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Russian Formalist Criticism
Four Essays

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with an Introduction by
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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS · LINCOLN

In the following selection, three asterisks (* * *) are used to indicate that a portion of the original has been omitted.

The Theory of the "Formal Method"

"The Theory of the 'Formal Method'"[1] *provides an admirable overview of the work of the Russian Formalists. Boris Eichenbaum joined the* Opoyaz *group shortly after its formation in 1914 and quickly became one of its most prolific and influential members. His essay "How Gogol's 'Greatcoat' Was Made" was an important contribution to the first collection of Formalist essays,* Poetics: Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language.[2] *Articles and books on a variety of subjects followed, ranging from "The Melody of Verse" and a full-length study of the work of the poet Anna Akhmatova, through studies of Lermontov, Leo Tolstoy, and O. Henry, to general speculations on literature (especially the novel) and a journal of essays, criticism, and stories which he wrote and edited himself.*[3]

By 1926 Eichenbaum and his fellow Formalists found themselves under heavy attack. The attack had started in 1923, after the Formalists had begun to attract a number of young disciples, in Leo Trotsky's Literature and the Revolution, *which devoted an entire chapter to "The Formalist School."*[4] *Trotsky's attack was not devastating. Although sharply worded and largely uninformed of the rapidly growing breadth and depth of Formalist study, it did not demand the dissolution of the movement. Trostky's main point, briefly, was that the Formalist approach to literature was grossly incomplete. The exclusive concentration upon the literariness of literature and the autonomy of art (or, in later phases of Formalism, upon the autonomy of literature as a field of investigation) ignored what from the Marxist point of view was most*

1. Eichenbaum's "Teoriya 'formalnovo metoda,'" was first published in Ukranian in 1926. The text used here is the Russian text in *Literatura: Teoriya, kritika, polemika* [*Literature: Theory, Criticism, Polemics*] (Leningrad, 1927).

2. *Poetika: Sborniki po teorii poeticheskovo yazyka* (Petrograd, 1919). Included were essays by Brik, Jakubinsky, and Shklovsky.

3. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (Vol. IV of *Slavistic Printings and Reprintings*, ed. Cornelis H. Van Schooneveld; 'S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1955), pp. 253–254, gives a bibliography of Eichenbaum's Formalist publications.

4. Leo Trotsky, *Literature and the Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), Chap. V.

crucial—the social causes and effects of art. Trotsky saw Formalism as concerned only with the technical aspects of literature, as a mechanical enumeration of literary devices. He admitted its value as a technical study; he found it valueless and vicious as a complete system of literary study.

The next stage in the attack came in 1924, in the journal The Press and the Revolution. *An article by Anatoly Lunacharsky,*[5] *the first Soviet Commissar of Education, took up where Trotsky left off and, by going further, substantially altered the nature of the charge against the Formalists. The key term in the bill of particulars was no longer "narrow," but "decadent." The specific attack was that Formalism encouraged art for the sake of art and promoted aesthetic sterility. But the still unsettled nature of the official attitude is best shown by the fact that the same issue of* The Press and the Revolution *contained a defense of Formalism in which Eichenbaum answered Trotsky by arguing that Formalism and Marxism were mutually irrelevant. The former explained literature from the inside, the latter from the outside; because each had a different object of study, there could be no real conflict between them.*

A number of interesting attempts to reconcile the two approaches followed, the most promising being the line pursued by such theorists as Alexander Zeitlin, whose general line of argument was that the Marxist sociological analyses of literature could not proceed effectively until theorists knew the nature of the thing they were studying—in short, the internal descriptive work of the Formalists would have to precede any development of a broader literary theory.

The original Formalists themselves, in particular Shklovsky and Eichenbaum, also attempted a compromise. Shklovsky's compromise was a confused and partial recantation, Eichenbaum's a deliberate attempt to broaden a method which he had begun to find too constraining.[6] *Internally, Formalism faced much the same problem the New Criticism faced after its initial success. Having begun with specific and precise problems, it found that the specific led*

5. *Pechat i revolyutsiya*, No. 5.

6. See especially Shklovsky's *Tretya fabrika* [*Third Factory*] (Moscow, 1926) and his "*Voyna i mir* Lva Tolstovo (Formalno-sotsiologicheskoye issledovaniye)" ["*War and Peace* of Leo Tolstoy (A Formalistic-Sociological Study)"], *Novy lef* [*New Left*], No. 1 (1928), and the short-lived journal Eichenbaum wrote and edited himself, *Moy vremennik* [*My Times*] (1929).

only to the general. Unfortunately, the Formalist movement was ended before it fully explored the problems its method posed.

Such, then, was the condition of Formalism at the time of Eichenbaum's summary of the movement. Or perhaps "summary" is not the precise word, for in many respects "The Theory of the 'Formal Method'" reads more like an apologia—a defense carefully calculated to appeal to a hostile audience without distortion of the basic doctrines involved. This perhaps explains Eichenbaum's insistence upon the scientific nature of the Formal method, an insistence that is likely to annoy Western readers. Eichenbaum could not in conscience claim that Formalism was in any sense Marxist in orientation; the simplest and most logical recourse was to insist upon, perhaps even to exaggerate, the notion that the Formalists were engaged merely in a nonideological study of data, that whatever hypotheses they used developed out of the observation of facts and were modified by those facts. The strategy, if we correctly surmise Eichenbaum's aim, was to argue that Formalism was scientific, and thus compatible with Marxism. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Eichenbaum's strategy is at most exaggeration, not falsification; the work of the Formalists is characterized by a desire for accuracy and concreteness that it did not always attain.

Eichenbaum is also guilty of another exaggeration. The reader of "The Theory of the 'Formal Method'" is led to sense a logic of consistent progression within the history of the movement, a consistency improbable for a group of diverse talents dealing with a huge and complex subject. Time and again Eichenbaum varies the formula, "Having disposed of that, we turned to this," as if a dozen or so of Russia's most brilliant literary theoreticians brainstormed through one problem, neatly published a definitive solution, then moved on to something else. Actually, the Formalists no more "solved" the problems involved in such concepts as defamiliarization or motivation than the New Critics solved the problems of irony or metaphor. The leading practitioners rather reached a point of diminishing returns and so began to invest their time in other, but closely related, areas. Once these two types of exaggeration (the scientism of the Formalists and the orderly progress of their research) are discounted, Eichenbaum's essay takes its place as an adequate and accurate summary of the Russian Formalist movement.

The subtitles in this selection have been editorially supplied.

The worst, in my opinion, are those who describe science as if it were settled.

[*Le pire, à mon avis, est celui qui représente la science comme faite.*]—A. DE CANDOLLE

The so-called "formal method" grew out of a struggle for a science of literature that would be both independent and factual; it is not the outgrowth of a particular methodology. The notion of a "method" has been so exaggerated that it now suggests too much. In principle the question for the Formalist[7] is not how to study literature, but what the subject matter of literary study actually is. We neither discuss methodology nor quarrel about it. We speak and may speak only about theoretical principles suggested to us not by this or that ready-made methodology, but by the examination of specific material in its specific context. The Formalists' works in literary theory and literary history show this clearly enough, but during the past ten years so many new questions and old misunderstandings have accumulated that I feel it advisable to try to summarize some of our work—not as a dogmatic system but as a historical summation. I wish to show how the work of the Formalists began, how it evolved, and what it evolved into.

The evolutionary character of the development of the formal method is important to an understanding of its history; our opponents and many of our followers overlook it. We are surrounded by eclectics and late-comers who would turn the formal method into some kind of inflexible "formalistic" system in order to provide themselves with a working vocabulary, a program, and a name. A program is a very handy thing for critics, but not at all characteristic of our method. Our scientific approach has had no such prefabricated program or doctrine, and has none. In our studies we value a theory only as a working hypothesis to help us discover and interpret facts; that is, we determine the validity of the facts and use them as the material of our research. We are not concerned with definitions, for which the late-comers thirst; nor do we build general theories, which so

7. By "Formalists" I mean in this essay only that group of theoreticians who made up the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (the *Opoyaz*) and who began to publish their studies in 1916. [Actually, Eichenbaum also includes as Formalists members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle; see above, p. xiv, note 9.]

delight eclectics. We posit specific principles and adhere to them insofar as the material justifies them. If the material demands their refinement or change, we change or refine them. In this sense we are quite free from our own theories—as science must be free to the extent that theory and conviction are distinct. There is no ready-made science; science lives not by settling on truth, but by overcoming error.

This essay is not intended to argue our position. The initial period of scientific struggle and journalistic polemics is past. Such attacks as that in *The Press and the Revolution*[8] (with which I was honored) can be answered only by new scientific works. My chief purpose here is to show how the formal method, by gradually evolving and broadening its field of research, spread beyond the usual "methodological" limits and became a special science of literature, a specific ordering of facts. Within the limits of this science, the most diverse methods may develop, if only because we focus on the empirical study of the material. Such study was, essentially, the aim of the Formalists from the very beginning, and precisely that was the significance of our quarrel with the old traditions. The name "formal method," bestowed upon the movement and now firmly attached to it, may be tentatively understood as a historical term; it should not be taken as an accurate description of our work. Neither "Formalism" as an aesthetic theory nor "methodology" as a finished scientific system characterizes us; we are characterized only by the attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material. We ask only for recognition of the theoretical and historical facts of literary art as such.

