Writers and artists of any aesthetic focus do not create complete meaning alone. Rather, they inherit from their predecessors a wealth of ideas, philosophy, and literary tricks and turns. This volume, *Reading Backwards: An Advance Retrospective on Russian Literature*, takes a different approach toward intertextuality using a paradoxical concept called "anticipatory plagiarism" (p. xxii). It is an idea that abandons traditional chronology to analyze literature and suggests that writers are inspired not only by those preceding them but also by the ones going to succeed them. The concept at first appears to be shocking and illogical as the word "plagiarism" is used for the unethical act of copying or stealing original ideas/work without proper attribution. It also reminds one about a similar concept called “hyperstition” founded by the experimental cultural theorist collective in 1995 in England called the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU). Nick Land, a prominent member of the group, defined the term "hyperstition" (hyper+ superstition) as the “element of effective culture that makes itself real, through fictional quantities functioning as time-travelling potentials.”[1] However, the introduction by the editors of this volume does not mention CCRU or the concept of "hyperstition" as they trace the concept of "anticipatory plagiarism" from the earlier 1960s French-speaking group of writers and mathematicians called the Oulipo group.

The Oulipo group was dedicated to "exploring the use of mathematical structures to generate literature."[2] They included the lipogram technique to create "potential literature" of the future and called their innovative techniques "le plagiat par anticipation" (plagiarism by anticipation) (p. xiii). Interestingly, the Oulipian ideas to introduce constraints in creative writing were ironically not original as they can be traced “from Lasus of Hermione, the sixth-century BC inventor of the lipogram (from the Greek leipo, ‘to leave out’), to the love lyric manuals of the troubadour.”[3] French author Pierre Bayard developed Oulipian ideas of writing beyond self-imposed constraints. He defines "anticipatory plagiarism" as “a kind of diffuse radiation, whose perception allows us, in scrutinizing texts with sufficient care, to intuit the new aesthetic territories towards which we are heading and whose anticipatory traces are already inscribed in the works of the present.”[4] Bayardian interpretation has helped to build the core tenet of the essays in this volume as the authors have regrouped different writers in a "mobile literary
history" instead of subjecting them to the traditional laws of chronology (p. 117). Using the concept of "anticipatory plagiarism," authors in the edition have reassessed the work of the great three of Russian literature—Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy—in terms either of previous writers who plagiarized them or of their own plagiarism against later writers.

Timothy Langen's opening essay explores the connections among the imaginary world of Gogol and its relationship with the works of Irish novelist Flann O'Brien and Russian-Soviet writer Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky. Langen discusses how Krzhizhanovsky understood important concepts of O'Brien. Gogol also plagiarized some of these ideas and changed them to suit the concerns of his time. The three aforementioned authors from different space-time suffered from the fear that "artistic powers may have demonic origins or intention and that those creative gains may be lost at any moment" (p. 17). Another outstanding essay on Gogol, by Ilya Vinitsky, follows. Vinitsky employs a distinctive approach rooted in the Bayardian interpretation of plagiarism to investigate the intriguing connection between Gogol's final request in his book Selected Passages from Correspondence with My Friends (1847) and the renowned artwork Transfiguration by Italian painter Raphael, created between 1516 and 1520. Gogol in his book expressed a final wish: that those who truly cared for him should possess an engraving of his portrait rather than distributing or producing his actual portrait. This declaration sparked a controversy, leading some to speculate that Gogol regarded himself as a messianic figure. Vinitsky in his analysis has tried to provide an alternative interpretation based on the counter-chronological relationship between the painting and Gogol's last will.

Three essays included in the second section of the edition are dedicated to Dostoevsky. In the first essay, Michael Bowden demonstrates that "Dostoevsky plagiarized [Kurt] Vonnegut, [J. M.] Coetzee, and [Mikhail] Bakhtin] in prose that foreshadowed the significance of ethical dialogism to the early twenty-first century" (p. 73). In Coetzee's experimental novel, Diary of a Bad Year (2007), the main character Senor C talks about Dostoevsky's character Ivan Karamzov. That becomes one of the case studies for intertextual exploration by Bowden. Moving forward, we encounter an essay by David Gillespie and Marina Korneeva that offers a compelling comparison between the literary works of Dostoevsky and Guzel Yakhina. This essay stands out as the sole instance in this collection where the exploration of a female writer's work is juxtaposed with that of the canonical male authors. Within this essay, Gillespie and Korneeva undertake a meticulous examination of Dostoevsky's lesser-known work, The House of the Dead (1861), and skillfully draw connections between it and Yakhina's contemporary masterpiece, Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes (2015). Through this comparative analysis, the authors illuminate the shared response of Dostoevsky and Yakhina to the horror of totalitarianism. Also, the community of exiles described by Yakhina is similar to the social composition of Dostoevsky's prison. The next essay, by Inna Tigountsova, is built on observing Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground (1864) and The Time: Night (1991) by Liudmila Petrushevskaia as a case of "reciprocal plagiarism." Reciprocal plagiarism rather than direct influence implies a conversation, an exchange, a multidirectional dialogue among authors and their texts. Tigountsova borrowed this idea from Bayard's model of biography of a writer called "Tolstoevskyy" (blending Tolstoy with Dostoevsky). She proposed to study the texts by two authors, Petrushevskaia and Dostoevsky, as if they had been written by one hybrid author, "Petroevsky." This approach helps the reader to look at Petrushevskaia's work retrospectively and also provides a unique view of Dostoevsky's work.

Moving on to Tolstoy, Muireann Maguire in her incredible essay compares the work of Tolstoy and Hall Caine to assert their reciprocal plagiar-
ism. Her analysis and choice of passages serve as credible evidence to the deep connections—thematic and philosophical—between Tolstoy and Caine. In the subsequent essay, Steven Shankman introduces the reading of Tolstoy’s work in the light of Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy and recalls the similarities in not only their work but their life experiences as well. Tolstoy and Levinas were deeply engaged with ethical concerns. Tolstoy, particularly in his later years, focused on moral and religious questions and emphasized the importance of compassion, love, and the pursuit of a meaningful life. Levinas, on the other hand, developed an ethical philosophy centered on the “responsibility for the other” (p. 166). Equally noteworthy is Svetlana Yefimenko’s provocative essay reflecting her intensive study of Tolstoy and Homer. She argues that Homer’s Achilles is no conventional hero but a Tolstoyan hero of truth similar to Andrei Bolkonskii from War and Peace (1869). Finally, the idea of anticipatory plagiarism becomes very convincing in Eric Naiman’s afterword. He substantiates the conceptual framework of this volume through his observant exposition that comparable situations hold for Dostoevsky, Gogol, Vladimir Nabokov, Marcel Proust, Tolstoy, and many others. He underscores the indispensable role of anticipatory plagiarism as literary device to exercise on past and present literature.

Overall, this book maintains good academic standards by being exciting, insightful, and richly argued. The term “anticipatory plagiarism” at best appears to be a unique literary imagination or as a provocative metaphor that demands the reader to be empathetic and patient. The multidirectional chronology to study literature resonates with the idea of circular time. How much it can challenge traditional notions of influence and originality is difficult to predict. As a whole, fields of knowledge are designed to study influence in a traditional chronological way. The authors in a way have tried to swim against the tide to find new ways of seeing the text. Having no end point or starting point in literature development also restores the truth that literary achievements are common human endeavors rather than feats of individuals from a particular space-time.

Notes


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