Sense and Humor in Russian Formalism. Part I

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Abstract. Humor and things related (such as the category of the merry [*veselost'*]), played an unusually prominent role in what is often considered the first school of contemporary literary theory, Russian Formalism, or, to be specific, its Petrograd wing, mainly represented by Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, and Boris Eikhenbaum. Humor helped these Formalists in their battle against approaching literature from the standpoint of "psychologism". The comic let them emphasize literature's own agenda (centered round the interplay of its constructive elements, not only within a single work but also across history), at the cost of the "serious" authorial purpose, previously identified with the meaning of the work. In fact, an artistic breakthrough, the Formalists maintained, tends to be (taken as) humorous at the beginning, its "serious" explanations being a later development; accordingly, the Formalists considered as the prototype of all novels the parodic works of Cervantes and Sterne. Humor advanced Formalist theory, helping it take its eyes off the tenor of the work and see the vehicle, off content and see the medium, which now was considered the true message. However, when it came to their special theory of the comic, this approach threatened to deconstruct the literary significance of humor in literature, humorous works no longer distinguishable from non-humorous ones. Why this was so is analyzed in the forthcoming second part of this article, titled "Literature as a Joke".

Keywords: Alexander Slonimsky; Andrei Bely; Bakhtin; Baudelaire; Bergson; Cervantes; comedy; comic; construction; Eikhenbaum; formal cause; gaiety; Gogol; Husserl; interplay; Roman Jakobson; joke; Leontiev; meaning; merry; *Opoyaz*; José Ortega y Gasset; *ostranenie*; parody; psychologism; Pumpyansky; Russian Formalism; Shklovsky; teleology; tragedy; Tynianov; Vygotsky; *zaum'*

> "The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook."
>
> —William James

1. The Lifeblood of Literature

Humor and things related were no laughing matter to the Russian Formalists, but when it came to art, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, and Yuri Tynianov dared laugh where others did not. All three represented the *Opoyaz* ramification of Russian Formalism, *Opoyaz* being an acronym of the Society for the Study of the Theory of Poetic Language.[1] Taken together, their articles, letters, and memoirs reveal that one of their favorite words was *veselyi* (gay, merry). Dozens of apt quotations with *veselyi* and its cognates can be found in Shklovsky, but this one is probably definitive: "Like ferment [*gnezdo brozheniia*], gaiety is at the bottom of art" (Shklovsky 1928, p. 152).[2] No less resolute is another one, this time from

[1] To read about the variations among the Russian Formalists, cf. Glanc (2015) and Pilshchikov (2011). For the most part, the names "Formalists" and "*Opoyazians*" are used interchangeably in the article.

[2] This article relies on translations with one major exception: when it came to the theoretical texts of the *Opoyaz* Formalists, preference was given to the originals.

Tynianov: "[L]iterary culture is merry and light [. . .] it is not tradition or decorum but the knowledge and skill of making things both necessary[3] and merry" (Tynianov 2003, p. 521). Whatever the *Opoyaz* Formalists implied by "merry," they evidently took it in earnest.

Among their texts, it is possible to single out those that focus on humor more than others: Eikhenbaum's "How Gogol's *Overcoat* Is Made" (1919) and "Art and Emotion" (1924) with its discussion of laughter; Tynianov's "Dostoyevsky and Gogol: (Towards a Theory of Parody)" (1921) and "On Parody" (written in 1929); and Shklovsky's "Towards a Theory of the Comic" (1922), as well as the chapters from his *Theory of Prose* (1925/1929), on Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and on the parody novel (Laurence Sterne's). However, each of these is likely to dissatisfy someone looking for a unified Formalist theory of the comic, for there is none. Moreover, to the dismay of a more orthodox theorist of humor, Tynianov's work on parody or Shklovsky's 1922 essay seem to suggest that the comic element is not essential to the forms traditionally considered as comic (more on this in the second part of this article). And yet one not primarily interested in humor will, upon reading the *Opoyazians*, chance on their frequent celebrations of the phenomena related to it: gaiety, laughter, absurdity, (ironic) play, etc. To them, the merry, the jocular (the *Opoyazians* made no sharp distinctions between these) was the lifeblood of literature, as the following analysis should demonstrate. From this, only one conclusion can be drawn: like the biblical God, humor is everywhere and nowhere in the texts of the *Opoyaz* Formalists.

That — it could be argued — more than almost anything else sets them apart from a great many theorists of humor: Aristotle, Hobbes, Bergson, Pirandello, Freud, or Bakhtin, to name only some. These authors analyzed humor only with regard to specific texts, genres, or situations, while for the Opoyazians humor was all-pervading. Freud or Bakhtin sought some respectable truth underlying humor: Freud wanted to lift the veil on the affinity between the technique of wit and dreams; Bakhtin spoke about the carnivalesque as a departure of the freedom-seeking human spirit from the official culture, whose serious meaning, however, he did not doubt.[4] Conversely, the *Opoyazians* appear to have done the opposite, to the point of laughing off any seriousness — consider, for example, Shklovsky's defiant statement about Shakespeare's famous play: "That *King Lear* is a tragedy is the least significant thing about it, in my opinion" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 109). Why the *Opoyaz* Formalists reasoned this way, whether they meant what they said, what values and goals, explicit and not, they were driven by and towards, and what their particular contribution to the theory of humor was — these are the issues tackled in the article.

The abovementioned ubiquity of humor determines the structure of this article. There is no attempt in it simply to summarize the *Opoyaz* views on humor, as it could be done with Bergson's theory or Freud's. To isolate the issue of humor from that of literature's literariness (as the Formalists called it) would be severely limiting. It would not be much different from interpreting the remarks of a character out of the context of the entire novel. It will be shown soon that humor became relevant to the *Opoyazians* as an ally in their struggle against what they called "psychologism," in a struggle for finding the formal meaning of literature, which prompted them, sometimes in earnest and sometimes in jest, to make light of what other critics considered the real, serious, "content" of a literary work.

For these reasons, the next two sections show how the theme of the comic bobbed up, again and again, in the Formalists' discussion of literature's specificity and its autonomy from other disciplines. This should inform the discussion of the *Opoyaz* special theory of humor,

[3] N.B. When Tynianov mentions the necessary, this has nothing to do with the *docere et delectare*, or *instruire et plaire*, of traditional poetics. For the *Opoyaz* understanding of necessity, cf. Gudkov (1988). Necessity, according to the *Opoyaz* Formalists, emerges from the *Zeitgeist* of a certain epoch, and, in this regard, it is somewhat Hegelian — for a comparison of *Opoyaz* Formalism with Hegel's philosophy, cf. Paramonov (1996).
[4] Cf. the beginning of the second part of the article.

analyzed in the second part of this article, to be published separately (in the next volume of this journal).

2. *Opoyaz* Anti-psychologism and the Benefit of the Joke

The *Opoyaz* Formalists wrote witty, feuilleton-like, essays about literature[5] and were fond of merry and loud debates about it, at times culminating in rambunctious escapades in the spirit of their allies among the Russian Futurists.[6] Such was the gaiety of their subversive, carnivalesque zeitgeist.[7] Shklovsky and his friends acted with revolutionary fervor years before the revolution of 1917; the revolution began for them with the Russian Futurists' experiments in language.[8]

Like the Futurists, so eager to break with tradition in art, the Formalists tried to break with the preceding scholarship.[9] The reason why both movements fought against tradition was, to cite Tynianov, their "new vision" [*novoe zrenie*] of culture (Tynianov 1929, p. 582). The Futurists believed they had discerned our speech in its primordial freshness and attempted to resurrect it by reinventing the language of their day. The *Opoyazians* shared the Futurists' intuition; as far as theory was concerned, the *Opoyazians* were determined to penetrate the unique essence of verbal art, hence their aspiration to create a science of literature from scratch.[10] In Russia and in the world, the feeling of novelty as such hovered in the air and informed all areas of intellectual life. Roman Jakobson reminisced about that time (Jakobson 1997, pp. 4–5):

> There clearly emerged a united front of science, art, literature, and life, full of unknown values of the future. It seemed as if a science based on new principles was being created, a self-sufficient science, opening up endless perspectives and introducing into general use new concepts, which at the time did not seem to fit into the usual framework of common sense.

The feeling of European culture's learned senility, so widespread at the turn of the century, had suddenly ebbed away, and the *Opoyaz* Formalists rejoiced along with other innovators in the "the saturnalia of a mind that ha[d] patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure — patiently, severely, coldly, without yielding, but also without hope — and [was] now all of a sudden attacked by hope, by hope for health, by the *intoxication* of recovery," as the author of *The Gay Science* put it (Nietzsche 2008, p. 3).[11]

As though echoing Nietzsche, Eikhenbaum exclaimed in 1918, "What a merry feeling of liberation!" — when writing about contemporary Futurist poetry and the new kind of literary scholarship inspired by it (Eikhenbaum 1969, p. 293). The *Opoyaz* Formalists' texts from the

[5] Cf. Lvoff (2014). Cf. Tynianov and Kazansky (1927).
[6] Cf. Kaverin (1963) and Ustinov (2001).
[7] For all their unwillingness to accept that literary evolution is mainly contingent on social, politico-economic, history, the *Opoyaz* Formalists attached great importance to the notions of history and its epochs. Cf. Eikhenbaum (2016). For a comparison of Bakhtin and the *Opoyazians* with regard to the carnivalesque, cf. Hansen-Löve (2001), chapter "'Carnivalization' as a Defamiliarizing Principle."
[8] Cf. Pomorska (1968). It should be added that at first Eikhenbaum, whose views are very important for the topic of this article, was opposed to the Futurists but embraced their views around the time of the 1917 revolution (earlier in fact) and soon became a partisan of *Opoyaz* Formalism. To read more about this transition, cf. Lvoff (2016).
[9] Cf. Erlich (1981, part 1).
[10] Cf. "Izuchenie teorii poeticheskogo iazyka" (1919), which is a declaration of the *Opoyaz* program. The word *nauka* is used for "scholarship" in it. *Nauka* can be translated as both "science" and "scholarship," but a preference is given here to "science" in order to stress the fact that the Formalists called for a rigorous *nauka* of literature that would study literary laws (however different these may be from the laws of physics, for example).
[11] Cf. Khmelnitskaya (2005), Kujundžić (1997), Kurganov (1998), and Lvoff (2015b).