1. THE ORIGINS OF FORMALISM

Representatives of the formal method were frequently reproached by various groups for their lack of clarity or for the inadequacy of their principles—for indifference to general questions of aesthetics, sociology, psychology, and so on. These reproofs, despite their varying merit, are alike in that they correctly grasp that the chief characteristic of the Formalists is indeed their deliberate isolation both from "aesthetics from above" and from all ready-made or

8. See above, p. 100. *Ed. note.*

self-styled general theories. This isolation (particularly from aesthetics) is more or less typical of all contemporary studies of art. Dismissing a whole group of general problems (problems of beauty, the aims of art, etc.), the contemporary study of art concentrates on the concrete problems of aesthetics [*Kunstwissenschaft*]. Without reference to socio-aesthetic premises, it raises questions about the idea of artistic "form" and its evolution. It thereby raises a series of more specific theoretical and historical questions. Such familiar slogans as Wölfflin's "history of art without names" [*Kunstgeschichte ohne Nahmen*][9] characterized experiments in the empirical analysis of style and technique (like Voll's "experiment in the comparative study of paintings"). In Germany especially the study of the theory and history of the visual arts, which had had there an extremely rich history of tradition and experiment, occupied a central position in art studies and began to influence the general theory of art and its separate disciplines—in particular, the study of literature.[10] In Russia, apparently for local historical reasons, literary studies occupied a place analogous to that of the visual arts in Germany.

The formal method has attracted general attention and become controversial not, of course, because of its distinctive methodology, but rather because of its characteristic attitude toward the understanding and the study of technique. The Formalists advocated principles which violated solidly entrenched traditional notions, notions which had appeared to be "axiomatic" not only in the study of literature, but in the study of art generally. Because they adhered to their principles so strictly, they narrowed the distance between particular problems of literary theory and general problems of aesthetics. The ideas and principles of the Formalists, for all their concreteness, were pointedly directed towards a general theory of aesthetics. Our creation of a radically unconventional poetics, therefore, implied more than a simple reassessment of particular problems; it had an impact on the study of art generally. It had its impact

9. See Hinrich Wölfflin's *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Munich, 1915). Wölfflin was one of the originators of the stylistic analysis of art. *Ed. note.*

10. R[udolph] Unger notes the strong influence of the work of Wölfflin on such representatives of the "aesthetic" trend in German historical-literary study as O[skar] Walzel and F[ritz] Strich. See his article, "Moderne Strömungen in der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft," *Die Literatur*, II (November 1923). Cf. also Walzel's *Gehalt und Gestalt im Kunstwerk des Dichters* (Berlin, 1923).

because of a series of historical developments, the most important of which were the crisis in philosophical aesthetics and the startling innovations in art (in Russia most abrupt and most clearly defined in poetry). Aesthetics seemed barren and art deliberately denuded—in an entirely primitive condition. Hence, Formalism and Futurism seemed bound together by history.

But the general historical significance of the appearance of Formalism comprises a special theme; I must speak of something else here because I intend to show how the principles and problems of the formal method evolved and how the Formalists came to their present position.

Before the appearance of the Formalists, academic research, quite ignorant of theoretical problems, made use of antiquated aesthetic, psychological, and historical "axioms" and had so lost sight of its proper subject that its very existence as a science had become illusory. There was almost no struggle between the Formalists and the Academicians, not because the Formalists had broken in the door (there were no doors), but because we found an open passageway instead of a fortress. The theoretical heritage which Potebnya and Veselovsky left to their disciples seemed to lay like dead capital —a treasure which they were afraid to touch, the brilliance of which they had allowed to fade. In fact, authority and influence had gradually passed from academic scholarship to the "scholarship" of the journals, to the work of the Symbolist critics and theoreticians. Actually, between 1907 and 1912 the books and essays of Vyacheslav Ivanov, Bryusov, Merezhkovsky, Chukovsky, and others, were much more influential than the scholarly studies and dissertations of the university professors. This journalistic "scholarship," with all its subjectivity and tendentiousness, was supported by the theoretical principles and slogans of the new artistic movements and their propagandists. Such books as Bely's *Simvolizm* (1910) naturally meant much more to the younger generation than the monographs on the history of literature which sprang up from no set of principles and which showed that the authors completely lacked both a scientific temperament and a scientific point of view.

The historical battle between the two generations [the Symbolists and the Formalists]—a battle which was fought over principles and was extraordinarily intense—was therefore resolved in the journals,

and the battle line was drawn over Symbolist theory and Impressionistic criticism rather than over any work being done by the Academicians. We entered the fight against the Symbolists in order to wrest poetics from their hands—to free it from its ties with their subjective philosophical and aesthetic theories and to direct it toward the scientific investigation of facts. We were raised on their works, and we saw their errors with the greatest clarity. At this time, the struggle became even more urgent because the Futurists (Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Mayakovsky), who were on the rise, opposed the Symbolist poetics and supported the Formalists.

The original group of Formalists was united by the idea of liberating poetic diction from the fetters of the intellectualism and moralism which more and more obsessed the Symbolists. The dissension among the Symbolist theoreticians (1910–1911) and the appearance of the Acmeists[11] prepared the way for our decisive rebellion. We knew that all compromises would have to be avoided, that history demanded of us a really revolutionary attitude—a categorical thesis, merciless irony, and bold rejections of whatever could not be reconciled with our position. We had to oppose the subjective aesthetic principles espoused by the Symbolists with an objective consideration of the facts. Hence our Formalist movement was characterized by a new passion for scientific positivism—a rejection of philosophical assumptions, of psychological and aesthetic interpretations, etc. Art, considered apart from philosophical aesthetics and ideological theories, dictated its own position on things. We had to turn to facts and, abandoning general systems and problems, to begin "in the middle," with the facts which art forced upon us. Art demanded that we approach it closely; science, that we deal with the specific.

2. The Science of Literature: The Independent Value of Poetic Sound

The establishment of a specific and factual literary science was basic to the organization of the formal method. All of our efforts

11. The Acmeists, like the Futurists, rebelled against the principles and practices of the Symbolists. But unlike the Futurists, they attempted a highly controlled, polished style of poetry. The best-known Acmeists were Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. The movement did not survive World War I. *Ed. note.*

were directed toward disposing of the earlier position which, according to Alexander Veselovsky, made of literature an abandoned thing [a *res nullius*]. This is why the position of the Formalists could not be reconciled with other approaches and was so unacceptable to the eclectics. In rejecting these other approaches, the Formalists actually rejected and still reject not the methods, but rather the irresponsible mixing of various disciplines and their problems. The basis of our position was and is that the object of literary science, as such, must be the study of those specifics which distinguish it from any other material. (The secondary, incidental features of such material, however, may reasonably and rightly be used in a subordinate way by other scientific disciplines.) Roman Jakobson formulated this view with perfect clarity:

> The object of the science of literature is not literature, but literariness—that is, that which makes a given work a work of literature. Until now literary historians have preferred to act like the policeman who, intending to arrest a certain person, would, at any opportunity, seize any and all persons who chanced into the apartment, as well as those who passed along the street. The literary historians used everything—anthropology, psychology, politics, philosophy. Instead of a science of literature, they created a conglomeration of homespun disciplines. They seemed to have forgotten that their essays strayed into related disciplines—the history of philosophy, the history of culture, of psychology, etc.—and that these could rightly use literary masterpieces only as defective, secondary documents.[12]

To apply and strengthen this principle of specificity and to avoid speculative aesthetics, we had to compare literary facts with other kinds of facts, extracting from a limitless number of important orders of fact that order which would pertain to literature and would distinguish it from the others by its function. This was the method Leo Jakubinsky followed in his essays in the first *Opoyaz* collection, in which he worked out the contrast between poetic and practical language that served as the basic principle of the Formalists' work on key problems of poetics. As a result, the Formalists did not look,

12. Roman Jakobson, *Noveyshaya russkaya poeziya* [*Modern Russian Poetry*] (Prague, 1921) p. 11. [Jakobson, it should be stressed, is not arguing that literature is unrelated to history, psychology, etc. He is, rather, insisting that the study of literature, if it is to be a distinct discipline, must have its own particular subject.]

as literary students usually had, toward history, culture, sociology, psychology, or aesthetics, etc., but toward linguistics, a science bordering on poetics and sharing material with it, but approaching it from a different perspective and with different problems. Linguistics, for its part, was also interested in the formal method in that what was discovered by comparing poetic and practical language could be studied as a purely linguistic problem, as part of the general phenomena of language. The relationship between linguistics and the formal method was somewhat analogous to that relation of mutual use and delimitation that exists, for example, between physics and chemistry. Against this background, the problems posed earlier by Potebnya and taken for granted by his followers were reviewed and reinterpreted.

Leo Jakubinsky's first essay, "On the Sounds of Poetic Language,"[13] compared practical and poetic language and formulated the difference between them:

> The phenomena of language must be classified from the point of view of the speaker's particular purpose as he forms his own linguistic pattern. If the pattern is formed for the purely practical purpose of communication, then we are dealing with a system of *practical language* (the language of thought) in which the linguistic pattern (sounds, morphological features, etc.) have no independent value and are merely a *means* of communication. But other linguistic systems, systems in which the practical purpose is in the background (although perhaps not entirely hidden) are conceivable; they exist, and their linguistic patterns acquire *independent value.*

The establishment of this distinction was important both for the construction of a poetics and for understanding the Futurist's preference for "nonsense language" as revealing the furthest extension of the sheer "independent" value of words, the kind of value partially observed in the language of children, in the glossolalia of religious sects, and so on. The Futurist experiments in nonsense language were of prime significance as a demonstration against Symbolism which, in its theories, went no further than to use the idea of "instrumentation" to indicate the accompaniment of meaning by sound and so to de-emphasize the role of sound in

13. Leo Jakubinsky, "O zvukakh poeticheskovo yazyka," *Sborniki*, I (1916).

poetic language. The problem of sound in verse was especially crucial because it was on this point that the Formalists and Futurists united to confront the theorists of Symbolism. Naturally, the Formalists gave battle at first on just that issue; the question of sound had to be disposed of first if we were to oppose the aesthetic and philosophical tendencies of the Symbolists with a system of precise observations and to reach the underlying scientific conclusions. This accounts for the content of the first volume of *Opoyaz*, a content devoted entirely to the problem of sound and nonsense language.

