

**L. N. TOLSTOY AND N. N. STRAKHOV:
LABYRINTHS OF CREATIVE COHESIONS**

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To this day Nikolai Strakhov's three articles about *War and Peace*—published in 1866, 1869, and 1870—remain among the most sensitive and underappreciated attempts to grasp the novel's mysterious holism. By discussing the novel's overarching artistic and philosophical vision, Strakhov became one of the first critics to appreciate that "labyrinth of cohesions," which, in an 1876 letter to Strakhov, Tolstoy would define as "the essence of art." Strakhov was also one of the first critics to touch on an aspect of Tolstoy's art that has thrilled readers for generations: how Tolstoy's "realism" feels so real, so true to life, and yet at the same time captures the extraordinariness of everyday reality. The critic asserts that, while no "abstract paraphrase" will do justice to *War and Peace*, the novel *does* do justice to the complexity of life: "A complete picture of human life. A complete picture of Russia of those days. A complete picture of the things in which men set their happiness and greatness, their sorrow and their shame. That is what *War and Peace* is."¹ Strakhov's assessment is absolutely correct. In this paper I confirm the accuracy of Strakhov's profound insights, and I reconstruct his important arguments. This seems to me to be all the more important in our current post-modernist intellectual climate, in which claims about the unity of an artistic text or the wholeness of the world are often considered naïve and passé. But a striving for such a unified conception of the universe was at the very core of Tolstoy's art and thought. We must get back to the basics, to understanding the essence of Tolstoy's beautiful and humane vision on its own terms. Strakhov can help us do just that.

For Strakhov, as for the other contemporary critics, the novel was incomprehensible; not, however, because it lacked a guiding principle, but rather because of its artistic richness and philosophical profundity, which are beyond the reach of the ordinary, rational intellect: "Count L. N. Tolstoy is a poet in the old and best sense of the word. He carries within him the deepest questions of which man is capable. He sees things clearly and opens up to us the most sacred secrets of life and death."² And then, in a not so subtle swipe at the radical intelligentsia, who mocked the novel's refined "elegance" and "philosophy of stagnation,"³ Strakhov asks: "How do you want people to understand him, people for whom such questions completely fail to exist, and who are so obtuse or, if you wish, so intelligent that they don't find any secrets either within themselves or around them?"⁴

To appreciate the uniqueness in its time of Strakhov's approach to *War and Peace*, we may contrast it with another important contemporary article, "*Staroe Barstvo*" ("The Old Gentry"), published in 1868, by Dmitry Pisarev. As was characteristic of the radical intelligentsia, Pisarev used Tolstoy's novel as a springboard for his discussion

about the “pathology of Russian society” of the era of Alexander I, and by extension, of the current era, as well.⁵ In *War and Peace*, Pisarev argues, Tolstoy “poses and decides the question about what happens to human minds and characters in those conditions which create the possibility for people to get by without knowledge, without energy, and without labor.”⁶ Pisarev is referring here, of course, to the gentry class, one of the radical intelligentsia’s favorite whipping boys. Of the two characters in the novel whom Pisarev censures--Boris Drubetskoi and Nikolai Rostov—he sees Boris as the lesser of the two evils. Despite his aristocratic pretensions, he is a practical-minded careerist who possesses skills that could potentially make him a productive member of society. Nikolai, on the other hand, is a self-indulgent and weak-willed child of privilege. Boris “seeks solid and tangible benefits” for himself, whereas “Rostov wants more than anything, and come what may, bustle, glamour, strong sensations, effective scenes and bright pictures.”⁷

The reason Boris “is more intelligent and has a deeper character than Rostov” is that he is grounded in empirical reality. He has “a far greater capacity to observe attentively and to make sensible generalizations about surrounding phenomena,”⁸ by which Pisarev means specifically material facts. “With the proper development of his talents Boris would make a good investigator while Rostov with the same proper development of his would make in all probability an exceptional artist, poet, musician, or painter.”⁹ Without denigrating the value of art as a professional pursuit (Pisarev is himself a literary critic, after all), the critic makes it clear that a rational, scientific approach to the world is preferable. Still, Nikolai might at least leverage his penchant for “bustle” and “glamour” into a socially useful artistic career, in which he can share his “strong sensations” and interest in “effective scenes and bright pictures” with the rest of society.

