win, and means to conquer, vanquish, to defeat; to master or overcome (526). The Russian verb belongs (although not exclusively) to a biblical register, describing the second coming in the book of Revelation – a white horse “went out conquering [pobedonosnyi] and to conquer [pobedit’]” (Rev. 6:2) – and Christ’s victory over death in St Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth – “O death, where
is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory [pobeda]? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory [pobedu] through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Tikhon’s point is that the form produces irony in the sense of reversal that counters the narrative’s content: the form of “truly great repentance” has something “ridiculous in it,” and that this ambiguity may be the enabling condition of the narrative’s redemptive potential.

Dostoevsky’s chronicler is not only Aristotelian – establishing the inner connections between events – or Benjaminian –inscribing events within a salvific narrative – but also writes in the style of Old Testament biblical narrative, which makes great use of puns to establish dramatic irony, to exemplify poetic justice, and to link disparate events across extended narratives. At the would-be heart of the novel, its missing center, we find the potential for Stavrogin’s redemption, a redemption that is predicated upon the paradoxical logic of the cross, which transforms death into life (“Trampling down death by death” to quote the Eastern Orthodox “Paschal troparion” with which Dostoevsky would have been familiar). But it may also contain a clue to the formal artistry of a novel that appears formless and excessive on the levels of character and plot, prompting us to read slowly and carefully, to “perhaps reread some passages a second time,” to read the puns as a promise that an event may contain within itself the kernel of its reversal.

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57 Russian Synodal Text.
Chapter 3

Subjectivity and Double-Vision in *Anna Karenina*

*Introduction*

From Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s aphoristic description of Tolstoy’s artistic method as a “dialectics of soul” to Boris Eikhenbaum’s classic study of the young Tolstoy, scholars have repeatedly identified Tolstoy’s particular type of Realism as one concerned not primarily with realistic descriptions of the natural-physical world per-se, so much as descriptions of an individual’s consciousness in the act of perceiving that world.1 These descriptions of the external reality are often focalized through characters in order to project the dialectics of the soul onto the external world. This shift recasts the oppositions of the soul’s dialectics into the activity of perception such that attributes of the perceiving subject’s soul infiltrate the narrative descriptions of what the subject is looking at. This chapter investigates what might be called the dialectics of seeing, tracing in particular the motif of narrowing or squinting eyes, whereby Anna and Levin experiment with altering their modes of visual perception.

The concept of vision plays a central role in Tolstoy’s poetics. Tolstoy’s “visualism,” according to Thomas Seifrid, influences his “approach to problems of human meaning,” “taking[ing] the form of a pervasive insistence on the role vision plays in human experience – both the simple act of empirical *observation* with the eyes and the more complex analog of *speculation*, the figurative viewing of events with the eye of the mind.”2 Seifrid borrows the opposition between observation and speculation from Martin Jay’s classic study *Downcast Eyes*, historically situating Tolstoy’s understanding of the concept of vision and its attendant epistemological figures between the ocularcentric perspectivalism of the west, which privileged sight as the sense modality that grants the subject the most immediate access to reality, and Eastern iconicism, which was founded on the opposition “between empirical vision and mental contemplation.”3

The opposition and identity between observation and speculation will provide a framework for analyzing both Anna’s and Levin’s modes of seeing in order to explicate Tolstoy’s understanding of the human subject. For both Anna and Levin, acts of looking are linked to modes of interpretation by the subjective positioning of an observer in both a visual as well as linguistic field. Tolstoy’s techniques of narrating consciousness problematize the boundaries between subject and object in the moments where we encounter characters in the act of looking.

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3 Ibid., 439.
In the case of Levin, this chapter shows how Tolstoy employs unconventional techniques of narrating consciousness in his representation of faith as a fusion of the minds of author and character, a technique I term later in the chapter “free indirect vision.” Free indirect vision offers a combination of the two narrative techniques of free indirect discourse and focalization that traditionally describe how novels present unmarked representations of consciousness. If free indirect discourse consists of a syntactically unmarked fusion of the languages of author/narrator and character, and focalization captures the experience of seeing the world through a given character’s eyes, then free indirect vision describes a technique whereby the objective field of perception and the subjective act of perception balance between identity and difference.

In the case of Anna, the split subjectivity attributed to Anna, which I argue results from her affair, manifests itself in her body, in a gesture – the narrowing of her eyes – that signifies her interpretive disposition via the world and her intersubjective imbrication with others, but is also connected to the failure of her inner vision, the eye of her soul. Narrowing one’s eyes, paradoxically, represents a way of choosing neither to see clearly nor to inspect something closely. Levin, also, squints or narrows his eyes in his contemplation of the sky. If Levin learns to make meaning of the world as the result of adopting an authorial point of view, by seeing beyond it, then Anna’s split subjectivity, which is figured as the double vision of her soul, becomes a form-giving principle for the entire novel, a model for how meaning in Anna Karenina is made on the level of narrative structure.

One of the novel’s most conspicuous formal features is its double-plot structure, which critics have pondered ever since Rachinsky made his now well-known statement about its constituting “a basic defect in the structure of the whole novel” in his 6 January 1878 letter to Tolstoy: “There is no architecture in it. Two themes are developed beautifully, yet without any link between them.”

This chapter, by theorizing doubling as not only a feature of the novel’s plot but as a form assumed by subjectivity as it is represented in the novel, offers another way of conceiving of the question of the novel’s formal unity.

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Anna’s Narrowed Eyes

Anna repeatedly squints or narrows (shchurit'sia) her eyes throughout the novel. Not unlike Vronsky’s teeth, Karenin’s ears, or Oblonsky’s broad chest, Anna’s narrowed eyes constitute a defining motif of this character. The narrowing of Anna’s eyes has been read as a sign of her increasingly negative view of the world and human relations; as evidence of her desire to be seen rather than see, thus making her a participant with the text and the social world in the transformation of herself into an erotic object; as well as a providing an intertextual link to another adulterous heroine, Flaubert’s Emma.5

“Certain feelings impel us to corresponding movements, and on the other hand, certain habitual movements impel to the corresponding internal states,” writes Dmitri Merezhkovsky in his discussion of facial expressions in Anna Karenina. “Thus there exists an uninterrupted current, not only from the internal to external, but from the external to the internal.”6 Anna’s gesture connects the internal and the external modes of vision, and has almost universally been interpreted negatively as the sign of her misapprehension of the world. But in the case of Anna’s eyes, this connection can be further distinguished and elaborated by the dual concept of vision as speculation and observation: squinting the eye is an operation of an observer, while interpretation of the world is an operation of speculation. The reduction of the eye’s aperture to admit less light offers a way of altering an image, which in Anna’s case results in the figurative misreading of the world and other people, but the notion that an observer’s perception of the world might be altered derives from the apparatus of the camera obscura, which provided the most important model for the understanding of vision in the nineteenth-century.7 Narrowing the eyes does not necessarily imply a misperception of the world, but is more abstractly an attempt to adjust the apparatus of the eye in order to see the world differently, which implies an underlying belief that not only inner vision (i.e. contemplation) but literal vision may be subjective. Levin, as we will see, also squints at the sky, in an attempt to alter his perception of the world.

5 Stenbock-Fermor interprets Anna’s squinting as her beginning to avoid that which she does not want to think about and simultaneously beginning to see the evil in others. Stenbock-Fermor, The Architecture of Anna Karenina, 48. Amy Mandelker writes: “Anna is on display throughout the novel, while her insistence of being the object, rather than the subject of the gaze is figured in her habit of screwing up her eyes, wanting to be seen rather than to see.” Amy Mandelker, “Illustrate and Condemn: The Phenomenology of Vision in Anna Karenina,” Tolstoy Studies Journal 8 (1995-1996): 46-60, 47. And finally see Priscilla Meyer for Tolstoy’s polemic with Flaubert’s Madame Bovary. Priscilla Meyer, “Anna Karenina: Tolstoy's Polemic with Madame Bovary,” Russian Review 54.2 (1995): 243-259, 246.


We know this gesture is important for understanding Anna’s character not only because of its multiple occurrences in the novel but also because Dolly notices this habit of Anna’s and offers an interpretation of it. If during her train ride Anna is afraid to “look directly” [взглянуть прямо] at the nature of her relationship with Vronsky, then as Anna’s affair with Vronsky begins to devolve, Anna tells Dolly, during the latter’s visit to her estate: “you said I look at things too darkly. You cannot understand. It’s too terrible. I try to not look at all” (639-640, 19:216). This visual metaphor implies a narrative framing in which current events and circumstances portend suffering. Dolly and Anna are discussing the possibility of a divorce, but Anna is beginning to feel that her situation is hopeless. Dolly’s earlier comment that Anna “looks at things too darkly” is a metaphor that Anna herself makes use of in describing her own experience of the present, or rather her inability to bear what she believes to be the implications of her present circumstances. In this same conversation about divorce Anna exclaims: “Dolly, I don’t want to talk about it” (ibid.). Anna cannot look at “things” nor think or talk about them, which implicitly links the acts of observation and contemplation. On multiple occasions during this visit, the conversations between Anna and Dolly associate Anna’s narrowed eyes – a gesture signaling she does not want to look at something – with not wanting to or being able to talk about it.

The chapters that narrate Dolly’s visit offer several examples of Anna’s “new habit” of “narrowing her eyes” [щуриться] (618, 19:204). Dolly uses the visual metaphor – to “look at things too darkly” – to describe Anna’s orientation to the world. This metaphor connecting the act of seeing to understanding and interpreting the world is actually Anna’s, and it finds its corollary in Anna’s unconscious bodily habit, which actually reduces the amount of light entering her pupil. At the beginning of her visit, Dolly notices Anna’s “new habit”: “Anna turned her glance from her friend’s face and, narrowing her eyes (this was a new habit that Dolly had not known in her), pondered, wishing to fully understand the meaning of those words. And, evidently having understood them as she wanted, she looked at Dolly” [Anna, отведя глаза от лица друга и сощурившись (это была новая привычка, которой не знала за ней Долли), задумалась, желая вполне понять значение этих слов. И, очевидно, поняв их так, как хотела, она взглянула на Долли] (614, 19:188). Anna’s double movement correlates an interpretive act – understanding the meaning of Dolly’s words – with an activity of the body. Anna is looking at Dolly. She looks away from Dolly. She squints her eyes. She then interprets Dolly’s words while not looking at her, but interprets them as she wants to, and only then does she look back at Dolly. The interpretive act manifests itself as a meaningful gesture, narrowing the eyes so as not to see, and turning away from Dolly. It’s almost as if Anna wants to separate the words from the speaker in order to misinterpret them, and she enacts this by both looking away from the speaker and then narrowing her eyes, which establishes a parallelism between these two actions and links this habit not only with the misinterpretation of another person – “understand the

meaning of those words” – but also with a type of thinking that could be understood as a withdrawal into oneself as suggested by the verb “zadumat’sia.” By restricting her visual field, Anna withdraws from the domain of the social into herself, potentially breaking the link that would make it impossible for her to understand what Dolly is saying about Anna’s own life. In fact, the words that Dolly has spoken concern a non-judgmental acceptance of Anna and her love for her. Dolly says she has “no opinion” about Anna’s situation: “but I’ve always loved you, and when you love someone, you love the whole person, as they are, and not as you’d like them to be” (614). That Anna’s habit is actually only “new” to Dolly challenges Dolly’s claim to know Anna’s “whole person.” Anna narrows her eyes at and then turns away from Kitty, when approaching her during the mazurka, after she notices Kitty’s look of confusion and despair (83, 18:89). Significantly, Anna reacts to the sisters in the same way, which suggests that she does not want to engage with Dolly just as she earlier ignored Kitty.