Victor Shklovsky, along with Jakubinsky, in "On Poetry and Nonsense Language,"[14] cited a variety of examples which showed that "even words without meaning are necessary." He showed such meaninglessness to be both a widespread linguistic fact and a phenomenon characteristic of poetry. "The poet does not decide to use the meaningless word; usually "nonsense" is disguised as some kind of frequently delusive, deceptive content. Poets are forced to acknowledge that they themselves do not understand the content of their own verses." Shklovsky's essay, moreover, transfers the question from the area of pure sound, from the acoustical level (which provided the basis for impressionistic interpretations of the relation between sound and the description of objects or the emotion represented) to the level of pronunciation and articulation. "In the enjoyment of a meaningless 'nonsense word,' the articulatory aspect of speech is undoubtedly important. Perhaps generally a great part of the delight of poetry consists in pronunciation, in the independent dance of the organs of speech." The question of meaningless language thus became a serious scientific concern, the solution of which would help to clarify many problems of poetic language in general. Shklovsky also formulated the general question:

> If we add to our demand of the word as such that it serve to clarify understanding, that it be generally meaningful, then of course "meaningless" language, as a relatively superficial language, falls by the wayside. But it does not fall alone; a consideration of the facts forces one to wonder whether words always have a meaning, not only in meaningless speech, but also in simple poetic speech—or whether this notion is only a fiction resulting from our inattention.

14. Victor Shklovsky, "O poezii i zaumnom yazyke," *Sborniki*, I (1916).

The natural conclusion of these observations and principles was that poetic language is not only a language of images, that sounds in verse are not at all merely elements of a superficial euphony, and that they do not play a mere "accompaniment" to meaning, but rather that they have an independent significance. The purpose of this work was to force a revision of Potebnya's general theory, which had been built on the conviction that poetry is "thought in images."[15] Potebnya's analysis of poetry, the analysis which the Symbolists had adopted, treated the sound of verse as "expressive" of something behind it. Sound was merely onomatopoetic, merely "aural description." The works of Andrey Bely (who discovered the complete sound picture that champagne makes when poured from a bottle into a glass in two lines from Pushkin, and who also discovered the "noisomeness of a hangover" in Blok's repetition of the consonantal cluster *rdt*) were quite typical.[16] Such attempts to "explain" alliteration, bordering on parody, required a rebuff and an attempt to produce concrete evidence showing that sounds in verse exist apart from any connection with imagery, that they have an independent oral function.

Leo Jakubinsky, in his essays, provided linguistic support for [our arguments in favor of] the independent value of sound in verse. Osip Brik's essay on "Sound Repetitions"[17] illustrated the same point with quotations from Pushkin and Lermontov arranged to present a variety of models. Brik doubted the correctness of the common opinion that poetic language is a language of "images":

> No matter how one looks at the interrelationship of image and sound, there is undoubtedly only one conclusion possible—the sounds, the harmonies, are not only euphonious accessories to meaning; they are also the result of an independent poetic purpose. The superficial devices of euphony do not completely account for the instrumentation of poetic speech. Such instrumentation represents on the whole an intricate product of the interaction of the general laws of harmony. Rhyme, alliteration, etc., are only obvious manifestations, particular cases, of the basic laws of euphony.

15. See above, pp. 5–7. *Ed. note.*

16. See the essay, "A. Bely," *Skifi* [*Scythians*] (1917), and *Vetv* [*Branch*] (1917): also my essay, "O zvukakh v stikhe" ["On Sound in Verse"], reprinted in *Skvoz literaturu* [*Through Literature*] (Leningrad, 1924).

17. Osip Brik, "Zvukovye povtory," *Sborniki*, II (1917).

In opposing the work of Bely, Brik, in the same essay, made no comment at all on the meaning of this or that use of alliteration, but merely affirmed that repetition in verse is analogous to tautology in folklore—that is, that repetition itself plays something of an aesthetic role: "Obviously we have here diverse forms of one general principle, the principle of simple combination, by which either the sounds of the words or their meanings, or now one and now the other, serve as the material of the combination." Such an extension of one device to cover the various forms of poetic material is quite characteristic of the work of the Formalists during their initial period. After the presentation of Brik's essay the question of sound in verse lost something of its urgency, and the Formalists turned to questions of poetics in general.

3. Content and Correspondent Form Versus Technique as Content

The Formalists began their work with the question of the sounds of verse—at that time the most controversial and most basic question. Behind this particular question of poetics stood more general theses which had to be formulated. The distinction between systems of poetic and practical language, which defined the work of the Formalists from the very beginning, was bound to result in the formulation of a whole group of basic questions. The idea of poetry as "thought by means of images" and the resulting formula, "Poetry = Imagery," clearly did not coincide with our observations and contradicted our tentative general principles.[18] Rhythm, sound, syntax—all of these seemed secondary from such a point of view; they seemed uncharacteristic of poetry and necessarily extraneous

18. This refusal to establish any one element—except rhythm, which is unavoidable in temporal arts such as literature—as the one essential of poetry is perhaps the theoretical feature that distinguished the Formalists from their later counterparts in Britain and America. By refusing to single out some such quality as irony or ambiguity, in the manner of Cleanth Brooks or William Empson, the Formalists achieved a literary theory that was at once broad and flexible. *Ed. note.*

to it. The Symbolists accepted Potebnya's general theory because it justified the supremacy of the image-symbol; yet they could not rid themselves of the notorious theory of the "harmony of form and content" even though it clearly contradicted their bent for formal experimentation and discredited it by making it seem mere "aestheticism." The Formalists, when they abandoned Potebnya's point of view, also freed themselves from the traditional correlation of "form and content" and from the traditional idea of form as an envelope, a vessel into which one pours a liquid (the content). The facts of art demonstrate that art's uniqueness consists not in the "parts" which enter into it but in their original *use*. Thus the notion of form was changed; the new notion of form required no companion idea, no correlative.

Even before the formation of the *Opoyaz* in 1914, at the time of the public performances of the Futurists, Shklovsky had published a monograph, *The Resurrection of the Word*,[19] in which he took exception partly to the concepts set forth by Potebnya and partly to those of Veselovsky (the question of imagery was not then of major significance) to advance the principle of perceptible form as the specific sign of artistic awareness:

> We do not experience the commonplace, we do not see it; rather, we recognize it. We do not see the walls of our room; and it is very difficult for us to see errors in proofreading, especially if the material is written in a language we know well, because we cannot force ourselves to see, to read, and not to "recognize" the familiar word. If we have to define specifically "poetic" perception and artistic perception in general, then we suggest this definition: "Artistic" perception is that perception in which we experience form—perhaps not form alone, but certainly form.[20]

Perception here is clearly not to be understood as a simple psychological concept (the perception peculiar to this or that person), but, since art does not exist outside of perception, as an element in art itself. The notion of "form" here acquires new meaning; it is no longer an envelope, but a complete thing, something concrete, dynamic, self-contained, and without a correlative of any kind.

19. Victor Shklovsky, *Voskresheniye slova* (Petersburg, 1914).

20. See above, p. 11 ff. *Ed. note.*

Here we made a decisive break with the Symbolist principle that some sort of "content" is to shine through the "form." And we broke with "aestheticism"—the preference for certain elements of form consciously isolated from "content."

But these general acknowledgements that there are differences between poetic and practical language and that the specific quality of art is shown in its particular use of the material were not adequate when we tried to deal with specific works. We had to find more specific formulations of the principle of perceptible form so that they could make possible the analysis of form itself—the analysis of form understood as content. We had to show that the perception of form results from special artistic techniques which force the reader to experience the form. Shklovsky's "Art as Technique," presenting its own manifesto of the Formalist method, offered a perspective for the concrete analysis of form. Here was a really clear departure from Potebnya and Potebnyaism and, at the same time, from the theoretical principles of Symbolism. The essay began with objections to Potebnya's basic view of imagery and its relation to content. Shklovsky indicates, among other things, that images are almost always static:

> The more you understand an age, the more convinced you become that the images a given poet used and which you thought his own were taken almost unchanged from another poet. The works of poets are classified or grouped according to the new techniques they discover and share, and according to their arrangement and development of the resources of language; poets are much more concerned with arranging images than creating them. Images are given to poets; the ability to remember them is far more important than the ability to create them. Imagistic thought does not, in any case, include all aspects of art or even all aspects of verbal art. A change in imagery is not essential to the development of poetry.[21]

He further pointed out the difference between poetic and nonpoetic images. The poetic image is defined as one of the devices of poetic language—as a device which, depending upon the problem, is as important as such other devices of poetic language as simple and negative parallelism, comparison, repetition, symmetry, hyperbole,

21. See above, p. 7. *Ed. note.*

etc., but no more important. Thus imagery becomes a part of a system of poetic devices and loses its theoretical dominance.

