

E Pluribus Unum: Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* As a Story Cycle

EDYTA M. BOJANOWSKA

*R*ed Cavalry's form has perplexed critics since its first publication in 1926. The work has been described as an epic, a lyric poem, a baroque novel, a novel of stories, a loose collection of stories unified by a theme, and a series of anecdotes.¹ While each of these approaches illuminates a certain aspect of the work, a full appreciation of *Red Cavalry*'s masterful design and its wealth and complexity of meanings requires an approach that will take the work for what it appears to be: a cycle of short stories, that is, a series of short narratives composed and arranged by the author to form a coherent whole. Despite acknowledgements of *Red Cavalry*'s unified structure, the question of what exactly holds the cycle together has so far received only perfunctory treatment.² In this article I will attempt a more comprehensive—though by no means exhaustive—analysis of *Red Cavalry*'s basic patterns of cohesion. I also will demonstrate a close interdependence of formal structure and thematic developments in the work. In conclusion I will consider some implications of Mikhail Bakhtin's narrative theory for the genre of the story cycle and will discuss the cycle's differences from the novel form. *Red Cavalry* baffles its readers for what they take to be its unresolved tensions, stark juxtapositions, and ambiguities in the narrative voice. The work's open-endedness fully justifies this reaction. Yet an approach to *Red Cavalry* as a whole, as a work of a particular genre that generates meanings in ways peculiar to itself, is likely to dispel some of this bafflement.

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¹Respectively, Marc Slonim, *Portrety sovetskikh pisatelei* (Paris, 1933), 145; A. Arkhipov, "Uroki," *Neva* 6 (1958): 187; Louis Iribarne, "Babel's 'Red Cavalry' as a Baroque Novel," *Contemporary Literature* 14, no. 1 (1973): 58–77; Jan van der Eng, "Red Cavalry: A Novel of Stories," *Russian Literature* 33 (1993): 249–64; Stanley E. Hyman, "The Identities of Isaak Babel," *The Hudson Review* 8 (1956): 622–23; and Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature since the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 89.

²See, for example, Carol Luplow, *Isaak Babel's "Red Cavalry"* (Ann Arbor, 1982); Efraim Sicher, *Style and Structure in the Prose of Isaak Babel* (Columbus, OH, 1986); and Agnes Gereben, "The Syntactics of Cycles of Short Stories," *Essays in Poetics* (April 1986): 44–75.

Isaac Babel himself treated his work as a unified whole. He referred to the stories as “chapters of *Red Cavalry*” and resented having to publish some of them separately: “I published for money a few foul (*pakostnykh*) fragments in the local *Izvestiia*, foul—simply because they are fragments.”³ Each separately published story was marked as a fragment of *Red Cavalry*. Babel’s concern with the cycle’s structure is documented by a letter to his censor and editor, Furmanov, concerning changes in the titles and ordering of the stories.⁴ Babel was a meticulous and painstaking craftsman known to revise a story even twenty-two times according to Paustovsky’s well-known anecdote about “Liubka the Cossack.” Babel’s correspondence with publishers and editors is overrun with pleas for additional advance payments and for extensions of deadlines—to make time for yet another revision. At least ten such extensions preceded *Red Cavalry*’s publication.⁵ Such assiduity in crafting the stories and arranging them in a volume suggests that the stories’ ordering was carefully considered. All these facts point to the need of interpreting *Red Cavalry* holistically.

My approach to *Red Cavalry* is informed by Forrest Ingram’s pioneering study of the story cycle genre.⁶ He defines a story cycle as “a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader’s successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts.” Ingram applies the term “pattern” in a broad sense, to include both the regular and irregular recurrence of an element. He discusses static patterns (such as framing devices or titles), yet asserts that the dynamic ones—such as the recurrence and development of characters, motifs, and symbols—are far more important in binding the stories into a whole. Ingram likens the dynamic pattern to the motion of a wheel whose rim represents recurrent elements that “rotate around a thematic center.” Thus, “the thematic core of a cycle expands and deepens as the elements of the cycle repeat themselves in varied contexts.”⁷ Such recurrence relativizes the element itself and influences the “thematic core” as well. Later contexts add dimensions to the original usage of an element, yet in retrospect the original usage is itself affected by this expanded context. Ingram’s sensitivity to a story cycle’s unique dynamism, to its unceasing back-and-forth movement between *pars* and *toto* makes his insights most useful for the methodology of dealing with story cycles. In my discussion of *Red Cavalry* I will identify some of its dynamic patterns and thematic cores and will explore the dynamic between motifs reappearing in various contexts. Since space does not allow me to recapitulate the reader’s “successive experience” (from Ingram’s definition) of

³Letter to I. V. Evdokimov, 16 April 1926, and letter to I. L. Livshits, 17 April 1923, both in Isaak Babel’, *Sochineniia*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1990), 1:243, 238. All further quotes from Babel’s letters will be taken from this edition. All translations of Russian texts other than Babel’s stories are mine.

⁴Letter to Furmanov, 4 February 1926, *ibid.*, 244.

⁵Dmitrii Furmanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1961), 4:340.

⁶Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Study in a Literary Genre* (The Hague, 1971). The subsequent studies do not make radical departures from or add substantial elaborations to Ingram’s model of the genre. See Susan G. Mann, *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (Westport, CT, 1989); and J. Gerald Kennedy, ed., *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities* (New York, 1995), both of which fine-tune Ingram’s notions and provide insightful case studies (Mann’s book also sketches the genre’s history). In the Anglo-American criticism Ingram’s study has inspired a plethora of projects similar to mine.

⁷Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles*, 19, 20, 21.

the cycle story-by-story, I will limit myself to discussing the implications of a particular ordering of stories only for a few sequences.

On the macro-level, the cycle is unified by the theme of the Russo-Polish War of 1920, and by its narrator, Liutov. However, Liutov's status is not clearly defined and his narrative life does not follow a logical path of events. There is no consistent pattern to his incarnations as a propaganda officer and as a soldier on active service.⁸ In fact, sometimes this issue remains ambiguous (as in "The Death of Dolgushov" or "Berestechko"). In some stories he is an observer, in others a participant. He relates the stories he has heard, and also plays the role of an omniscient narrator (for example, in "The Widow"). Liutov's functions as a character and a narrator are inconsistent. It is his role as a unifying perceiving consciousness of the world he describes that adds cohesion to the cycle. Robert Maguire perceptively highlights the crucial aspects of this consciousness:

He is a Bolshevik whose loyalties are eroded at every turn by scruple, sentimentalism, and a deep sense of a past both dead and vital. He is an intellectual who is incapable of defining welling problems of conscience, morality, and ethics forced on him by experience. Liutov, then, stands outside everything. ... [He] longs to find an allegiance that will put together all these conflicting and incomplete identities; yet circumstances compel him to make constant acts of allegiance that he knows fall short of perfection.⁹

Maguire's characterization captures well the conflict and the flux of Liutov's consciousness. Thus the kind of cohesion that this consciousness will impart to the cycle cannot be static; various stories will plot its different (often conflicting) aspects.