Anna has asked Dolly to reflect on her situation: Anna wants Dolly to tell her something about herself from a point of view that exists outside of herself, she is asking Dolly to mirror her back to herself, and yet in the moment of this mirroring, Anna severs the link between the two of them. In what might be read as a pun, Anna’s act of misinterpretation, the narrator tells us, is “ochevidno,” suggesting the existence of a third perspectival position from which it is clear that Anna has misconstrued Dolly’s words. The adverb “evidently” (ochevidno), in Russian literally “seen by the eye,” belongs to the narrator, this clarity could also be attributed to Dolly and the reader. Dolly’s noticing this new habit prompts the reader to do the same, encouraging her to wonder about the meaning of this facial expression, and preparing her for Dolly’s interpretation, which follows a few pages later in a conversation with Vronsky about the possibility of Karenin granting Anna a divorce.

“Very well, I’ll talk with her. But how is it she doesn’t think of it herself?” said Darya Alexandrovna, at the same time suddenly recalling for some reason Anna’s strange new habit of narrowing her eyes. And she remembered that Anna had narrowed her eyes precisely when it was a matter of the most intimate sides of life. “As if she narrows her eyes at her life in order not to see it all,” thought Dolly.

-- Хорошо, я поговорю. Но как же она сама не думает? – сказала Дарья Александровна, вдруг почему-то при этом вспомнила странную новую привычку Анны щуриться. И ей вспомнилось, что Анна щурилась, именно когда дело касалось задушевых сторон жизни. «Точно она на свою жизнь щурится, чтобы не всё видеть», подумала Долли. – Непременно, я для себя и для нее буду говорить с ней, -- отвечала Дарья Александровна на его выражение благодарности.

(628, 19:204)

Dolly’s question – “How is it that she doesn’t think of it herself?” – precedes her recollection of Anna’s new habit. Tolstoy writes “for some reason,” which leaves this associative link opaque, but also asks the reader to make Dolly’s connection explicit. She
connects Anna’s new habit of narrowing her eyes to her inability to think, specifically “when it was a matter of the most intimate sides of life” (именно когда дело касалось задушевых сторон жизни). The intervening moments between Dolly’s first observation and her recollection of this habit suggest that Dolly’s interpretation is correct. Three times Anna narrows her eyes while avoiding talking about her two children, Anna and Seryozha. In the third instance Anna’s refusal to think about her relationships with her children becomes associated with her refusal to think about the future. This association makes sense, if only because the future is what children represent. But the association of narrowing the eyes also suggests that the type of thinking in which Anna does not engage is future-oriented, and in this sense narrative. It is a limited vision of what might be, a limited vision of the potentiality latent in the present that consequently forecloses the future. In a very real sense, there will be no more future/children for Anna, for in this conversation Anna alludes to the consequences of her illness associated with her first pregnancy, and birth control that will keep her from future childbearing.

The adjective intimate (zadushevnii) is etymologically related to the Russian word for soul – dusha – that innermost or intimate space within herself in which the objects of her soul-vision began to go double after the consummation of the affair. Anna chooses not to see the intimate side of life, the innermost side of life, and therefore cannot see clearly relations between people. The qualifier “intimate” refers both to knowing oneself, that is, having a clear sense of the state of one’s soul, and understanding the nature of one’s intimate relations with others. The second meaning is certainly active here: Anna cannot think about, or “look at” her relationships with Vronsky, her husband, or her children. Anna’s misperception of the world, figured by her narrowed eyes, finds a corollary in the doubled-vision of her soul’s eye, which figures her experience of psychological and spiritual decentering.

Three times Anna’s soul vision is described as going double. In the third instance of this simile, this feeling causes Anna to want to cease thinking, linking Anna’s blurry soul vision with the mental habit associated with the narrowing of her eyes. If in the first instance the doubling in her soul is associated with Anna’s inability to speak and in the second with an inability to think, in the third she struggles to write. The first and third instances suggest that this state of Anna’s soul has lead to a breakdown in her ability to meaningfully use language to convey her affective experience, in the sense that the former is understood as predominantly somatic.9

The first instance of this internal state occurs after Anna awakes and recalls the “strange, coarse words” spoken to her husband in the carriage. Further distraught by having seen Vronsky later that night but choosing not to tell him of her confession to her husband, Anna feels ashamed, hopeless, and “terrified of the disgrace” that will inevitably result from her confession to her husband, imagining that everyone has already heard these words that are now repeated in her mind. This is also the moment when she begins to imagine that Vronsky has ceased to love her.

9 Fredric Jameson’s recent study differentiates between the named emotions and bodily affects. See in particular “The Twin Sources of Realism: Affect, or, the Body’s Present” in The Antinomies of Realism (London: Verso, 2013).
Annushka left, but Anna did not begin to dress; she went on sitting in the same position, her head and arms hanging down, and every once in a while her whole body shuddered, as if wishing to make some gesture, to say something, and then became still again. She kept repeating: “My God! My God! But neither the “my” nor the “God” had any meaning for her. Though she had never doubted the religion in which she had been brought up, the thought of seeking help from religion in her situation was as foreign to her as seeking help from Alexei Alexandrovich. She knew beforehand that the help of religion was possible only on condition of renouncing all that made up the whole meaning of life for her. Not only was it painful to her, but she was beginning to feel fear before the new, never experienced state of her soul. She felt that everything was beginning to go double in her soul, as an object sometimes goes double in tired eyes. Sometimes she did not know what she feared, what she desired: whether she feared or desired what had been or what would be, and precisely what she desired, she did not know.

And then a few pages later, in the third instance, Anna experiences a similar disorientation as she attempts to write to Vronsky for help:

“What can I write?” she thought. “What can I decide alone? What do I know? What do I want? What do I love?” Again she felt that things had begun to go double in her soul. She became frightened at this feeling and seized on the first pretext for action that came to her, to distract her from her thoughts of herself. “I must see Alexei” (so she called Vronsky in her mind), “he alone can tell me what I must do.”

“Что я могу писать? — думала она. — Что я могу решить одна? Что я знаю? Чего я хочу? Что я люблю?” опять она почувствовала, что в душе ее начинает двоиться. Она испугалась опять этого чувства и ухватилась за...
The most striking description of Anna’s state of disorientation comes in the form of a visual simile: “everything was beginning to go double in her soul” [в душе её всё начинает двоиться]. The container of the soul in which we find the objects that are doubled is likened to a field of vision. The soul is analogous to a sense organ, the means by which the world is perceived, which sets the boundaries of this field, framing the objects perceived by the “soul’s eye.” This simile recalls Plato’s almost identical formulation in The Republic: “the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands and is radiant with intelligence; but when turned towards twilight of becoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes blinking about.”10 Anna’s soul is not “blinking” but going out of focus.

The soul in Anna Karenina is the center of one’s being, the place where truths are known of which the conscious subject may not even be aware; the eye, in the ocularcentric tradition that provides the context for Tolstoy’s simile, is the means by which truth is known. This perspectival vision associated with the eye has found its way into theorizations of novelistic subjectivity such as point of view and focalization that assume narrative descriptions, be they direct, indirect, or free-indirect, rely on a fixed point of reference, even if that fixed point is not explicitly named as a hypothetical observer. Tolstoy’s extension of Plato’s simile provides a key figure of subjectivity that, as we will see, challenges the epistemological priority of the visual as a narrative paradigm as well as means by which characters gain access to truth.

The figure of objects going double in Anna’s soul, in the first instance, depicts her as a decentered subject. She no longer knows what she desires; fear and desire, in fact, become indistinguishable. Similarly, Anna’s decentering is captured by the questions she asks herself: “What do I know? What do I want? What do I love?” Knowledge, desire, and love – the defining characteristics of the subject— are put in question along with an incapacity for autonomous agency (“What can I decide alone?”). She also experiences a temporal disorientation, not knowing if what she fears/desires is in the past or the future. The adverbs “sometimes” (иногда) and “once in a while” (изредка), which describe the repeated action of her shuddering body and her repeated cry, suggest that Anna is stuck in a traumatic repetition characterized by a dissociation of mind and body, where the feared/desired event has for the subject perhaps both already occurred and is yet to occur (again). Such a traumatic event, by definition, consists of a reminder or excess that lies beyond the subject’s ability to incorporate it into meaningful experience. It is her body that tries to say something, while she keeps repeating the same, meaningless words, but the imperfective verb начинат’ (to begin), which occurs twice in this passage. These repetitions gradually induce a change in a state that approaches the ecstatic in a sense closer to that word’s etymology: ek-stasis, an evacuation of the self, a decentering or

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shattering of the ego.\(^{11}\) In this sense, the state in which Anna finds herself mirrors the consummation of her affair with Vronsky.

If this moment culminates in the doubling of objects in her soul, the consummation of the affair also describes a splitting or doubling of the body: Vronsky, standing over Anna’s body, “felt what a murderer must feel when he looks at the body he has deprived of life. This body deprived of life was their love, the first period of their love” [Он же чувствовал то, что должен чувствовать убийца, когда видит тело, лишенное им жизни. Это тело, лишенное им жизни, была их любовь, первый период их любви]. Anna’s body doubles metaphorically as the body of their love, which is then doubled as it is cut up so that it can be hidden. The death of this metaphorical body ends “the first period of their love,” that is, divides their love (149, 18:157-58). The shame felt in both instances also binds these moments. The affair’s consummation produces another doubling that manifests itself in Anna’s experience of being bound to two men, who both happen to have the same name, and about whom she begins to have the recurring nightmare that they are both her husbands. In this dream “Alexei Alexandrovich wept, kissing her hands and saying: ‘It’s so good now!’ And Alexei Vronsky was right there, and he, too, was her husband” [Алексей Alexandrovich плакал, целуя ее руки, и говорил: как хорошо теперь! И Алексей Vronsky был тут же, и он был также ее муж] (150, 18:159). Anna’s desire is split between the two Alexeis. Perhaps, the doubled object in Anna’s soul is Alexei, who is simultaneously both one and two, one signifier, two signifieds, a point which Tolstoy implies when he tells us parenthetically “(so she called Vronsky [Alexei] in her mind),” and which is reinforced by a description at the horse race of Anna’s extrasensory perception of the two Alexeis: “Two men, husband and lover, were the two centers of life for her, and she felt their nearness without the aid of external senses” [Два человека, муж и любовник, были для нее двумя центрами жизни, и без помощи внешних чувств она чувствовала их близость] (206-07, 18:218). The means by which Anna feels their presence is implicitly an inner faculty of perception, to which her soul has already been likened.

The traumatic event that she fears has perhaps already occurred; namely, the consummation of the affair, but the belief that it also lies ahead creates a sense of destiny, a bad infinity, one of Anna’s “omens,” which further suggests that the consequences of the event are perhaps yet to be fully realized.\(^{12}\) As Anna’s plot approaches its denouement, the incapacity of Anna’s soul vision is reproduced in the failure of her eyes; she is unable to recognize her daughter, and then herself in the mirror. Vronsky’s departure to visit his mother causes Anna to panic: “afraid to stay alone now,” she goes into the nursery, where her vision begins to fail her:

“No, this isn’t right, it’s not him! Where are his blue eyes, his sweet and timid smile?” was her first thought when she saw her plump, red-cheeked little girl with curly hair instead of Seryozha, whom, in the confusion of her thoughts, she had


\(^{12}\) See Morson, “Omens.”
expected to see in the nursery. The girl, sitting at the table was loudly and persistently banging on it with a stopper, looking senselessly at her mother with two black currants – her eyes.

«Что ж, это не то, это не он! Где его голубые глаза, милая и робкая улыбка?» была первая мысль ее, когда она увидела свою пухлую, румяную девочку с черными вьющимися волосами, вместо Сережи, которого она, при запутанности своих мыслей, ожидала видеть в детской. Девочка, сидя у стола, упорно и крепко хлопала по нем пробкой и бессмысленно глядела на мать двумя смородинами – черными глазами.