Shklovsky likewise repudiated the principle of artistic economy, a principle which had been strongly asserted in aesthetic theory, and opposed it with the device of "defamiliarization" and the notion of "roughened form." That is, he saw art as increasing the difficulty and span of perception "because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged";[22] he saw art as a means of destroying the automatism of perception; the purpose of the image is not to present the approximate meaning of its object to our understanding, but to create a special perception of the object—the creation of its "vision," and not the "recognition" of its meaning. Hence the image is usually connected with the process of defamiliarization.

The break with Potebnya was formulated definitely in Shklovsky's essay "Potebnya."[23] He repeats once more that imagery—symbolization—does not constitute the specific difference between poetic and prosaic (practical) language:

> Poetic language is distinguished from practical language by the perception of its structure. The acoustical, articulatory, or semantic aspects of poetic language may be felt. Sometimes one feels the verbal structure, the arrangement of the words, rather than their texture. The poetic image is one of the ways, but only one of the ways, of creating a perceptible structure designed to be experienced within its very own fabric. . . . The creation of a scientific poetics must begin inductively with a hypothesis built on an accumulation of evidence. That hypothesis is that poetic and prosaic languages exist, that the laws which distinguish them exist, and, finally, that these differences are to be analyzed.

These essays are to be read as the summation of the first phase of the Formalists' work. The main achievement of this period consisted in our establishment of a series of theoretical principles which provided working hypotheses for a further investigation of the data for the defeat of the current theories based on Potebnyaism. The chief strength of the Formalists, as these essays show, was neither the

22. See above, p. 12. *Ed. note.*

23. Victor Shklovsky, "Potebnya," *Poetika* (1919).

direction of their study of so-called "forms" nor the construction of a special "method"; their strength was founded securely on the fact that the specific features of the verbal arts had to be studied and that to do so it was first necessary to sort out the differing uses of poetic and practical language. Concerning form, the Formalists thought it important to change the meaning of this muddled term. It was important to destroy these traditional correlatives and so to enrich the idea of form with new significance. *The notion of "technique,"* because it has to do directly with the distinguishing features of poetic and practical speech, *is much more significant in the long-range evolution of formalism than is the notion of "form."*

4. Applications of Theory: Questions of Plot and Literary Evolution

The preliminary stage of our theoretical work had passed. We had proposed general principles bearing directly upon factual material. We now had to move closer to the material and to make the problems themselves specific. At the center stood those questions of theoretical poetics that had previously been outlined only in general form. We had to move from questions about the sound of verse to a general theory of verse. The questions about the sound of verse, when originally posed, were meant only as illustrations of the difference between poetic and practical language. We had to move from questions about "technique-in-general" to the study of the specific devices of composition, to inquiry about plot, and so on. Our interest in opposing Veselovsky's general view and, specifically, in opposing his theory of plot, developed side by side with our interest in opposing Potebnya's.

At this time, the Formalists quite naturally used literary works only as material for supporting and testing their theoretical hypotheses; we had put aside questions of convention, literary evolution, etc. Now we felt it important to widen the scope of our study, to make a preliminary survey of the data, and to allow it to establish its own kind of "laws." In this way we freed ourselves from the necessity of resorting to abstract premises and at the same time mastered the materials without losing ourselves in details.

Shklovsky, with his theory of plot and fiction, was especially

important during this period. He demonstrated the presence of special devices of "plot construction" and their relation to general stylistic devices in such diverse materials as the *skaz*, Oriental tales, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Tolstoy's works, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and so on. I do not wish to go into details—those should be treated in specialized works and not in a general essay such as this on the Formalist method—but I do wish to cover those ideas in Shklovsky's treatment of plot which have a theoretical significance beyond any relationship they might have to particular problems of plots as such. Traces of those ideas can be found in the most advanced pieces of Formalist criticism.

The first of Shklovsky's works on plot, "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style,"[24] raised a whole series of such ideas. In the first place, the proof that special devices of plot arrangement exist, a proof supported by the citation of great numbers of devices, changed the traditional notion of plot as a combination of a group of motifs and made plot a compositional rather than a thematic concept. Thus the very concept of plot was changed; *plot* was no longer synonymous with *story*. Plot construction became the natural subject of Formalist study, since plot constitutes the specific peculiarity of narrative *art*. The idea of form had been enriched, and as it lost its former abstractness, it also lost its controversial meaning. Our idea of form had begun to coincide with our idea of literature as such, with the idea of the literary fact.

Furthermore, the analogies which we established between the devices of plot construction and the devices of style had theoretical significance, for the step-by-step structure usually found in the epic was found to be analogous to sound repetition, tautology, tautological parallelism, and so on. All illustrated a general principle of verbal art based on parceling out and impeding the action.

For instance, Roland's three blows on the stone in the *Song of Roland* and the similar triple repetition common in tales may be compared, as a single type of phenomenon, with Gogol's use of synonyms and with such linguistic structures as "hoity-toity," "a

24. Victor Shklovsky, "Svyaz priyomov syuzhetoslozheniya s obschimi priyomami stilya," *Poetika* (1919).

diller, a dollar," etc.[25] "These variations of step-by-step construction usually do not all occur together, and attempts have been made to give each case a special explanation." Shklovsky shows how we attempt to demonstrate that the same device may reappear in diverse materials. Here we clashed with Veselovsky, who in such cases usually avoided theory and resorted to historical-genetic hypotheses. For instance, he explained epic repetition as a mechanism for the original performance (as embryonic song). But an explanation of the genetics of such a phenomenon, even if true, does not clarify the phenomenon as a fact of literature. Veselovsky and other members of the ethnographic school used to explain the peculiar motifs and plots of the *skaz* by relating literature and custom; Shklovsky did not object to making the relationship but challenged it only as an explanation of the peculiarities of the *skaz*—he challenged it as an explanation of a specifically literary fact. The study of literary genetics can clarify only the origin of a device, nothing more; poetics must explain its literary function. The genetic point of view fails to consider the device as a self-determined use of material; it does not consider how conventional materials are selected by an author, how conventional devices are transformed, or how they are made to play a structural role. The genetic point of view does not explain how a convention may disappear and its literary function remain. The literary function remains not as a simple [customary or social] experience but as a literary device retaining a significance over and beyond its connection with the convention. Characteristically, Veselovsky had contradicted himself by considering the adventures of the Greek romance as purely stylistic devices.

The Formalists naturally opposed Veselovsky's "ethnographism" because it ignored the special characteristic of the literary device and because it replaced the theoretical and evolutionary point of view with a genetic point of view.

Veselovsky saw "syncretism" as a phenomenon of primitive poetry, a result of custom, and he later was censured for this in

25. Eichenbaum gives two nonsense phrases here, "*kudy-mudy*" and "*plyushki-mlyushki*." The point is, of course, that repetition of sound alone may keep alive certain otherwise meaningless expressions. *Ed. note.*

B. Kazansky's "The Concept of Historical Poetics."[26] Kazansky repudiated the ethnographic point of view by affirming the presence of syncretic tendencies in the very nature of each art, a presence especially obvious in some periods. The Formalists naturally could not agree with Veselovsky when he touched upon general questions of literary evolution. If the clash with the Potebnyaists clarified basic principles of poetics, the clash with Veselovsky's general view and with that of his followers clarified the Formalist's views on literary evolution and, thereby, on the structure of literary history.

Shklovsky began to deal with the subject of literary evolution in the essay I cited previously, "The Relation of Devices of Plot Construction to General Devices of Style." He had encountered Veselovsky's formula, a formula broadly based on the ethnographic principle that "the purpose of new form is to express new content," and he decided to advance a completely different point of view:

> The work of art arises from a background of other works and through association with them. The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it. . . . Not only parody, but also any kind of work of art is created parallel to and opposed to some kind of form. *The purpose of the new form is not to express new content, but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality.*

Shklovsky supported this thesis with B[roder] Christiansen's demonstration of "differentiated perceptions" or "perceptions of difference." He sees that the dynamism characteristic of art is based on this and is manifested in repeated violations of established rules. At the close of his essay, he quotes F[erdinand] Brunetière's statements that "of all the influences active in the history of literature, the chief is the influence of *work on work*," and that "one should not, without good cause, increase the number of influences upon literature, under the assumption that literature is the expression of society, nor should one confuse the history of literature with the history of morals and manners. These are entirely different things."

Shklovsky's essay marked the changeover from our study of theoretical poetics to our study of the history of literature. Our

26. B. Kazansky, "Ideya istoricheskoy poetiki," *Poetika*, I (1926), a publication of the Division of the Verbal Arts [not to be confused with the old *Poetika* of 1919, published by the *Opoyaz*].

original assumptions about form had been complicated by our observation of new features of evolutionary dynamics and their continuous variability. Our moving into the area of the history of literature was no simple expansion of our study; it resulted from the evolution of our concept of form. We found that we could not see the literary work in isolation, that we had to see its form against a background of other works rather than by itself. Thus the Formalists definitely went beyond "Formalism," if by "Formalism" one means (as some poorly informed critics usually did) some fabricated system which permitted us to be "classified," some system which zealously adapted itself to logic-chopping, or some system which joyously welcomed any dogma. Such scholastic "Formalism" was neither historical nor essentially connected with the work of the *Opoyaz*. We were not responsible for it; on the contrary, we were irreconcilably its enemies on principle.