1910s and the early 1920s are permeated with this "merry feeling of liberation" — a liberation from the snares of a legion of serious disciplines that tried to impose their tenets on merry, freedom-loving, and capricious literature (the way the *Opoyaz* saw it). Social scientists, for example, or critics simply interested in ideology wanted to discuss social problems contained in literature; historians, problems of history; psychologists, those of psychology, while devoted readers, including those among scholars and critics alike, were eager to look into writers' private lives reflected in literary works. Literature's value was reduced to that of a mirror; because of this, literature had enjoyed nothing fundamentally of its own.[12] Such an approach — the Formalists argued — made light of the specificity of literature, of the unique way in which something is expressed in it, as well as of literature's own historical development, from one artistic canon to another, according to its own, inner, regularities, stemming from its inimitable organization. There was hardly a better weapon for overcoming positivist tedium[13] and impressionistic sensitivities than emancipatory humor — especially when it came to the all-powerful psychological approach.

At first blush, the psychological approach to literature (the inner life of (the author's) soul understood as the "meaning" of the work and of literature as such) stirred up unflagging opposition among the *Opoyaz* Formalists. And yet, as it will be argued afterwards, it was a certain tradition, the one they called "psychologism," that they withstood, while simultaneously paying attention to literature vis-à-vis the creative and the perceptive mind.

From the outset, the *Opoyazians* needed to make their readers realize: feelings and thoughts (often viewed as "content") are no longer themselves when recreated in the literary work, no matter how "simple" or "artless." The same could be applied to real life objects in a picture. Such objects are artificial proper (Magritte's *ceci n'est pas une pipe* comes to mind) and abide by perspective laws—which may, of course, vary and be violated but are always present, be it academic art or primitivism. In other words, to cite Shklovsky's metaphor also inspired by painting: "As it is incorrect to graze cows on painted grass, it is incorrect to measure a work of art sociologically or psychologically" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 109).

A similar line of reasoning brought the *Opoyaz* Formalists to the following question: what is it that makes literature, literature; in other words, what is its specificity, its "literariness" (Roman Jakobson's term)? For the *Opoyazians*, unlike some other Russian Formalists, it was not language alone but what they (and the Futurists) called poetic language, i.e., language uniquely organized and creatively actualized. That is what the *Opoyazians* meant when they wrote about the construction of the literary work, hence Tynianov's later definition of literature as "the dynamic speech construction" (Tynianov 1977, p. 261). The *Opoyazians*'

[12] Cf. the following statement by Alexander Veselovsky, an important influence on the Formalists; they referred to it implicitly and not more than once (Veselovsky 2016, p. 40):

> Literary history is reminiscent of a geographical zone that international law has consecrated as *res nullius*, where the historian of culture and the aesthetician, the erudite antiquarian and the researcher of social ideas all come to hunt. Each carries away what he can, according to his abilities and views; the goods or the quarry display the same tag, but their contents are far from identical.

[13] Unfortunately, the view on *Opoyaz* Formalism as a positivist school persists: those who hold it are so gullible as to mistake the *Opoyazians*' declarations about making the study of literature a science for a desire to establish "scholarly Salierism" (cf. Medvedev 1925), i.e., the kind of scholarship that would be a dry compendium, a catalogue, of devices. Meanwhile, the *Opoyazians* (let it be remembered that there were other Formalists in Russia) shunned academism (cf. Dmitriev and Ustinov 2002), to the point of forgoing any systematization of their discoveries — the discoveries elaborated and organized by others, decades to come. Cf. Boris Pasternak's perplexed remark about the *Opoyazians*: "If I were in [the Formalists'] place, I would at once [. . .] begin developing a system of aesthetics; what has always [. . .] made me stay away from [. . .] the Formalists was exactly this incomprehensibility of their standing still on the verge of the most promising ascents" (Superfin 1971, p. 529). Also cf. Steiner (1984).

task was precisely to cut to the essence of literature as a construction — or, to use Shklovsky's pet metaphor, to lay bare [*obnazhit'*] the device of literature.[14]

This is what Shklovsky felt or at least claimed to feel like about his own books, containing his innermost feelings and ideas. A vivid example is his famous *Zoo, or Letters Not about Love*. This book, which is three in one (an epistolary novel, a memoir, and a treatise on art), is based on a real story of Shklovsky's unrequited love for Elsa Triolet. Yet, according to the author, the essence of the book is not psychological as regards letting us in on his mental life; the essence is literary, just as the essence of a picture with trees are not the trees — it is the artifice with which the painter managed to limn these trees (otherwise, we probably would not notice them, *like an artist can*, with our habitual and desensitized perception).[15] In the preface to his book, Shklovsky contends that his love story, the life of his psyche, served merely as mortar for the building blocks of his variegated material (his numerous observations about literature, its theory, the Russian emigration, politics, the construction of automobiles, etc.). To put it in Shklovsky's terms, the love story served as a motivation (one could also say "justification")[16] for the letters comprising the novel.[17]

This need not mean that Shklovsky felt nothing for Triolet, but the role of his feelings in the structure of the work was already different from their mode of existence in everyday life.[18] One could also surmise that such feelings, their intensity notwithstanding, had nothing special about them, having been as old as the world; Shklovsky may well have agreed with it. His book, however, was anything but hackneyed — thanks to its strange construction, in which previously incompatible types of material were brought together. The same could be said about two pieces of music inspired by the composer's thoughts about death: one written in a mediocre way and forgotten, another composed by Mozart or Schnittke. All this brings to mind Shklovsky's favorite quotation from Vasily Rozanov: "'People fancy that the soul is substance. But why can't it be music? And so they keep looking for its 'properties' (the

[14] Cf. Ginzburg (Ginzburg 1996), who traces this technique of baring back to the Stoics. Also cf. a similar metaphor in Luigi Pirandello's essay on humor (1908, 1920): "[The humorist] sees the world, if not entirely naked, let's say in only its shirtsleeves. He sees a king in his shirtsleeves, a king who makes a beautiful impression in the majesty of his throne, with his royal staff and crown, his purple robe and ermine" (Pirandello 1966, p. 57).

[15] Cf. Shklovsky's "Art as Device" (Shklovsky 2015), famous, among other things, for the idea of *ostranenie*, put forth in it not only as a technique but also a principle of literary development. Given the strangeness of the notion of *ostranenie* itself, it seems fitting to employ the Russian original instead of its multiple translations: "estrangement," "enstrangement," "bestrangement," "defamiliarization," "making strange," and others. After all, the same has been done with many other terms used by the Formalists, such as *skaz* and *syuzhet*, not to mention the fact that *ostranenie* is relatable enough as a cognate of the English "strange." To read more about the term, cf. Berlina (2018), Shklovsky (1983, chapter "Ostrannenie" (sic!)), and Tulchinsky (1980).

[16] Cf. Tynianov: "Motivation in art is the justification of some factor from the standpoint of others, its accord with the others (V. Shklovsky, B. Eikhenbaum)" (Tynianov 1924, p. 14).

[17] Here is an excerpt from that preface (Tynianov and Shklovsky 2001, p. 642):

> This book is written the following way.
>
> At first, I conceived of a series of sketches about Russian Berlin; then I became interested in bringing these sketches together around some general theme. I took [Khlebnikov's] "Ménagerie" ("*Zoo*") — the title of the book was born now, but it did not thread the pieces together. Then it dawned on me to make of it a kind of an epistolary novel.
>
> An epistolary novel needs a motivation—the reason why people decided to write to each other. The usual motivation is love and those in its way. I took a particular case of this motivation: the letters are written by a man in love with a woman who has no time for him. Here, I felt the need for a new detail: since the bulk of the book is unrelated to love, I introduced a prohibition against love-writing.

[18] Cf. Tynianov: "Certainly, I do not object to 'the link of literature to life.' I, however, doubt the correctness of the question. Can one speak of 'life and art' when art is also 'life?'" (Tynianov 1924, p. 123).

properties of an object). But why can't it have only pitch [*stroi*]? . . .'" (qtd. in Shklovsky 1929, p. 228). Below, we will see, more than once, this move of dismissing "content" for the sake of "form," which, in turn, is reconsidered as content-laden.[19]

In their search for literature's specificity, the *Opoyazians* were led by the belief that "[*t*]*he constructive principle*," in the words of Tynianov, "*is recognized not in maximum but in minimum conditions responsible for it*" (Tynianov 1924, p. 17). For this reason, they turned to those works that seemed to be free from the brunt of "content," and it was already there that the humor-related underpinnings of *Opoyaz* theory made themselves known, before the *Opoyaz* theory of humor had appeared.

The *Opoyazians* put forth—as an example of pure, motivation-free, construction — the so-called *zaum'* (rendered into English as trans-sense or transrational language), i.e., nonce and nonsensical words, such as Futurist poet Aleksei Kruchenykh's "*Dyr bul shchyl*" — the kind that an average person, unburdened with sophisticated theories, will likely ridicule. In his article, Shklovsky himself mentions the association of *zaum*', this bared construction, with the comic: he cites Dickens's words from *David Copperfield*, about Micawber, who revels in hearing "ludicrous and unnecessary" words, just as so many other people (qtd. in Shklovsky 1919b, p. 16).[20] Shklovsky does not explain the nature of this laughter in the article on *zaum'*, though he remarks in his later text on the theory of the comic that "a new form is almost always perceived as comic" — we will revisit this thought below (Shklovsky 1922, p. 66).[21] Again, there is no detailed explanation why: Shklovsky does not want to delve into pure psychology, or philosophy for that matter, lest he should abandon the discussion of literature.

Meanwhile, the theory which would fit this case perfectly is that of Bergson, with his concept of laughter as a form of social critique of a certain rigidity — and to common sense *zaum'* is exactly that: rigid and condemnable. For it is not the speech of a sentient being but a form of gibberish spat out by a lunatic or a broken automaton. Needless to say, for the *Opoyazians* such an estimate of *zaum'* is just a philistine impression of someone complaining about a picture that has abstract, unintelligible lines in it instead of trees. The utilitarian vulgarian wants to know what "*Dyr bul shchyl*" means, and, upon hearing that it is meaningless (from the utilitarian perspective, that is), he decides it is pointless.

But the *Opoyaz* Formalists have a different point of view. They know that a work of art may exist with an explanation (or motivation) for what is happening, as well as without one. As a matter of fact, the bulk of *Opoyaz* writing is not devoted to such unalloyed and marginal cases as *zaum'*. The *Opoyazians*, for example, wrote about the same Russian authors as their Marxist and other rivals: Pushkin, Tolstoy, Leskov — meanwhile, *the Opoyazians'* primary focus was not on the psychological or social aspect but on the interplay within the system of these authors' single works, their oeuvre, and the ever-evolving literature as a whole. The Formalist analysis of Cervantes and Gogol, summarized in the next section, should clarify it. As for the works with "content" and "meaning," i.e., with a motivation, the *Opoyazians*

[19] Cf. Shklovsky: "[C]ontent is the transformation of form into content" (Shklovsky 1931, p. 63). Also cf. Yarkho: "'[H]ow?' is the same question as 'what?', but only related not to the fact but to the act. However, in art, which we have defined as labor [*rabota*], the fact and the act are one" (Yarkho 1925, p. 50).