While the war theme and the persona of Liutov undoubtedly contribute to the work's unity, its remarkable cohesiveness owes the most to the recurrence and development of subthemes, motifs, and characters—Ingram's "dynamic patterns." I argue that the cycle is composed of three structural-thematic blocks. The first ten stories describe life behind the front line and set up most of the work's themes, motifs, and symbols. These are reworked in the main block of twenty-three stories that center around the front-line experience. The final block of one to three stories, depending on the edition, reconnects with the opening stories, thus foregrounding further the work's cyclical structure.¹⁰ I will trace *Red Cavalry's* dynamic patterns within and throughout these three blocks.

The opening story, "Crossing the Zbrucz," contains the essence of the whole cycle.¹¹ Most fundamentally, it indicates the various viewpoints that the narrator will adopt throughout

⁸For example, he is the former in "The Rebbe," "Evening," and "The Rebbe's Son"; the latter in "Afon'ka Bida," "Two Ivans," and "After the Battle."

⁹Robert A. Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil* (Ithaca, 1987), 328.

¹⁰The original 1926 edition ends with "The Rebbe's Son." In 1932, Babel adds "Argamak." The inclusion of "The Kiss" in the posthumous editions is based on Babel's wife's indication that the author intended to do so.

¹¹*Isaac Babel: The Collected Stories*, trans. Walter Morison (New York, 1974). My emendations are marked by square brackets. In-text parenthetical references to stories in the cycle are to the Russian text published in Babel, *Sochineniia*, vol. 2. David McDuff's most recent translation, *Collected Stories* (New York, 1994), is noteworthy for its use of the uncensored Russian text published in Israel in 1979. Morison's translation, however, surpasses

Red Cavalry. The opening paragraph introduces the impersonal perspective of a laconic and objective observer, removed from the reality he describes by the intellectual awareness of larger historical conditions that have shaped it. This is inherent, for example, in the reference to Nicholas I who built the road to Warsaw “on the bones of peasants” (p. 140). The second paragraph introduces a collective perspective, as the narrator portrays a division of Cossacks, of whom he is one, crossing the river. This fragment also foreshadows the tension between Liutov’s simultaneous belonging to and separateness from the community of Cossacks: though he is part of the group, the visceral captivation with the beauty of the landscape appears clearly his own. The third section brings to the fore an aspect of Liutov’s identity. He now is a Russian Cossack—billeted in a house of Polish shtetl Jews (the reader does not yet know that Liutov himself is Jewish). He reacts to the house’s filthiness with contempt and indignation. He watches the Jews “skip[] about ... *monkey-fashion*, like *Japs* in a circus act” (p. 42, emphasis added). These epithets underscore his perception of the Jews’ “otherness”: they appear to him non-human and non-Russian. The story’s ending, however, shows Liutov revising his dismissive attitude. In a gesture of humane empathy he withholds his own commentary and instead gives full voice to the pregnant Jewish woman whose father, as Liutov learns, had been massacred by the Poles. Her anguished cry closes the story: “I should wish to know where in the whole world you could find another father like my father” (p. 43). The story opens with a matter-of-fact, declarative communiqué and unexpectedly concludes on a poignant personal question to which no answer is—nor can be—given. In an ideological sense, this movement from an assertion to an often perplexed and unanswerable question is characteristic of the work as a whole. A narrowing focus, shifting from a detached, impersonal vision, through a collective experience to an individual one, reappears throughout *Red Cavalry*, as does the motif of stepping outside oneself to experience “the other.” “Crossing the Zbrucz” also introduces many themes that will run through the cycle, for example, the abuse of civilians and the moral deterioration of the Cossack army (Liutov’s dream), as well as the motif of regeneration amid chaos and death (the proximity of pregnancy and death), which will become prominent in the cycle’s concluding stories. The motif of crossing, of trespassing, indicated in the story’s title, will also recur in the cycle, as the narrator enters new realms of experience, and as he slowly descends into the hell of war atrocities.

The pivotal story in the first block is “Pan Apolek.” Liutov’s meeting with the eponymous village painter is a turning point in his life. Nowhere else in the book does he so openly comment on the effects of his experience: “I then made a vow to follow Pan Apolek’s example. And the sweetness of meditated rancor, the bitter scorn I felt for the curs and swine of mankind, the fire of silent and intoxicating revenge—all this I sacrificed to my

McDuff’s stylistically, especially in its rendition of *skaz* (for example, in “Treason” or “Pavlichenko”). Following McDuff’s example, however, I will use Polish spelling for Polish place names rather than follow Morison in transcribing them from Russian. The most important changes are: Beresteczko (compare with Morison’s “Berestechko”), Cześniiki (“Chesniki”), Zamość (“Zamoste”), Zbrucz (“Zbruch”). I will also use a more direct translation of “Perekhod cherez Zbruch”—“Crossing the Zbrucz” (Morison’s “Crossing into Poland”), and of “Rabbi” and “Syn rabbi” (Babel uses the Hebrew word, not the Russian “*ravvini*”) as “The Rebbe” and “The Rebbe’s Son” (Morison’s “The Rabbi” and “The Rabbi’s Son”). I will also use the Library of Congress system for transliterating Russian names, such as “Liutov” or “Il’ia” (compare with Morison’s “Lyutov” and “Ilya”).

new vow" (p. 55). Pan Apolek has portrayed as saints the same people whom the narrator approached earlier with hostility and scorn. Some belonged to the Jewish villagers who initially appalled Liutov in "Crossing" (incidentally, both stories are set in Novograd). The lame convert Yanek is portrayed as St. Paul and the loose woman Elka as Mary Magdalene. Polish Catholics, Pan Romuald and Pani Eliza, described by Liutov in "The Church at Novograd" with jaundiced Bolshevik clichés, appear on Apolek's paintings as John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. The pledge to follow Pan Apolek's example implies indiscriminating empathy with other human beings, whether a pathologically vicious Cossack, a filthy and grotesque shtetl Jew, or a treacherous Pole. As Patricia Carden remarks, Pan Apolek's example also implies that "true humanity demands not only the acceptance of man in those attributes that elevate him, but also in those ... that we despise."¹² She is right to stress the importance of compassion that Liutov sees in Apolek's humanism. "[A presage of mystery touched me]" (*Predvestie tainy kosnulos' menia*)—these words of Liutov mark his stepping onto the path of reevaluating his previous moral and artistic beliefs, the path on which Pan Apolek serves as a beacon.¹³ Liutov's "new vow" is manifest in *Red Cavalry's* affinity with Apolek's murals, both being, as Iribarne remarks, "brilliant tableau[x] of unsaintly figures."¹⁴

In the first block's last four stories Liutov attempts to sort out his allegiances. The world of the Jews, with their culture, tradition, and humanistic ideals appears to him noble and precious, but stifling. The Cossacks, with their commitment to the revolution that will create a new and better world, with their vitality and heroism, captivate Liutov, but their cult of violence, and cold-blooded, often mindless cruelty, repel him. The ordering of the stories reflects Liutov's wavering. "Gedali" and "The Rebbe," which stand for the Jewish tradition, alternate with "My First Goose" and "The Road to Brody," which represent the Cossack values, the ones Liutov resolves to uphold, though he remains an outsider in both worlds.