5. Prose Fiction: "Motivation" and Exposed Structure

Later I shall return to the historical-literary work of the Formalists, but now I wish to conclude the survey of those theoretical principles and problems contained in the early work of the *Opoyaz*. The Shklovsky essay I referred to above contains still another idea which figured prominently in the subsequent study of the novel—the idea of "motivation."[27] The discovery of various techniques of plot construction (step-by-step structure, parallelism, framing, the weaving of motifs, etc.) clarified the difference between the elements used in the construction of a work and the elements comprising its material (its story, the choice of motifs, the characters, the themes, etc.). Shklovsky stressed this difference at that time because the basic problem was to show the identity of individual structural devices in the most diverse materials imaginable. The old scholarship worked exclusively with the material, taking it as the "content" and treating the remainder as an "external form" either totally without interest or of interest only to the dilettante. Hence the naive and pathetic aesthetics of our older literary critics and historians, who found "neglect of form" in Tyutchev's poetry and simply "bad form" in

27. See above, p. 30, note 9. *Ed. note.*

Nekrasov and Dostoevsky. The literary reputations of these authors were saved because their intensity of thought and mood excused their formlessness. Naturally, during the years of struggle and polemics against such a position, the Formalists directed all their forces to showing the significance of such compositional devices as motivation and ignored all other considerations. In speaking of the formal method and its evolution, we must constantly remember that many of the principles advanced by the Formalists in the years of tense struggle were significant not only as scientific principles, but also as slogans, as paradoxes sharpened for propaganda and controversy. To ignore this fact and to treat the work of the *Opoyaz* (between 1916 and 1921) in the same way as one would treat the academic scholarship is to ignore history.

The concept of motivation permitted the Formalists to approach literary works (in particular, novels and short stories) more closely and to observe the details of their structure, which Shklovsky did in two later works, *Plot Development* and *Sterne's* Tristram Shandy *and the Theory of the Novel*.[28] In these works, he studied the relationship between technique and motivation in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. He uses *Tristram Shandy* as material for the study of the structure of the short story and the novel apart from literary history, and he studies *Don Quixote* as an instance of the transition from collections of tales (like the *Decameron*) to the novel with a single hero whose travels justify or "motivate" its episodic structure. *Don Quixote* was chosen because the devices it contains and their motivation are not fully integrated into the entire context of the novel. Material is often simply inserted, not welded in; devices of plot construction and methods of using material to further the plot structure stand out sharply, whereas later structures tend "more and more to integrate the material tightly into the very body of the novel." While analyzing "how Don Quixote was made," Shklovsky also showed the instability of the hero and concluded that

28. Victor Shklovsky, *Razvyortyvaniye syuzheta* and Tristram Shandy *Sterna i teoriya romana*, published separately in Petrograd, 1921, and later reprinted together in *O teorii prozy* (Moscow, 1925). [For the essay on *Tristram Shandy* see above, pp. 27–57.]

his "type" appeared "as the result of the business of constructing the novel." Thus the dominance of structure, of plot over material, was emphasized.

Neither a work fully "motivated" nor an art which deliberately does away with motivation and exposes the structure provides the most suitable material for the illumination of such theoretical problems. But the very existence of a work such as *Don Quixote*, with a deliberately exposed structure, confirms the relevance of these problems, confirms the fact that the problems need to be stated as problems, and confirms the fact that they are *significant* literary problems. Moreover, we were able to explain works of literature entirely in the light of these theoretical problems and principles, as Shklovsky did with *Tristram Shandy*. Shklovsky not only used the book to illustrate our theoretical position, he gave it new significance and once more attracted attention to it. Studied against the background of an interest in the *structure* of the novel, Sterne became a contemporary; people spoke about him, people who previously had found in his novel only boring chatter or eccentricities, or who had prejudged it from the point of view of its notorious "sentimentalism," a characteristic for which Sterne is as little to blame as Gogol for "realism."

Shklovsky pointed out Sterne's deliberate laying bare of his methods of constructing *Tristram Shandy* and asserted that Sterne had "exaggerated" the structure of the novel. He had shown his awareness of form by his manner of violating it and by his manner of assembling the novel's contents. In his conclusion to the essay, Shklovsky formulated the difference between plot and story:

> The idea of plot is too often confused with the description of events—with what I propose provisionally to call the *story*. The story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation. The plot of *Evgeny Onegin* is, therefore, not the romance of the hero with Tatyana, but the fashioning of the subject of this story as produced by the introduction of interrupting digressions. . . .
>
> The forms of art are explainable by the laws of art; they are not justified by their realism. Slowing the action of a novel is not accomplished by introducing rivals, for example, but by simply *transposing*

parts. In so doing the artist makes us aware of the aesthetic laws which underlie both the transposition and the slowing down of the action.[29]

My essay "How Gogol's 'Greatcoat' Was Made,"[30] also considers the structure of the novel, comparing the problem of plot with the problem of the *skaz*—the problem of structure based upon the narrator's manner of telling what had happened. I tried to show that Gogol's text "was made up of living speech patterns and vocalized emotions," that words and sentences are selected and joined by Gogol as they are in the oral *skaz*, in which articulation, mimicry, sound gestures, and so on, play a special role. From this point of view I showed how the structure of "The Greatcoat" imparts a grotesque tone to the tale by replacing the usual humor of the *skaz* (with its anecdotes, puns, etc.) with sentimental-melodramatic declamation. I discussed, in this connection, the end of "The Greatcoat" as the apotheosis of the grotesque—not unlike the mute scene in *The Inspector General*.[31] The traditional line of argument about Gogol's "romanticism" and "realism" proved unnecessary and unilluminating.

Thus we began to make some progress with the problem of the study of prose. The line between the idea of plot as structure and the idea of the story as material was drawn; this explanation of the typical techniques of plot construction opened the door for work on the history and theory of the novel; and furthermore, the *skaz* was treated as the structural basis of the plotless short story. These works have influenced a whole series of recent studies by persons not directly connected with the *Opoyaz*.

6. Poetry: Meter Versus a Complete Linguistic Prosody: Syntax, Intonation, Phonemics

As our theoretical work broadened and deepened it naturally became specialized—the more so because persons who were only beginning their work or who had been working independently joined the *Opoyaz* group. Some of them specialized in the problems

29. See above, p. 57. *Ed. note.*

30. Boris Eichenbaum, "Kak sledana 'Shinel' Gogolya," *Poetika* (1919).

31. The final scene, in which not a word is spoken for a minute and a half as the curtain slowly falls. *Ed. note.*

of poetry, others in the problems of prose. The Formalists insisted upon keeping clear the demarcation between poetry and prose in order to counterbalance the Symbolists, who were then attempting to erase the boundary line both in theory and in practice by painstakingly attempting to discover meter in prose.[32]

The earlier sections of this essay show the intensity of our work on prose. We were pioneers in the area. Several Western works resembled ours (in particular, such observations on story material as Wilhelm Dibelius' *Englische Romankunst*, 1910), but they had little relevance to our theoretical problems and principles. In our work on prose we felt almost free from tradition, but in dealing with verse the situation was different. The great number of works by Western and Russian literary theorists, the numerous practical and theoretical experiments of the Symbolists, and the special literature of the controversies over the concepts of rhythm and meter (produced between 1910 and 1917) complicated our study of poetry. The Futurists, in that same period, were creating new verse forms, and this complicated things still more. Given such conditions, it was difficult for us to pose the right problems. Many persons, instead of returning to basic questions, were concerned with special problems of metrics or with trying to put the accumulation of systems and opinions in good order. Meanwhile, we had no general theory of poetry: no theoretical elucidations of verse rhythm, of the connection of rhythm and syntax, of the sounds of verse (the Formalists had indicated only a few linguistic premises), of poetic diction and semantics, and so on. In other words, the nature of verse as such remained essentially obscure. We had to draw away from particular problems of metrics and to approach verse from some more disciplined perspective. We had, first of all, to pose the problem of rhythm so that it did not rest on metrics and would include a more substantial part of poetic speech.[33]

Here, as in the previous section, I shall dwell upon the problem

32. See especially Andrey Bely's *Simvolizm* (Moscow, 1910). *Ed. note.*

33. One might compare this aspect of the Formalists' work with the recent attempts of the structural linguists to incorporate such rhythmic and acoustical elements as stress, pitch, juncture, etc., into their study of the total linguistic pattern. *Ed. note.*

of verse only insofar as its exploration led to a new theoretical view of verbal art or a new view of the nature of poetic speech. Our position was stated first in Osip Brik's "On Rhythmic-Syntactic Figures" [1920], an unpublished lecture delivered before the *Opoyaz* group and, apparently, not even written out [Brik's lecture was published in 1927 in *New Left*]. Brik demonstrated that verse contained stable syntactical figures indissolubly connected with rhythm. Thus rhythm was no longer thought of as an abstraction; it was made relevant to the very linguistic fabric of verse—the phrase. Metrics became a kind of background, significant, like the alphabet, for the reading and writing of verse. Brik's step was as important for the study of verse as the discovery of the relation of plot to structure was for the study of prose. The discovery that rhythmic patterns are related to the grammatical patterns of sentences destroyed the notion that rhythm is a superficial appendage, something floating on the surface of speech. Our theory of verse was founded on the analysis of rhythm as the structural basis of verse, a basis which of itself determined all of its parts—both acoustical and nonacoustical. A superior theory of verse, which would make metrics but a kindergarten preparation, was in sight. The Symbolists and the group led by Bely, despite their attempts, could not travel our road because they still saw the central problem as metrics in isolation.