[20] This is not the original quotation from Dickens, but a translation of the one Shklovsky uses in the Russian text. Shklovsky's quotation is somewhat inexact — cf. Janecek and Mayer's translation of Shklovsky's article (Shklovsky 1985), p. 8, fn. 20. Dickens's original passage begins thus: "Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words, which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not at all peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men" (qtd. in Shklovsky 1985, p. 8). After this, the passage gets somewhat moralizing, which seems to be lost in Shklovsky's rendition.

[21] There is a telling passage in *Zoo* in which Shklovsky describes an unusual vaudeville in a Czech theater. "At the end of the performance," Shklovsky writes, "a comic actor does all the numbers, parodying and exposing them. For instance, he shows magical tricks standing with his back to the audience, which can see where the missing card went" (Tynianov and Shklovsky 2001, p. 684). Why form is likely to be taken humorously when laid bare is discussed in the next sections of the article.

considered them the hardest, but also the most interesting, to construe. Tynianov wrote: "[W]hat is outwardly most facile and simple — the realm of *motivated art*—turns out to be most difficult and untoward material" (Tynianov 1924, p. 14). Writing about the "constructive factors" of the work, he further observed that their "*specifica"* is "smooth[ed] over, as it were" by "inner motivation," which "makes art 'facile,' acceptable" (*ibid.*). Accordingly, the *Opoyaz* Formalists reappraised motivation as *one* of the work's devices — a device for putting together the work's variegated elements so that this work could unfold.[22] The latter kind of motivation, however important, was again seen as a device — not as the ultimate message of the work. From the literary perspective, a psychological motivation inherent in the work would be important not for the fact it is psychological but for its motivating constructive function. If the previous sentence seems redundant so that one wants to reread it, that is because the line drawn by the *Opoyazians* is so fine — which makes the distinction even more important. In the words of Tynianov (*ibid.*, pp. 14–15),

> it is most difficult to study the functions of a factor in "facile" art. A study of these functions is concerned not with the quantitatively typical but with the qualitatively distinctive; as for the elements shared with other areas of intellectual activity, these are the peculiar plus of art. That is why it is motivation (= the shading in of the plus) that distinguishes motivated works of art, as their original negative characteristic (V. Shklovsky).

This terse passage, so characteristic of Tynianov, could be simplified by the following comparison. Imagine two fractions with the same denominator; the denominator is doubtless important (without it none of these fractions would be themselves), but if we want to understand what makes each fraction unique, we have to focus on the numerator. Similarly, it can be said of Tynianov's excerpt that psychology, which is shared by literary works, private diaries, people's actions, etc., is the denominator ("the quantitatively typical"). However, if it is to be accounted for from the literary standpoint, it should be seen no longer as the denominator (that which also belongs to other, nonliterary, systems), but as the numerator ("the qualitatively distinctive"), that which is uniquely literary. Consequently, psychological motivation should not be taken at face value — it is a device, a ruse, a catch, and art's ultimate one at that.[23] For all these reasons, the *Opoyazians* saw *zaum'* as the simplest case study of literature qua construction; *zaum'* only proved — to repeat Tynianov's words — that "[*t*]*he constructive principle is recognized not in maximum but in minimum conditions responsible for it*" (*ibid.*, p. 18)

In this regard, *zaum'*, free from psychological motivation, is not senseless and pointless: it testifies to the laws of literature and its medium, language.[24] Moreover, having first stated that

[22] For more detail, cf. Letter 22 from Shklovsky's *Zoo* (Tynianov and Shklovsky 2001), in which motivation in the formation of psychological novel is discussed. Shklovsky was not alone in feeling as though psychology were not the gist of the novel as such but a convention, by that time largely worn out — cf. Mandelstam (1966).

[23] When the Formalists insisted — as Jakobson put it — that "the science of literature [. . .] ought to recognize 'device' [*priem*] as its only 'hero,'" it went without saying that the device was also the protagonist of literature as such (Jakobson 1987b, p. 275). To bare the device meant to show that it is the device that constitutes the essence of the work and propels the entire system of literature in its evolution.

[24] It, of course, has long been established by scholars that the so-called nonsense is not without rhyme or reason. In his article devoted to Lewis Carroll's nonsense, Michael Holquist writes (Holquist 1999, p. 104):

> [N]onsense, in the writing of Lewis Carroll [. . .] does not mean gibberish; it is not chaos, but the opposite of chaos. It is a closed field of language in which the meaning of any single unity is dependent on its relationship to the system of the other constituents. Nonsense is "a collection of words of events which in their arrangement do not fit into some recognized system" [a quotation from Elizabeth Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense*], but which constitute a new system of their own.

Different types of *zaum*' are singled out, some of them more motivated than others — cf. Feshchenko (2009).

zaum' "often has no particular meaning [*znachenie*] and acts outside or apart from any particular meaning, directly upon the emotions of people around," Shklovsky goes on to explains the *artistic* meaning of commonsensically meaningless words, which leads to one and only conclusion (Shklovsky 1919b, p. 14). Just as the *Opoyaz* Formalists differentiated between practical, or everyday [*bytovoi*], language and the so-called poetic language (subordinate to artistic laws), they also distinguished everyday meaning from artistic one, hence Shklovsky's phrase about "the meaning of 'worthless' [*nichtozhnyi*] speech," such as *zaum*' (*ibid.*, p. 16).[25]

This solves the problem of meaning (temporarily) but begets another one. No sooner did we part with psychology than we ran into it at the next corner, namely, when Shklovsky replaced the notion of meaning as that which "makes sense" with the notion of the construction's emotional meaning (or shall we say significance?).[26] On one hand, Shklovsky's essay on *zaum'* rejects the kind of psychological motivation that reduces the heroes' or the author's actions and words to specific ideas and practical goals — in one word, to some rational and translatable *summa summarum*. On the other, Shklovsky's essay hinges on emotion (which is usually considered a psychic fact), so much that it employs the word or its cognates more than a dozen times. It looks as though Shklovsky had felt that some justification of the "gibberish" about which he wrote was in order, after all.

One could, of course, say that Shklovsky's essay on *zaum'* is an exception, that it is an early text, and then cite Shklovsky's later statement that "art, essentially, is beyond emotion [*vneemotsional'nyi*]" (Shklovsky 1929, p. 192).[27] However, emotion proves to be a very important category for the *Opoyazians* in general, not for Shklovsky alone. Thus, it was in the same collection of *Opoyaz* articles that Shklovsky's counterpart Lev Yakubinsky wrote, in the article titled "On the Sounds of Verse Language": "In verse language — thanks to the attention being focused on sounds—an emotional attitude towards them reveals itself, which is a fact of great importance for defining the interrelationship of sound and meaning as the aspects of speech in verse language" (Yakubinsky 1919, p. 44). In this article, Yakubinsky refers to William James, who wrote the book titled *Psychology*, while Shklovsky's essay draws on none other than Wilhelm Wundt, one of the founding fathers of scientific psychology — namely, on his theory of *Lautbilder* (phonetic images). It may seem that, by resorting to phonetic images, Shklovsky tries to motivate the transrational in "motivationless

[25] Cf. Janecek and Mayer's translation: "the meaning of 'meaningless' speech" (Shklovsky 1985, p. 7). The word *nichtozhnyi* in Shklovsky is a quotation from Mikhail Lermontov's poem cited in his article.

[26] What matters here is the fact that emotion is considered a psychological phenomenon. Another problem that goes beyond the scope of this article is the interpretation of that which constitutes meaning. Yet the question of meaning vs. significance vs. information, etc. is of primary importance. One thing is for certain: meaning may mean different things. Cf. Ogden and Richards (1923, chapter IX, "The Meaning of Meaning").

[27] Shklovsky makes this claim in his essay on Sterne (we will turn to it later as the humor-related theme of parody is at its heart). Shklovsky asserts it when arguing that Sterne's sentimentalism was not about sentiments; essentially, it was a certain principle of description. Emily Finer sums up this argument in *Turning into Sterne: Viktor Shklovskii and Literary Reception* (Finer 2010, p. 90):

> If art has no content [i.e., the thoughts and feelings we read into or infer from a work are not essential to it. – B. L.], there is no point in [. . .] searching for Sentimentalism [in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*] [. . .]
>
> Shklovskii's attack on Sentimentalism maintains that description from a 'sentimentalist point of view' is no different to description from the point of view of a horse [Leo Tolstoy's "Kholstomer" is implied; Shklovsky analyzed it in "Art as Device."]. According to Shklovskii, a shift in point of view can activate processes of *ostranenie*, but a Sentimentalist narrative — if it exists — is no more or less successful in provoking a new observation of reality than any other narrative from any other point of view.

Also cf. Borislavov (2011).

art" [*nemotivirovannoe iskusstvo*], as he calls it elsewhere (Tynianov and Shklovsky 2001, p. 607). Moreover, this is not the only mention of Wundt by an *Opoyazian*. Tynianov's 1924 *Problem of Verse Language* (cited above) refers to Wundt multiple times, though often to contradict him. Recurring references to contemporary psychologists made by the *Opoyazians*, the topicality of emotion for them — all this testifies to the fact that, for all their provisos, they were having a dialogue with psychology. Let us briefly dwell on this contradiction, after which we will see how humor came to the *Opoyazians'* rescue.

Among those to have pointed out this inconsistency — the dependency of the *Opoyazians* on psychological categories — was Lev Vygotsky (Aage A. Hansen-Löve considers him a Formalist, irrespective of his differences from the *Opoyazians*). In his *The Psychology of Art*, a section devoted to a critique of the *Opoyazians* bears the same title as Shklovsky's famous "Art as Device." Vygotsky does justice in it to the *Opoyazians'* views, but he disapproves of their attacks on psychology, one of his strongest arguments being that the *Opoyazians* cannot do without psychology in their own theory (Vygotsky 1998, p. 70, emphasis added):

> The [*Opoyaz*] Formalists themselves proceed from the assumption that they have put an end to the cheap and popular psychological doctrine of art and are, therefore, inclined to regard their principle as an essentially anti-psychological one. One of the methodological foundations of this principle is the rejection of any psychologism in developing the theory of art. *They try to study artistic* [*khudozhestvennyi*] *form as something perfectly objective and independent from the thoughts and feelings present in it, as well as any other psychological material*.

Yet they break their own rule, Vygotsky says — for instance, by resorting to the category of perception (Shklovsky's "Art as Device" is a perfect case in point).