There is something wrong with everyone’s eyes in this moment that records a double failure of recognition: both Anna and her daughter fail to recognize one another. Anna’s eyes are not working; Seryozha’s “blue eyes,” the first feature whose absence strikes Anna, are missing; and Anne’s eyes are replaced by “two black currants,” a defamiliarizing metaphor that dehumanizes Anna’s daughter. This scene of Anna’s failure to recognize her daughter provides a foil for the scenes in which Kitty and her son Mitya recognize each other, and the scene where Levin recognizes his creator, both of which will be examined in the next section. Perhaps even more significantly, after failing to recognize Anne, Anna fails to recognize herself in the mirror, which is one of the passages that most clearly reflects the form of Anna’s split subjectivity:

“Ah, and did I do my hair or not?” she asked herself. And could not remember. She felt her head with her hand. “Yes, my hair’s done, but I certainly don’t remember when.” She did not even believe her hand and went to the pier-glass to see whether her hair had indeed been done or not. It had been, but she could not remember when she had done it. “Who is that?” she thought, looking in the mirror at the inflamed face with strangely shining eyes fearfully looking at her. “Ah, it’s me,” she realized, and looking at herself all over she suddenly felt kisses on her hand and, shuddering, moved her shoulders. Then she raised her hand to her lips and kissed it.

«Да, да, причесалась ли я или нет?» спросила она себя. И не могла вспомнить. Она ощупала голову рукой. «Да, я причесана, но когда, решительно не помню.» Она даже не верила своей руке и подошла к трюму, чтоб увидать, причесана ли она в самом деле или нет? Она была причесана и не могла вспомнить, когда она это делала. «Кто это?» думала она, глядя в зеркало на воспаленное лицо со странно блестящими глазами, испуганно смотревшими на нее. «Да это я», вдруг поняла она, и, оглядывая себя всю, она почувствовала вдруг на себе его поцелуи и, содрогаясь, двинула плечами. Потом подняла руку к губам и поцеловала ее.

(754-55, 19:334)

(755, 19:334-35)
Anna is standing in front of a mirror, but the mirror is not working because Anna’s vision has failed. The mirror, which works to double an object, is doubling Anna, but in such a way as to create a non-coincidence or non-identification of image and viewer. The mirror’s doubling causes a split in the observing subject, who, as a result of her disabled vision, cannot reintegrate image and viewer – the dialectics of seeing fails, unable to achieve a synthesis. As with the misrecognition of her daughter (and her double) Anna, Anna does not recognize her own eyes, which demonstrates how estranged she is from herself; the structure of the clause “глядя в зеркало на воспаленное лицо со странно блестящими глазами, испуганно смотревшими на нее” reproduces the reflexivity that it describes: she looks at the face with the eyes looking back at her. The sudden (vdrug) self-recognition expressed by the thought “Ah, it’s me” [Da eto ia] is accompanied by taking her whole self into view and suddenly (vdrug) feeling “his kisses.” That Anna is “looking at her whole self” suggests that she takes herself as an object, an object that immediately becomes an erotic object (suggested by feeling his kisses); and having recognized herself as an erotic object, she proceeds to kiss herself, enacting the objectification and eroticization of her own image. The feeling of Vronsky’s kisses also recalls the aftermath of the consummation: “And as the murderer falls upon this body with animosity, as if with passion, drags it off and cuts it up, so he covered her face and shoulders with kisses” [И с озлоблением, как будто со страстью, бросается убийца на это тело, тащит, и режет его; так и он покрывал поцелуями ее лицо и плечи] (149-50, 18:158). The sensation of Vronsky’s kisses links Anna’s experience of division before the mirror with the cutting kisses that divide the body.

In his discussion of the multiple instances where Anna is described as split, including the moment after the consummation of the affair, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere notes that there are four Annas in this scene: Anna herself, Anna’s reflection, Anna’s daughter, Annie, and Anna’s maid, Annushka. “Tolstoy’s heroine,” he goes on to observe, “seems to be breaking up into narrative bits and pieces. This fragmentation presages the physical smashing up of Anna’s body by the train a few pages later.”¹³ There is, however, another way to read the proliferation of Annas in this scene, for all these doubles are not of the same order. Except for the mirror image, the other Annas are not exactly projections of Anna in either a literal or psychological sense; they are not (only) instances of seeing oneself everywhere in the world around, but perhaps just the opposite. Anna is surrounded by doubles that she cannot recognize (including her own projection), and the principle of doubling that operates in her soul has become a constitutive principle of the world around her.

The most striking formal feature of the passage that describes Anna in front of the mirror is that it is structured like a mirror. If the state of Anna’s vision mirrors the state of her soul that was earlier described as seeing double, then here Anna is not seeing double so much as the text is seeing double for her. The first half of the passage alternates between direct and (free)-indirect discourse that grammatically mirror the first and third persons (ia/ona), and recalls Anna’s revelation where, thinking she is on her deathbed, she speaks about herself in the third-person to Karenin: “I’m the same … But there is

another woman in me, I’m afraid of her – she fell in love with that man, and I wanted to hate you and couldn’t forget the other one who was there before. The one who is not me. Now I’m real, I’m whole” “Я всё та же… Но во мне есть другая, я ее боюсь – она полюбила того, и я хотела возненавидеть тебя и не могла забыть про ту, которая была прежде. Та не я. Теперь я настоящая, я вся” (412, 18:434).

Passion divides Anna’s two selves, which are defined by their respective objects of desire. The statement “In me there is another” can also be read literally as Anna is not dying but pregnant with a girl who will also be named Anna, such that even the level of the biological expresses the doubling that characterizes Anna’s subjectivity. The mode in which Anna speaks about herself assumes the same form as the narrator’s in the mirror passage, employing both first- and third-person pronouns.

Anna’s revelation is prefaced by the exclamation “Now I do understand, I understand everything, I see everything” [Теперь я понимаю, и всё понимаю, я всё вижу] (412, 18:433), a parallelism that repeats the novel’s ocularcentric motif. Understanding everything and seeing everything will later become a reason to commit suicide. Chapter 30 of part 7, which builds towards this event, begins: “‘Here it is again! Again I understand everything,’ Anna said to herself” [‘Вот она опять! Опять я понимаю всё», сказала себе Анна] (762, 19:342). The adverb “again” signals that this is the return of Anna’s initial revelation, which also seems to be what the “it” in the first exclamation refers to. In Russian, however, the pronoun that is rendered as “it” in English is gendered feminine, and so the line could also be read as “Here she is again!” This it/she may refer to Anna’s double, the other one in her, where the chiastic syntax of the Russian – ona opiat’ / opiat’ ia invites a comparison of the third and first person pronouns (ona/ia). A few pages later, Anna thinks: “Why not put out the candle, if there’s nothing more to look at, if it’s vile to look at it all?” [Отчего же не потушить свечу, когда смотреть больше не на что, когда гадко смотреть на всё это?] (766-67, 19:347). Anna’s question is about knowledge and desire, both of which motivate the act of looking; there is nothing more to know and there is nothing more to desire, including life. Anna’s eyes seem to be set on death and she follows them under the train: “She looked at the bottom of the carriages […] and tried to estimate by eye the midpoint between the front and back wheels and the moment when the middle would be in front of her” [Она смотрела на низ вагонов […] и глазомером старалась определить середину между передними и задними колесами и ту минуту, когда середина эта будет против нее] (19:348); and despite crossing herself, which invokes a series of joyful childhood associations that disperse “the darkness that covered everything,” “she did not take her eyes from the wheels of the approaching second carriage” [мрак, покрывавший для нее всё; она не спускала глаз с колес подходящего второго вагона] (ibid.). The eye is associated with volition, and directs the body towards its goal almost in spite of the activity of consciousness. As a result, Anna tragically recalls the joy of life just as she terminates it.

Readings of the novel suggest that the failure of Anna’s vision plays a role in her decision to take her own life.14 Anna’s vision, in both literal and metaphorical senses,

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deteriorates. Anna thinks in visual metaphors, which she uses to reason her way to suicide, at the same time that her eyes cause her to misread the world. Levin, as one of Anna’s many doubles, also struggles with a worldview that does not seem to justify his decision to continue living. The meaninglessness of this worldview is not resolved through reason but through what he sees as he contemplates the heavens. What he sees, significantly, without realizing that he is seeing it, alters his vision of the world, allowing him to imbue his life with meaning. This section has argued that Anna and the text in some instances “see” the world in a similar manner – both see double, producing a correspondence between how Anna thinks of herself and how she is narrated. The next section argues that Levin sees through the text of *Anna Karenina*, glimpsing a reality beyond the novel, apprehending the invisible hand of Tolstoy the creator.

_The Vault of the Heavens and the Vault of the Text_

“Have you read Levin’s confession in *Anna Karenina*?” [Вы читали исповедь Левина в «Анне Карениной»?] Tolstoy asked his friend A. D. Obolensky, during the latter’s visit to Tolstoy’s estate in the mid-seventies. Hearing that Obolensky had, Tolstoy continued: “Well then, tell me, whose side was I myself on, in your opinion, Levin’s or the priest’s?”15 Boris Eikhenbaum cites this account in his well-known study of Tolstoy’s novel, where it opens his discussion of “Tolstoian ‘objectivity’” (135). For, in response to Tolstoy’s second question, Obolensky, reflecting back, writes: “I answered that it was written so truthfully and well that from the story itself it was utterly impossible to tell on whose side the author himself was.” Tolstoy is pleased with this response (quoted from Obolensky):

I really think I did write it well. I myself am, of course, on the priest’s side and not at all on Levin’s. But I rewrote that account four times, and it still seemed to me that it was apparent on whose side I was myself. And I have noticed that any work, any story, makes an impression only when it is impossible to make out with whom the author sympathizes. And so I had to write everything in such a way that this was not noticeable.

Я в самом деле думаю, что написал хорошо. Сам я, конечно, на стороне священника, а вовсе не на стороне Левина. Но я этот рассказ четыре раза переделял, и всё мне казалось, что заметно, на чьей я сам стороне. А заметил я, что впечатление всякая вещь, всякий рассказ производит только тогда, когда нельзя разобрать, кому сочувствует автор. И вот надо было всё так написать, чтобы этого не было заметно.16

16 Ibid., 134, 186-7.
In these last lines Tolstoy offers a principle of artistic creation, advocating what we might describe as the erasure of authorial subjectivity, an erasure that would seem to produce the effect of authorial objectivity of interest to Eikhenbaum. Tolstoy’s position vis-à-vis Anna Karenina is reminiscent of Flaubert’s well-known dictum that “the author in his work should be like God in His universe, everywhere present but nowhere visible” (l’auteur, dans son oeuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l’univers, présent partout et visible nulle part). This conception of the author’s God-like presence in his work, which emphasizes the invisibility of the author and draws an explicit parallel between an author’s work and God’s universe (“dans son oeuvre”/ “dans l’univers”), often goes by the name of omniscient third-person narration, commonly found in the nineteenth-century European realist novel. In his study The Novel and the Police, D. A. Miller calls this “panoptical narration” to account for the ideological work of policing the “liberal subject” it accomplishes via this erasure of the authorial subject: “the faceless gaze becomes an ideal of the power regulation.” Miller argues that the hiddenness of the police, the hiddenness of the author, and the hiddenness of God all amount to the same thing, insofar as the invisibility of disciplinary power produces a common effect.

What effect does the erasure of authorial subjectivity produce in Anna Karenina? In the reading I offer in this chapter, the erasure of Tolstoy’s authorial presence stages for both the novel’s readers and characters the problem of meaning-making in a world that seems to lack, to use Georg Lukács’s formulation, a transcendental locus. Lukács, in his 1916 The Theory of the Novel writes: “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (56). Lukács describes this existential condition as God’s “abandonment” of the world, which consequently produces a contingent universe and a subjectivity that are mutually constitutive. But if Lukács believes that the novel’s form is predicated upon God’s absence, I would like to suggest that for Tolstoy it is predicated upon the author’s hiddenness.