But Brik's work merely hinted at the possibility of a new way; like his first essay, "Sound Repetitions,"[34] it was limited to showing examples and arranging them into groups. From Brik's lecture one could move either into new problems or into the simple classification and cataloging, or systematizing, of the material. The lecture was not necessarily an expression of the formal method. V[ictor] Zhirmunsky continued the work of classification in *The Composition of Lyric Verse*.[35] Zhirmunsky, who did not share the theoretical principles of the *Opoyaz*, was interested in the formal method as only one of the possible scientific approaches to the division of materials into various groups and headings. Given his understanding of the formal method, he could do nothing else; he accepted any superficial feature as a basis for the grouping of materials. Hence the unvarying cataloging and the pedantic tone of all of Zhirmunsky's theoretical work. Such works were not a major influence in the general evolution of the formal method; in themselves they merely emphasized the tendency (evidently historically inevitable) to give the formal method an academic quality. It is not surprising, therefore, that Zhirmunsky later completely withdrew from the *Opoyaz* over a difference of opinion about the principles he stated repeatedly in his last works (especially in his introduction to the translation of O[skar] Walzel's *The Problem of Form in Prose* [1923]).

34. Osip Brik, "Zvukovye povtory," [*Poetika* (1919)].

35. Victor Zhirmunsky, *Kompozitsiya liricheskikh stikhotvoreny* (Petrograd, 1921).

My book, *Verse Melody*,[36] which was prepared as a study of the phonetics of verse and so was related to a whole group of Western works (by Sievers, Saran, etc.), was relevant to Brik's work on rhythmic-syntactic figures. I maintained that stylistic differences were usually chiefly lexical:

> With that we drop the idea of versification as such, and take up poetic language in general. . . . We have to find something related to the *poetic phrase* that does not also lead us away from the *poetry* itself, something bordering on both phonetics and semantics. This "something" is syntax.

I did not examine the rhythmic-syntactic phenomena in isolation, but as part of an examination of the structural significance of metrical and vocal intonation. I felt it especially important both to assert the idea of a *dominant*, upon which a given poetic style is organized, and to isolate the idea of "melody" as a system of intonations from the idea of the general "musicality" of verse. On this basis, I proposed to distinguish three fundamental styles of lyric poetry: declamatory (oratorical), melodic, and conversational. My entire book is devoted to the peculiarities of the melodic style—to peculiarities in the material of the lyrics of Zhukovsky, Tyutchev, Lermontov, and Fet. Avoiding ready-made schematizations, I ended the book with the conviction that "in scientific work, I consider the ability to see facts far more important than the construction of a system. Theories are necessary to clarify facts; in reality, theories are made of facts. Theories perish and change, but the facts they help discover and support remain."

36. Boris Eichenbaum, *Melodika russkovo liricheskovo stikha* (Petrograd, 1922).

The tradition of specialized metrical studies still continued among the Symbolist theoreticians (Bely, Bryusov, Bobrov, Chudovsky, and others), but it gradually turned into precise statistical enumeration and lost what had been its dominant characteristic. Here the metrical studies of Boris Tomashevsky, concluded in his text *Russian Versification*,[37] played the most significant role. Thus, as the study of metrics became secondary, a subsidiary discipline with a very limited range of problems, the general theory of verse entered its first stage.

Tomashevsky's "Pushkin's Iambic Pentameter"[38] outlined the entire previous course of developments within the formal method, including its attempt to broaden and enrich the notion of poetic rhythm and to relate it to the structure of poetic language. The essay also attempted to go beyond the idea of meter in language. Hence the basic charge against Bely and his school: "The problem of rhythm is not conformity to imaginary meters; it is rather the distribution of expiratory energy within a single wave—the line itself." In "The Problems of Poetic Rhythm"[39] Tomashevsky expressed this with perfect clarity of principle. Here the earlier conflict between meter and rhythm is resolved by applying the idea of rhythm in verse to all of the elements of speech that play a part in the structure of verse. The rhythms of phrasal intonation and euphony (alliterations, etc.) are placed side by side with the rhythm of word accent. Thus we came to see the line as *a special form of speech* which functions as a single unit in the creation of poetry. We no longer saw the line as something which could create a "rhythmic variation" by resisting or adjusting to the metrical form (a view which Zhirmunsky continued to defend in his new work, *Introduction to Metrics*[40]). Tomashevsky wrote that:

> Poetic speech is *organized* in terms of its sounds. Taken singly, any phonetic element is subject to rules and regulations, but sound is a *complex* phenomenon. Thus classical metrics singles out accent and normalizes it by its rules. . . . But it takes little effort to shake the

37. Boris Tomashevsky, *Russkoye stikhoslozheniye: Metrika* (Petrograd, 1923).

38. Boris Tomashevsky, "Pyatistopny iamb Pushkina," *Ocherki po poetike Pushkina* [*Essays on the Poetics of Pushkin*] (Berlin, 1923).

39. Boris Tomashevsky, "Problema stikhotvornovo ritma," *Literaturnaya mysl* [*Literary Thought*], II (1922).

40. Boris Tomashevsky, *Vvedeniye v metriku: Teoriya stikha* [*Introduction to Metrics: The Theory of Verse*] (Leningrad, 1925).

> authority of traditional forms, because the notion persisted that the nature of verse is not fully explained by a single distinguishing feature, that poetry exists in "secondary" features, that a recognizable rhythm exists alongside meter, that poetry can be created by imposing a pattern on only these secondary features, and *that speech without meter may sound like poetry.*

The important idea of a "rhythmic impulse" (which had figured earlier in Brik's work) with a general rhythmic function is maintained here:

> Rhythmic devices may participate in various degrees in the creation of an artistic-rhythmic effect; this or that device may dominate various works—this or that means may be the *dominant.* The use of a given rhythmic device determines the character of the particular rhythm of the work. On this basis poetry may be classified as accented-metrical poetry (e.g., the description of the Battle of Poltava[41]), intoned-melodic poetry (the verses of Zhukovsky), or harmonic poetry (common during the recent years of Russian Symbolism).

Poetic form, so understood, is not contrasted with anything outside itself—with a "content" which has been laboriously set inside this "form"—but is understood as the genuine content of poetic speech. Thus the very idea of form, as it had been understood in earlier works, emerged with a new and more adequate meaning.

7. Toward a More Complete Prosody

In his essay "On Czech Versification" Roman Jakobson pointed out new problems in the general theory of poetic rhythm.[42] He opposed the [earlier] theory that "verse adapts itself completely to the spirit of the language," that is, that "form does not resist the material [it shapes]" with the theory that "poetic form is the organized coercion of language."[43] He applied this refinement of

41. Pushkin, *Poltava. Ed. note.*

42. Roman Jakobson, *O cheshskom stikhe preimuschestvenno v sopostavlenii s russkim* (Berlin, 1923).

43. Jakobson is close here to John Crowe Ransom's theory of determinate and indeterminate factors, in which Ransom argues that the intended meaning of a poem is roughened, sometimes deliberately, as the poet attempts to give it a form; and that the form is likewise roughened as the poet attempts to put his meaning into it. *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941), pp. 316–317. *Ed. note.*

the more orthodox view—a refinement in keeping with the formalist method—to the question of the difference between the phonetic qualities of practical language and those of poetic language. Although Jakubinsky had [for example] noted that the dissimilation of liquid consonants [*l* and *r*] is relatively infrequent in poetry, Jakobson showed that it existed in both poetic and practical language but that in practical language it is "accidental"; in poetic language it is, "so to speak, contrived; these are two distinct phenomena."[44]

In the same essay Jakobson also clarified the principle distinction between emotional and poetic language (a distinction he had previously considered in his first book, *Modern Russian Poetry*):

> Although poetry may use the methods of emotive language, it uses them only for *its own* purposes. The similiarities between the two kinds of language and the use of poetic language in the way that emotive language is used frequently leads to the assumption that the two are identical. The assumption is mistaken because it fails to consider the radical difference of *function* between the two kinds of language.

In this connection Jakobson refuted the attempts of [Maurice] Grammont[45] and other prosodists to explain the phonetic structure of poetry in terms either of onomatopoeia or of the emotional connection between sounds and images. "Phonetic structure," he wrote, "is not always a structure of audible images, nor is a structure of audible images always a method of emotional language." Jakobson's book was typical because it constantly went beyond the limits of its particular, special theme (the prosody of Czech verse) and shed light on general questions about the theory of poetic language and verse. Thus his book ends with a whole essay on Mayakovsky [a Russian poet], an essay complemented by his earlier piece on Khlebnikov [another Russian poet].

In my own work on Anna Akhmatova[46] I also attempted to raise basic theoretical questions about the theory of verse—questions of

44. Jakubinsky had already pointed out the excessive complexity of the idea of "practical speech" and the impossibility of analyzing it in terms of function (conversational, oratorical, scientific, and so on); see his essay, "O dialogicheskoy rechi," ["On Dialogic Speech"], *Russkaya rech* [*Russian Speech*], I (1923).