Vygotsky is right: insofar as the *Opoyazians* focused on the reaction produced by a work of art (consider such *Opoyaz* terms as *ostranenie*, automatization, and dynamism), their theory was, at least in part, psychological (hence, its appeal to today's literary scholars with a penchant for cognitive science).[28] And yet, as Ilona Svetlikova argues in her perspicacious book *The Origins of Russian Formalism: The Tradition of Psychologism and the Formalist School*, the *Opoyaz* opposed psychologism, not psychology.[29]

Nowadays, Svetlikova observes, it is hard to see the difference between psychology and psychologism, not to mention the fact that the latter term has become pejorative, cut off from its historical context. Meanwhile, she says, psychologism was a particular "historical force that determined exceptionally much in the intellectual life of the nineteenth and twentieth century" (Svetlikova 2005, p. 19). "Originally," Svetlikova writes, "the word 'psychologism' denoted an adherence to the view whereby all the facts of consciousness and its work are to be described exclusively within the framework of psychology, relying on its methods and apparatus" (*ibid.*, p. 17). Based on this definition, it could be said that the difference between psychology and psychologism is that between a circumscribed discipline and its principle extrapolated to other disciplines.[30] Psychologism goes beyond the inner life of the psyche and busies itself with the mind's (objectified) products, including art. Psychologism is rooted in

[28] Cf. Romand and Tchougounnikov (2010). Cf. Oever (2010, "Part III. Cognitive and Evolutionary-Cognitive Approaches to Ostranenie: Perception, Cognitive Gaps and Cognitive Schemes"). Cf. Berlina (2018).

[29] Interestingly, humor in Formalist theory does not attract Svetlikova's attention. Vygotsky did not write about it either when analyzing *Opoyaz* works; neither did he dwell on humor with regard to Sigmund Freud's *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, discussed in another chapter of *The Psychology of Art*.

[30] Likewise, Eikhenbaum refused to consider Formalism a method and insisted on its being a scholarly principle (Eikhenbaum also accentuated the root of the word principle, saying that there cannot be more than one); accordingly, the Formalists (or specifiers [*spetsifikatory*], as Eikhenbaum preferred to call his allies and himself) may have, and did, change their methods, without, however, abandoning their allegiance to the principle of the dominance of form in art (let it be remembered that the understanding of form in *Opoyaz* Formalism was a complex one and entailed the category of material) — cf. Eikhenbaum (1924b).

the belief that aesthetic problems can be solved through psychology, namely, by dint of empirical (physiological) and mathematical experiments (as in Gustav Theodor Fechner's experimental aesthetics).[31] In the realm of the comic, a vivid example of psychologism is Lillien J. Martin's 1905 study "Experimental Prospecting in the Field of the Comic." Meanwhile, it will be shown later that not only is the *Opoyaz* take on humor devoid of any such psychologism; no matter how much the *Opoyaz* trio of Shklovsky, Tynianov, and Eikhenbaum was influenced by the psychology of the time, it avoided psychologism even when dealing with such traditionally psychological notions as perception or emotion.[32]

The *Opoyazians* treated perception in art as something impersonal rather than a fact of the individual's inner, psychic, life. The most vivid examples, perhaps, are Tynianov's "The Literary Fact" (1924) and "On Literary Evolution" (1927), in which one reads that literature develops by certain formal patterns that immanently presuppose certain modes of perception. This could be compared to the development of language, which already contains certain perceptual possibilities unfolding according to its inner rules, i.e., its morphological, structural, and evolutionary characteristics.[33]

Svetlikova compares such anti-psychologism of the *Opoyazians* to that of Edmund Husserl, as in his *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901). This study, which is at the origin of Husserl's phenomenology, has an anti-psychologist agenda. In Svetlikova's account, "the content of a proposition" for Husserl "and the attendant psychic processes are the phenomena of different series," which is why it is incorrect to think that "we explain the nature of a

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[31] Rad Borislavov writes (Borislavov 2011, p. 40):

> Physiological psychology examined the difference between voluntary and involuntary actions and how these in turn affected the mind's cognitive abilities, the ability to focus for a given period of time, and thus to control one's attention. [. . .] Physiological psychology not only became an important reference point for Victorian cultural life, it was also the immediate precursor to experimental psychology."

Cf. Sirotkina's studies (Sirotkina 1999, Sirotkina 2016, Sirotkina 2016b) regarding the physiological and psychological experiments and underpinnings of the arts in Russia during the first decades of the twentieth century.

[32] An objection to Fechner's experimental aesthetics, based on its alleged inability to account for the uniqueness of aesthetic experience proper, can be found in "Lyric Poetry and Experiment," a 1909 article of Andrei Bely, included in his book *Symbolism*, which anticipated many of *Opoyaz* ideas — cf. Lvoff (2013).

[33] By Rens Bod's laconic definition, the Formalists "searched for *internal* regularities in literary works, such as form characteristics and their effects, and not for *external* laws that could clarify the creation of the works" (Bod 2013, p. 327). From these inner regularities, they deduced a history of literature (or literariness, to be precise), which consisted in an alteration of canons, contingent on certain combinations of devices, *perceived* as *ostranenie*-laden when new. The ensuing *Opoyaz* theory of the literary fact (to which Tynianov contributed most of all) is exactly an attempt to recapture perception from the individual and make it a fact of art's systemic existence; the nomothetic is thus reclaimed from the idiographic. In such a way, even when the *Opoyazians* wrote about a shift in an epoch's orientation [*ustanovka*] towards certain aesthetic tenets, that orientation was discussed not as a psychological or sociological fact; from the *Opoyaz* standpoint, "literary contemporaneity [was] not the sum of isolated and subjective aspirations, on which it is impossible to rely, but a system of correlations characterized by objective unity" (Weinstein 1996, p. 43). The most radical expression of this approach belongs to Osip Brik, who was very close to the *Opoyaz* trio and Shklovsky in particular; Brik wrote that, "had Pushkin never lived, *Eugene Onegin* would have been written anyway" (Brik 1923, p. 213). In other words, though it is true that perception emanates from individuals — just as *parole* in Saussurean linguistics — for every epoch there is a certain norm of perception by which individuals abide — and this is already comparable to the Saussurean notion of *langue*. Nevertheless, it must be added, despite everything previously said, that this tendency towards finding the nomothetic principles of literary history in *Opoyaz* theory was undermined by Shklovsky, Tynianov, and Eikhenbaum's belief in the ever-changing and untraceable nature of the literary fact (form), so that they allowed for the unpredictability of literature's evolution. This belief had to do with the principle of *ostranenie* and resulted in a fundamental contradiction within the *Opoyaz* theory — cf. Lvoff (2015, the first chapter).

preposition by describing its psychic genesis," for "logical connection is an ideal form, irreducible to one psychic act or another" (*ibid.*, p. 33-34).[34]

We see the same logic in Eikhenbaum's *The Young Tolstoy* (1922): "The life of the soul [*dushevnaia zhizn'*] is subsumed [. . .] under some general notions of the forms in which it manifests itself; it submits to a certain design, which often has to do with traditional forms, and thus inevitably assumes a conventional aspect not coincident with its actual, nonverbal [*vneslovesnyi*], immediate content" (Eikhenbaum 1922, p. 11).[35] Therefore, it may be concluded that there is no contradiction between Shklovsky's reduction of psychology to motivation, on the one hand, and his discussion of emotion, on the other, since emotion in literature, not as "the life of the soul" but as a *form* in which this life "manifests itself," is a business of literary theory, not psychology. Jakobson, who was very close with the *Opoyazians* in the 1910s and 1920s, wrote on the matter with utmost clarity in his famous 1921 essay "The Newest Russian Poetry" (Jakobson 1987b, pp. 274–275):

> In emotive and poetic language, language representations (phonetic as well semantic ones) draw greater attention to themselves; the link between the acoustical aspect and that of meaning [*znachenie*] is greater, more intimate, and more revolutionary as a result, because the habitual associations by contiguity sink into the background. [. . .]
>
> But this exhausts the affinity between the emotive and the poetic language. While in the first one, it is affect [*affekt*] that dictates its laws to the verbal mass [. . .], poetry, which is nothing but an *utterance oriented towards expression* [*vyskazyvanie s ustanovkoi na vyrazhenie*], is governed [. . .] by immanent laws; the communicative function, inherent in practical as well as emotive language, is minimal here.[36]

In such a way, the *Opoyaz* doctrine does not exclude the author's feelings and individual aspirations, but it brackets them off[37] — or, to cite one of the most perspicacious scholars of Russian Formalism, "Formalist anti-psychologism in the realm of creative aesthetics (i.e., the elimination of the author as a biographical, existential, personality) should not be confused with a rather psychological tendency of the Formalist aesthetics of perception. [. . .] Formalist anti-psychologism is primarily against the exclusion of 'constructiveness' from the factors of the psychology of creativity" (Hansen-Löve 2001, p. 178).

Accordingly, the *Opoyazians* bracketed off the serious, if not tragic, "content" of the literary work, as the following critical summary of Shklovsky's writings on Cervantes and Eikhenbaum's essay on Gogol should demonstrate. Furthermore, the *Opoyazians* highlighted

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[34] It is important to remind the reader that the *Opoyazians* did not delve into philosophy but, conversely, shunned it, for the reasons laid out at the beginning of the article and also in fn. 13. There is a danger that *Opoyaz* Formalism in Svetlikova's description may sound too academic for a deliberately not-so-academic movement; Ilya Kalinin points it out: "The drawback of [Svetlikova's] important and useful work is that [. . .] having reduced Russian Formalism's many theoretical breakthroughs to European academic psychology of the nineteenth century, it [Russian Formalism] ended up almost completely deprived of its revolutionizing potential" (Kalinin 2006, p. 75).

[35] Also cf. Eikhenbaum (1914).

[36] Cf. Jakobson's example: "When Mayakovsky says: / 'I will open to you with words simple as mooing / Our new souls, buzzing as lanterns' arcs' (Tragedy *Vladimir Mayakovsky*), then the poetic fact are the 'words simple as mooing,' while the soul is a secondary, attendant, and made-up fact" (Jakobson 1987b, p. 275).