False steps, misadventures, and failed projects characterize the Levin plot line, and the narrator’s introductory gloss on this character captures Levin’s ever-shifting attitude towards the world: “Levin always came to Moscow agitated, hurried, a little uneasy, and annoyed at this uneasiness, and most often with a completely new, unexpected view of things” (Левин приезжал в Москву всегда взволнованный, торопливый, немного стесненный и раздраженный этим стеснением и большею частью с совершенно-новым, неожиданным взглядом на вещи) (17,

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18 Ibid.
His conversion will not amount to yet another new view of things, but rather a shift in interpretation of the meaning of this life that occurs “imperceptibly” (nezametno).

Lukács’s theory begins where Tolstoy’s novel ends: both works make use of the image of Kant’s “starry sky” that concludes his Critique of Practical Reason: (“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”) Scholars have identified the Kantian nature of Levin’s final revelation that the “Good” exists outside of the cause-and-effect domain of sensory experience. However, from Lukács’s point of view, such a revelation about identical essential nature of the heavens and the soul, which makes possible a transcendental map, should no longer be possible for the world of the novel. He writes that “Kant’s starry firmament now shines only in the dark night of pure cognition, it no longer lights any solitary wanderer’s path.”

In Anna Karenina, it is while contemplating the sky that Levin discovers faith. This faith grants Levin access to a meaning so robust as to potentially fill his whole life. Given the significance of Levin’s conversion for the novel, and no less so for Tolstoy’s own life, it is not surprising that several scholars have engaged in detailed analyses of the final moments of the novel, which constitute Levin’s conversion. Almost all of these studies identify Levin’s famous conversation with the muzhik Fyodor about “living for the soul” as the turning point in his crisis. Some of these studies go as far as to link together Levin’s various meditations on the sky.

Levin’s three meditations on the heavens in Part 8 of Anna Karenina represent a tripartite encounter. The first moment is when Levin “discovers” faith, while lying in a field and staring up at the clear, blue sky, just after his conversation with Fyodor. The second scene describes the well-known thunderstorm, in which Kitty and Mitya get caught. While the third, and perhaps best known scene, occurs in the final moments of the novel, when Levin looks up at the starry night sky after the storm. Apart from the thematic link — Levin’s evolving discovery of

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20 See Ilya Kliger’s insightful analysis of the form of Levin’s plot as a combination of the picaresque and Bildungsroman. Ilya Kliger, The Narrative Shape of Truth, 154-55.
21 Lukács, Theory of the Novel, 36.
22 Alexandrov argues that Levin’s faith “functions as a coda to the entire work.” V. Alexandrov, Limits to Interpretation, 160.
23 From Boris Eikhenbaum’s work on Anna Karenina to Inessa Medzhibovskaya’s recent monograph on Tolstoy’s “long conversion,” these final moments of the novel have yielded much in our understanding of Tolstoy’s life and poetics. B. Eikhenbaum, Tolstoi in Seventies; Inessa Medzhibovskaya, Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of his Time: A Biography of a Long Conversation, 1845-1887 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).
24 Gustafson and Medzhibovskaya explicitly connect these moments, while Alexandrov and others deal with some of them separately. See R. F. Gustafson, Leo Tolstoy, Resident Stranger, 132-155; I. Medzhibovskaya, Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of his Time, 177-78; Alexandrov, Limits to Interpretation, 160-71.
faith – these scenes are connected to one another by the repetition of words, phrases, and images.\textsuperscript{25}

The narrative of Levin’s contemplation of the sky consists largely of descriptions of his processes of perception. The distinction between what Levin sees versus what he looks at will play a crucial role in his evolving interpretation of the symbolic significance of the sky; and, subsequently, this interpretation bears directly on Levin’s discovery of faith. This dichotomized view of the world corresponds to Anna’s double vision. Levin’s crisis of faith expresses itself as a “dialectics of seeing,” which Tolstoy resolves by weaving a description of an objective visual field into a description of Levin’s vision as a subjective observer.

Levin’s inability to find meaning nearly drives him to commit suicide; and the resolution of Levin’s despair, exemplified by his final inner monologue, rests on the notion that he is now able to meaningfully interpret his own life:

But my life now, my whole life, regardless of all that may happen to me, every minute of it, is not only not meaningless, as it was before, but has the unquestionable meaning of the good which it is in my power to put into it!

Но жизнь моя теперь, вся моя жизнь, независимо от всего, что может случиться со мной, каждая минута ее - не только не бессмысленна, как была прежде, но имеет несомненный смысл добра, который я властен вложить в нее! (817, 19:445)

It is these lines that end the book, and as such have special weight, urging us to see Levin’s faith not merely as an ascension to a set of propositional truths, so much as a hermeneutic tool.

Levin’s first meditation on the heavens occurs right after a conversation about the peasant Platon who “lives for the soul” and “remembers God,” which produces “a new, joyful feeling”; “it was as if a host a vague but important thoughts burst from some locked-up place and, all rushing towards the same goal, whirled through his head, blinding him with their light” (794). This moment, which marks the beginning of Levin’s contemplation of the heavens, anticipates the blinding light that accompanies his vision of God during the lightning storm and is prefigured by the moment when the priest invites Levin to make his confession: “A moment later he peeked out and beckoned to Levin. The thought locked up till then in Levin’s head began to stir, but he hastened to drive it

\textsuperscript{25} One example of this linkage is Levin’s marked application of the word “свод,” which appears as a descriptor for the heavens in all three scenes. Conceiving of the text’s structure as a “labyrinth of linkages” (a reading suggested by Tolstoy in his April 23 & 26 1876 letter to Strakhov) also provides a basis for my reading these scenes as a single prolonged episode interwoven by Tolstoy throughout Part 8 of \textit{Anna Karenina}. The power and range of this approach is evidenced by its various applications in Tolstoy scholarship. In particular, see Stenbock-Fermor, \textit{The Architecture of Anna Karenina} and Liza Knapp, “The Estates of Pokrovskoe and Vozdvizhenskoe: Tolstoy’s Labyrinth of Linkings in \textit{Anna Karenina},” \textit{Tolstoy Studies Journal} (1995-1996): 81-98.
away. ‘It will work out somehow,’ he reflected and walked to the ambo” (440). The act of confession stirs an unnamed thought that finally bursts fourth some three hundred pages later, compelling Levin to turn heavenwards.

Lying on his back, he was now looking at the high, cloudless sky. “Don’t I know that it is infinite space and not a round vault? But no matter how I squint and strain my sight, I cannot help seeing it as round and limited, and despite my knowledge of infinite space, I am undoubtedly right when I see a firm blue vault, more right than when I strain to see beyond it.”

The negations imply that there might be another way to see the sky that Levin cannot conceptualize, but they also point to how the act of seeing is a mediated process that might produce different visions of the world. Levin attempts to squint and strain his vision (zrenie). These activities draw attention to the eye as a visual apparatus, the aperture of which might be dilated to produce different images. Levin’s squinting recalls Anna’s. In both cases squinting represents an attempt to alter an observer’s perception of the world but with the important difference that Levin is described as consciously attempting to alter his perception of the world, while Anna’s squinting is described as a habit, which suggests that she may not be entirely conscious of this behavior or of her distortion of Dolly’s words.

The second meditation occurs after the lightning storm:

“He walked across the terrace and looked at two stars appearing in the already darkening sky, and suddenly remembered: ‘Yes, when I was looking at the sky and thinking that the vault I see is not an untruth, there was something I didn’t think through, something I hid from myself’.”

The second vision of the heavens does not only describe what Levin currently sees, but also what he remembers having seen and determined to be not an untruth. This vision is thus doubly mediated. Looking at the sky he recalls the earlier sky, which connects these moments for the reader that are also connected for Levin, and like the first vision, the thinking that accompanies the reflection is in the form of logical double negation. The double negative constitutes a form of reflective thinking in which a concept is identical
with itself through a logical doubling, as if the concept has passed through a mirror in the mind. The form of thinking as doubling differs for and Levin: Anna’s doubling involuntarily distorts her reality, while Levin’s reflective thinking consciously mediates between the individual and the world.

As Levin stares up at the sky he experiences the tension between what he knows and what he perceives. Levin knows that the sky constitutes an “endless expanse” [бесконечное пространство], but despite his efforts to “squint” and “strain,” he cannot deny what he sees, namely, the sky as a “firm blue vault” [твердый голубой свод]. The first interpretation of the sky as an endless expanse arguably represents a rational, scientific worldview, the philosophical underpinnings of which Levin has already determined to be devoid of meaning. On the other hand, seeing the sky as a “firm blue vault” is an interpretation of the heavens, which implies a creator, insofar as a vault is a constructed object. Presented with these two interpretations of the sky, despite his effort, Levin cannot bring himself to see what he feels he ought.

Levin’s thinking obstructs his perception of reality. In this respect, Tolstoy’s description of the sky serves as the undigested sensory material presented to Levin – “he was now looking at the high, cloudless sky” [он смотрел теперь на высокое, безоблачное небо]. Comparing what Levin looks at with what Levin sees (firm blue vault, твердый голубой свод), allows us to conjecture about his perceptual processing. This distinction expresses itself as a shift in the narrator’s point of view from an objective “outside” stance—“he was looking at” [он смотрел], to penetrating Levin’s mind and recording his inner monologue—“I see” [я вижу]. The fact that neither of Levin’s conceptions of the sky coincide with what Tolstoy tells us Levin is looking at demonstrates that the act of conscious perception necessarily induces a degree of

26 Medzhibovskaya, referencing this moment, comments that “Levin concludes Tolstoy’s gallery of sky watchers, who wonder about life’s meaning,” before going to compare this moment with Prince Andrey’s meditation on the sky at Austerlitz, articulating the respective differences in Tolstoy’s poetics in both works. Medzhibovskaya, Tolstoy and the Religious Culture of his Time, 183, 203-04.

27 Levin’s sky, for Alexandrov, is largely representative of the relativity of the subjective point of view. He makes reference to both the blue-sky scene and Levin’s reflection on the stars/planet as instances of the same relativism, drawing a parallel between Levin’s faith and the “falsehood” of astronomical observation. Alexandrov asks, “How can even a heuristic lie lead to truth?” His answer consists in elaborating the faith-reason dichotomy, the theological antecedent of which derives from the Russian Orthodox conception of уродство. He also appeals to the biblical precedent of the relative foolishness of man’s wisdom compared with God’s (1 Corinthians 1:25), in order to work out the paradoxes of Levin’s thinking. Alexandrov, Limits to Interpretation, 169.

28 Donna Orwin notes how Levin, by describing the heavens as a vault, “is injecting not goodness [as Levin’s final inner monologue would have us think] but metaphysical truth into objective reality.” Orwin also goes on to compare this moment with Prince Andrey’s mediation on the sky, articulating the respective differences in Tolstoy’s poetics in both works. Donna Orwin, Tolstoy’s Art and Thought, 1874-1880, 203-04.
separation between the observer and the world. When Levin looks at the sky he only experiences his own dichotomized consciousness.

Both moments find Levin comparing what he knows, associated with what he looks at, to the position of a subjective observer, what he experiences, what his senses tell him. The result of this dialectical struggle is that Levin finally embraces as “more true” the notion that his experience of reality is ultimately conditioned and determined by his subjective position within it. Levin’s toggling between his subjective experience and his theoretical speculations about the possibility of an objective experience finds a corollary in his two visions of the world. As Thomas Seifrid observes, “[t]he term ‘vault’ suggests the ceilings in a Russian church, particularly those inside the cupolas; but whereas those lofty spaces with their frescoes are meant to approximate a view into the heavens (or to reveal the heavens to the spiritual eye), the effect when Levin gazes at the real sky is ironically the opposite one: a reduction to a theater-like space.”