"Gedali" and "The Rebbe" pose a question that will resurface in later stories: Could the downtrodden of this world, exploited and decimated by antirevolutionaries and revolutionaries alike, improve their lot by joining the revolution? Gedali expresses his confusion and doubt: "The Revolution is the good deed of good men. But good men do not kill. So it is bad people that are making the Revolution. But the Poles are bad people too. Then [who will tell Gedali] which is Revolution and which is Counter-Revolution?" (p. 71). This valid reservation is problematized by "The Rebbe," which questions whether a continued allegiance to tradition remains a viable option for the Jews. The story portrays Hasidism

¹²Patricia Carden, *The Art of Isaac Babel* (Ithaca, 1972), 135.

¹³Babel, *Sochineniia* 2:18. There may be other parallels between Liutov and Pan Apolek. Apolek's identity is not clear but he may be Jewish. He is described as having a thin neck—a frequent attribute of Babel's Jewish characters (for example, the Jewish woman's sons in the first story). He claims to have been christened, but he may be lying in order to gain employment from Catholics. His stories and murals reveal little care about Christian dogma. Apolek and Liutov (and Babel) may thus be seen as artists working in fundamentally hostile communities: the former among Polish Catholics, the latter among Russian Cossacks. In working *for* them, they need to balance their own artistic vision with the employer's tastes and views. Perhaps in this respect Apolek also provides a model for Liutov. For an extra fee Pan Apolek will paint the customer's enemy as Judas in a monstrous Last Supper scene, just as Liutov will write propagandist articles for a Communist rag. Both, however, can also create great art.

¹⁴Iribarne, "Babel's 'Red Cavalry,'" 65.

as barren and bankrupt, implying that it keeps the chosen nation in the "Zhitomir ghetto" (p. 78). The Rebbe's "unruly" (p. 79) son, Il'ia Bratslavskii, *will* join the Revolution.¹⁵

"The Road to Brody," which closes the first block, shows Liutov, another Jewish revolutionary, on his way to the front line. The story also laconically suggests Liutov's initiation into battlefield slaughter: "The chronicle of our workday offenses oppressed me without respite, like an ailing heart" (p. 81). The story's final paragraph concludes simultaneously the story itself and the whole introductory block, offering different meanings on each of these planes. Within the context of the story, the passage suggests Liutov's relief at having escaped death in an ambush that the Poles set up near Brody: "O Brody. ... I could already sense the deathly chill of orbits suffused with tears grown cold. And here I am being borne away at a jolting gallop, far from the dented stones of your synagogues" (p. 82). However, as a conclusion to the whole block, most notably in the context of "Gedali" and "The Rebbe," these sentences indicate that Liutov is leaving behind all that has so far been associated with the synagogue and Jewishness, that is, the passivity of a victim, on the one hand, and humanism, peace, and culture, on the other.¹⁶ The passage conspicuously stands out in the story, which triggers an impulse to read it in these two perspectives. So far the story has been describing in detail concrete events and conversations, following, "nose to the ground," so to speak, concerns as to who did what when. The exclamation "O Brody" brings this flow to a sudden halt. The unanticipated pathos of the passage and the sudden distance it creates take the reader by surprise and encourage him to follow the narrator by taking a step back and pausing for reflection. Not only is the story over; the first "act" of *Red Cavalry* is over. It is time for an intermission. In addition to the thematic distinction between the first ten stories and the ones that follow, this passage provides further support for marking the block boundary here and not elsewhere. Moreover, the liminality is also geographical, since Brody was an important check point between Russia and the Polish provinces of the Habsburg Empire.

Interestingly, "The Road to Brody" exhibits a deliberate lack of focus. Three-fourths of the story is devoted to Afon'ka Bida's bucolic stories. Then comes the paragraph about the Brody ambush (Is it, then, the story "proper," considering the title?). The conclusion takes on yet another dimension, as I have just shown. Quite a few other stories are similar composites of more than one story line (for example, "Zamość," "Cześniaki"). This technique underscores the fluidity of narrative boundaries in the cycle and encourages a reading that will transcend them.

In the main block of stories Liutov fulfills his promise to follow Pan Apolek's example of universal humanism and through his art ennoble seemingly less suitable subjects. The character of Prishchepa appears as one of Liutov's unsaintly Apolek-like vignettes: "a young Cossack from Kuban—a tireless [bully, kicked out] from the Communist Party, a future rag-and-bone man, a carefree syphilitic, and a happy-go-lucky fraud" (p. 108). The story of

¹⁵See also Efraim Sicher's brilliant investigation of the issue of Jewishness in Babel in *Jews in Russian Literature after the October Revolution* (New York, 1996).

¹⁶The motif of renouncing Jewishness and espousing the Revolution has already appeared in "The Rebbe," when Liutov leaves the rebbe's house and rushes back to the propaganda train to finish an article for *Red Trooper*. It will reappear in "The Rebbe's Son."

Pavlichenko, victimized by his master until the revolution provided him with an opportunity to lynch him (which he does slowly and sadistically), bears the title "*zhizneopisanie*," ironically suggestive of the genre of saints' lives. Liutov now withholds his opinion about Pavlichenko, but portrays him in a more positive light when he reappears in "Cześniiki" as a disciplined soldier and a prudent commander, unaffected by the rampant anarchy in the Soviet army. Although both stories are independent, self-contained units, the readers might conceivably be tempted to revise *ex post facto* their reading of "Pavlichenko" after seeing the hero's redemptive qualities in the "Cześniiki" episode. Perhaps the lynching, though morally wrong, had an expurgating, regenerative influence upon him? Could the Revolution have tempered Pavlichenko's bloodthirstiness or harnessed it for positive ends? Or perhaps the reader will choose not to reconcile the two behaviors: are they two separate sides of Pavlichenko's personality?

To ask a more fundamental question: to what extent does Babel resolve the moral dilemmas he poses? We follow Liutov into new fields of experience, see old acquaintances—like Pavlichenko—in new situations, and are invited to see the world through their eyes. By making us experience a character's perspective and by showing his various aspects, Babel makes us question and test our most basic moral beliefs. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of *Red Cavalry* is Babel's insistence on constructing seemingly plausible situations or states of mind in which killing *might appear* justified. Rather than leading us to condone evil and violence, Babel aims at exposing the immense complexity of any moral action and, consequently, of any moral judgment. Instead of resolving a moral dilemma, he often chooses to dramatize it. The possibilities of balancing stories and of shifting narrative viewpoint inherent in the story cycle genre aid him well in this task.

Yet not all is left unresolved. "In St. Valentine's Church" shows how the epiphany occasioned by Pan Apolek's art makes Liutov revise his contemptuous and hostile attitude toward "the other," here: Polish Catholics. Poles were added to this structural category in the initial block, in "The Church at Novograd," which also initiated the motif of a sacrilegious plundering of a church. The change in Liutov's attitude is already apparent in the contrasting descriptions of the two churches. The Novograd church is a treacherous place: "Bone buttons sprang beneath our fingers, icons split down the middle and opened out, revealing subterranean passages and mildewed caverns" (p. 46). The church of St. Valentine, on the other hand, emerges as an almost immaterial oasis of tranquility: "It was full of sunshine, full of dancing sunbeams, airy pillars, a kind of cool gaiety" (p. 140). The framing of the story between the portrayals of the violence of war in the preceding "Afon'ka Bida" and the following "Squadron Commander Trunov" enhances this effect. Similarly, Babel creates "lyric relief" by inserting a brief poetic interlude, "The Cemetery at Kozin," between the stories about Pavlichenko and Prishchepa, both laden with violence.¹⁷