When dealing with *War and Peace* as a work of art, Pisarev creatively resolves his deep-seated distrust of art created by an idle aristocrat of Tolstoy’s ilk. The critic does not deny that *War and Peace* is an important work of art. On the contrary, he argues that

precisely because the author spent much time, labor, and love, that truth, throbbing with the life of the facts themselves, that truth, bursting forth apart from the personal sympathies and convictions of the story-teller, is especially valuable for its irresistible persuasiveness.¹⁰

For Pisarev Tolstoy’s authorial eye becomes a photographic lens, accurately if accidentally reflecting the objective reality that gave rise to it. *War and Peace* is, in spite of itself, a valuable sociological document,¹¹ because it reveals the concrete, empirical reality of the world that produced it. Tolstoy’s creative imagination, his personal attitudes and subjective perception of objective reality do not interest Pisarev. In fact, it is as if Pisarev believed that an artist of Tolstoy’s caliber—and with ample time to shape his careful observations into art—must necessarily record reality with total accuracy. It is no wonder, then, that Nikolai Rostov so incensed Pisarev. One of the novel’s expansive personalities, Nikolai’s impulsiveness, sense of life’s poetry, and deep patriotism, often expressed with childlike abandon, are the bane of Pisarev’s sober faith in the supreme importance of objective reality. Any individual who strives—through reverie, art, or any other means—to overcome or otherwise transform that reality is, for Pisarev, self-

delusional and a drag on social progress. Objective reality exists outside of our subjective consciousness; it is something that “you can’t conceal in a bag.”¹²

Strakhov’s article about *War and Peace* shares two assumptions with Pisarev’s article: that the novel presents an indisputable truth about the world, and that its capacity to do so lies in the author’s great artistry. But here is where the similarity between the two critics ends. For Pisarev, the author is a passive vehicle through which objective reality is filtered. Strakhov, however, focuses on the productive act, not just the final result, of the author’s creative engagement with his world. For Strakhov the human subject—and this includes both the author and his characters—do not merely exist in the world. They do not merely see or fail to see external reality for what it is. They participate in the world, they proactively engage in it, seeking its hidden meanings, searching out its deeper truths. According to Strakhov, Tolstoy does not merely present life’s phenomena; as an artist, he penetrates them, he transforms them artistically and illuminates their inner essence. For Strakhov, then, “what” *War and Peace* reveals about the world is not simply illustrated by, but is contained *in*, its artistic “how.”

“There is realism and realism [*Realizm realizmu rozn*’],” Strakhov writes. “Art essentially can never reject the ideal and always strives for it; and the more clearly and vividly one senses that striving in the creation of realism, the loftier that realism is, the nearer it is to being truly artistic.”¹³ Herein lies the difference, according to Strakhov, between Tolstoy’s realism and that of his less gifted contemporaries who

turn their souls into a simple photographic instrument and photograph with it whatever pictures happen to arise: Then simple-minded readers, imagining that before them appear genuine artists, will be not a little surprised upon seeing that absolutely nothing comes of these writers. The matter, however, is understandable; these writers were faithful to reality not because it was brightly illuminated by their ideal, but because they themselves did not see further than that which they depicted. They stood on the same level as the reality that they described.¹⁴

Although Strakhov does not name the specific practitioners of what he calls “photographic realism,” we may assume that he is referring to those prose writers who became popular in Russia in the 1860’s for their stark, journalistic reportage of the various social ills.¹⁵ Strakhov’s distaste for these writers stemmed, in part, from his distaste for their radical political positions. Interestingly, though, Strakhov’s critique here of “photographic realism” focuses not on its misguided ideology, but on its creative and philosophical shallowness. What Strakhov disliked most about the politics of the radicals of his generation—their privileging of the material over the spiritual; their mechanistic and atomistic, as opposed to organic, sense of life; their inability to recognize an ideal of transcendent beauty in the world—is precisely what he disliked in the art of the “photographic realists,” as well. Like their counterparts in the political sphere, these realist writers only see objective empirical facts, never the unifying truths and higher spiritual beauty contained within those facts.

Tolstoy, on the other hand, is able to rise above this “photographic” realism and to “penetrate that poetry which is hidden in reality.”¹⁶ Tolstoy’s realism is inspired by, indeed infused with, the ideal: “A realistic depiction of the human soul was essential [to