This architectural metaphor and the ontological nesting it implies does not only reduce the heavens to a theater-like space but also allows us to posit something outside that space, a builder or architect of the constructed edifice.

In an oft-cited 27 January 1878 letter to Sergei Rachinsky, Tolstoy defends the structure of Anna Karenina: “On the contrary, I am proud of the architecture – the vaults [svody] are brought together in such a way that it is impossible to notice where the keystone is” (Я гордусь, напротив, архитектурой—своды сведены так, что нельзя и заметить, где замок). The motif of the “the vault” (свод) here serves not only to connect Levin’s mediations on the sky within the novel, but also as a metaphor for the text itself. The figure of the heavens as a vault becomes a linguistic point of convergence between Tolstoy and Levin, a shared vision of what is inherently the same object, the world of Anna Karenina, but seen from two different vantage points, those outside and inside the text respectively.

In this letter Tolstoy again articulates a principle of artistic creation similar to that which we encountered in Obolensky’s memoir. Tolstoy hides the work’s “keystone” so that it is impossible “to notice” (заметить) where it is. Tolstoy rewrote the scene of Levin’s confession because it was “noticeable” (заметно) that he was on the priest’s side, and he writes “everything” so that his sympathy is “not noticeable” (чтобы этого не было заметно). The first instance of the motif of the vault, which constitutes the keystone in the narrative of Levin’s conversion, occurs during Levin’s confession.

At the beginning of part 5, Stiva reminds Levin that he cannot go to the altar without performing this rite. The arrangements are made, and Levin finds himself before the priest.

“What particular sins do you have?” [Какие особенные грехи имеете?]
Levin replies: “My chief sin is doubt.” [Мой главный грех есть сомнение]

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29 Seifrid, “Gazing,” 442.
30 L. N. Tolstoi, Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh (Moskva: Xudozhestvennaja literatura, 1965), 17:467.
The priest responds: “What doubt can you have of the existence of the Creator, when you behold his Creations? […] Who adorned the heavenly firmament with lights? Who clothed the earth in its beauty? How can it be without a creator?”

[Какое же вы можете иметь сомнение о творце, когда вы воззрите на творения его? (…) Кто же украсил светилами свод небесный?]

Levin’s vision of the sky as a vault may find its origin here, in the biblical figure of the heavenly firmament conveyed to Levin through the priest, which is the fourth occurrence of this figure, three within the novel, and one in Tolstoy’s letter about the novel. The fifth and most significant occurrence marks the crux of Levin’s conversion.

Between Levin’s first and final meditations on the sky, a thunderstorm covers the heavens. Levin and company are at the apiary arguing about the Serbian war when the storm breaks. Levin returns home to discover that Kitty and Mitya are caught in it. As he rushes out to look for them, lightning strikes the oak behind which he thinks they are taking shelter: “suddenly everything blazed, the whole earth caught fire and the vault of the sky seemed to crack overhead” [Как вдруг все всыхнуло, загорелась вся земля и как будто над головой треснул свод небес] (811, 19:393). The vault that Levin contemplates and which the priest has suggested is the result of God’s architectural handiwork has cracked open.

The rending of the heavens is a common biblical image used to depict God’s entry into creation, the best-known instance probably being the episode of Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan, but it occurs in the Old Testament as well. Another clue to the creator’s hidden presence is contained in the passage where the expression of “curtain of rain” occurs twice, but with two different words for curtain. As Levin approaches the oak we read:

“The white curtain of pouring rain had already invaded all the distant forest and half the nearby field and was moving quickly towards the Kolok”

Белый занавес проливного дождя уже захватывал весь дальний лес и половину ближнего поля и быстро подвигался к Колку. (811, 19:393).

But after the lighting bolt, the more theatrical “zanaves” is transformed into a metaphysical “zavesa”:

“Opening his dazzled eyes and peering through the thick curtain of rain that now separated him from the Kolok, Levin first saw with horror the strangely altered position of the familiar oak’s green crown in the middle of the wood.”

Открыв ослеплённые глаза, Левин сквозь густую завесу дождя, отделявшую его теперь от Колка, с ужасом увидел прежде всего странно изменённую свое положение зелёную макушку знакомого дуба в середине леса. (811, 19:393-94)
The juxtaposition of the two expressions for a curtain of rain forces the word “завеса” upon our notice. “Завеса” derives from the biblical lexicon, where it describes the thick curtain that separates the rest of the Jewish Temple from the “Holy of Holies”: the place where the spirit of God was believed to dwell. In the New Testament this curtain (“завеса”) functions both literally and metaphorically as the “dividing wall between man and God,” and the Synoptic Gospels describe how this curtain in the Jewish temple is rent in two at the moment when Christ breathes his last breath on the cross.  

In his final inner monologue, Levin realizes that he cannot explain what has happened to him: “And faith or not faith – I don’t know what it is – but this feeling has entered into me just as imperceptibly through suffering and has firmly lodged itself in my soul” [А вера – не вера – я не знаю, что это такое, – но чувство это так же незаметно вошло страданиями и твёрдо засело в душе] (817, 19:399). Levin has failed to notice – “так же незаметно” – how this feeling has lodged itself in his soul, but we have not.

The principle that Tolstoy advocates concerning how a work of art succeeds in making an impression may also apply to how an individual acquires a new vision of the world. Levin does not seem to realize that he has seen God in this moment. This vision, accompanied by the lightning, in addition to mirroring the inner flash he experiences after speaking to the peasant about living for the soul, is followed by Levin’s “senseless prayer” that his family not be crushed by the lightning struck oak (811, 19:394).

Before Levin’s final, well-known, cogitation on the night sky, in which he recognizes the creator, he arrives at the nursery, where Mitya recognizes his mother: “As soon as Levin came up to the bath, an experiment was performed for him, and it succeeded perfectly” [Как только Левин подошел к ванне, ему тотчас же был представлен опыт, и опыт вполне удался] (814, 19:396). The “experiment” (опыт) that is demonstrated for Levin is Mitya’s “preconscious” recognition of Kitty, his mother. And it is, presumably, in order to demonstrate this phenomenon to Levin that he has been summoned to the nursery. But the results of the experiment are not without wider effect. For, as Levin returns to the terrace to examine the stars, he no longer contemplates the vault, but in a similar manner to his son recognizes God:

It was already quite dark, and in the south, where he was looking, there were no clouds. The clouds stood on the opposite side. From there came flashes of lightening and the roll of distant thunder. Levin listened to the drops.

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32 The phrase “Holy of Holies” itself appears twice in Part 8 of the novel, in its first and last chapters. In the first instance Tolstoy uses it as a metaphor to describe Levin’s country estate – “the very holy of holies of the people, the depths of the country” [(Сергей) ехал отдохнуть на две недели и в самой святой святых народа, в деревенской глуши] (772, 19:353) – while the second mention, occurring in the novel’s final paragraph, describes the structure of Levin’s soul: “there will be the same wall between my soul’s holy of holies and other people” [так же будет стена между святая святых моей души и другими] (817, 19:399).
monotonously dripping from the lindens in the garden and looked at the familiar triangle of stars and the branching Milky Way passing through it. At each flash of lightening not only the Milky Way but the bright stars also disappeared, but as soon as the lightning died out they reappeared in the same places, as if thrown by some unerring hand.

Уже совсем стемнело, и на юге, куда он смотрел, не было туч. Тучи стояли с противной стороны. Оттуда вспыхивала молния и слышался дальний гром. Левин прислушивался к равномерно падающим с лип в саду каплям и смотрел на знакомый ему треугольник звезд и на проходящий в середине его млечный путь с его разветвлением. При каждой вспышке молнии не только млечный путь, но и яркие звезды исчезали, но, как только потухала молния, опять, как будто брошенные какой-то меткой рукой, появились на тех же местах.

The sky began as clear blue, was covered by clouds during the storm, and now, in these final moments of the novel, the clouds have parted – Levin’s sky is clear and the stars have come into view. The flash of lightning, which marked the turning point in Levin’s conversion, is replicated over and over again. During the storm, with the flash of lightning it was “as if the vault of the sky cracked overhead” [как будто над головой треснул свод небес]. Now, after each flash the stars reappear, “as if thrown by some unerring hand” [как будто брошенные какой-то меткой рукой]. In a manner similar to Mitya’s recognition of his mother, when Levin looks up at the sky he recognizes the *hand* of God.

This preconscious perception has been important throughout Levin’s conversion. It has been argued that Tolstoy is able to avoid pathetic fallacy by limiting the symbolic interpretation of the objective world to a given character’s consciousness. But such a limitation still allows for a discrepancy between what a character can see and what he perceives. This is certainly true of Levin, and in relation to seeing and perceiving, we might understand Levin’s conversion as one in which he learns to implement the hermeneutic tool of faith as a means of broadening his field of perception. Moreover, the material which is presented to his senses gains the potential to generate multiple possible perceptions, leading to multiple interpretations of the world. What Levin gains through his conversion is not the authority to say that one way of seeing the world is necessarily closer to the truth or “meaning” than another, rather he discovers the validity of his

33 See Morson, “Anna Karenina” in *Our Time*, 121.
34 Levin seems to be engaged in a mental act that is somewhere between “sight” and “recognition” as Viktor Shklovsky uses these terms to define his concept of “estrangement”: “The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of *sight* instead of *recognition*” [Целью искусства является дать ощущение вещи как видение, а не как узнавание] (my emphasis). Viktor Shklovsky, *The Theory of Prose*, trans. by Benjamin Sher, intro. Gerald L. Burns (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 6; *O terorii prozy* (Moskva: Sovetskii Pisatel’, 1983), 15.
specific point of reference, which operates cogently as a semantic locus. Levin realizes it is impossible, or at the least misguided, to try to extract from his personal revelation, by means of reason, an abstract understanding of all of reality – an understanding that would account for all of humanity’s relationship to the divine across time and space. Levin realizes that any potential disclosure of meaning is, therefore, necessarily tied to his specific and limited point of view.

Having recognized the hand of God as putting the stars in place, similar to his question about the validity of the vault – “Don’t I know that it is infinite space and not a round vault?” [Разве я не знаю, что это – бесконечное пространство и что оно не круглый свод?], Levin now asks about the stars: “Don’t I know that the stars don’t move?” [Разве я не знаю, что звезды не ходят?], while looking at the “bright planet that had already changed its position over the topmost branch of a birch” [изменившую уже свое положение к высшей ветке березы яркую планетку] (816, 19:398).

The syntax employed to describe what Levin is looking at is quite convoluted, but it is Levin’s perception, tied to a fixed position, that brings the disparate phenomena of the branches of the birch and the celestial bodies together into a single perception. Levin’s point of view has become a locus of meaning, a focal point of (meaningful) narrative, and not only for his own life, but for the novel itself. Levin assumes the semantic focal point of the narrative of the novel when the previous narrative focal point, or structuring principle (the story of Anna’s intrigue) is left open by Anna’s suicide.

Levin sees the stars moving, and thus even though he knows that his perception is an effect induced by the earth’s rotations, he posits his point of view as valid, as more correct (“более прав”), as meaningful. The shift from the abstract, rational (scientific) point of view, governed by reason, to the individual, subjective point of view, governed by revelation of and relationship to the divine is what allows Levin to make meaning in the world. His subjective view is substantiated, and thus his point of view is able to serve as source of meaning-making in his own, as well as the novel’s narrative.

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35 Ilya Kliger describes Levin’s insight as “structural” in the sense of related to his own subplot in the novel. He writes: “The real revelation is structural: Levin is granted insight into the nature of the narrative he has inhabited form the very beginning – he recognizes and sanctions his own partial externality in relation to existence,” The Narrative Shape of Truth, 161. Levin’s structural insight could be expanded to include the metaphor of the vault and the narrative structure of free indirect vision.