Another "control" for Liutov's change in attitude in "In St. Valentine's Church" is his portrayal of Kurdiukov. He was introduced in the initial block in "A Letter" as an example of a morally anesthetized revolutionary, with Liutov ultimately withholding his

¹⁷For a compelling reading of the story see Joost van Baak, "Isaac Babel's 'Cemetery at Kozin,'" *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 36, no. 1-2 (1994): 69-87. Van Baak makes a compelling argument for the story being an important "nodal point in the semantics and composition of *Red Cavalry*" (*ibid.*, 69).

opinion. In contrast, "In St. Valentine's Church" does signal Liutov's criticism of Kurdiukov's part in desecrating the church, which consists in simulating intercourse with an army nurse. Liutov describes him with scorn: "Kurdiukov the half-wit straddled her as if on horseback, shook as though in the saddle, and pretended to be satisfying his lust" (p. 140). In portraying other *Red Cavalry* characters, such as Pavlichenko or Afon'ka Bida, Liutov also alternates what I will call mediated and unmediated descriptions. I will use these terms as shorthand labels—I do not wish to claim that an objective, unmediated narrative in absolute terms is possible.¹⁸ I merely wish to indicate the two poles of the spectrum, a relative contrast between an opinion expressed (with varying degrees of articulation or openness) and an opinion withheld (which does not preclude its existence).¹⁹

Pan Apolek, Liutov's role model, reappears metonymically in the masterpieces of St. Valentine's Church that bear the indelible mark of his "heretical and intoxicating brush" (p. 141). The central epiphany in the story occurs when a falling curtain reveals Pan Apolek's statue of Jesus Christ, so lifelike that everyone at first takes him to be alive.²⁰ From Liutov's perspective, Apolek's Jesus combines "sameness" (he is a Jew, like Liutov) with "otherness"—he wears a Polish coat (Poles are the enemy) and is pursued by his oppressors, as the Poles are pursued by their enemies, the Russians. Liutov's revelation is triggered by a sudden awareness of a basic bond that connects him with all humanity, one that transcends the differences of ethnicity, nationality, and religion.

This is borne out by yet another alignment of motifs. The description of the bell-ringer's wife, who implores Liutov to stop the desecration of St Valentine's Church, evokes the portrayal of the harrowed old woman in "My First Goose" who, broken by the weight of wartime violence, threatens to hang herself when Liutov kills her goose. The pupils of the bell-ringer's wife "were infused with the white moisture of blindness, and were brimming with tears" (p. 139). The woman in "Goose" "raised ... the diffused whites of her purblind eyes" (p. 75). The predicament of both women signals the ill treatment of the civilian population in the territories conquered by the Cossacks. Yet the purblind eyes also suggests the women's affinity with the severely short-sighted and bespectacled Liutov. Thus the image symbolically links the victim with the oppressor. Babel's use of the purblind eyes motif exemplifies the way a cycle creates symbols. As Ingram explains, the repetition of an element in various contexts "amplifies and deepens [its] significance to such an extent that it becomes a symbol."²¹ Babel's symbolic use of the half-blind eyes suggests an interpretation that Liutov as a moral being and artist remains connected indiscriminately to other human beings, that no single faction, nation, army, or ethnicity can claim his exclusive allegiance.

¹⁸See Wayne Booth's exposé of the "objective fallacy" of authors and readers, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1983).

¹⁹Indeed, the spectrum approach to the study of narrative viewpoint has been gaining acceptance over the rigid binary approach. See, for example, Susan Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton, 1981).

²⁰Babel quite likely took the trick from Maupassant's 1885 novel *Bel-Ami*, in which the narrator describes a work of art (a painting of Christ walking on water) as if the event it depicts were actually taking place ([New York, 1975], 357, 400–401).

²¹Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles*, 201.

The main block of stories also develops the initial block's other thematic embryos. The idea of an ideal, humane revolution contained in Gedali's notion of an International of good people returns in "The Story of a Horse" and "The Story of a Horse, Continued." The former story portrays Khlebnikov, an idealistic Bolshevik who renounces his party membership when the party fails to redress his just claim and return his horse to him. Khlebnikov's idealistic view of the Revolution echoes Gedali's: "The Communist Party ... was founded, as I understand it, for joy and sound justice without limit, and it ought to consider the small fry also" (p. 112). However, a disparity between this ideal and his individual experience makes Khlebnikov disillusioned with the revolution. In "The Story of a Horse, Continued," in turn, Khlebnikov renounces his cynicism and acknowledges the need to overcome the individual and espouse the collective. In a letter to Savitskii, who now holds possession of the horse, he expresses joy that his horse advances the revolutionary cause by serving a war hero. Savitskii's cynical reply provides yet another ironic inversion of Khlebnikov's idealism. He jocosely lists the dead brothers-in-arms and off-handedly mentions that Khlebnikov's horse is also dead. The conclusion of Savitskii's letter stands in stark contrast to the earnestness and simple-hearted kindness of Khlebnikov: "We shall meet again, to put it bluntly, in the Kingdom of Heaven, though there is a rumor going around that the old fellow up in Heaven has not got a kingdom at all, but a regular whorehouse, and clap there's plenty of on earth as it is, and so it is quite on the cards that we shall not see one another again" (p. 162).

Another issue that "Gedali" raised earlier, the question of the Revolution's promise for the oppressed masses it now liberates, resurfaces in "Beresteczko" and "Afon'ka Bida," this time with clearly pessimistic overtones. Beresteczko and its miserable inhabitants await a new era with hope: "The town reeks on, awaiting a new era, and instead of human beings there go about mere faded schemata of frontier misfortunes" (p. 120). The Soviet promises sound enticing: rule belongs to you, no more masters. Yet the Soviets' ability to live up to these promises is undermined in the story through references to Bohdan Khmel'nitsky and Napoleon, who failed to deliver on their alluring promises, and by the historical context of Khmel'nitsky's infamous pogroms that in the seventeenth century decimated the Jewish population in this area.²² On a smaller scale, Babel's Cossacks repeat this inglorious historical topos by murdering an elderly Jew suspected of spying, which further undermines their credibility. The infantry unit in "Afon'ka Bida" is drafted from the same milieu as the Beresteczko inhabitants (the most destitute Galician peasants and Jews). The Cossacks' scandalous treatment of these poorly armed soldiers in bast sandals shows that Russian Communists are no better than Polish masters: the Cossack horsemen round them up like cattle and whip them. Afon'ka Bida gladly partakes in this lashing spree, and amuses himself by shouting commands to these soldiers as to a dog: "Look out ... [n]ow go and catch fleas!" (p. 133).

By the time the reader encounters "Afon'ka Bida," the abuse of civilians by the warring armies already constitutes an expanded "thematic core," to use Ingram's term. What follows is some elements that have been "rotating" around this core in the initial block of stories:

²²Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature*, 98.

- 1) In "Crossing" Poles raid the Jewish woman's house and murder her father.
- 2) In "The Remount Officer" red cavalymen confiscate draft horses; the peasants consider this a plunder that deprives them of means to farm the land.
- 3) "My First Goose" describes Liutov's killing of a goose that belongs to a despairing old woman, a gruesome and grotesque initiation rite through which Liutov hopes to gain acceptance among Cossacks.