Tolstoy] in order that a genuine realization of the ideal, however weak, might appear before us all the more powerfully and all the more truthfully.”¹⁷ The novel celebrates the “genuine inner beauty, [the] genuine human dignity” of the individual, not by means of abstract generalization or by romantic distortion, but by capturing “each feature, each trace of genuine inner beauty, of genuine human dignity” of the human individual, struggling nobly against the implacable forces of history.¹⁸ “The broader subject of the author,” Strakhov writes, “is, simply, *man*.”¹⁹ Tolstoy’s ideal, for Strakhov, is thus not a vision of Utopia. It exists “in the pure light of day” (*v rovnom dnevnom svete*)²⁰: right here, right now, within this imperfect world, and within every ordinary, imperfect human being that lives and strives for meaning in this world. Tolstoy “tries to find and define with complete precision, in what way and in what degree man’s striving for the ideal (*ideal’nye stremeniia cheloveka*) are realized in actual life.”²¹ Tolstoy’s art does not pit the “wonderful life” (*prekrasnaia zhizn’*) against “ordinary everyday reality” (*obyknovennaia budnichnaia deistvitel’nost’*).²² The author’s ideal does not emerge only in special moments or in certain privileged scenes. In *War and Peace* it can be felt in the artistic fabric of the entire text, in that mysterious authorial voice that both reveals the imperfect world to us with utter verisimilitude, while at the same time illuminating life’s poetic grandeur. And yet, as readers of the novel have discovered, to their delight or dismay, one of its most original features is the existence of a second authorial voice – polemical, rational, severe – that regularly punctuates the text, rudely puncturing that shimmering narrative fabric.

Thinker and Artist

This second voice confronts us with a fundamental problem: In a novel that celebrates the world’s grandeur and illuminates the extraordinariness of the ordinary, how are we to make sense of the openly polemical historical-philosophical treatises, which are cantankerous, rigidly rational intrusions into an otherwise expansive vision of life? For many contemporary critics the authorial digressions were only one of many examples of the work’s general structural confusion and indeterminacy. In his article about *War and Peace*, published in 1870, Strakhov went further than his contemporaries in helping to pinpoint what is problematic about the theoretical essays in the context of the novel. For him, the shortcoming of the essays is not in its ideas. “The philosophical arguments of Count L. N. Tolstoy are in and of themselves extremely good,” he writes. “If he had published them in a separate book, then it would be impossible not to call him an excellent thinker, and the book would be one of those few fully deserving of the title of philosophy.”²³ The problem with the essays is not that they interfere with the novel’s generic integrity, as other critics emphasized, but that they detract from the work’s artistic integrity and overall philosophical spirit. They reduce the celebration of life’s fullness, evoked in the artistic portions, to a one-sided system of ratiocination, which, dissects rather than integrates, and thus gives an “incomplete” picture of life:

[The] formulas about knowledge are in and of themselves cold, passionless, indifferent; they capture neither beauty, nor good, nor truth, that is to say, that which is higher than all else on earth, in which consists the most essential interest of our life... For science the world becomes a dead, one-sided play of reasons and consequences; but for a living person the world has beauty, life, it constitutes an

object of despair or delight, blessing or repulsion. . . . The mind finds nothing in the world besides some sort of endless and senseless mechanism; but the heart shows us another meaning, which at bottom is singularly important. And so, the primary meaning of *War and Peace* is not to be found in the philosophical formulas of Count L. N. Tolstoy, but in the chronicle itself, where the life of history is illustrated with such amazing fullness, where there are so many profound discoveries for our heart.²⁴

The larger issue that Strakhov illuminates here is the same one with which Tolstoy himself grappled in his reflections about art throughout the late 1860's and 1870's: the *difference* between an artistic representation of the world, and rational understanding. Tolstoy and Strakhov shared the belief that art, with its ability to speak in images, can reveal things that science, or abstract philosophy cannot. That Strakhov, who oversaw the editing of the 1873 edition of *War and Peace*, agreed with Tolstoy's decision to remove the theoretical essays, reveals the extent to which his artistic and philosophical judgements jibed with Tolstoy's own. Strakhov, did not so much change Tolstoy's mind as guide him towards—and perhaps even help him articulate—his ongoing thoughts about the difference between artistic expression and rational, scientific thought.²⁵

In attempting to resolve the question of the digressions, we would do well to heed Tolstoy's own instincts when he removed the essays from the novel's 1873 edition.²⁶ In fact, even as he worked on the novel in the 1860's, the author vacillated about using the polemical digressions.²⁷ The essays were reinstated only in the fifth edition, appearing in 1886, and even then most probably at the behest of Tolstoy's wife, who at that point took control of the publishing of all her husband's works written before 1881. Most future publications of *War and Peace* relied on this 1886 edition as the canonical one, thus obscuring the crucial fact that Tolstoy himself always had serious reservations about whether these digressions should remain at all.²⁸ This incontrovertible fact raises legitimate doubts about interpretations that try to make them “fit” organically into the rest of the work.