[37] The very act of bracketing off may be reminiscent of phenomenological *epoché* — cf. Yamposkaya's article (Yampolskaya 2017) analyzing Marc Richir's phenomenology by resorting to Formalist terms. However, Hansen-Löve justly remarks that the *Opoyaz* Formalists were not influenced by Husserl's teaching unlike the Moscow Formalists, especially Gustav Shpet, who oriented himself towards the German philosopher and even corresponded with him. Nevertheless, Hansen-Löve adds, Boris Engelgardt's analysis of *Opoyaz* Formalism demonstrates the *Opoyazians*' own kind of reduction, comparable with Husserl's. This reduction manifests itself in "the elimination of the [. . .] notion of the aesthetic message as [. . .] an 'expression' of some 'design' or 'task,' determined by the extra-aesthetic [. . .] social, biographical, or ideological position" (Hansen-Löve 2001, p. 174).

humor as that which brings out the construction of the work. In conclusion of this section, which has been chiefly devoted to *Opoyaz* Formalism vis-à-vis psychology and the question of emotion in particular, it is essential to mention another *Opoyaz* text on that matter, Eikhenbaum's article "Meditations on Art: Art and Emotion," which devotes special attention to the comic. At first, we find in it the same argument as in *The Young Tolstoy*: there are emotions of the soul (i.e., our inner psychic life) and of the spirit (i.e., objectified, cultural, forms of emotions), but what is of special interest for us is that the only emotion that, according to Eikhenbaum, is purely spiritual, is laughter. Carol Any's summary of this article is lucid and succinct: "An instance of a purely spiritual [*dukhovnyi*] emotion, in Eikhenbaum's opinion, is laughter. We understand humor no matter our state of the soul [*dushevnoe sostoianie*]. Comedy, the lowest form of drama, is the quintessence of art for Eikhenbaum. Comedy's capability to affect us without evoking personal emotions is a sign of the highest form of art" (Any 1985, p. 138). The idea is clear: when we cry at a play, we tend to prioritize our crying, unable to see well through the tears. Meanwhile, laughter does not interfere with our attention to the play's formal specificity. When watching a comedy, we are ever on the lookout for the funny, such as various twists and catches (both could be covered with the Russian word *priem*, device) in the dialogue or in the plot; in this condition, we do not necessarily expect to be moved but are ready to derive pleasure from the work's play of wit.

In seeing things this way, the *Opoyazians* were not alone but — as the previous comparison with Husserl shows — in the vanguard of European thought. It was in 1925, the next year after the publication of Eikhenbaum's article, that José Ortega y Gasset's famous "The Dehumanization of Art" saw the light of day. The following passage written by the Spanish philosopher articulates the same idea; let it be cited at length to compensate for the *Opoyazians* essayistic brevity, which, however brilliant, has often prevented many a critic from understanding them (Ortega y Gasset 1968, pp. 8–10):

> A man likes a play when he has become interested in the human destinies presented to him, when the love and hatred, the joys and sorrows of the personages so move his heart that he participates in it all as though it were happening in real life. And he calls a work "good" if it succeeds in creating the illusion necessary to make the imaginary personages appear like living persons. [. . .]
>
> It thus appears that to the majority of people aesthetic pleasure means a state of mind which is essentially undistinguishable from their ordinary behavior. [. . .] By art they understand a means through which they are brought in contact with interesting human affairs. Artistic forms proper — figments, fantasy — are tolerated only if they do not interfere with the perception of human forms and fates. [. . .]
>
> [P]reoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper.
>
> We have here a very simple optical problem. [...] Take a garden seen through a window. Looking at the garden we adjust our eyes in such a way that the ray of vision travels through the pane without delay and rests on the shrubs and flowers. Since we are focusing on the garden and our ray of vision is directed toward it, we do not see the window but look clear through it. The purer the glass the less we see it. [. . .]
>
> Similarly a work of art vanishes from sight for a beholder who seeks in it nothing but the moving fate of John and Mary or Tristan and Isolde and adjusts his vision to this.

What Eikhenbaum and Ortega wrote resonates, in turn, with Henri Bergson's book on laughter, first published in 1900: "[T]he *absence of feeling* [. . .] usually accompanies laughter. It seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled. Indifference is its

natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion" (Bergson 1914, p. 4).[38] The difference, however, is that Bergson did not extrapolate this principle to those works in which tears and laughter are mixed (as in drama), not to mention pure tragedies; meanwhile, the next section of the article shows that that is precisely what the *Opoyazians* did.

3. The Means of Meaning: Humor vs. Teleology

Thus far, we have seen that the *Opoyazians* vindicated the bare essence of literature with high convincingness, as far as *zaum'* was concerned. Emotive but uncommitted to anything more "serious" than literariness itself, *zaum'* allowed the *Opoyazians*, who relied on such perception-related categories as *ostranenie* and automatization, to circumvent the pitfall of psychologism (the difference between psychologism and the psychological has already been explained). *Zaum'* helped the *Opoyazians* to draw a distinct line between the extra-textual and the specifically textual. It also displayed their propensity for humor, which, unlike distracting earnestness, proved compatible with literariness. Had Shklovsky and his allies limited themselves to *zaum'* and the like phenomena, they would have largely eschewed the challenges described below, even though their theory would have hardly been such a slap in the face[39] of common sense, or as much of a breakthrough. Yet the "imperialism"[40] of *Opoyaz* theory, its great stubbornness and self-imposed blindness to alternative approaches,[41] which let it become a most influential twentieth-century doctrine, consisted in extrapolating the same principles as found in *zaum'* to motivated works of art, i.e., the ones that appear to have a message separable from the medium. In the *Opoyazians'* analysis of motivated works, the binary of the comic and its opposite became — more vividly than before — the firing line of the debate between the literary and the personal (in the extra-literary sense).

Two illustrative examples are Eikhenbaum's essay on Gogol's "The Overcoat" and Shklovsky's writings on Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Both of these classics are famous for their humor, and yet there had existed a tradition, equally valid today, to motivate and ennoble this

[38] Despite the *Opoyaz* Formalists' big interest in Bergson's work (cf. Curtis 1976), his approach to the comic through the prism of laughter is rather psychological from the *Opoyaz* standpoint and is evidently different from the approach expounded here. Shklovsky mentions Bergson's theory of the comic in the article "On the Laws of Cinema" (cf. Shklovsky 1924), but he does not delve into it; he only says that this theory explains well Charlie Chaplin's kind of comedy. Shklovsky also singles out the role of automatization in the comic according to both Chaplin and Bergson, but, as the reader may see in the following section of the article and its forthcoming second part, automatization, though important for Shklovsky's overall dialectic of art, does not figure much in his theory of humor proper.

[39] Cf. the famous manifesto of the Russian Futurists, "The Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (Burlyuk, Kruchenykh, Mayakovsky, and Khlebnikov 2009).

[40] By the "'imperialism' of the constructive principle" of literature, Tynianov meant literature's incessant conquest of those forms that were not originally literary, i.e., were not initially taken as art — e.g., the diary (Tynianov 1977, p. 267). It may be said that the same expansion, only with regard to literary theory, is distinctive of *Opoyaz* Formalism.

[41] Cf. Lydia Ginzburg (Ginzburg 2002, p. 37):

> As all innovative movements, [*Opoyaz*] Formalism resided in partiality [*predvziatost'*] and intolerance. [. . .] Zhirmunsky [he shared much with the *Opoyazians* but was a moderate] remarked once, while talking to me about Tynianov's new views: "I have pointed out from the very beginning that a historical study of literature is impossible without accounting for the interrelationship of the series [other systems, such as the social one]." But at that moment, such a statement could weaken the initial singling out of literary science as a specific one. Boris Mikhailovich [Eikhenbaum] has been defending the proverbial theory of [literature's] immanent development only recently — however, not because of having been unable to understand the arguments advanced against it, but because of his desire to preserve his blindness while it guarded the search for the specific in literature.

humor, making it meaningful and significant, by insisting on a serious, tragic, message behind it. Meanwhile, faithful to the doctrine expounded in the previous sections, the *Opoyazians* believed that the message of the work is its medium; that the "what" is in the "how"; that the tenor is in the vehicle. (This entailed the material, with units of meaning in it, but it was the interrelationship of the units that was important, not the units by themselves.) Hence, the respective titles of Eikhenbaum's and Shklovsky's essays: "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' Is Made" and "How *Don Quixote* Is Made."

Eikhenbaum's essay "How Gogol's 'Overcoat' Is Made" carries out a painstaking phonetic, verbal, syntactic — in one word, stylistic, analysis of the story. Drawing on the drafts of Gogol's work as well as on the contemporaries' accounts of his manifestly theatrical manner of reading his work in public, Eikhenbaum shows: Gogol's design of the story was born from verbal and syntactic play, which, in turn, climaxed in the phantasmagoric story of Akaky Akakievich. Eikhenbaum maintains that the constructive principle of Gogol's story is *skaz*, i.e., a special way of telling the story in the "voice" that is not neutral but, on the contrary, so peculiar that it constitutes another character in that story. Eikhenbaum's aim is to show how Gogol's special way of telling the story by merrily alternating masks, tragic and not, lays bare the fundamental playfulness of art as such.

At this point, the earnest and compassionate reader of Russian literature usually exclaims: but what about the lesson of the story, the fact that Akaky Akakievich (as the consensus has it) is the proverbial little man of Russian literature, ever humiliated and insulted (to use the title of Dostoyevsky's novel)? Eikhenbaum does not dodge these questions. On the contrary, he focuses on the so-called "humane place" of the story, when the poor protagonist beseeches the world to leave him alone and stop offending him. Yet, rather than consider this the ultimate message of "The Overcoat," Eikhenbaum regards it as only one of the colors in the kaleidoscope of *skaz*; eventually, he diminishes the importance of the tragic element (which, according to him, shielded the sentimental readers from the artistic essence of the work, which essence, to repeat, had allegedly sprung from Gogol's inner drive to wordplay): "In 'The Overcoat,' there is also a different, sentimental-melodramatic, type of declamation that creeps into the overall punning style; this is the famous 'humane' [*gumannyi*] place,[42] which had grown so popular with Russian literary criticism that, rather than a side artistic device, had become the 'idea' of the entire story" (Eikhenbaum 1919, p. 158).

By celebrating "the overall punning style" of the story, Eikhenbaum prioritizes the humorous side of *skaz*. It could be argued, of course, that he overplayed its importance, but it can also be said that he simply equated the tragic with the comic. This, however, implies that *skaz* as such is not so serious in and of itself. At any rate, *skaz* does not reject the tragic; however, it abolishes its monopoly on meaning.

Unsurprisingly, Eikhenbaum's contemporaries had much to object to it, but before we turn to them, let us consider Shklovsky's paper on *Don Quixote*, since it voices and develops some very important assumptions of Eikhenbaum's essay. Shklovsky wants to bring the construction of Cervantes's novel to light — something those preoccupied with the "meaning"[43] of the work failed to do, having forgotten in their ideological and psychological discussions of Don Quixote about the literary specificity of. . . . *Don Quixote*. Shklovsky does not try to interpret the text in the sense of guessing the meaning that *underlies* it.[44] Instead, he

[42] This humane place has to do with the theme of the little man, humiliated and insulted, which theme, dominant in Russian literature, is traditionally traced back to "The Overcoat."