Toward the end of the main block, "Zamość and "The Song" will add new motifs to this theme of abuse.

Liutov's portrayal of Afon'ka Bida in a number of stories gives the reader a good cross-section of a Cossack soul. In "The Road to Brody" Afon'ka shows his humane, benevolent face: he sings Cossack ballads and tells a touching story about a bee. Liutov calls Afon'ka his friend. "The Death of Dolgushov" reveals Afon'ka's capacity for compassion—he weeps over leaving behind wounded comrades who will inevitably fall prey to the Poles. The story also shows that Afon'ka possesses something that Liutov will always lack: an ability to perform a mercy killing on a fatally wounded comrade who begs for a bullet. Afon'ka berates Liutov for what he sees as Liutov's weakness and lack of compassion, and threatens to kill him. Liutov's admiration of Afon'ka—now with an admixture of horror—is replaced by repulsion in the story "Afon'ka Bida." Afon'ka displays more sympathy for his horse (like Kurdiukov in "A Letter") than for the infantry soldiers, whom he whips "for fun." His unorthodox ways of finding a new horse, which include going single-handedly behind the enemy lines, though courageous, display the full extent of his anarchic nature. (He is nicknamed after the anarchist commander, Makhno, under whom Sidorov, the anarchist in "Italian Sunshine," served.) Liutov becomes entirely disillusioned with Afon'ka when the latter defiles the shrine of St. Valentine ("Afon'ka Bida"), and in a drunken stupor performs a cacophonous "concerto" on the church organ ("In St. Valentine's Church").

An important theme running through *Red Cavalry* is the role of propaganda in forming the New Man that the Revolution was to create. The story "Salt" shows how the propagandist (mis)conception of collective revolutionary goals serves simply as an excuse for completely arbitrary, amoral acts. The story's hero, Balmashev, takes pity on a woman with a small baby who begs to be taken aboard the train, but when he discovers that she has fooled him by pretending that a bag of salt is her child, he throws her off the moving train and shoots her. He addresses her with a harangue full of Communist slogans: "You, abominable woman, you're more counterrevolutionary than the White General who goes about on a horse that cost a thousand. ... He can be seen from everywhere, that general can ... but you ... can't be seen no more than a flea can, and you go biting away for all you're worth" (p. 126). The entranced line of this rhetoric leads Balmashev to assert that the woman is a traitor and a dangerous threat to the Revolution. He considers it a revolutionary duty to kill her: "I ... washed away that stain from the face of the workers' land and the republic" (p. 126). Balmashev's initial act of kindness predisposes us toward him and makes us try to accept his rationale for killing the woman. Yet the incongruity between the facts and Balmashev's rhetoricized version of them remains puzzling. The story in its entirety consists of a letter to an editor (Liutov?), but unlike "A Letter," "Salt" lacks a narrative frame—it stands on its own and the narrator in no way guides the reader in evaluating Balmashev's act.

The next story, "Evening," adds a new dimension to the Balmashev question. The story also portrays a character who views the world through the prism of propagandist clichés, but now the portrayal is rather comical. The efforts of the love-stricken Galin to win the heart of a washerwoman by raising her revolutionary consciousness appear futile and ridiculous. The story's conclusion shifts to a more somber tone, as it becomes clear that Galin's immersion in propagandist newspeak has deprived him completely of the ability to communicate emotions. After catching a glimpse of the washerwoman snuggling in bed with someone else, Galin turns to Liutov with the following words: "The Cavalry Army ... is the social focus effected by the Central Committee of our Party. The revolutionary curve has thrown into the first rank the free Cossacks still soaked in many prejudices, but the Central Committee's maneuvering will rub them down with a brush of iron" (p. 130). This is hardly what one would expect from a scorned lover. The juxtaposition of "Salt" and "Evening" in the text is significant. The (tragi)comical treatment of propaganda in "Evening" may retroactively influence our interpretation of its detached, unmediated presentation in "Salt." But, one may ask, can we really read "Salt" through the prism of "Evening"? After all, they are connected neither by plot nor character.

Even if the answer to this question is negative, "Evening" does seem to indicate the direction in which the propaganda theme will develop. Indeed, Balmashev himself reappears in "Treason," now as a quixotic figure, more comical than even Galin in "Evening." Babel's use of *skaz* in "Treason" to render Balmashev's inflated revolutionary zeal and propagandist indoctrination resembles Zoshchenko's use of this technique. Balmashev and his friend come to a hospital for treatment, but steadfastly refuse to surrender their weapons and clothes for sterilization, accusing the staff of betrayal: "What contagion could there be in a sharp Kuban saber except for the enemies of our Revolution?" (p. 174) The party affiliation of the person in charge of the storeroom is a vital issue in their dilemma. After the hospital staff finally drugs them and puts them in hospital clothes, they start a riot. The story ends, like "Salt," with a tirade against ubiquitous treason, but now Balmashev's fulminations clearly cannot be taken seriously.

As I have mentioned, the balancing of the unmediated and mediated stories forms a pattern in *Red Cavalry*. The unmediated portrayals of Kurdiukov, Pavlichenko, and Balmashev in "A Letter," "Pavlichenko," and "Salt," respectively, are in each instance balanced by the mediated ones in "In St. Valentine's Church," "Cześniiki," and "Treason." The unmediated portrayals are based on the characters' own speech, which allows Liutov to withhold his opinion, while the mediated ones appear mostly as Liutov's narratives, Liutov's opinion being embedded in the tone, structure, and symbolism of the stories. ("Treason," kept in a letter form, is an exception, though a degree of evaluation is suggested by its addressee, an investigator, and by the comic absurdity of Balmashev's self-portrayal.) The unmediated stories are among the most enigmatic ones in the cycle. The lack of narratorial comment in these stories proves all the more unsettling since they portray human behavior in the absence of law and moral rules. Pavlichenko's improvisation of a fictitious party order that allows him to kill his former master makes a mockery of a moral sanction: "I ... takes out my book of orders and opens it at a blank page and reads, though I can't read to save my life. 'In the name of the nation ... and for the foundation of a nobler life in the future, I order Pavlichenko, Matthew son of Rodion, to deprive certain people of life,

according to his discretion.' 'There,' I says, 'that's Lenin's letter to you'" (p. 105). Stories about Kurdiukov and Balmashev also portray morally arbitrary actions justified by idiosyncratic conceptions of the advancement of the revolutionary cause. Babel balances the mediated and unmediated stories to capture Liutov's quest for a resolution of the dilemmas arising at his first contact with these characters, dilemmas that the reader certainly shares. The reader may either see the mediated versions as relevant to their interpretation of the unmediated counterparts, or may consider them separately, as reflections of particular stages of Liutov's cognitive journey through the world of war. The genre of a story cycle allows for both possibilities. However, the presence of the same characters in the parallel stories, and often in the context of the same problem (for example, morality vs. the revolution), requires that the issue of the relation between these stories be addressed in one's reading.