If we examine what, specifically, is problematic about the essays in the context of the novel as a whole, and why Tolstoy had ongoing reservations about them we uncover the essence of his narrative art. Our first clue is provided by Tolstoy himself, who in his notebook entry of March 1870, quoted earlier, denigrates the “vanity” of linear, scientific thinking, which imposes onto the world its rigid requirements of “lines, symmetry, movement in space and time.” Such thinking, according to Tolstoy, leads only to “thought” itself, leaving the “essence” [*sushchnost*] of the world unexplored: “Only art, always inimical to symmetry and the circle, gives the essence [*sushchnost*].”²⁹

Applying Tolstoy's formulation to the text of *War and Peace*, we find that the authorial voice in the theoretical essays is vain and rigid in just the way that troubles the author of the notebook entry. The author of the theoretical essays destroys his intellectual competition by mounting a point-by-point assault against the “false” theories of historical evolution and then carefully leading the reader through his own “correct” reasoning processes. The voice is that of a severe and humorless social critic and intellectual crank, whose spirit reminds one more of the later author of “What is Art?” and the moralistic fiction than the broad-minded, life-affirming narrator of *War and Peace*. These captious

authorial musings reinstate, in fact, the very intellectual divisiveness of the era (the 1860's) that the artistic narrator seeks to transcend.

In contrast to the theoretical narrator, the artistic narrator does not argue rationally for or against abstract intellectual positions. In and of themselves, ideas are sterile and irrelevant to his conception of the world. What counts are the infinitely complex natural and historical processes, in which rational ideas play, at best, a trifling role. The artistic narrator is concerned above all with the human capacity to live successfully within these organic processes--a capacity that depends not on ideas, but on the person behind the ideas, on the person's emotional, intuitive responsiveness to the world. So Speransky's shortcoming is not only his faulty conclusions but his faulty approach to living, not only his plans for reform but his haughty delusional belief that he, with his superior human intellect, can impose lasting change upon the world. As Prince Andrei discovers, Speransky's ideas can have no bearing on his or anybody else's happiness, and his clever words, which "lacked just that something which is the salt of mirth." (PSS 10: 208) embody the ultimate ineffectuality and sterility of the man himself. By contrast, Pierre, whose ideas are frequently confused or half-baked amalgams of other peoples' thought, leaves a lasting effect on other people through the warmth of his personality and the sincere quality of his words. "A fine fellow--your friend--I like him!" Old Prince Bolkonsky says to his son, Andrei, after Pierre's departure. "Another says clever things and one doesn't care to listen, but this one talks rubbish yet stirs an old fellow up." (PSS 10: 123)

While the narrator's irony can be harsh indeed in the artistic sections, as we see in the Speransky passages, it stops short of outright contempt and is always counterbalanced by a kind of paternal, godlike benevolence. In contrast the narrator of the theoretical essays openly scoffs at the narrow-mindedness of the historians and philosophers he discredits. The artistic narrator always bestows a full-blooded, complex humanity on even the most reprehensible of characters. What reader is not gripped by sudden compassion for the cruel, maleficent Dolokhov, when the narrator has Rostov unexpectedly discover that "Dolokhov the brawler, Dolokhov the bully, lived in Moscow with an old mother and a hunchback sister, and was the most affectionate of sons and brothers"? (PSS 10: 27) The narrator of the theoretical treatises cannot surprise us with such a revelation because his perspective is defined and circumscribed by the nature of the genre in which he is writing: a mixture of philosophical disquisition, historiography, and polemical journalism. His purpose is to conquer his audience with the power of rational, linear argument, not to invite us to share emotionally in the fate of his characters and in the complexities of their lived experience.

In the theoretical essays, we, the readers, are passive recipients of the world. In the artistic portions of the novel, however, we are invited to be active participants in, indeed co-creators of, the universe alongside the narrator. Carried along by the overwhelming lifelikeness of the narrator's invented world, we achieve the sort of clear, comprehensive vision of the universe that Prince Andrew, Nikolai, and Pierre, Napoleon, Speransky, and the military strategists, covet but cannot attain.³⁰ We fully empathize with the characters' struggles and vicariously participate in them, while calmly recognizing, along with the narrator, the concealed patterns and unifying truths hidden from the characters' gaze. This awareness only intensifies our empathy for the characters,

widening our understanding of each character's individual experience and, by extension, our own.