[43] It has been already shown that the *Opoyazians* did not disregard meaning — they reevaluated it from the standpoint of literariness. Cf. Shklovsky: "Who told you that we have forgotten meaning? We just do not discuss that which we do not (yet) understand; the only thing we have forgotten are your theories of filling with meaning [*osmyshlenie*], so primitive in their highfalutin abstractness" (Shklovsky 1919, p. 68).

[44] The Formalists liked to support this stance with Tolstoy's famous reply to Nikolai Strakhov's interpretation of *Anna Karenina*: "Your judgment about my novel is right [. . .], but [. . .] does not express everything I wanted to

takes Cervantes's novel apart — like a car, as he himself provocatively wrote, urged by the desire to see "how life is made, and how *Don Quixote* is made, and how the automobile is made" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 146).[45]

Shklovsky concentrates on those components that comprise the construction of Cervantes's novel, namely, the speeches of the main characters and the interpolated stories, showing the ways in which these are brought together through various devices subject to the dominant "threading device" [*priem nanizyvaniia*] (Shklovsky 1929, p. 87). But, just as the tailor (the writer) conceals the seam from the unwitting eyes of the one whom he dresses, Cervantes motivates this threading—for example, by the device of "framing" [*obramlenie*], such as when the reader of *Don Quixote* is presented with "The Tale of Ill-Advised Curiosity," which, having nothing to do with the storyline, is introduced as a manuscript read by one of the novel's characters (*ibid.*, p. 111). The types of motivated threading, which Shklovsky analyzes, are many.

Threading, according to Shklovsky, is what allows Cervantes's novel to exist; however, it is not something auxiliary; the artistry of the novel does not exist for the Knight of the Woeful Figure — it is the other way round. The point of the novel is, simply, to be. Such is the daring conclusion that Shklovsky's essay compels. At first, it sounds insultingly reductive and primitive; common sense suggests that Cervantes, a reputedly great writer, must have had something to say, that he must have had some *meaningful* intention when writing the novel, which is far from trifling *zaum'* or Dada. But then one comes across two major answers to this objection in Shklovsky's texts (the essay at issue and also some others). The first answer has to do with the negative, parodic, task of Cervantes's novel; the second answer, which I infer from Shklovsky's writing, has to do with the *Opoyaz* take on the purpose of art. Both of these answers, as will be seen in a moment, challenge the myth of the single witting author reining in his text, unwaveringly heading towards some clear-cut destination.

Don Quixote's original task of a parody was of cardinal importance to Shklovsky, who, as an *Opoyazian*, considered parody the very incarnation of the driving principle of literary development, for in the literary universe, seen through *Opoyaz* eyes, one heads not towards, as much as away from something.[46] This is a negative, if not apophatic, dialectics.[47] Thus, Tynianov argued that Dostoyevsky discovered his own style by having combatted Gogol's—through parody. In a way, Shklovsky went even farther than this in his study of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (included in *Theory of Prose* under the title "The Parody Novel"). Shklovsky

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say. […] Had I wanted to say in words everything I meant to express with my novel, then I should have written the same novel that I wrote from the very beginning" (Tolstoy 1984, p. 784).

[45] Cf. Eikhenbaum: "Science as such does not explain but only establishes the specific features and correlations of phenomena. [Literary] history can answer no 'whys' but only the question, 'what it means'" (Eikhenbaum 2001, p. 55).

In many of Shklovsky and Eikhenbaum's contemporaries, such defiant phrases planted a deceitful expectation of an "essentially descriptive and semi-statistic" method (Trotsky 1971, p. 163). Yet the *Opoyazians'* goal was far from cataloguing devices. Rather, they could be compared to a biologist studying the DNA of an organism. In the essay on *Don Quixote*, Shklovsky tried to envisage how the great novel came into being from the "nuts and bolts" constituting it, and how the unique construction of that novel determined its role in the history of literature.

The naturalistic metaphor employed above is but a rhetorical figure. Despite some claims otherwise (as in Borislavov's informative dissertation), it seems inaccurate to prioritize naturalistically sounding metaphors (e.g., literary evolution) in Shklovsky and his allies' works, rife with metaphors of all kinds. An example of a truly biology-oriented Formalists is Boris Yarkho — cf. Gasparov (2016) and Pilshchikov (2011).

[46] Shklovsky puts forth this view in a chapter on literature without a plot, from his *Theory of Prose*, writing about the perpetual struggle between various canons (artistic principles). The logic of this struggle is the same as with the sons' not willing to be like their fathers, whom they oppose. This is very close to what Harold Bloom termed "the anxiety of influence," Freud's idea of *Familienroman* having been an important one for him—cf. Kalinin (2006) and Lvoff (2012).

[47] Cf. Bakhtin and Medvedev (1991, chapter "The Apophatic Method in Literary History").

emphasized Sterne's playful turning upside down of multifarious conventions and clichés of previous novels, yet, rather than consider *Tristram Shandy* an exception to the rule, Shklovsky proclaimed it to be "the most typical novel of word literature" (*ibid.*, p. 204). Typical in the same sense in which *zaum'* is typical — not because of being the most widespread aesthetic principle (which it is not), but because of being the rule's purest, most unadulterated, confirmation — for this irreverent upending of all is typical of *ostranenie*, whose energy is at the heart of art's evolution.

Parody, "the humorous form" as such,[48] according to Shklovsky, is "the least canonized[49] one and at the same time the most active in dealing with the sensation of semantic disparities [*semanticheskoe neravenstvo*],"[50] which is why it "prepares new forms for 'serious' art" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 234).[51] In such a way, the humor that Shklovsky writes about with regard to parody appears to be not its cause but the consequence. Humorous is our reaction to the bracing irregularity of the text in which conventions (of art and its perception, or orientation) are violated, while new ones are introduced, often by force, without having been polished yet by motivation and habit.

Led by these views, Shklovsky diminishes the significance of Don Quixote for the sake of *Don Quixote*, as has already been said. That Cervantes's knight is a woeful one is definitely not the message of the novel, despite what the Romantics and, later, Dostoyevsky believed (Shklovsky's examples), or, say, Miguel de Unamuno in the twentieth century.[52] Conversely, Shklovsky emphasizes Cervantes's unsympathetic attitude to Don Quixote and the idiocy of the latter (in the first volume).[53] And yet the fact that Cervantes let Don Quixote deliver wise speeches (in Shklovsky's opinion, this was initially done because Cervantes simply wanted to see them in the book, just as he simply wanted to include in it "The Tale of Ill-Advised Curiosity") — this favored the transformation of the "brainless knight" into the Knight of the Woeful Figure, of which tendency Cervantes became aware with time, especially in the second volume (Shklovsky 1929, p. 94). "The novels' second parts," Shklovsky remarks, "or

[48] Shklovsky discusses parody as a humorous form. It must be stressed — provisionally so — that Tynianov did not consider parody a necessarily comic phenomenon—the second and forthcoming part of this article explains why.

[49] Canonization is a term from the *Opoyaz* theory of literary evolution. Canonization follows innovation, such as when a certain artistic principle becomes dominant, so that its multiple adherents labor it to perfection, until it has ossified in that perfection, i.e., has become automated, canonized. Apparently, humor is the least canonized form because — at the time of Shklovsky — it was still largely considered unequal to the tragic and thus denied as much canonizing attention.

[50] He repeats this thought in "Towards a Theory of the Comic" (analyzed in the second part of this article): "a new form is almost always perceived as comic"; "the comic genre in art is usually in the vanguard" (Shklovsky 1922, p. 66).

[51] That is the reason why, as Hansen-Löve observes, "the acts of *ostranenie* (as well as the effects of *ostranenie*) are simultaneously comical acts and effects" (Hansen-Löve 2001, p. 192).

[52] Unamuno wrote a book titled *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza*. Simon Leys summarizes Unamuno's vision as follows (Leys 1998, n. pag.):

> His main argument, which he sustained, tongue in cheek, over more than four hundred pages, is that Don Quixote should be urgently rescued from the clumsy hands of Cervantes. Don Quixote is our guide, he is inspired, he is sublime, he is true. As for Cervantes, he is a mere shadow: deprived of Don Quixote's support, he hardly exists; when reduced to his own meager moral and intellectual resources, he proved unable to produce any significant work. How could he ever have appreciated the genius of his own hero? He looked at Don Quixote from the point of view of the world—he took the side of the enemy. Thus, the task which Unamuno assigned to himself was to set the record straight — to vindicate at last the validity of Don Quixote's vision against the false wisdom of the clever wits, the vulgarity of the bullies, the narrow minds of the jesters — and against the dim understanding of Cervantes.

[53] Cf. Nabokov (1983).

their continuations rather, change their structure very often. The main story [*novella*] cuts short, as it were, and the action begins to develop according to a different principle already" (*ibid.,* p. 114). Nevertheless, this development can by no means change the formative cause of the novel, the reason why this novel is itself. At this point, *Don Quixote* is opposed not only to Don Quixote the hero but also to Cervantes, the author (and also the reader, for Cervantes is exactly that when he interprets his own text).

Shklovsky does not deny the fact that he is more interested in the work than in its author,[54] and the work plays by its own rules eventually, even the most sophisticated author not being fully aware of the astounding complexity of these rules, rooted deep down in art's evolution. What the author thinks—at the beginning of writing the work or in the process of it (but definitely not later)—this may tell on the work; it just as easily may not, but even if it did, this is certainly not decisive, in Shklovsky's opinion. The following fragment from his essay on Andrei Bely is revealing (*ibid.*, p. 205, emphasis added):

> The philosophical worldview of the writer is his working hypothesis. [. . .]
>
> When an external ideology, unsupported by the technical preconditions of the craft, invades the realm of writing, the work of art does not come out. [. . .]
>
> The attempts to create an artistic parallel to some extra-artistic worldview hardly succeed. The work of art bends or straightens the line according to its own laws.
>
> *Sometimes, the author cannot even say what he has created*.