There is a definite sense of direction in Babel's development of the propaganda theme. Balmashev is an avid reader of the *Red Trooper*, the propagandist rag for which Liutov writes articles. The same paper equips Balmashev with the specious rationale for his refusal to be disarmed in the hospital: "the *Red Trooper* says about our international position that it's real terrible, and that the horizon is full of clouds" (pp. 174–75). That propaganda makes one blind is suggested on the literal level in the description of Galin's walleye and twitching eyelid. The story "Squadron Commander Trunov" compares interestingly with Babel's actual article about Trunov, "More of Such Trunovs," which he published in the *Red Trooper* under the name of Liutov. The article is a propagandist funeral panegyric of Trunov: "Yet another illustrious life ... was given for the cause of the downtrodden; yet another proletarian heart was broken in order to paint the banners of the Revolution with its hot blood."²³ Babel's fictional portrayal of Trunov, on the other hand, is problematized: although he dies a heroic death, he has earlier butchered prisoners of war and tried to force Liutov to falsify their number in an official report.

Liutov himself at the beginning of the campaign views reality through the eyes of a propaganda officer. In "The Church at Novograd" he commits a more refined version of the Balmashevian discourse: "Here is Poland, here is the proud distress of the *Res Publica*! And I, a violent intruder, spread out a lousy mattress in a church abandoned by its priest, and placed beneath my head folios in which were printed hosannas to the Most Excellent and Illustrious Head of State, Joseph Pilsudski" (p. 45). Yet Liutov liberates himself from the propaganda's seductively cocksure and thunderous voice in the stories that follow, for example, in "In St. Valentine's Church," which balances "The Church at Novograd."²⁴ In fact, in the course of his war experience he comes to despise *any* form of propaganda, whether Soviet or Polish, and goes as far as to claim brotherhood with his enemy. This is how Liutov relates his unintentional defilement of a Polish soldier's corpse: "I felt splashes of something on my hand. I lit my little lantern ... and saw lying on the ground the corpse of a Pole I had splattered with my urine. ... With Commander-in-Chief Pilsudski's procla-

²³Babel', *Sochineniia* 1:202.

²⁴For a contrasting interpretation of the propaganda theme see Gareth Williams, "The Rhetoric of Revolution in Babel's *Konarmija*," *Russian Literature* 15 (1984): 279–98. Williams's article, though rich in fascinating minutiae, remains unconvincing. In order to argue Babel's acceptance of propaganda and revolution, Williams disregards problematic passages, glosses over irony whenever it suits his purpose, and imputes to Liutov mental leaps that lack any textual evidence.

mation I wiped the skull of my unknown brother" ("Two Ivans," pp. 155–56). This gesture symbolizes Liutov's ultimate rejection of propaganda as a reliable cognitive and moral guidepost.

The theme of propaganda has also a metaliterary significance: it is a type of discourse whose objectives and methods are antithetical to those of a story cycle like *Red Cavalry*. Propaganda aims at persuading its audience; it selects and links "stories" and events in such a way as to project a monistic vision of reality. A story cycle like *Red Cavalry*, in contrast, presents a multiplicity of truths and casts events and characters in a wide range of moral perspectives. Rather than attempting to persuade, it invites interpretive pluralism. Thus, built into the cycle is a competing model of a narrative, one that gradually becomes undermined and discredited. It is therefore arguable that on the metaliterary level, the theme of propaganda provides the cycle with an opportunity to accentuate the prerogative of its own poetics.

The main block's final group of stories portrays a growing deterioration of the army that is losing the campaign. (This theme has been initiated by Liutov's dream in the opening "Crossing the Zbrucz.") In "Zamość" Liutov reaches the nadir of his war experience. He spends the night in a ditch full of water, with his horse tied to his leg: "The sodden ground offered me a soothing embrace of the [grave]" (p. 168). His dream about a woman named Margot stands in juxtaposition to Sidorov's plea to his fellow conspirator, Victoria, in "Italian Sunshine." Yet the escape that Liutov finds in Margot is not the prospect of a "heroic" deed (an assassination of an autocrat), but his own death. Like the opening story, "Zamość" also mentions a pogrom perpetrated by the Poles and Liutov's camouflaged Jewish identity (his conversation with an anti-Semitic peasant who takes Liutov for a non-Jew).²⁵ The next day, when his housekeeper refuses to feed him, he threatens to burn down her house. In contrast to "My First Goose," in which Liutov's act of terror was motivated by a desire to insinuate himself into the Cossacks' good graces, he now commits a parallel act out of sheer desperation to obtain the necessary sustenance. The story ends on a somber note: "'We've lost the campaign,' muttered Volkov. ... 'Yes,' I answered'" (p. 172).

By depicting commanders who are about to disobey orders, "Cześniaki" presages the breakdown of army morals that will reach its apogee in "After the Battle." The latter story relates the events of the Cześniaki battle in which the Poles won a spectacular victory, as five thousand Cossacks fled in disarray after a brief skirmish. The Russian army has deteriorated to the point that the Cossacks turn against one another. Liutov, trying to collect his men for another attack, approaches Gulimov, who refuses to follow the order unless Liutov moves to the attack first. In the ensuing conflict Gulimov threatens to kill Liutov, and

²⁵In this curious dream, Liutov's death merges with a sexual climax and is followed by an eerie Christian-pagan funeral ritual. Margot prays to Jesus and then places five-kopek coins on Liutov's eyelids and stuffs his mouth with hay. Upon awakening, Liutov becomes imagistically transformed into a figure of a cross formed by the "black crossbar of [his] horse's back" and by his leg that was "sticking in the air, caught fast in the tight noose of the bridle." The blood trickling down his face, "torn by the weeds of the steppe," further likens Liutov to a Christ figure (p. 169). An image of Jesus, so frequently encountered in the Jewish art of the period (most notably in Chagall; see, for example, Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature*, 40–71) signals the martyrdom of the Jewish people and in this story connects Liutov with the Jews being massacred in the Zamość pogrom whose groans he hears through the tumult of battle.

Liutov buries his nails in Gulimov's face.²⁶ Later, Akinfiev, who accuses Liutov of not having put cartridges in his rifle during the Cześniiki battle, does the same to Liutov's face.

Although these last stories represent the absolute lowest circle of the hell of war, they also offer glimmers of hope, of life, of a regenerative force—though the work's ending cannot be deemed uplifting on account of these images. Liutov's prayer to fate in "After the Battle" for the ability to kill a fellow man may be viewed as a sign of the degeneration of his earlier humanistic ideals, but it may also be seen in positive terms: despite all he has experienced, Liutov is still unable to kill. The motif of life at the juncture with death, most often though not exclusively symbolized in sexual intercourse, becomes a prominent motif toward the end of *Red Cavalry*. As I have mentioned earlier, it appears already in the cycle's first story, this brilliant miniature of all of *Red Cavalry*, in the image of a pregnant Jewish woman mourning her dead father. In "The Widow," the nurse Sashka abandons her dying lover and makes love to his helper in the nearby bushes. In "Treason," the hospital—an institution that saves human lives—is situated in Kozin, the location of a cemetery in an earlier story. The Russian word *shashki* appears in "Treason" in two different meanings and contexts: as the bellicose Kustov's "sword," and as the "checkers" which the recovering patients make from bread, the symbolic food of life. The story "Cześniiki," whose title would suggest that it will focus on the battle, is half devoted to Sashka getting her mare covered by the commander's stallion. The case of Sandy the Christ is more ambiguous. In "The Song" he offers to make love to the elderly woman psychologically destroyed by war, by which he recapitulates the gesture of Christ in Pan Apolek's story, who in the same way took pity on Deborah, abandoned by her bridegroom. On the other hand, an earlier story ("Sandy the Christ") has shown Sandy become infected with a sexually transmitted disease, which compromises his gesture of love to the old woman in "The Song." This profoundly ambivalent image closes the main block of *Red Cavalry* stories.