"Can they be coming at me?" Nikolai Rostov thinks as he lies wounded on the battlefield at Schoengraben. "And why? To kill me? Me whom everybody loves so?" (PSS 9: 229) The brilliance of the narrative perspective resides in the narrator's ability to embrace both the deep poignancy of the moment and also the comic naivete of Nikolai's thought. The gung-ho young hussar knows that he is at war, and yet in his heart-of-hearts he cannot conceive of anybody trying to hurt him, the beloved son and brother and "young master." We both feel *with* Nikolai and shake our heads at his childish amazement. The narrator thus invites us to remain fully human, empathizing with Nikolai's suffering as he experiences it, and at the same time he provides us with his wise, godlike view of things, for, as we shall see in the following chapter, the narrator allows us to stand godlike above the fray and see the parallel between Nikolai's and Andrei's suffering, occurring at the very same moment on the same battlefield. The narrator's omniscient perspective is benevolent and responsive to multiple emotional levels in a way that the more severe voice of the polemical narrator, constrained by the limits of the genre in which he is writing, cannot be.

Not all critics are willing to grant this extraordinary success to the narrator. In a recent study, Jeff Love argues that "While *War and Peace* strives towards absolute vision, it also certainly fails to achieve such vision, what amounts to a hyperborean view belonging to the gods or God alone. In this very failure is the secret of its remarkable realism, or rather, the illusion of realism which has struck so many readers of the novel..."³¹ I would argue, on the contrary, that readers are struck by how Tolstoy's realism *does* achieve a comprehensive, transcendent vision while never eschewing the rough edges, the gaps, the imperfect ebb and flow of the ordinary. Finitude may be a condition of the characters, but not of the Tolstoyan narrator—and by extension, not of us, his readers. Therein lies the peculiar power of what Boris Eikhenbaum has described as the Tolstoyan narrator's "otherworldly voice" (*potustoronnyj golos*), by which I take him to mean a voice that not only speaks from the perspective of eternity, but also one that is forbearing and humane in a way that only God can be.

As distinct from the narrator of the theoretical treatises, the artistic narrator's synoptic vision is never abstractly philosophical. His transforming presence can be felt in the concrete, sensual details of the here-and-now. As Ivan Turgenev said, "Whenever [Tolstoy] touches the ground, he, like Antaeus, regains his powers."³² And those powers are felt most palpably in the way the narrator illuminates both what is, and also what lies beyond what is, the extraordinary in the ordinary. One of Nikolai Rostov's most intensely religious experiences in the novel—his desperate prayer to God to send the wolf his way during the hunt—is also one of the novel's most earth-bound. As I show elsewhere, a seemingly unremarkable moment, such as Prince Andrew's surveying of the battlefield the night before the Battle of Schoengraben, grows into a vast chain of metaphysical and artistic ramifications when viewed in the context of his life's—and the novel's—larger trajectory.³³

Two Hedgehogs

The question of the novel's unity has been at the center of the critical debate right up to our own time. One particularly influential twentieth-century critique is Isaiah Berlin's famous essay, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*, published in 1953. In that celebrated essay Berlin argues that Tolstoy's intellectual approach to history, as developed in the theoretical essays, is at odds with the writer's artistic treatment of history in the rest of the work. As a rational thinker, Berlin argues, Tolstoy was a determinist. That is, he believed that life is ultimately circumscribed by objective laws. At the same time, as an artist, Tolstoy shows that, within this philosophically determined universe, there also exists the possibility for creative self-expression and some degree of moral freedom on the part of the individual.

I think that Isaiah Berlin was right when he recognized that Tolstoy's vision of the world in *War and Peace* both tends towards a unifying philosophical order, and recognizes the value of individual human experience at the same time. But, by associating the hedgehog with the thinker and the fox with the artist in Tolstoy, Berlin draws the distinction too sharply. He fails to consider the way in which these two impulses co-exist within the *artistic* portion of *War and Peace*, and are ultimately conjoined there.³⁴ Because Berlin associates Tolstoy's hedgehog-like integrative wisdom with the thinker and fox-like skepticism with the artist, he looks for Tolstoy's unified vision in his theories, not his art.³⁵ But because the artist, in Berlin's view, necessarily deconstructs whatever organizing system the thinker tries to erect, Berlin cannot take seriously the possibility that the artist, also strives for a holistic vision of the world. Indeed, a conflict exists in the novel, but not between the powerful destructive genius of the artist and the weak, ordering aspirations of the thinker. The conflict is not between hedgehog and fox but between *two* hedgehogs—the artist and the thinker—who both try to articulate a unifying conception of the world, the former in the language of artistic imagery, the latter through the medium of rational polemics.