45. Maurice Grammont, *Le vers français, ses moyens d'expression, son harmonie* (Paris, 1913). *Ed. note.*

46. Boris Eichenbaum, *Anna Akhmatova* ([Petrograd], 1923).

the relation of rhythm to syntax and intonation, the relation of the sound of verse to its articulation, and lastly, the relation of poetic diction to semantics. Referring to a book which Yury Tynyanov was then preparing, I pointed out that "as words get into verse they are, as it were, taken out of ordinary speech. They are surrounded by a new aura of meaning and perceived not against the background of speech in general but against the background of poetic speech." I also indicated that the formation of collateral meanings, which disrupts ordinary verbal associations, is the chief peculiarity of the semantics of poetry.[47]

Until then, the original connection between the formal method and linguistics had been growing considerably weaker. The difference that had developed between our problems was so great that we no longer needed the special support of the linguists, especially the support of those who were psychologically oriented. In fact, some of the work of the linguists was objectionable in principle. Tynyanov's *The Problem of Poetic Language*,[48] which had appeared just then, emphasized the difference between the study of psychological linguistics and the study of poetic language and style. This book showed the intimate relation that exists between the meanings of words and the poetic structure itself; it added new meaning to the idea of poetic rhythm and initiated the Formalists' investigation not only of acoustics and syntax, but also of the shades of meaning peculiar to poetic speech. In the introduction Tynyanov says:

> The study of poetry has of late been quite rewarding. Undoubtedly the prospect in the near future is for development in the whole field, although we all remember the systematic beginning of the study. But the study of poetry has been kept isolated from questions of poetic language *and* style; the study of the latter is kept isolated from the study of the former. The impression is given that neither the poetic language itself nor the poetic style itself has any connection with poetry, that the one does not depend upon the other. The idea of "poetic language," which was advanced not so long ago and is now changing, undoubtedly invited a certain looseness by its breadth and by the vagueness of its content, a content based on psychological linguistics.

47. This is the nearest the Formalists came to pursuing the line taken by the New Critics—the discussion of poetry as compacted meaning. *Ed. note.*

48. Yury Tynyanov, *Problema stikhotvornovo yazyka* (Leningrad, 1924).

Among the general questions of poetics revived and illuminated by this book, that of the idea of the "material" is most fundamental. The generally accepted view saw an opposition between form and content; when the distinction was made purely verbal, it lost its meaning. In fact, as I have already mentioned, our view gave form the significance of a thing complete in itself and strengthened it by considering the work of art in relation to its purpose. Our concept of form required no complement—except that other, artistically insignificant, kind of form.[49] Tynyanov showed that the materials of verbal art were neither all alike nor all equally important, that "one feature may be prominent at the expense of the rest, so that the remainder is deformed and sometimes degraded to the level of a neutral prop." Hence the conclusion that "the idea of 'material' does not lie beyond the limits of form; the material itself is a formal element. To confuse it with external structural features is a mistake." After this, Tynyanov could make the notion of form more complex by showing that form is dynamic:

> The unity of the work is not a closed, symmetrical whole, but an unfolding, dynamic whole. Its elements are not static indications of equality and complexity, but always dynamic indications of correlation and integration. The form of literary works must be thought of as dynamic.

Rhythm is here presented as the fundamental specific factor which permeates all the elements of poetry. The objective sign of

49. See Cleanth Brooks' "articles of faith," which include the convictions that "*in a successful work, form and content cannot be separated*," and that "*form is meaning*." "The Formalist Critics," *Kenyon Review*, XIII (1951), p. 72. Both the Russian Formalists and Brooks go beyond the old form-content dichotomy which sees content either as "meaning" or as "material" and form as a kind of superficial glamorization of the content, a sugar coating to make the content palatable. The problems raised by the old view are formidable and pervasive. To give just one example, is the alliteration in "Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth" an element of form, or an element of content? It "glamorizes" the line, yet it also links the central concepts. If we change the alliteration pattern, and hence the form, by making "sinful" read "evil," we seem to imply that the "poor soul" is surrounded by a wicked earth, rather than that it is infested with the earth's wickedness. In brief, to alter the form is to change the content. *Ed. note.*

poetic rhythm is the establishment of a *rhythmic group* whose *unity* and *richness* exist side by side with each other. And again, Tynyanov affirms the principal distinction between prose and poetry:

> Poetry, as opposed to prose, tends toward unity and richness ranged around an uncommon object. This very "uncommonness" prevents the main point of the poem from being smoothed over. Indeed, it asserts the object with a new force. . . . Any element of prose brought into the poetic pattern is transformed into verse by that feature of it which asserts its function and which thus has two aspects: the emphasis of the structure—the versification—and the deformation of the uncommon object.

Tynyanov also raises the question of semantics: "In verse are not the ordinary semantic meanings of the words so distorted (a fact which makes complete paraphrase impossible) that the usual principles governing their arrangement no longer apply?" The entire second part of Tynyanov's book answers this question by defining the precise relation between rhythm and semantics. The facts show clearly that oral presentations are unified in part by rhythm. "This is shown in a more forceful and more compact integration of connectives than occurs in ordinary speech; words are made correlative by their positions"; prose lacks this feature.

Thus the Formalists abandoned Potebnya's theory and accepted the conclusions connected with it on a new basis, and a new perspective opened on to the theory of verse. Tynyanov's work permitted us to grasp even the remotest implications of these new problems. It became clear even to those only casually acquainted with the *Opoyaz* that the essence of our work consisted not in some kind of static "formal method," but in a study of the specific peculiarities of verbal art—we were not advocates of a method, but students of an object. Again, Tynyanov stated this:

> The object of a study claiming to be a study of art ought to be so specific that it is distinguished from other areas of intellectual activity and uses them for its own materials and tools. Each work of art represents a complex interaction of many factors; consequently, the job of the student is the definition of the specific character of this interaction.

8. STYLE, GENRE, AND HISTORICAL CRITICISM

Earlier I noted that the problem of the diffusion and change of form—the problem of literary evolution—is raised naturally along with theoretical problems. The problem of literary evolution arises in connection with a reconsideration of Veselovsky's view of *skaz* motifs and devices; the answer ("new form is not to express new content, but to replace old form") led to a new understanding of form. If form is understood as the very content, constantly changing according to its dependence upon previous "images," then we naturally had to approach it without abstract, ready-made, unalterable, classical schemes; and we had to consider specifically its historical sense and significance. The approach developed its own kind of dual perspective: the perspective of theoretical study (like Shklovsky's "Development of Plot" and my "Verse Melody"), which centered on a given theoretical problem and its applicability to the most diverse materials, and the perspective of historical studies—studies of literary evolution as such. The combination of these two perspectives, both organic to the subsequent development of the formal school, raised a series of new and very complex problems, many of which are still unsolved and even undefined.

Actually, the original attempt of the Formalists to take a particular structural device and to establish its identity in diverse materials became an attempt to differentiate, to understand, the *function* of a device in each given case. This notion of functional significance was gradually pushed toward the foreground and the original idea of the device pushed into the background. This kind of sorting out of its own general ideas and principles has been characteristic of our work throughout the evolution of the formal method. We have no dogmatic position to bind us and shut us off from facts. We do not answer for our schematizations; they may require change, refinement, or correction when we try to apply them to previously unknown facts. Work on specific materials compelled us to speak of functions and thus to revise our idea of the device. The theory itself demanded that we turn to history.

Here again we were confronted with the traditional academic sciences and the preferences of critics. In our student days the

academic history of literature was limited chiefly to biographical and psychological studies of various writers—only the "greats," of course. Critics no longer made attempts to construct a history of Russian literature as a whole, attempts which evidenced the intention of bringing the great historical materials into a system; nevertheless, the traditions established by earlier histories (like A. N. Pypin's *History of Russian Literature*) retained their scholarly authority, the more so because the following generation had decided not to pursue such broad themes. Meanwhile, the chief role was played by such general and somewhat vague notions as "realism" and "romanticism" (realism was said to be better than romanticism); evolution was understood as gradual perfection, as progress (from romanticism to realism); succession [of literary schools] as the peaceful transfer of the inheritance from father to son. But generally, there was no notion of literature as such; material taken from the history of social movements, from biography, etc. had replaced it entirely.

This primitive historicism, which led away from literature, naturally provoked the Symbolist theoreticians and critics into a denial of any kind of historicism. Their own discussions of literature, consequently, developed into impressionistic "etudes" and "silhouettes," and they indulged in a widespread "modernization" of old writers, transforming them into "eternal companions." The history of literature was silently (and sometimes aloud) declared unnecessary.

We had to demolish the academic tradition and to eliminate the bias of the journalists [the Symbolist theoreticians]. We had to advance against the first a new understanding of literary evolution and of literature itself—without the idea of progress and peaceful succession, without the ideas of realism and romanticism, without materials foreign to literature—as a specific order of phenomena, a specific order of material. We had to act against the second by pointing out concrete historical facts, fluctuating and changing forms, by pointing to the necessity of taking into account the specific functions of this or that device—in a word, we had to draw the line between the literary work as a definite historical fact and a free interpretation of it from the standpoint of contemporary

literary needs, tastes, or interests. Thus the basic passion for our historical-literary work had to be a passion for destruction and negation, and such was the original tone of our theoretical attacks; our work later assumed a calmer note when we went on to solutions of particular problems.

That is why the first of our historical-literary pronouncements came in the form of theses expressed almost against our will in connection with some specific material. A particular question would unexpectedly lead to the formulation of a general problem, a problem that inextricably mixed theoretical and historical considerations. In this sense Tynyanov's *Dostoevsky and Gogol*[50] and Shklovsky's *Rozanov*[51] were typical.