The concluding stories do not resolve *Red Cavalry*'s conflicts or provide an overarching meaning to the whole book, as some critics have suggested.²⁷ On the contrary, countless ambiguities and irresolutions are built into every seeming conclusion. What all three endings share, however, is a tendency of returning to the beginning of *Red Cavalry*, thus endowing the book with a cyclical structure.

"The Rebbe's Son" may be seen as a positive ending: the revolution wins over a prominent representative of a group which in earlier stories harbored skepticism toward communism—the Jews. This person is Il'ia, the last prince of a Jewish dynasty. An overview of Il'ia's belongings may also imply a possibility of reconciling personal and cultural values with collective, revolutionary ones. This optimistic resolution, however, is undermined by Il'ia's demeaning death and burial at a forgotten station. In addition, the possibility of Il'ia's messianic role (is Il'ia—Elijah the new Prophet?) is undermined by images of "ema-

²⁶Gulimov also sends a bullet by Liutov's ear. This act acquires symbolic significance when read in the context of "Two Ivans," in which Akinfiev repeatedly fires his pistol near the ear of Aggeev, who evades active service by pretending to be deaf. Thus, a shot fired by someone's ear, like the purblind eyes or the thin neck motifs, becomes a symbol: it labels a person as a deserter.

²⁷See, for example, Allan Reid, "Isaak Babel's *Konarmia*: Meanings and Endings," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 33, no. 2 (1991).

ciation and impotence."²⁸ Liutov's fraternal identification with Il'ia provides another twist: it may imply that what Il'ia stands for will live in Liutov. Yet Liutov earlier has called a dead Polish soldier his brother as well. Does Liutov's identification with Il'ia and the Pole suggest simply his recognition of the basic bond between human beings? The story invites various interpretations. "The Rebbe's Son" contributes to the cyclical structure of *Red Cavalry* by evoking a recollection of Zhitomir, which is chronologically Liutov's first recorded experience of the campaign (while in Novograd he reminisces about his earlier stay in Zhitomir). By relating further events of Il'ia's life, the story looks back to "The Rebbe" from the first block of *Red Cavalry*. The thrice-repeated "do you remember" accentuates this pattern of reconnection.

"Argamak," though slightly more optimistic, is similarly ambiguous. The story may suggest that Liutov has found his place among the Cossacks, but the terms of the Cossacks' acceptance ironically undermine this conclusion: stopping to stare at him and his horse does not connote friendship. Liutov remains an outsider and a grotesque misfit. Horsemanship alone does not secure the status of a true Cossack; further training in killing geese without pangs of remorse—not to mention killing people—would be needed. *Red Cavalry* never shows Liutov learning that. Like "The Rebbe's Son," "Argamak" refers the reader to the beginning of the cycle. "The Cavalry Army has gained possession of Novograd-Volynsk" (p. 196), announces Liutov, which takes the reader back to the opening sentence of the book: "The Commander of the VI Division reported: Novograd-Volynsk was taken at dawn today" (p. 41).

"The Kiss" represents the most optimistic version of a *Red Cavalry* ending. Joost van Baak is right to attribute the surprisingly positive overtones of "Argamak" and "The Kiss" to the fact that they were written much later than *Red Cavalry* proper, "under the ideological pressure of the thirties."²⁹ "The Kiss" reworks the theme and plot of Chekhov's eponymous story. Yet while Chekhov's hero never again meets the mysterious woman who kissed him and comes to see his life as purposeless and incomprehensible, Babel's hero finds the woman, makes love to her, and discovers purpose in revolutionary struggle. The story's conclusion affirms the revolutionary path as the only natural one. Liutov's Cossack companion finds it by animal-like instinct: "We ... found ourselves in a ploughed field [without a path]. Surovtsev straightened up in the saddle, looked right and left, gave a whistle, sniffed for the right direction and breathed it in with the air; then he leaned forward and shot off at a gallop" (p. 373). Nonetheless, the story has its ironic pitfalls. The woman's father remains skeptical about Liutov and Surovtsev's triumphant vision of "the right direction": "In order not to cloud his happiness, he tried [not to notice] our bloodthirsty bravado, the loudmouthed simplicity that in those days we brought to the solution of all world problems" (p. 368). Liutov's promise of a better life for the woman may be impossible to keep: the story "Zamość" has already related the Russian defeat. The context of "Beresteczko," which alludes to Bohdan Khmel'nitsky and Napoleon, whose armies rolled through these territories leaving behind a path of destruction, magnifies this doubt. (Both stories also use the motif of a liaison between a local woman and a foreign soldier, which encourages an interpretive connection.)

²⁸Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature*, 104.

²⁹Joost van Baak, "Story and Cycle: Babel's 'Potseluj' and Konarmija," *Russian Literature* 15 (1984): 326.

Again, the story provides closure to the cycle by reporting the Russians' crossing of the Polish border, which recapitulates the "crossing" from the opening story and takes the reader again to the beginning of the war and of *Red Cavalry*.

In its cyclical structure, recurrent themes and motifs, and in the pattern of Liutov's reexamination of his values and beliefs as he enters new fields of experience, *Red Cavalry* emerges as a coherent, closely knit whole. I would therefore agree with the proponents of treating *Red Cavalry* as a novel insofar as the need for a holistic approach is concerned. In a letter of 1929, Babel himself admitted to gravitating toward the novelistic form in his early years: "Before I always tried to write (*razmakhivalsia na*) novels, and what would come out instead were stories, shorter than a sparrow's tail."³⁰

Jan van der Eng offers the most convincingly articulated "novel approach" to *Red Cavalry*. He views the work as a modernist novel among whose features he lists a shifting ironic viewpoint, secondary narrators, truncated transitions between narrative sections, and non-indicated flashbacks.³¹ Yet considering the proliferation of story cycles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these features may arguably suggest the opposite direction of influence. The novel itself may be undergoing a "contamination" by the story cycle poetics—a process parallel to the novelization of the epic (a previously dominant genre) so insightfully described by Bakhtin. More important, van der Eng's insistence on fitting the work into a novelistic mold causes him to smooth out and tie up more than seems warranted. The "clear developmental line" that he sees in the events, characters, and especially the narrator seems to me much less clear, at times even zigzaggy or circular (in ways that the qualification "modernist" no longer accounts for it).³² Van der Eng's focus on the narrator's development, conditioned precisely by a novelistic expectation, also appears somewhat forced. *Red Cavalry* is only in part about Liutov. By choosing the story-cycle form Babel could be attempting to "dethrone" the main protagonist (here also narrator), to deemphasize his *Bildung* relative to that of his novelistic counterpart. Even the *kind* of narrator that Liutov is underscores this tendency. His centrifugal consciousness prompts him to suspend his ego in encountering the various "others"; his initial impulse is always the experience of the object itself rather than the discovery of the object's relation to him. Finally, any novel approach, including van der Eng's, inevitably tends to consider the story cycle a poor version of the novel: rather than be judged on its own, the cycle is shown to barely meet the novel's standards. Therefore, instead of justifying *Red Cavalry*'s deficiencies as a novel, I consider it more productive to investigate what the work gains by *not* being one. While arguing a holistic approach to *Red Cavalry* I have thus far stressed the connections and linkages in the work, a comparison with the novel form now requires a comment upon the relative separateness and autonomy of stories and voices within a story cycle.