Elsewhere, Shklovsky expressed the same idea: "I know my craft [*remeslo*] is cleverer than I" (Shklovsky 1926, p. 97). By the same token, his conclusion about Cervantes seems to be that Cervantes's craft outsmarted Cervantes.[55] Whereas the individual's inner psychic life, still inarticulate, is his own, the moment it has been expressed, it has been *alienated* from him — from then on, it already belongs to a certain system: the system of language, for example, or the system of literature in our case. Thus, Shklovsky concedes that the ruefully sublime aspect of the protagonist, later championed as such by the Romantics, who had thereby motivated the hidalgo's every eccentricity — such was the unforeseen result of what had initially been Cervantes's parody of chivalric romances; the protagonist's lofty speeches countered the parodying task and made possible the Romantic motivation of the knight errant. Nevertheless, this heroic, tragic, aspect that Don Quixote gradually assumed was an addition to the novel's gamut, but not the clue to its meaning, which meaning resides in the novel's construction. At first a mirthful madman and then a lofty lunatic, toward the end of the novel the protagonist finds his sanity and dies as "a meek Christian," yet that is not the literary message: these are merely the "mask[s]" he alternates, Shklovsky writes (Shklovsky 1929, p. 124). The meaning is not in one mask or another but in the very fact they alternate — this is yet another example of the priority of the "how" over the "what" in *Opoyaz* theory. Eikhenbaum made the same argument about "The Overcoat."

Of course, to an admirer who ascribes godlike omniscience to his favorite author, the very idea that most of the time the author does not control what he is doing, even when he thinks that he does — this idea is blasphemous. And yet those among us who have written creatively know how true this often is — which knowledge is not always conducive to creativity.[56] Still, writers hope that there is some greater meaning looming behind their creativity, but the

[54] Cf. Jakobson's rejection of "biographism" and his simultaneous acceptance of biography as the continuation of the author's creative activity (Jakobson 1987). Cf. a contemporary application of this principle in the works of Vladimir Novikov (Novikov 2012, Novikov 2015).

[55] Cf. Shklovsky: "An invention in general, and the invention of a literary style in particular, is often born from the fixation of a random mutation, a random modification" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 422).

[56] That is what Alexander Blok said to Shklovsky, allegedly: "Blok told me that I was the first person from whom he'd heard serious talk about poetry, but that the things I was saying, though right, are harmful knowledge for the poet" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 454).

Opoyaz answer seems to dash these hopes, while the Formalists' treatment of *Don Quixote* and "The Overcoat" raises disconcerting questions, including the following ones. Does all of this mean that there is no purpose behind a work, as long as we do not reckon with the author, or that a purpose, if there is one, is attendant, hence unimportant? Doesn't it matter in which order the masks of which Eikhenbaum and Shklovsky wrote replaced each other, and doesn't this order reflect the author's design? Even if the author, supposedly, did not know what he was doing at first, doesn't his later realization of the tendency latent in his work shed light on the whole undertaking?[57] Finally, if the answer to all of these questions is negative, what are we left with? Nothing but the merry yet pointless play of art? A hedonistic pastime, bound to tickle our perception?[58] This would hardly have been the answer for Shklovsky, who believed in the value of *ostranenie*, which he opposed to automatization, "devour[ing] things, clothes, furniture, the wife, and the fear of war" (*ibid.*, p. 13). Obviously, he believed there was much more to art than simply pleasure. In fact, his *ostranenie* and Tynianov's "new vision," both of which restore the value of the world—that was the answer.

The opponents of the *Opoyazians* did not necessarily disagree with the last statement; thus, one of the most implacable and brilliant among them, Mikhail Bakhtin, used the term *ostranenie* in his own work (cf. "The Epic and the Novel"). Yet these opponents did not think that literature, multi-faceted as it is, could be reduced to literariness, whereas the *Opoyazians* believed that by baring the device they did not impoverish but rehabilitated literature. To analyze this fundamental rift between the *Opoyaz* worldview and the worldviews of their opponents, let us turn to Gogol's oeuvre, which serves as a litmus paper, since Gogol was particularly popular with competing twentieth-century Russian scholars. [59] He was thanks to his status of a classic; his style, so palpable and variegated; and most importantly, the abundance of the lyrical and the sarcastic, the comic and the tragic, the absurd and the tendentious, the meaningful and the meaninglessness in him, not to mention the rare flamboyancy and universality of his gift.

Eikhenbaum's take on Gogol has already been discussed, but to recapitalize: the humorous and the dramatic are equivalent in the story of Akaky Akakievich; the logic of "The Overcoat" is that of stylistic play effected through *skaz*. Those who disagreed with Eikhenbaum did not deny the importance of *skaz* but did not want to regard this medium as the message of the story either.

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[57] This problem, raised by the *Opoyazians*, namely, that of the author's realizing the tendency latent in his art and trying to act upon it, was further elaborated by Andrei Bely in his 1934 book *Gogol's Craft*. (It has previously been pointed out that early Andrei Bely influenced the *Opoyazians*, but in the case of this book he took much from them himself — suffice it to compare his statements with those made in Eikhenbaum's study of Gogol.)

Here, it is the approach of Andrei Bely that may prove synthetic — not necessarily at the cost of being eclectic, though one can find eclecticism in Andrei Bely's book that, for example, tries to juggle his subtle and idealistic aesthetic views with the Soviet notion of the social mandate [*sotsial'nyi zakaz*] — but synthetic in terms of bringing together the thesis of the *Opoyazians* and the antithesis of their teleology-centered opponents (discussed at the end of this section). Andrei Bely writes how Gogol's style emerged from the melody he heard; how it all started for Gogol with single sounds — and here Andrei Bely resembles Eikhenbaum to a degree. What used to be a simple sound grows into an image and an image, into a plot of the story. At some point, Andrei Bely adds, a certain tendency reveals itself in the author's work. But Andrei Bely warns against the danger of "overthink[ing]" [*pereosoznavat'*] this tendency (Bely 1934, p. 26). He likens the author to the wire; the electricity that runs through it has to do with the collective (this somewhat resonates with what the *Opoyazians* wrote about the epoch shared by its contemporaries and Bakhtin, about the event [*sobytie*] of the work between the author and the reader). Yet, Andrei Bely admonishes, should the overly deliberate author put his finger on this wire, the electricity, the radio signal will not reach its destination. Thus, for all his differences with the Formalists, Andrei Bely also acknowledges the autonomy of one's creative work.

[58] The accusation of hedonism was levelled at the *Opoyazians* by Bakhtin in "The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art" (Bakhtin 1990).

[59] Cf. Maguire (1976) and Vinogradova (2004).

One of such critics was Alexander Slonimsky, an author of a short and insightful 1923 book *The Technique of the Comic in Gogol*. The title of the book (which was published by the same house as many *Opoyaz* texts) and the fact that its author was a brother of Mikhail Slonimsky, a member of the Serapion Brothers literary movement, in whose work Shklovsky actively participated — all this only emphasizes the fundamental discrepancy in how Alexander Slonimsky and the *Opoyaz* Formalists saw Gogol's oeuvre. Slonimsky acknowledges this discrepancy himself, already in the preface: "My method is not 'formal,' as it may seem at first glance, but 'aesthetic,' rather. I analyze 'technique' insofar as it possesses 'teleological' value" (Slonimsky 1923, p. 5).

The word "teleological" is key here: Slonimsky is interested not in literature's cleverness (like Shklovsky) but in that of Gogol proper. Accordingly, Slonimsky rejects Eikhenbaum's view on Gogol's humor as a realization of literature's self-valuable play. Slonimsky relies on late Gogol's confession about his dissatisfaction with the "unadulterated" and "aimless" comicalness of his early work (*ibid.*, p. 10).[60] Slonimsky adduces *The Inspector General* as an example of Gogol's purposeful humor of the later period. In this work, Slonimsky writes, "Gogol sharply opposes his humor — 'lofty and rapturous laughter' — to the pure, 'merry,' comicalness that he calls 'the grimacing of a slapstick joker' [*krivlian'e balagannogo skomorokha*]" (*ibid.*, pp. 9–10). In discussing "The Overcoat," Slonimsky does justice to Eikhenbaum but turns to very different theorists, namely, aestheticians, Theodor Lipps, with his *Komik und Humor*, and Johannes Volkelt, with his *System der Ästhetik*, who consider humor a manifestation of the sublime through the comic. What Slonimsky writes next, citing Gogol occasionally, is very close to Romantic irony with its legitimization of the high through the low.[61] Slonimsky's conclusion is that, while comicalness in Gogol is the driving force of the plot, it is the purposeful movement upwards that the work is written for, with its "headlong, ascending, lofty [*pateticheskii*] line of the grotesque" (*ibid.*, p. 65).

Teleology — by way of an *argumentum a contrario* — is also implicitly present in Lev Pumpyansky's interpretation of Gogol's humor. Written about the same time as Slonimsky's book (1922–1923), Pumpyansky's essay was only published in the year 2000. In Caryl Emerson's summary, the main idea of Pumpyansky is that, with the comic in Gogol, "[p]urposelessness suddenly descends upon the weary laborer, the superstitious believer, the tragic mourner, and brings a moment of relief and freedom"; his "[c]onsciousness is at last permitted to stand outside the lofty purpose and assess it" (Emerson 2011, p. 85). By escaping the onus of teleology, such purposelessness only acknowledges it.

As Emerson points out, Pumpyansky anticipated in such a way the idea of the carnivalesque, advanced some time later by Bakhtin, his friend and colleague. Bakhtin's essay on Gogol (1940, 1970) was written in the light of his book on Rabelais and long after the disappearance of the *Opoyaz* movement at the beginning of the 1930s.[62] He writes about freedom from the fetters of ideology as the aim of Gogol's humor, which stems from the laughter of popular culture, whose language and images withstand the narrowness, abstraction, and stifling solipsism of official discourse. The inspiration with which Bakhtin writes in his article about seeing the world as never solved and ever open to the future reverberates with the logic of *ostranenie*;[63] nevertheless, when we read about humor in the *Opoyaz* Formalists, they do not resort to liberating *ostranenie* as much as to the rigid and

[60] Cf. Bely (1934).
[61] As a vivid example of it, cf. Baudelaire (1981). Baudelaire uses Charles Maturin's Gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* as a model to discuss the comic. Baudelaire argues that one laughs not only due to the feeling of being superior but also due to feeling infinitesimal as against the Absolute.
[62] Cf. Galushkin (2000); cf. Levchenko (2014).
[63] Cf. Emerson (2005).

bared construction.[64] As has been argued above and will be shown below, they needed humor to articulate the construction-, and not the *ostranenie*-related, aspect of their theory.

It was precisely the *Opoyazians'* understanding of construction that was the major flaw in their theory according to Bakhtin's "The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art" (1924). Bakhtin protested against "the fact that [in Formalism] *the uncritically understood goal-directed composition of a work is declared to be the artistic value itself, the aesthetic object itself,*" so that "cognitive judgment and inferior technical evaluation [. . .] are substituted for artistic activity (and for contemplation)" (Bakhtin 1990, p. 268). The meaning is not in the work by itself, Bakhtin says; that which the work is oriented towards, together with the work, is what constitutes its meaning; taking a work by itself is "material aesthetics"; the work's architectonics need be considered (*ibid.*, p. 270). "*Humor, heroization, type, character*," writes Bakhtin, "are purely *architectonic* forms," albeit "realized [. . .] through specific compositional devices" (*ibid.*).[65] The flaw of the Formalists, according to Bakhtin — and here Shklovsky's metaphor could be turned against Shklovsky — is that they talk about the construction of an automobile without considering for what purposes this automobile has been built and who is driving it, and where.[66] This brings us to the main, irremovable disagreement between the *Opoyaz* Formalists and their teleology-centered opponents.