36 Eikhenbaum discusses how Levin dominates the second half of the novel, and that Tolstoy’s interest in the novel is only renewed once he is able to incorporate the significant themes of faith and “the meaning of life” that begin to come to the fore when Levin’s brother dies in part 5, chapter 20. One might argue that Anna’s suicide was the result, in part, of her ever-increasing inability to establish a meaningful relationship between her perceptions of the word and the “objective” state of the world. Evidence for argument can be found in Anna’s final inner monologue during her carriage ride. Where, unlike Levin’s increasing ability to synthesize his perceptions, Anna’s become increasingly fragmented and disjointed. Eikhenbaum, Tolstoi in Seventies, 122, 125.
Free Indirect Vision

One aspect of the “reality” which constitutes Tolstoy’s realism is the description of an individual, particular consciousness in the act of perception. Although it may be true that Tolstoy does not imbue his symbols with more semantic potential than is available to a character,37 in the case of Levin’s conversion, the boundary, which divides these two minds, is difficult to distinguish. This results from the free indirect vision, which operates in the description of the starry-night sky, where the objective field of perception and subjective act of perception balance between identity and difference. The statement Levin “began looking at the sky” [стал смотреть на небо] (815, 442) creates ambiguity with respect to the description of the sky that immediately follows. It is unclear what parts of the description make up what Levin sees when he looks at the sky and which parts are to read as an objective description of the meteorological phenomena that are occurring within Levin’s field of vision.

In Tolstoy’s descriptions of Levin’s meditations on the sky the question is not, who is thinking or speaking, but rather who is seeing. In other words, in whose field of vision can we locate these perceptions of the heavens? The first blue-sky scene is marked by a clear differentiation between Levin’s and Tolstoy’s conscious viewing, demarcated by the verbs “смотреть” and “видеть” (“to look at” and “to see”). But this difference is effaced in the storm scene, and altogether absent in the last view of the heavens. And yet, is this gradual erasure of the boundary between the minds of author and character not appropriate for describing the process of conversion, a discovery of faith, the reestablishment of the link between man and God? If we understand faith as a means of apprehending the transcendental, the free indirect vision employed by Tolstoy is an artistic device quite appropriate for describing the psychic state of the “faith experience,” creating, on the level of form, a fusion of the author’s and character’s consciousnesses.38

Free indirect vision requires that narrative signals like “he saw” or “she looked” preface a description of a visual field, which may not be identical to that the character’s, or a description of phenomena that are not visual, but are woven into these descriptions that are purportedly visual. Free indirect vision, like some instances of free indirect discourse, cannot be established using grammatical criteria alone.39 Given the

37 Gary Saul Morson (argues that this is the case, citing Levin’s mediation on the shell-like clouds in Part 3, Chapter 12 of the novel. Morson, “Anna Karenina” in Our Time, 121.
38 Gustafson describes a trend across Tolstoy’s works, commenting that all of Tolstoy’s heroes “although variously, go through such a series of cumulative revelations which result from sudden questions of faith posed by their lives in moments freed from custom and routine, often in the face of death. These revelations lead to new ways of seeing and being for all.” Gustafson, Leo Tolstoy, Resident Stranger, 196.
39 The question of vision is addressed by both Cohn and Genette in order to qualify their definitions of narrated monologue and focalization, respectively. See Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 110; Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay
significance of the visual for Tolstoy’s poetics, and especially for Anna Karenina, an analysis of his narrative techniques should account for visual and not just discursive categories. In Anna Karenina, free indirect vision describes passages that combine the dual modes of vision – observation and contemplation – into a single description.

Tolstoy’s description of Levin’s conversion might appropriately be called “Spiritual Realism,” where the exterior world, the subject’s consciousness, and the transcendental realm comprise the three operational categories of this realism. In Tolstoy it is necessary to introduce into the classic subject/object opposition the transcendental as a third term. The dual concept of vision, which in the western philosophical tradition comes to mean both “speculation with the eye of the mind and observation with the two eyes of the body,” can be modified to offer a framework for explaining how the transcendental finds its way into visual descriptions as instances of seeing not with the eye of the mind but with the eye of the soul. Contemplation in the sense associated with seeing with the eye of the mind as an enlightenment metaphor is “rational” in nature, while Tolstoy is at pains to establish the non-rational nature of Levin’s spiritual contemplation.

As Levin looks at the night sky, he engages in acts of observation and spiritual contemplation: he “looked at the familiar triangle of stars and the branching Milky Way passing through it. At each flash of lightning not only the Milky Way but the bright stars also disappeared, but as soon as the lightning died out they reappeared in the same places, as if thrown by some unerring hand” (815), where the “as if” signals the shift from observation, seeing with the eyes of the body, to spiritual contemplation, not seeing with the eye of mind, but in Anna Karenina, seeing with the eye of the soul the “unerring hand” of God throwing the stars into place. With each flash Levin not only unconsciously relives his vision of God that occurred during the earlier lightning storm, but also, as if, watches the recreation of the world, when the stars where set in place. The unerring hand is the hand of the creator; it is (also) the hand of Tolstoy. And yet this vision of the hand is not something that is explicitly attributed to Levin – there is no conclusive evidence to

in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin with a foreword by Jonathan Culler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 193. J. Hillis Miller argues that free indirect discourse as a term is more appropriate to its object of study – that is, discourse – than Girard Genette’s “focalization,” which is already a figurative rendering of a discursive phenomenon. J. H. Miller, “Henry James and ‘Focalization,’ or Why James Loves Gyp” in A Companion to Narrative Theory, edited by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz. Although Ann Banfield and Dorrit Cohn both strive to ground free indirect discourse (or in Cohn’s terminology, “narrated monologue”) in grammatical categories, but D. A. Miller convincingly demonstrates in a dazzling close reading, grammatical distinctions alone cannot capture every instance of this extremely flexible form. Miller shows how Austen’s repetition of the same phrase – “Emma could not forgive her” – “both at the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next” should be read, in the first instance, as an example of free indirect discourse and, in the second, indirect discourse. D. A. Miller, Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 63.

suggest that he is consciously seeing the hand of God, just as earlier he does not seem to be conscious that he has seen God. The technique of free indirect vision is employed to describe a character in the act of an unconscious perception that *unnoticeably (nezametno)* effects a change in perception.

An earlier example in the novel occurs during Levin’s early morning stroll through Moscow just before he proposes to Kitty:

And what he saw then, he afterwards never saw again. He was especially moved by children going to school, the grey-blue pigeons that flew down from the roof to the pavement, and the white rolls sprinkled with flour that some invisible hand had set out. These rolls, the pigeons and the two boys were unearthly beings. All this happened at the same time: a boy ran up to a pigeon and, smiling, looked at Levin; the pigeon flapped its wings and fluttered off, sparkling in the sun amidst the air trembling with snowdust, while the smell of baked bread wafted from the window as the rolls appeared in it. All this together was so extraordinarily good that Levin laughed and wept from joy.

Does the reader see what Levin gets to see but never sees again? The narrator, having suggested that what follows will describe what Levin saw instead describes Levin’s affective experience, what touched him, causing him to laugh and weep for joy. Levin’s vision transforms school children, pigeons, and pastries into “unearthly beings” [неземные существа]; even the rolls are transcendent. Moreover, what seems to be the description of an instantaneous act of visual observation (“all this happened at once”) is, on a closer reading, an act of spiritual contemplation, of seeing with the eye of the soul. Specifically notice that the rolls seem to be set out twice, where the verbs for the two instances are the same except the second is reflexive; the reflexive ending in the second instance functionally replaces the invisible hand in the first. This description not only blurs the distinction between what Levin is looking at versus what he is seeing, but it also smuggles into this description an act of contemplation, of seeing with the eye of the soul. Similar to Levin’s vision of the night sky, here he also, as if, sees [vidit] “the invisible [nevidimui] hand.”

It would seem, then, that Anna’s double vision results in her misperception of the world, while Levin’s new vision grants him access to a transcendent truth. Anna’s soul manifest itself in her failed vision; Levin’s vision causes a change in his soul; and the
eye serves as a channel or conduit between the internal and the external. Interpretations of the world emerge from this dialectical interplay between the eye and the soul, an interplay that constitutes the activity of the interpreting subject in *Anna Karenina*.

**The Novel Sees Double**

The principle of seeing double is the novel’s most conspicuous formal feature. Every character has multiple doubles, some of whom have the same name (Anna, Alexei), which partially bares this device. The coincidence of Vronsky’s and Karenin’s shared first name is referenced numerous times, and Anna’s dream further equates and confuses the two. When her near death experience brings the two together we even read: “Роли вдруг изменились” (18:437). But Levin, clearly, also serves as a double for Vronsky; when Dolly is visiting Anna’s estate, the narrator observes in a single-sentence paragraph: “Vronsky in this case acted not at all like Levin” [Вронский поступил в этом случае совсем не так, как Левин] (632, 19:208), and then Dolly, during the same conversation, “remembered Levin, who thought the opposite, being just as resolute in his opinions at his own table. But she loved Levin and was therefore on his side” [Она вспомнила, как Левин думающий противоположное, был так же решителен в своих суждениях у себя за столом. Но она любила Левина и потому была на его стороне] (633, 19:209). Another form of doubling is what R. F. Christian in his analysis of *War and Peace* calls situation rhymes: contrasting scenes that serve as foils for each other, such as Anna reading on a train, followed a few chapters later by Levin reading at home; the parallel circumstances of Vronsky’s courtship of Kitty and Karenin’s of Anna, or how both Anna and Levin seek relief from their spiritual despondency in activities of state reform. The horserace is told twice, from the perspectives of both Anna and Vronsky. A more nuanced example would be the mirroring between the scenes where Anna convinces Dolly to forgive Stiva, and the later scene where Dolly convinces Karenin to forgive Anna and not divorce her. The latter scene is then redoubled, when Stiva tries to convince Karenin to give Anna a divorce. This doubling produces a complex permutations of characters: Dolly takes the position vis-à-vis Karenin that Anna earlier occupied in relation to her. Character doubles become a function of the positions available to them by a particular social situation or scene. In this case, the forgiveness that Anna implores Dolly to offer Stiva returns to Anna through Dolly who pleads with Karenin. These situation rhymes would seem to allow for the flow of affect between the characters.

Other examples include how both Seryozha and Dolly’s children play a railroad game, and both Seryozha and Kitty imagine Anna in lilac. Dolly’s carriage ride to visit

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41 This nice example comes from Morson, “Prosaics,” 9.
42 Ilya Kliger observers: “One of Tolstoy’s favorite devises in his fiction before and after *Anna Karenina* is to tell the same story twice: the way it really happened, and the way it is disfigured by conventional expectations.” Tolstoy repeatedly deploys this device in *War and Peace*. In the case of the horse race, the two depictions are from Vronsky’s and Anna’s points of view, respectively. Kliger, *The Narrative Shape of Truth*, 156.
Anna mirrors Anna’s train ride, except that Dolly does not imagine herself to be a novelistic heroine having a grand affair, but rather imagines herself to be Anna. For readers, the two are one and the same. In a sense they also are for Dolly, who during her visit identifies with Anna as a reader might with a novelistic character by “mentally putting herself inside Anna”; consequently Dolly “understood how Anna could fall in love with [Vronsky]” [мысленно переносясь в Анну; она понимала, как Анна могла влюбиться в него] (624, 19:200). During the carriage ride she chooses not to examine herself in her pocket mirror, for fear of what the coachman might think of her. The act of looking in the mirror would really double Dolly as Anna, but its mere mention is enough to signal this scene’s function in the novel. And then there are the spatial oppositions: Moscow versus Petersburg, the city versus the country (671, 19:247), and Vozdvizhenskoe versus Pokrovskoe: “There were a great many ways of passing the time in Vozdvizhenskoe, and they were all different from what was done at Pokrovskoe” [Способов проводить время было очень много в Воздвиженском, и все были не те, какие употреблялись в Покровском] (621, 19:196). Even the denial of this comparative thinking points to its prevalence: “Don’t think I’m comparing…” [Не думай, чтобы я сравнивала…] (636, 19:213), Anna says to Dolly in reference to Betsy’s affair.

Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina seems to make a point of signaling the compositional principle of doubling, which constitutes one of the novel’s most conspicuous structural features. More significantly, however, this way of “seeing” the world as double is also the mode of subjective experience attributed to Anna. A double vision of the world is both the novel’s main structural principle and the state of the split subjectivity attributed to Anna as a result of her affair. The novel sees the world according to the same perceptual mode as Anna, and this mode is the form that the representation of consciousness takes in the novel. What Levin actually sees while meditating on the sky, for example, is his own dichotomized vision of the world, his own internal split, a projection of his soul onto the sky. This scene might be paired with Anna’s contemplation of nature, where she experiences for the second time objects going double in her soul and attributes elements of her subjective experience to the her perception of nature.

The novel’s famous first line announcing this principle of double vision at the same time that it divides the world into happy and unhappy families. In a conversation among the Shcherbatsky women on Levin’s estate late in the novel, one almost gets the sense that Dolly has read (and then perhaps forgotten) these opening lines, as she uses this generalized wisdom to frame the fates of Kitty and Anna: “‘How happily it turned out for Kitty that Anna came then,’ said Dolly, ‘and how unhappily for her. Precisely the

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43 Gary Saul Morson, commenting on this scene, writes “In this novel, mirrors recall Anna, who frequently looks at herself, and so Dolly’s checked actions suggests both her attraction to and repulsion from Anna’s choice.” Morson, “Anna Karenina” in Our Time, 44.

44 Gary Saul Morson boldly states that Dolly is the novel’s hero because she represents the novel’s moral center; when other characters disagree with Dolly, they are wrong. In this moment Dolly seems to also think like novel in which she finds herself. Morson “Prosaics,” 5.
opposite,’ she added, struck by the thought. ‘Anna was so happy then, and Kitty considered herself unhappy. How completely opposite! I often think about her’” [— Как счастливо вышло тогда для Кити, что приехала Анна, — сказала Долли, — и как несчастливо для нее. Вот именно наоборот, — прибавила она, пораженная своей мыслью. — Тогда Анна так была счастлива, а Кити себя считала несчастливой. Как совсем наоборот!] (556, 19:129). Dolly is so struck by this thought that she repeats her formulation concerning the reversal of Anna’s and Kitty’s fates. Here Anna and Kitty double each other, but the form of this observation also doubles the novel’s opening lines; both Dolly and the novel “think” about or seem to “see” the world in the same way. Dolly’s logic is disturbing, as it assumes that the acquisition of happiness may be a zero sum game in the world of the novel.

What does the correspondence between the form of Anna Karenina’s subjectivity and the form of Anna Karenina the novel suggest about Tolstoy’s conception of subjectivity? This chapter has attempted to describe the relationship between vision and subjectivity in Anna Karenina by making recourse to vision as a dual concept that in its development in the modern period produced a discourse founded on metaphors that link the activities of contemplation and observation. In Anna Karenina the descriptions of characters’ vision of the world relies on these metaphors in such a way that the difference between these two modes is obfuscated, problematizing a strict division of the concept of vision into these two categories, and demonstrating that acts of seeing and acts of interpretation are interdependent and perhaps even inseparable. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, this is not a surprising insight. The more compelling question that this chapter has attempted to pose regards the understanding of a subject’s projective presence in the world, which assumes that subject’s vision of the world is necessarily constituted by internal psychic structures. The descriptions of Levin’s sky gazing could easily be read in terms of such a projective presence, as has, less literally, Anna’s vision of the world been read by Gary Saul Morson: Anna projects a novelistic closure onto the “real” world resulting in her own “tragic” novelistic death.45

In his work on the concept of the Aesthetic Subject, Leo Bersani proposes a different, non-projective, mode of the subject’s being in the world that he describes as correspondences of forms “that are free of both an antagonistic dualism between human consciousness and the world it inhabits and the anthropomorphic appropriation of that world.”46 “Psychoanalysis,” Bersani claims, “has been the most authoritative modern reformulation of the Cartesian and Hegelian opposition (qualified by Hegel as ‘necessary absolutely’) between Nature and Spirit or between the res extensa and thought” describing, in his words, the subject’s projective presence in the world.47 In his essay “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject,” having first offered a projective reading of the narrator’s presence in the world, Bersani reverses his position: “And yet I want to propose, against the reading I’ve just offered, that interiority in La Grande Beune, far from refashioning the world into the structure of a psychic obsession, is actually

45 See Morson, “Anna Karenina’s Omens.”
47 Ibid., 162.
produced by the world. The narrator’s subjectivity is an effect of external reality. […] The narrator receives from the world the material that will be fashioned into his particular fantasy of violence.” Borrowing the concept of the Aesthetic Subject, we might read Anna’s subjectivity as “an effect of external reality,” whereby she not only receives from the world the material that will be fashioned into her particular fantasy of reality, but also borrows the form of that world.

The motif of the candle can be read as such a borrowing. The candle is referenced in Anna’s response to Vronsky’s departure to visit his mother, where the form that Anna’s consciousness takes is supplied to her from her past experience: “‘He’s gone. It’s over!’ Anna said to herself, standing at the window. And in response to this question the impressions of the horrible dream and of the darkness when the candle had gone out merged into one, filling her heart with cold terror” (754, 19:333). Anna associates the dream and the candle going out, but it is not an association that she makes consciously, but rather one that is offered to her from the world of the text as an “impression.” Just before her suicide, Anna explicitly thinks in terms of this metaphor: “Why not put out the candle, if there’s nothing more to look at, if it’s vile to look at it all?” [Отчего же не потушить свечу, когда смотреть больше не на что, когда гадко смотреть на всё это?] (766-67, 19:347). It is difficult to say if the candle as a metaphor for life is first Anna’s or Tolstoy’s. Here it is Anna’s and in the final lines of part 7, it will be Tolstoy’s: “And the candle by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief and evil, flared up brighter than ever, lit up for her all that had once been darkness, sputtered, grew dim, and went out for ever” [И свеча, при которой она читала исполненную тревог, обманов, горя и зла книгу, вспыхнула более ярким, чем когда-нибудь, светом, осветила ей всё то, что прежде было во мраке, затрещала, стала меркнуть и навсегда потухла] (768, 19:349).

Bersani further describes the nature of these correspondences between subject and object: “There is neither a subject-object dualism nor a fusion of subject and object; there is rather a kind of looping movement between the two. The world finds itself in the subject and subject finds itself in the world. What the world finds in the subject (in addition to physical correspondences) is a certain activity of consciousness, which partially reinvents the world as it repeats it.” The activity of the novel’s consciousness, in the case of Anna Karenina, its double vision, is found operating within the represented subjects of that world, even constituting their subjectivity.

Thus, another way of thinking about the subject’s presence in the world is possible, one that seeks out the various correspondences of forms that not only relate the self to the world but elucidate a mode of Tolstoyan intersubjectivity that explains how it might be possible for individuals to share dreams. Anna and Vronsky’s shared dream, perhaps the best evidence for intersubjective connectedness on the level of an unconscious that exceeds the two characters as individual subjectivities, results from their presence at both the initial train accident and the consummation of their affair; they are

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48 Ibid., 167.
49 Ibid., 168-69.
both subject to similar psychic accretions, drawing on the same material from the external world that similarly adheres within them.

Bersani’s account of a subjectivity that does not rely on the antagonism between subject and object seems almost utopian: “It is, I have been arguing, only the [notion of a nonsubjective interiority] that might speak persuasively of a subject inherently reconciled with the world.”\(^{50}\) His desire to achieve an “at-homeness in the world’s being” repeats the sentiment expressed by Lukács one hundred years earlier in the first lines of his *Theory of the Novel*: “Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages in new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars.”\(^{51}\) While Bersani speaks of correspondence of forms as a hope for reconciliation between subject and world, Lukács was still looking heavenward, up at the stars, and speaking of a correspondence between the soul and the stars, predicated upon their shared “essential nature.” This age, the age of the Greeks, according to Lukács, has passed, and both Bersani and Lukács are compelled to abandon the transcendental. Bersani implicitly excludes the category of the transcendental through his singular focus on form, which obscures the metaphysical question of essence, as if the question of the soul’s ontological status might be circumvented by speaking only of a mind, grounded in the physical world, or of a subject, grounded in language. Lukács, on the other hand, explicitly dismisses the category of the transcendental as the enabling condition for the emergence of the novel as an artistic form: “The novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God.”\(^{52}\) If Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* does provide a counterexample to Lukács’s conception of the modern novel as form that necessarily emerges under these historico-philosophical conditions, and I think that it does, then this is because Tolstoy has not given up the category of the transcendental; or to recast this philosophical position in artistic terms, *Anna Karenina*’s creator is not absent from his text but merely invisible, able to be seen with the eye of the soul.

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., 171.


\(^{52}\) Ibid., 88.
Coda

The Adventures of Epic Literature:
Reading Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* as a *Bildungsroman*

Critics have long wondered whether Georg Lukács’s influential *The Theory of the Novel* is best understood as a work of literary theory. One scholar goes so far as to suggest that this book reads “as a novel or a fantasy,” expressing its author’s “search through literary history for . . . the lost Blessed Ages, for immanence, for God.”\(^1\) Another reads it for metaphors with biographical connotations, such as the notorious “transcendental homelessness,” evoking Lukács’s own condition as an exile at the time of historical catastrophes.\(^2\) In his intellectual history of the central literary theories of the twentieth century, *The Master and the Slave*, Galin Tihanov describes Lukács’s theory as “the story of the genre” that places the novel within the framework of “the story of the world,” told “from the standpoint of a particular philosophy of history.”\(^3\) (This philosophy of history is, of course, Hegelian.) In this coda, I will expand on these suggestive remarks by reading *The Theory of the Novel* as a work of literature – a novel of sorts. Focusing on Part I, I identify the “hero” as well as roughly establish the “plot” of this historico-philosophical “novel.” Moreover, in sketching the contours of Lukács’s story of the novel as a genre, I will try to identify the generic structure of *The Theory of the Novel* itself, arguing that Lukács’s *Theory* bears the form of a *Bildungsroman*, whose hero, *epic literature*, follows a difficult path from childhood to maturity, ending (contrary to Hegel) in a crisis.

A comment is due on the specific understanding of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* that informs my analysis. In what is considered the first definition of this genre, from the early 1820s, Karl Morgenstern speaks of a work that “portrays the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness.”\(^4\) Dilthey’s influential definition elaborates this formula: “A regulated development within the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage.”\(^5\) In a word, the *Bildungsroman* is a biography presented as a progressive succession of “stages of development,” which are unified by a teleological trajectory.

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My reading of The Theory of the Novel as a Bildungsroman relies in part on the well-known idea that there are structural similarities between Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and the Bildungsroman. Scholars have long argued that Hegel’s treatise follows the pattern of this genre. Indeed, many read The Phenomenology as a Bildungsroman of sorts: Hegel’s “hero,” Geist, follows the plot determined by individual Bildung, from early stages to maturity. When I propose that there are structural similarities between Lukács’ Theory of the Novel and the genre of the Bildungsroman – as though Lukács’s “hero,” epic literature, follows the path from “normative childlikeness” of the epic to “virile maturity” of the modern novel – I draw the connection by way of the Phenomenology, which had obviously informed Lukács’s approach to the novel.