Tynyanov's basic problem was to show that Dostoevsky's *The Village of Stepanchikovo* is a parody, that behind its first level is hidden a second—it is a parody of Gogol's *Correspondence with Friends*. But his treatment of this particular question was overshadowed by a whole theory of parody [which he developed to solve the particular problem], a theory of parody as a stylistic device (stylized parody) and as one of the manifestations (having great historical-literary significance) of the dialectical development of literary groups. With this arose the problem of "succession" and "tradition" and, hence, the basic problems of literary evolution were posed [as part of the study of style]:

> When one speaks of "literary tradition" or "succession" . . . usually one implies a certain kind of direct line uniting the younger and older representatives of a known literary branch. Yet the matter is much more complicated. There is no continuing direct line; there is rather a departure, a pushing away from the known point—a struggle. . . . Any literary succession is first of all a struggle, a destruction of old values and a reconstruction of old elements.

"Literary evolution" was complicated by the notion of struggle, of periodic uprisings, and so lost its old suggestion of peaceful and gradual development. Against this background, the literary relationship between Dostoevsky and Gogol was shown to be that of a complicated struggle.

50. Yury Tynyanov, *Dostoevsky i Gogol* (Petrograd, 1921).
51. Victor Shklovsky, *Rozanov* (Petrograd, 1921).

In his *Rozanov*, Shklovsky showed, almost in the absence of basic themes, a whole theory of literary evolution which even then reflected the current discussion of such problems in *Opoyaz*. Shklovsky showed that literature moves forward in a broken line:

> In each literary epoch there is not one literary school, but several. They exist simultaneously, with one of them representing the high point of the current orthodoxy. The others exist uncanonized, mutely; in Pushkin's time, for example, the courtly tradition of [Wilhelm] Kuchelbecker and [Alexander] Greboyedov existed simultaneously with the tradition of Russian vaudeville verse and with such other traditions as that of the pure adventure novel of Bulgarin.

The moment the old art is canonized, new forms are created on a lower level. A "young line" is created which

> grows up to replace the old, as the vaudevillist Belopyatkin is transformed into a Nekrasov (see Brik's discussion of the relationship); a direct descendent of the eighteenth century, Tolstoy, creates a new novel (see the work of Boris Eichenbaum); Blok makes the themes and times of the gypsy ballad acceptable, and Chekhov introduces the "alarm clock" into Russian literature. Dostoevsky introduced the devices of the dime novel into the mainstream of literature. Each new literary school heralds a revolution, something like the appearance of a new class. But, of course, this is only an analogy. The vanquished line is not obliterated, it does not cease to exist. It is only knocked from the crest; it lies dormant and may again arise as a perennial pretender to the throne. Moreover, in reality the matter is complicated by the fact that the new hegemony is usually not a pure revival of previous forms but is made more complex by the presence of features of the younger schools and with features, now secondary, inherited from its predecessors on the throne.

Shklovsky is discussing the dynamism of genres, and he interprets Rozanov's books as embodiments of a new genre, as a new type of novel in which the parts are unconnected by motivation. "Thematically, Rozanov's books are characterized by the elevation of new themes; compositionally, by the revealed device." As part of this general theory, we introduced the notion of the "dialectical self-creation of new forms," that is, hidden in the new form we saw both analogies with other kinds of cultural development and proof of the

independence of the phenomena of literary evolution.[52] In a simplified form, this theory quickly changed hands and, as always happens, became a simple and fixed scheme—very handy for critics. Actually, we have here only a general outline of evolution surrounded by a whole series of complicated conditions. From this general outline the Formalists moved on to a more consistent solution of historical-literary problems and facts, specifying and refining their original theoretical premises.

9. Literary History and Literary Evolution

Given our understanding of literary evolution as the dialectical change of forms, we did not go back to the study of those materials which had held the central position in the old-fashioned historical-literary work. We studied literary evolution insofar as it bore a distinctive character and only to the extent that it stood alone, quite independent of other aspects of culture. In other words, we stuck exclusively to facts in order not to pass into an endless number of indefinite "connections" and "correspondences" which would do nothing at all to explain literary evolution. We did not take up questions of the biography and psychology of the artist because we assumed that these questions, in themselves serious and complex, must take their places in other sciences. We felt it important to find indications of historical regularity in evolution—that is why we ignored all that seemed, from this point of view, "circumstantial," not concerned with [literary] history. We were interested in the very process of evolution, in the very *dynamics* of literary form, insofar as it was possible to observe them in the facts of the past. For us, the central problem of the history of literature is the problem of evolution without personality—the study of literature as a *self-formed social phenomenon*. As a result, we found extremely significant both the question of the formation and changes of genres and the question of how "second-rate" and "popular" literature contributed to the formation of genres. Here we had only to distinguish that popular literature which prepared the way for the formation of new genres from that which arose out of their decay and which offered material for the study of historical inertia.

52. See above, pp. 92–95. *Ed. note.*

On the other hand, we were not interested in the past, in isolated historical facts, as such; we did not busy ourselves with the "restoration" of this or that epoch because we happened to like it. History gave us what the present could not—a stable body of material. But, precisely for this reason, we approached it with a stock of theoretical problems and principles suggested in part by the facts of contemporary literature. The Formalists, then, characteristically had a close interest in contemporary literature and also reconciled criticism and scholarship. The earlier literary historians had, to a great extent, kept themselves aloof from contemporary literature; the Symbolists had subordinated scholarship to criticism. We saw in the history of literature not so much a special theoretical *subject* as a special *approach*, a special cross section of literature. The character of our historical-literary work involved our being drawn not only to historical conclusions, but also to theoretical conclusions—to the posing of new theoretical problems and to the testing of old.

From 1922 to 1924 a whole series of Formalist studies of literary history was written, many of which, because of contemporary market conditions, remain unpublished and are known only as reports. * * *[53] There is, of course, not space enough here to speak of such works in detail. They usually took up "secondary" writers (those who form the background of literature) and carefully explained the traditions of their work, noting changes in genres, styles, and so on. As a result, many forgotten names and facts came to light, current estimates were shown to be inaccurate, traditional ideas changed, and, chiefly, the very process of literary evolution became clearer. The working out of this material has only begun. A new series of problems is before us: further differentiation of

53. The deleted material contains a listing of some Formalist works, including: Yury Tynanyov's "Verse Forms of Nekrasov," "The Question of Tyutchev," "Tyutchev and Pushkin," "Tyutchev and Heine," "The Ode as a Declamatory Genre"; Boris Tomashevsky's "Gavriliada," "Pushkin, a Reader of French Poets," "Pushkin," "Pushkin and Boileau," "Pushkin and La Fontaine"; Boris Eichenbaum's *Lermontov*, "Problems of the Poetics of Pushkin," "Pushkin's Path to Prose," "Nekrasov"; Victor Vinogradov's "Plot and Structure of Gogol's 'The Nose,'" "Plot and Architectonics of Dostoevsky's Novel *Poor People*," "Gogol and the Realistic School," "Studies on the Style of Gogol"; and Victor Zhirmunsky's "Byron and Pushkin."

theoretical and historical literary ideas, introduction of new material, posing new questions, and so on.

10. SUMMARY

I shall conclude with a general summary. The evolution of the formal method, which I have tried to present, has the look of a sequential development of theoretical principles—apart from the individual roles each of us played. Actually, the work of the *Opoyaz* group was genuinely collective. It was this way, obviously, because from the very beginning we understood the historical nature of our task; we did not see it as the personal affair of this or that individual. This was our chief connection with the times. Science itself is still evolving, and we are evolving with it. I shall indicate briefly the evolution of the formal method during these ten years:

1. From the original outline of the conflict of poetic language with practical we proceeded to differentiate the idea of practical language by its various functions (Jakubinsky) and to delimit the methods of poetic and emotional languages (Jakobson). Along with this we became interested in studying oratorical speech because it was close to practical speech but distinguished from it by function, and we spoke about the necessity of a revival of the poetic of rhetoric.[54]

2. From the general idea of form, in its new sense, we proceeded to the idea of technique, and from here, to the idea of function.

3. From the idea of poetic rhythm as opposed to meter we proceeded to the idea of rhythm as a constructive element in the total poem and thus to an understanding of verse as a special form of speech having special linguistic (syntactical, lexical, and semantic) features.

4. From the idea of plot as structure we proceeded to an understanding of material in terms of its motivation, and from here to an understanding of material as an element participating in the construction but subordinate to the character of the dominant formal idea.

5. From the ascertainment of a single device applicable to various materials we proceeded to differentiate techniques according to

54. *Lef* [*Left*], I, No. 5 (1925).

function and from here to the question of the evolution of form—that is, to the problem of historical-literary study.

A whole new series of problems faces us, as Tynyanov's latest essay, "Literary Fact," shows.[55] Here the question of the relation between life and literature is posed, a question which many persons "answer" on the basis of a simple-minded dilettantism. Examples of how life becomes literature are shown and, conversely, of how literature passes into life:

> During the period of its deterioration a given genre is shoved from the center toward the periphery, but in its place, from the trivia of literature, from literature's backyard, and from life itself, new phenomena flow into the center.

Although I deliberately called this essay "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" I gave, obviously, a sketch of its evolution. We have no theory that can be laid out as a fixed, ready-made system. For us theory and history merge not only in words, but in fact. We are too well trained by history itself to think that it can be avoided. When we feel that we have a theory that explains everything, a ready-made theory explaining all past and future events and therefore needing neither evolution nor anything like it—then we must recognize that the formal method has come to an end, that the spirit of scientific investigation has departed from it. As yet, that has not happened.

Boris Eichenbaum, "Teoriya 'formalnovo metoda,'" *Literatura: Teoriya, kritika, polemika* [*Literature: Theory, Criticism, Polemics*] (Leningrad, 1927).

55. *Lef*, II, No. 6 (1925).