In this competition of the hedgehogs, I propose that the artist wins. When the narrator presents in the Second Part of the Epilogue his calculus of history thesis—that historians must stop trying to seek causes and discover instead the laws that unite the “unknown, infinitely small elements” of the universe³⁶—it is an analytical clarification of the truths the novel's artistic canvas has created for us from the beginning: that every human being, individual moment, or decision is both irreducibly distinct and also an integral part of an inexhaustible, unified tapestry of human experience. The narrator's calculus thesis is at best a partial explanation of, a gloss on, the delicately textured, multi-layered experience of life already realized in the “labyrinth of cohesions” contained in the artistic sections of the work. The theorist writes *about* unity, he writes *about* the need to integrate. But the artist unites, he integrates. He gives us a glimpse of that “essence,” which Tolstoy described in his 1870 notebooks as the fundamental aim of artistic expression.

We may agree or disagree with the narrator's theories but never with his created universe. We may choose to accept the terms of that universe, strive to appreciate its mysteries, understand how it came to be and what its constituent elements are. But in that universe there is no “idea” being put forth or thesis being argued, no hidden ideology

to be exposed and explicated. There is only, as Strakhov understood so well, that “endless labyrinth of cohesions, in which consists the essence of art.”³⁷

¹ From Strakhov’s 1870 essay about *War and Peace*, republished in Nikolai Strakhov, *Kriticheskie stat’i ob I. S. Turgeneve i L. N. Tolstom (1862-1885)*. Vol. 1 4th ed. (Kiev: Izdanie I.P. Matchenko, 1901. [Reprint: The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1968], p.277.

² Ibid., p. 278.

³ The critics who made these comments were, respectively, Nikolai Shelgunov and S. Navalikhin, both radical social critics. Navalikhin’s article originally appeared in *Affair* in June 1868, and was provocatively called “*Iziashchnyi romanist i ego isiashchnye kritiki* (“An Elegant Novelist and His Elegant Critics”) Linda Gerstein points out that S. Navalikhin, who was in exile at the time, was the pen name of F. Flerovsky, author of influential *The Position of the Working Class in Russia*. Quoted Linda Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 82.

⁴ Strakhov, *Kriticheskie stat’i*, pp. 278-79.

⁵ V.A. Zelinskii, ed., *Russkaia kriticheskaia literatura o proizvedeniakh L.N. Tolstogo: khronologicheskii sbornik kritiko-bibliograficheskikh statei* (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms reprint, 1966), vol.2, p.146.

⁶ Ibid..

⁷ Ibid., p.168. We should keep in mind that Pisarev had only seen the first three volumes on the novel. The Epilogue, in which Nikolai takes up agriculture, had not yet come out.

⁸ Ibid..

⁹ Ibid..

¹⁰ Zelinskii, p.147.

¹¹ This is the same strategy that Pisarev used in his 1862 essay, “Bazarov” [*Bazarov*]. In that essay Pisarev holds up Turgenev’s hero, Bazarov, of *Fathers and Sons*, as the embodiment of the admirable traits of egoism and self-affirmation, qualities towards which Pisarev believed contemporary Russians should strive. In speaking of Bazarov as if he were a real person in society, rather than a literary hero, the critic reveals his tendency—also characteristic among the so-called “social critics” of the day--to read Turgenev’s novel as if it were a social document, rather than a work of art. In so doing, Pisarev’s discussion overlooks, among other things, the artistic and human complexities of the work, not least Turgenev’s deep ambivalence about Bazarov. Edward J. Brown discusses Pisarev’s “transformation” of “art” into “non-art”:

...Pisarev’s treatment of Turgenev and Dostoevsky is a special case of translation, or paraphrase, or transformation, as I have called it. Here he appropriates two verbal objects that he acknowledges as art and transforms each into non-art, into social meanings. In Kenneth Burke’s phrase, he transforms a complexity into a simplicity. [Edward J. Brown, “Pisarev and the Transformation of Two Novels,” in William Mills Todd III, ed., *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp.151-172.]

¹² Zelinsky, p.147.

¹³ From Strakhov's 1869 article about *War and Peace*. Strakhov, p.194. Charles Moser also quotes these lines from Strakhov's article, and in his book he places them in the context of the larger contemporary debate the extent to which art should depict the real, and the extent to which it should aspire to create an ideal. See Charles A. Moser, *Aesthetics as Nightmare: Russian Literary Theory, 1855-1870*, pp.153-154.

¹⁴ Strakhov, p.194.