This connection yields three specific generic features of the Bildungsroman that evidently structure Lukács’s Theory: 1) the hero’s formation occurs in stages, which are unified by a biographical form; 2) the hero passes through the necessary phases of alienation and reconciliation along his journey; and 3) the biography of the hero is organically embedded in a larger historical narrative.

Although Lukács writes about various genres, his study has one primary focus, one abstract or conceptual “hero,” if you will, around which he will construct his Theory. The work’s subtitle indicates this focus, describing the Theory of the Novel as “a historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature.” For Lukács, the most significant forms of epic literature are those of epic and novel, and his description of these two contrasting genres implies an organic relationship between them which exceeds that of a simple opposition or even a foil. This relationship between epic and novel receives a fuller explication in the well-known lines that open chapter 3, “Epic and Novel”:

The epic and the novel, these two major forms of great epic literature, differ from one another not by their authors’ fundamental intentions but by the given historico-philosophical realities with which these authors were confronted. The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality. (56)

“The novel is the epic.” As we will see, Lukács will repeat this formulation with various qualifications. Here, he defines the novel as an epic, that is, as a form of epic literature.

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6 The parallel between Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and the genre of Bildungsroman goes back to Josiah Royce’s Lectures on Modern Idealism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919); M. H. Abrams used it in application to literature in his Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1971).

that arises in an age “where the totality of life is no longer directly given.” This definition of the novel as epic, that is, as a form of epic literature, implies an organic relationship between historical periods and the various forms assumed by epic literature in these periods. Authors of epic literature, through their confrontation with the troubled philosophical reality of the modern age (Zeitalter) produce the novel.

Chapter 4 of The Theory relates the genres of epic and novel to one another through a figure of biological life stages. “The novel is the art-form of virile maturity [gereifte Männlichkeit], in contrast to the normative childlikeness [normative Kindlichkeit] of the epic (the drama form, being in the margin of life, is outside the ages of man [Lebensaltern] even if these are conceived as a priori categories or normative stages)” (71). Lukács genders masculine the genre of the novel: “the novel is the art-form of virile maturity” – gereifte Männlichkeit. This marks the first appearance of this formulation, which occurs four times in a space of 15 pages. Implicit in this formulation is that the novel is fully formed, fully developed, powerful, even sexually potent, metaphorically speaking. The form of the epic, in comparison, is figured as “normative childlikeness”: normative meaning that we are to understand these developmental categories as “normative stages,” the “ages of man” – “Lebensaltern.”

Noticing that Lukács conceptualizes The Theory of the Novel as a Bildungsroman, as a story describing the Bildung of epic literature, will allow us to grasp how the novel relates to and experiences the world in which it finds itself. Lukács explicitly links the definition of the novel’s form to a problematic conception of the world when he offers the following explanation. This is the second time Lukács defines the form of the novel as “virile maturity”:

The novel is the art-form of virile maturity: this means that the completeness [Abschließen] of the novel’s world, if seen objectively, is an imperfection [Unvollkommenes], and if subjectively experienced, it amounts to resignation. The danger by which the novel is determined is twofold: either the fragility of the world may manifest itself so crudely that it will cancel out the immanence of meaning which the form demands, or else the longing [die allzu starke Sehnsucht] for the dissonance to be resolved, affirmed and absorbed back into the work may be so great that it will lead [verführen] to a premature closing [Schließen] of the circle of the novel’s world, causing the form to disintegrate into disparate, heterogeneous parts. The fragility of the world may be superficially disguised but it cannot be abolished; consequently this fragility will appear in the novel as unprocessed raw material, whose weak cohesion will have been destroyed. (71-72)

What does it mean that “The novel is the art-form of virile maturity”? Lukács tells us what “this means,” but his explication seems to only further complicate his definition of the novel’s form; for it is not immediately clear how figuring the novel as the art-form of virile maturity means what Lukács says it does about either the subjective or objective experience of the world. Attending to the figure of erotic desire in this passage elucidates this connection between the novel and the world.
Epic literature, when it reaches the developmental stage of the novel, finds itself in an extremely precarious position: the novel is “determined” or defined by a “danger” that threatens to “disintegrate” its form: in other words, what the novel seeks may lead to its destruction. In fact, what threatens to destroy the novel’s form is the strength of its desire. Taking a closer look at Lukács’s statement, we see that the novel may not be able to resist “the all too strong desire” [die allzu starke Sehnsucht] that “seduces” [verführen] it into effect a premature closure [Schließen]. Lukács uses a noun with the same root – Abschließen – to describe the completeness of the novel’s world, a completeness that, “if seen objectively, is an imperfection.” And yet, as he goes on to say, “if subjectively experienced, it amounts to resignation.” The novel, as the art-form of virile maturity, finds itself in a double-bind vis-à-vis its desire. On the one hand, the novel experiences the desire to effect the closure of its world, a desire that Lukács figures as a seduction or sexual temptation; on the other hand, the novel experiences this imperfect closure, or incomplete completeness, as resignation, which would seem to imply the impotence of the novel’s desire before its object – the world. This impotence results from the novel’s knowledge that if it were to succumb to its desire, this desire would not be fully realized, as its achievement would be premature, an incomplete completeness. The paradox here is that the strength of the desire that seduces the novel into effecting a premature closure of the world effectively renders that desire impotent. A great irony structures the relationship between the novel and the world: the world’s weakness – what Lukács describes as her “fragility” – is precisely what threatens to vanquish the novel’s virile strength. The world’s fragility overwhelms the novel through its intrinsic quality of excess: its fragility is the “unprocessed raw material” that resists the assimilating and organizing function of form as such.

Lukács theoretically develops the concept of irony in The Theory of the Novel, but here it is present as an organizing force that governs the relationships among the protagonists of Lukács’s Bildungsroman. If later he tells us that “The irony of the novel is the self-correction of the world’s fragility” (75), this statement only begins to make sense because here he shows us the operation of this irony in the novel’s relationship to the world.

Another protagonist emerges in this last passage: the World [die Welt]. In The Theory of the Novel, this protagonist, I would like to suggest, also goes by the various names of nature (die Natur) and reality (die Wirklichkeit). The drama of Lukács’s Theory, the Bildungsroman plot that we are uncovering here, revolves around the fractured relationship between the novel and the world, as the novel tries to recapture the happy childhood experience of the epic. Recall the famous first lines of The Theory of the Novel: “Happy are those ages” (29), when “the world is wide and yet it is like a home” (29). Along the way, however, (as Lukács quotes Novalis) “the novel’s author […] lost the poet’s radiant youthful faith ‘that destiny and soul are twin names for a single concept’” (85). The novel is certainly past its youth, having left the “scattered happy moments” (57) of childhood far behind, and now faces a problem. This problematic moment represents a key stage in the Bildung of the Epic Literature, which, when it reaches the stage of novel, finds itself alienated from the world. Lukács famously formulates this alienated stage when he writes: “for the novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness” (41).
What, or to continue reading The Theory of the Novel as literature, who is the character that so radically alters the relationship between epic literature and the world? A third actor, God, is introduced into the drama of the novel’s desire for the world. The experience of the world as a home, the experience of the childlike epic, depends directly on the presence of a “divinity that rules the world,” who “is familiar and close to [man] as a father is to his small child” (30). While the novel’s “Estrangement from nature (the first nature) […] is only a projection of man’s experience of his self-made environment as a prison instead of as a parental home” (64). God, divinity, the father mediates the relationship between man and the world, between the novel and reality; and if this “parental home” is lost, it is because God has abandoned the world. The concept of home, not so much a spatial or even temporal category, describes rather a relationship between protagonists; it describes the relationship between the novel and the world as mediated by a divine father. This mediating function surfaces on a linguistic level: what the English renders as “parental home” appears in the German as a single word – Vaterhaus. The father’s absence proves problematic for the relationship between epic literature and the world, and, in Lukács’ logic, produces epic literature’s maturation into the form of the novel. Lukács connects God’s abandonment of the world to the emergence of the novel’s form in one of his most well known statements about the genre.

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God; the novel hero’s psychology is demonic; the objectivity of the novel [is] the mature man’s knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality [die Objektivität des Romans die männlich reif Einsicht, daß der Sinn die Wirklichkeit niemals ganz zu durchdringen vermag], but that, without meaning, reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality: these are merely different ways of saying the same thing. They define the productive limits of the possibilities of the novel—limits which are drawn from within—and, at the same time, they define the historico-philosophical moment at which great novels become possible, at which they grow into a symbol of the essential thing that needs to be said. The mental attitude [Die Gesinnung] of the novel is virile maturity [die gereifte Männlichkeit], and the characteristic structure of its matter is discreteness, the separation between interiority and adventure. (Translation altered, Ch. 5, 88, 84)

I have altered the translation slightly, restoring the original punctuation to the first sentence, so as to make it clear that Lukács intended the first three clauses, separated in the German by semicolons, to be equivalent. What fascinating logic governs the parallelism that structures the first three clauses of this definition of the novel? Lukács tells us “these are merely different ways of saying the same thing,” and yet, while it seems plausible that the first two statements are equivalent, the third clause seems to run away from, or perhaps run away with us both syntactically (through its multiplication of qualifications) and semantically (in that it is precisely meaning that here comes under scrutiny). What, in other words, does meaning’s inability to penetrate reality have to do with these first two statements about the novel?

This passage makes the fourth instance of the phrase “virile maturity” (gereifte Männlichkeit) to define the novel; here it describes the genre’s “mental attitude” (Die
Gesinnung), its way of thinking. In fact, the passage actually begins with a variation on this description. The third clause contains a phrase that the English renders as “the mature man’s knowledge,” while the German, die männlich reif Einsicht, represents a grammatical variation on “virile maturity.” If the previous three definitions describe the form of the novel in these terms, then here Lukács makes clear that this characteristic also conditions the novel’s psychic life. The novel realizes that it cannot satisfy the phallic desire that defines it; it knows that “meaning can never quite penetrate reality.” In German, the grammatical masculine gender of “meaning,” der Sinn, perhaps better translated “sense,” as well as the grammatically feminine “reality,” die Wirklichkeit nicely reinforce this erotic, epistemophilic figure. To begin to answer our question, then, it would seem that God’s abandonment of the world becomes equivalent to the novel’s insight concerning its impotence, if we read God as occupying the symbolic position that mediates the novel’s desire for the world. The novel is both aware of the strength and futility of its desire and that the father’s/God’s absence creates this double bind.

God’s abandonment of the world serves as the traumatic event that propels the novel into a new stage of development, forces it to grow up, producing within it something like a subjectivity or interiority. Having described this state of crisis, Lukács’s narrative about the development of epic literature breaks off. Interestingly, it was the historical trauma of the First World War that precipitated the writing of The Theory. Consequently, to the extent that the First World War threatened the conceptual possibilities of thinking in terms of historical teleology, we can see how Lukács’s narrative about the failed or suspended development of epic literature catches up with the historical conditions that served as The Theory’s original narrative impetus. And yet, by casting a theory of the novel in the form of a Bildungsroman, Lukács preserves the concept of historical teleology upon which this genre is founded, which in turn preserves some optimism that a dialectical synthesis of epic and novel may still be possible. As he writes in the work’s final pages, this synthesis may have already been achieved in the works of Dostoevsky, who he claims did not write novels (152). Lukács’s hope in Dostoevsky is markedly Dostoevskian (here we might recall Dostoevsky’s oft-quoted “Beauty will save the world”). But even if we don’t subscribe to such utopian readings, Lukács’s theory does leave us with the very relevant theoretical question as to how Dostoevsky’s novels may in fact mark a formally innovative departure from their 19th-century European counterparts. Or, to deploy Lukács’s central rhetorical figure, it leaves us wondering if perhaps God has not abandoned the world of the Russian novel…
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