The disagreement is of a philosophical nature, having to do with the problem of causality. When the *Opoyaz* theorists insist on the self-sufficiency of the literary construction and those from the other camp speak about teleology, the argument is between the formal and the final cause. The distinction goes back to Aristotle, who singled out four causes of all existing things. The intricacies and the history of the problem of causality put aside, these causes are as follows: (1) the material cause, i.e., matter from which something is born; (2) the formal

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[64] It should be pointed out that later, post-*Opoyaz*, Shklovsky never let go of *Don Quixote*, whose significance, it seems, grew for him year by year. *Ostranenie* plays a far greater role in it than in Shklovsky's early and better known treatment of the novel. Shklovsky's 1966 *Stories about Prose* and 1983 *Theory of Prose*, while retaining some of his initial observations about the structure of Cervantes's novel, address the connection between the epistemological revolution of Cervantes's time and the new type of the novel created by the great Spaniard. Moreover, Shklovsky pays more attention than before to the fact that there are two equally important minds in the novel—not just that of Quixote but also that of Sancho Panza. Shklovsky writes much about Sancho's popular, vernacular, background as significant for Cervantes's reform of the novel. In this, Shklovsky echoes Bakhtin. Finally, in 1983 *Theory of Prose* Shklovsky attacks the Structuralists, Roman Jakobson included, for a purely rhetorical analysis of *Quixote* — precisely the reproach Bakhtin levelled at the Formalists.

[65] Bakhtin's objection to *Opoyaz* Formalism could not be more relevant to modern literary scholars in Digital Humanities, engaged in what Franco Moretti calls Quantitative Formalism (cf. Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet 1). Cf. **Appendix.**

[66] It should be said that the *Opoyaz* Formalists addressed this problem. However, they saw these questions largely as an intervention of the social system into the literary one. Nevertheless, they tried accounting for the social: Tynianov in writing about the social orientation [*ustanovka*] of the ode and other genres; Eikhenbaum, in his theory of the literary everyday [*literaturnyi byt*] as a component of the literary fact of an epoch, and Shklovsky in his analysis of the social aspect of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (cf. Shklovsky 1928b). However, literature remained predominantly autonomous for them: its inner, formal, dialectics determined its development and generated its meaning. The difference can be illustrated with a metaphor to which I have resorted elsewhere (Lvoff 2016b, pp. 81–82):

> [According to the later *Opoyazians,*] social behavior changed the environment around literary evolution but not the evolution itself. To use another evolutionary metaphor, the role of socioeconomic life in literature [. . .] could be compared to that which a meteor supposedly played in the evolution of life on this planet, by putting an end to the dinosaurs' existence. The meteor's impact on evolution was immense; however, life adapted to the new environment according to its internal, evolutionary laws, not according to the laws of physics that had determined the meteor's trajectory from outer space.

In other words, from the *Opoyaz* standpoint, no matter how important the extra-literary factors may be, literariness does not hinge on the cleverness of the authors, but the authors depend on the cleverness of literature.

cause, i.e., the design, the blueprint, of the thing, its structure, the way in which given matter is shaped; (3) the efficient or moving cause, i.e., the agent of the thing coming into being (e.g., the author of the novel); and lastly, (4) the purpose of the thing, or its final cause (what end the novel is written for—to amuse or to terrify, to satirize or to glorify, etc.).

How the final, teleological, cause relates to literature should be self-evident. How the formal cause can do without the final is not as clear, but the short answer is that form absorbs finality. For clarity's sake, let an eloquent example be adduced from a nineteenth-century Russian philosopher, writer, and critic Konstantin Leontiev, valued by the Formalists. Leontiev wrote (Leontiev 1885, p. 143):

> Form in general is the expression of the idea contained in matter. [. . .] Thus, matter given us, is glass and its form, a tumbler—a cylindrical vessel empty inside; where the glass ends, where it no longer is, the surrounding air begins, or so does the liquid inside the vessel; matter cannot go beyond the glass—it does not dare if it wants to remain faithful to the chief idea of its hollow vessel, if it does not want to cease to be a tumbler.
>
> *Form is the despotism of the inner idea and prevents matter from scattering about*.

The essence of the glass is its form, and the same is true of a single work and the entire system of literature. As for the agent, his role is the least significant. As long as novels exist, they are written and read; as long as houses exist, they are built and moved into; for what end novels and houses exist is determined by what they (formally) are; people, though necessary for the novels and houses' existence, do not set the rules of this existence (the very nature of these things dictates them), and so people are left nothing but to comply. The dialectic laws that proceed from the form of the literary work determine the evolution of literature, even though the writer is often unaware of them just as the glassblower and the carpenter may be ignorant of the deeper scientific underpinnings of their craft; empirical knowledge is usually enough for them.

It may be opined that, in a way, the *Opoyazians* recognized not teleology *in* literature but rather the teleology *of* literature, i.e., the teleology of the system, not the person. If we turn to Shklovsky's analysis of *Don Quixote* at the beginning of this section, it is, in fact, possible to infer from it as a certain Weltanschauung (although the *Opoyazians* had always kept away from direct philosophizing, lest literariness be abandoned). The unarticulated philosophy of Shklovsky would postulate that the urge to creation (if not procreation) is the *causa causarum* of art. The weaving of the novel in *Don Quixote*'s case and the kaleidoscope of *skaz* in that of "The Overcoat" are more important than the threads or pieces of colored glass themselves, and even the embroidery and kaleidoscopic images. Such an interpretation can be supported by the following two excerpts from Shklovsky's other texts included in *Theory of Prose* together with the Cervantes article. In "The Structure of the Story and the Novel," Shklovsky writes that the seemingly "content"-driven use of brothers, sisters, and other relatives by various novelists is, in fact, motivated by the need of parallelism in the plot. "Here, as always in art, everything is a motivation of the craft [*motivorka masterstva*]," he writes (Shklovsky 1929, p. 83). It looks as though Shklovsky implies the author's semi-conscious, almost instinctive, will to realize his craft, which is somewhat reminiscent of Schopenhauer's irrational and all-consuming will to life.[67] Unlike Schopenhauer, however, not only does Shklovsky celebrate such will — he, it could be argued, also believes in its aesthetic and ethical good for the person.[68]

[67] Cf. Shklovsky: "Art develops [*razvivaetsia*] by the reason [*razum*] of its technique" (Shklovsky 1990, p. 170).

[68] The word "ethical" may take one by surprise when applied to an *Opoyaz* Formalist, but the antiwar potential of *ostranenie*, this central concept of *Opoyaz* Formalism, the very nature of those examples from Tolstoy that Shklovsky adduces in "Art as Device" — all this suggests otherwise, as many have argued already. Cf. Boym (2005). In relation to one of such ethical examples of *ostranenie* culled from Tolstoy's work, Shklovsky writes:

Finally, all of this brings us to the *Opoyaz* theory of humor discussed in the second and forthcoming part of this article. So far, we have seen how humor acted as an ally of the *Opoyazians*, when it helped them wrest meaning from psychologism; in return, as it were, the *Opoyazians* acknowledged the perfect compatibility of the comic (and not the "serious") with literariness and its objectively-cultural (formed), non-psychic, mode of perception. Moreover, such phenomena, in one way or another associated with the comic, as parody, stylistic play, and purposelessness, helped the *Opoyazians* make an argument for the formal cause as the dominant one (finality being not superior but subservient to it). And yet the moment the *Opoyazians* began to tackle the comic as such, they found themselves at odds with it, unable, or perhaps unwilling, to draw a straight line between humor and its opposite. This, as stated in the second part, could be seen as a failure of the *Opoyazians* — or a great heuristic contribution of their theory, in which humor turned its liberating and destructive sword on itself.

Appendix

For all their substantial differences with the *Opoyaz* Formalists, Franco Moretti and like-minded scholars also seek to see how the system of literature functions at large, which is why it can be argued that, though they may not want to defy the agency of the author, they try to do without him eventually. Hence, Moretti's opposition of close reading to "distant" one. Moreover, just as with the *Opoyaz* Formalists, humor helps to bring to light the strengths and weaknesses of Quantitative Formalists (as Moretti calls himself and his counterparts). This is especially evident when it comes to Matthew Jockers's *Syuzhet* package (mark the Russian word for plot taken from Shklovsky's work). The *Syuzhet* package helps to single out and compare plots from hundreds and thousands of texts — the number of texts one person cannot read (to have the machine deal with the so-called "great unread" is what motivates Franco Moretti and his colleagues). Jockers's idea is to contour a text's plot by looking for positive and negative spikes in it, based on tracking words and sentences with a positive or a negative connotation. He acknowledges himself that the end result (the graph the program produces) is not the plot itself but rather a "proxy for the plot" — in his opinion, "a pretty darn good one" (Jockers 2015, n. pag.).

It could be said that Jockers tries to portray a person by looking at his shadow. But if a person were smiling? One could hardly tell based on a shadow. But, then, would it matter as far as the construction of the work is concerned? It may, not in terms of the mood but rather in terms of the text's play with different (emotional) registers, as in Gogol's "Overcoat." Jockers recognizes this problem (*ibid.*, emphasis added):

> The most spectacular example of failure [in the work of the *Syuzhet* package] was discovered by my son. He'd just finished reading one of the books in my corpus, and I showed him the plot shape from the book and asked him it (sic!) it made sense. He said, 'well, yes, mostly. But this spike here is all wrong.' It was a spike in good fortune, positive valence, at precisely the place in the novel where the villains had scored a major victory. The positive valence was associated with a several page long section in which the bad guys were having a very good time. Readers, of course, would see this as a negative moment in the text, Suyzhet does not. *Nor does Suyzhet understand irony and dark humor and so on*.

Jockers adds that "[o]n a whole, however, Suyzhet gets it right, and that's because most books are not sustained satire, or sustained irony" (*ibid.*). But the latter is debatable if irony is

"I apologize for a painful example, but it is typical as Tolstoy's method of reaching conscience" (Shklovsky 1929, p. 14).

considered as one of the driving principles of literature as such — a view close to the *Opoyazians*. Cf. Steiner 1985 and Lvoff 2016b, pp. 80–81.

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