¹⁵ Among the most prominent of this group of minor novelists, who are sometimes called "the plebeian novelists of the sixties" (*belletristy-raznochintsy*), were Nikolai Uspensky, Reshetnikov, and Pomyalovsky. Uspensky and Reshetnikov became popular for their unadorned portrayal of ugly truths of peasant life. Pomyalovsky was best known for his novel *Molotov* (1861), which describes the frustrations of a typical young idealist of the 1860's. These novelists drew on the form of the physiological sketch, practiced by Turgenev and Gogol before them, in order to expose the ills of the contemporary social order. For more on the physiological sketch in Russia, see Joachim T. Baer, "The 'Physiological Sketch' in Russian Literature" in Joachim T. Baer and Norman W. Ingham, eds., *Mnemozina: Studia litteraria russica in honorem Vsevolod Setchkarev* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974), pp.1-12.

¹⁶ Strakhov, p. 202.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 208

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.205.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.261

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.196.

²² These are phrases that Strakhov himself uses in the article:

What is an ordinary man in comparison with the hero? What is the private man in relation to history? In a more general form this is just the question which has long since been worked out by our artistic realism: what is the ordinary, everyday reality in comparison with the ideal, the wonderful life? [*chto takoe obyknovennaia, budnichnaia deistvitel'nost'—v sravnenii s idealom, s prekrasnoiui zhizniu?*] (Strakhov, p. 197).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 296-297.

²⁵ Tolstoy valued in Strakhov the same qualities he valued above all in an artist: clear thinking, moral-spiritual commitment and strength, balanced by a tender compassion for people: "Under the clarity and brevity of the exposition is a softness, coupled with strength: you do not rip with teeth, but with soft, strong paws." Quoted in "Roundtable Discussion from IMLI: The Complete Correspondence of Leo Tolstoy and Nikolai Strakhov," *Tolstoy Studies Journal*, Vol. 18 (2006): 90

²⁶ Eikhenbaum goes further than the Soviet scholar N. Gusev, who argues that in the 1873 edition the historical and philosophical treatises were put into a separate appendix. These treatises, according to Eikhenbaum "are absent entirely from the 1873 edition." [Emphasis Eikhenbaum's] Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Sixties*, trans. Duffield White. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982.), p. 240.

²⁷ Katherine Feuer discusses Tolstoy's vacillation about the digressions in connection with his constant concern for artistic verisimilitude. Feuer describes how the polemicist and the artist were at odds with one another throughout the writing process:

Even in [the] form of the novel Tolstoy's vacillations about the use of author's digressions are evident from the fact that although, as the manuscripts make clear, he composed such passages from his very first work on *War and Peace*, they are omitted from Books 1 and 2 and included in Books 3 and 4. Indeed, with regard to this problem, *War and Peace* would seem to have been the crisis which broke the fever, for afterward Tolstoy was never again seriously troubled by the question of digression *and* he never worked again so hard (or to such brilliant effect) at the concealment of the author's view when he was not speaking in his own person. These efforts to develop a fictional style of perfectly transparent objectivity, are another important stylistic feature of the early *War and Peace* manuscripts, and they stem directly from Tolstoy's concern with the problems of digression and of use of the author's voice. [Katherine Feuer, *Tolstoy and the Genesis of War and Peace*, p.18]

²⁸ Boris Eikhenbaum discusses the complicated revision and publication history of the novel, on the basis of which he concludes that "there is no obvious, definitive 'canonical' text of *War and Peace*, and it is not possible to establish it by any means." Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Sixties*, trans. Duffield White. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982, p. 242.

²⁹ Notebook, 13 March, 1870. PSS: 48, 118.

³⁰ Tolstoy does what Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, argues all great fiction does:

The author makes his readers. If he makes them badly—that is, if he simply waits, in all purity, for the occasional reader whose perceptions and norms happen to match his own, then his conception must be lofty indeed if we are to forgive him for his bad craftsmanship. But if he makes them well—that is, makes them see what they have never seen before, moves them into a new order of perception and experience altogether—he finds his reward in the peers he has created. [Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 397-98.]

³¹ Jeff Love, *The Overcoming of History in War and Peace*, p.96.

³² Quoted in Boris Sorokin, *Tolstoy in Prerevolutionary Russian Criticism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press for Miami University, 1979, p.156.

³³ Andrew D. Kaufman, "Microcosm and Macrocosm in *War and Peace*: The Interrelationship of Poetics and Metaphysics," *Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3(1999).

³⁴ An example of how influential Berlin's essay remains to the present day can be found in the work of the contemporary scholar, Gary Saul Morson. In his recent monograph, *Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in 'War and Peace'*, Morson echoes Berlin's argument that, as an artist, Tolstoy was a "fox" and did not believe in any overarching theory of life or in any unifying rational order to history. Morson takes Berlin even further, by arguing that Tolstoy's opposition to the possibility of any unifying

structure in the world is not merely *present* in *War and Peace*. It is, in fact, the major *thesis* of the novel itself. Whereas Berlin separates Tolstoy, the thinker, from Tolstoy, the artist, Morson puts these two sides of the writer's personality back together.