Forrest Ingram's study of the story cycle genre again offers valuable insights for this comparison. He notes that story cycles accentuate "the rhythmic pattern of the telling" and deemphasize the time relationships among stories.³³ This certainly occurs in *Red Cavalry*.

³⁰Babel', *Sochineniia* 1:296.

³¹Van der Eng, "*Red Cavalry*: A Novel of Stories."

³²*Ibid.*, 261.

³³Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles*, 23.

For example, Liutov's transformation into a soldier in active service (though not consistently maintained) happens imperceptibly in the work; its timing and circumstances are unimportant. Only one of the concluding stories reports this event. Many stories stand out, as it were, from the main time framework, the 1920 Polish campaign (for example, "Sandy the Christ" or "Prishchepa"), or are completely "timeless" and static ("The Cemetery at Kozin" or most of "Discourse on the *Tachanka*"). While it is true that prehistories of characters (as in "Prishchepa") or lyrical passages (as "Kozin") also appear in novels, stories collected in a cycle are equipotent parts of the whole, and not departures from the main story line due to each story's autonomous, self-contained status. Ingram's rhythmically patterned telling characterizes sequences of individual stories (such as the ones describing the deterioration of the Cossack army) and of the major blocks; for example, the main block's development of the initial one's thematic embryos. The abandonment of the causal-temporal relationships in a cycle for the sake of the rhythmic patterns of thematic development allows for a greater ideological focus and flexibility while the work's unity and cohesion is simultaneously preserved.

Another vital contrast with the novel is the cycle's emancipation of peripheral characters. Ingram notes that the action of the cycle is always centered in the action of a given story.³⁴ Hence, in a cycle, a story of a secondary character is not a digression from the main plot, as it would tend to be in a novel. For as long as the character occupies the spotlight, he or she is the center of interest. In *Red Cavalry* such "peripheral" characters as Afon'ka Bida or Pavlichenko assume an even greater prominence by reappearing in a number of stories that modify and complement their portrayal in the stories where they are central.

It is arguable, if we take *Red Cavalry* as a model, that the genre of a story cycle is better suited for representing the flux of contemporaneity and for achieving the open-ended dialogue of heteroglossia than Bakhtin's venerated novel.³⁵ Bakhtin's definition of the novel hinges on the interillumination of various social languages through dialogue. *Red Cavalry* matches this definition. The languages of Russian Cossacks, Poles, Catholics, rabbis, shtetl Jews, Communists, anti-Communists, anarchists, and village artists, among others, dialogically illuminate and refract one another. Contrary to Bakhtin's assertion, however, the novel is not unique in combining the "subordinated, yet still *relatively* autonomous [compositional-stylistic] unities ... into the higher unity of the work as a whole."³⁶ It is true of cycles as well. Moreover, the autonomy of each story and character in a cycle weakens the links of subordination of various stylistic unities and discourses into the "higher unity." Therefore, it seems more natural for the story cycle than for the novel to convey inconclusive, open-ended contemporaneity.

Bakhtin also praises the polyphonic novel for representing the man who "ceased to coincide with himself," and for capturing "the dynamics of inconsistency and tension between various factors of his image."³⁷ Here again the Babelian cycle surpasses the Bakhtinian novel. As *Red Cavalry* demonstrates, in a story where a character occupies the

³⁴Ibid., 22.

³⁵Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), 35.

³⁶Ibid., 262 (emphasis added).

³⁷Ibid., 35.

central position, he or she receives a fully dramatized, independent voice. The portrayals of that character from different viewpoints in a number of other stories show his or her other selves and voices. The autonomous status of each story makes the genre perfectly suited for leaving the tensions between these voices unresolved, and for allowing these different selves to remain unmerged into a coherent, unified identity. Who is Afon'ka Bida? A Cossack raconteur with poetic leanings? A compassionate comrade? An awesome yet terrible mercy-killer? A cruel degenerate? An anarchist? A drunken wretch? The answer is that he is a hybrid of all the above, he "does not coincide with himself." The variety of vantage points and of stories in which these different selves and voices are plotted makes the "inconsistency" and the "tension" all the more palpable.

The role of plot in the two genres also offers revealing differences. Bakhtin revels in the novelistic word that is "half-ours and half-someone else's," that serves as the battleground of various ideological values and points of view. *Red Cavalry* abounds in such internally conflicted words. The struggle within Liutov between authoritarian discourse, such as political dogma, and other people's internally persuasive discourse, to use Bakhtin's term, serves as a good example. Bakhtin asserts that these discourses remain "incomplete and unresolved," though he himself sees plot—and the undeniable degree of resolution and closure that it offers—as a constraint on his notion of the novel's openness.³⁸ He conveniently underestimates the power of plot in evaluating discourse. If openness is the ideal, the generic features of the story cycle give it an advantage over the novel. First, in each story the narrator appears as if anew; his voices, views, and attitudes may fluctuate between stories. As a result the reader never relies on his word as authoritative. Liutov's internally persuasive discourse never liberates itself from another's discourse, even in the concluding stories. Second, the novel may have a plot and subplots, or at best a few parallel plots. *Red Cavalry* has thirty-six plots. While connected by the narrator and certain themes, they are nonetheless autonomous. Even when a character appears in a few stories, each time the plot is new. All these factors undermine the power of plot in *Red Cavalry* to resolve anything. In short, I believe that Babel's story cycle fulfills the potential of Bakhtin's model of a narrative more fully than the novel. The Bakhtinian analysis of several story cycles could quite likely yield interesting results.

Although this article has focused on *Red Cavalry's* sources of cohesion, my concluding discussion of the cycle's internal *separateness*, necessitated by the comparison with the novel, has added a crucial counterpoise without which the picture of the genre would be incomplete. Separateness and cohesion are simultaneously at work in the cycle, and their continuous interplay is crucial for the genre's idiosyncratic dynamic. A feature of the story cycle which relies in turn on the *connectedness* of its parts is its special blend of irony (I am concerned here with the irony that operates between, not within, individual stories). An ironic reading of this kind requires an assumption that the characters and motifs reappearing in various stories are meant to be read in the context of one another. This has been my approach to *Red Cavalry* in this article, and it has been motivated by the insufficient attention given to it by the existing scholarship. Yet the cycle's constant pull between independence and interdependence makes ironic correspondence a potential that is

³⁸Ibid., 345, 349.

constantly questioned: these are, after all, separate stories. Assuming they *are* interrelated, establishing specific ironic juxtapositions presents further difficulties, due to the proliferation of plots and contexts in a cycle. According to one of D. C. Muecke's definitions, irony consists in placing an element, without comment, in an invalidating or corrective context.³⁹ While the mediated and unmediated portrayals of various characters in *Red Cavalry* offer ample incongruities and incompatibilities (an indispensable ingredient of irony), do the mediated stories invalidate or correct the unmediated ones? No unequivocal answer to this question is possible. This latent irony, this irony "with a question mark," represents the story cycle's unique generic feature and contributes to *Red Cavalry's* ideological dynamism and uncompromising open-endedness.

³⁹D. C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London, 1969), 23.