He does so, however, in an unsatisfactory way. Morson is right in many of his observations--particularly in one of his central conclusions, that Tolstoy cherished ordinary moments in human life. But he is wrong to link this and other aspects of Tolstoy's novel to a broader Tolstoyan thesis about the superiority of prosaic experience, meaning precisely the ordinary, the unnoticed, even perhaps, *byt*. In so doing, Morson has underestimated the significance of an essential dimension of *War and Peace*: the fact that the novel transforms a mountain of "ordinary" facts about the characters into an extraordinary vision of human life as something inexhaustible and yet organically unified.

Among contemporary scholars, only Sergei Bocharov and George Clay approach the novel in a similar way. Rather than imposing their own theories onto Tolstoy's novel, or trying to extract from it a single, systematic idea or thesis, as Morson does, these scholars present nuanced, sensitive readings from which they discover unifying patterns in complex poetics of the work itself. George Clay describes a "phoenix design," patterns of literal and symbolic deaths followed by metaphorical resurrections, which recur throughout the artistic portions of the work. [George R. Clay, *Tolstoy's Phoenix: From Method to Meaning* in *War and Peace*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press; *Studies in Russian Literature and Theory*, 1998.) Proceeding from Tolstoy's injunction to critics not to look for "ideas" in art, Bocharov creatively guides the reader through several compartments in the work's "labyrinth of cohesions," described by Tolstoy in his 1876 letter to Strakhov. [Sergei Bocharov, *Roman L. N. Tolstogo 'Voina i Mir' (Moskva: 'Khudozhestvennaia literatura,' 1987).*] Unlike Clay and Bocharov, I emphasize the tension between the holism Tolstoy achieves artistically in the novel and the comprehensive vision coveted but never attained by the searching characters themselves. In my reading, the fictional subject and authorial subject engage in a continual, simultaneous effort to create order out of chaos, and higher forms of meaning out of the prosaic facts of reality. In the end, the authorial subject—embodied in the omniscient, artistic narrator—ultimately succeeds where the characters fall short.

³⁵ "What is it that Pierre, Prince Andrey, Levin discover?" Berlin asks at the beginning of one of the most breathless rhetorical passages in his essay. "And what are they searching for, and what is the center and climax of the spiritual crisis resolved by the experience that transforms their lives?" Some three pages later, after enumerating one intellectual red herring after another that confronts the characters—and by extension, the critic himself—Berlin finally gropes towards the nearly inarticulable answer. The ultimate Tolstoyan truth is

a special sensitiveness to the contours of the circumstances in which we happen to be placed; it is a capacity for living without falling foul of some permanent condition or factor which cannot be either altered, or even fully described or calculated; an ability to be guided by rules of thumb—the 'immemorial wisdom' said to reside in peasants and other 'wimple folk'—where rules of science do not, in principle, apply. The inexpressible sense of cosmic orientation is the 'sense of

reality,' the 'knowledge' of how to live. [Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Elephant Paperbacks, 1993, pp. 66,69.)

It seems that Berlin comes closest to appreciating that elusive *it* of Tolstoy's novel in this passage, and he certainly recreates for us the spirit of searching that Tolstoy's characters go through in pursuit of that wisdom. But Berlin seems unwilling to accept that the philosophical core he has discovered may not necessarily lie in any social construct ("the 'immemorial wisdom' said to reside in peasants and other 'simple folk'") or philosophical orientation ("[T]he inexpressible cosmic sense of orientation is the 'sense of reality,' the 'knowledge' of how to live") at all, but is in fact contained within the very poetics of the novel itself.

³⁶ The narrator writes in the Epilogue, Part Two:

Only by reducing this element of free will to the infinitesimal, that is, by regarding it as an infinitely small quantity, can we convince ourselves of the absolute inaccessibility of the causes, and then instead of seeking causes, history will take the discovery of laws as its problem.

The search for these laws has long been begun and the new methods of thought which history must adopt are being worked out simultaneously awith the self-destruction toward which—ever dissecting and dissecting the causes of phenomena—the old method of history is moving.

All human sciences have traveled along that path. Arriving at infinitesimals, mathematics, the most exact of sciences, abandons the process of analysis and enters on the new process of the integration of unknown, infinitely small, quantities. Abandoning the conception of cause, mathematics seeks laws, that is, the property common to all unknown, infinitely small elements." (PSS 12: 338-39)

³⁷ *Lev Tolstoi ob iskusstve i literature* (Moscow: Sovetskij pisatel', 1958), p. 517.