In general, despite such a variety of opinions about *Doctor Zhivago*, Cornwell’s analysis shows the novel to be on a solid pedestal: "It is clear after twenty-nine years that *Zhivago* has become a classic of Russian literature: the very existence of mass editions in many languages and the vast critical canon (no matter what it says) has ensured that *Doctor Zhivago* belongs to world literature."

As far as the main aim of this study—to evaluate as far as possible the immense variety of existent critical opinions about *Doctor Zhivago*—it definitely achieves the purpose. Altogether, the monograph is a useful study and can be recommended for university libraries and for all readers interested in secondary material on *Doctor Zhivago*.

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Gary Saul Morson’s book is important. Lucidly written, it recuperates the real idiosyncrasies of a work that has come to be regarded as smooth, canonical, the "perfect embodiment of the novel tradition."

The fact is, as Morson shows quite forcefully, *War and Peace* is not novelistic, at least not in any conventional sense. It is full of loose ends, characters who are developed only to disappear, incidents that lead nowhere, and philosophical tracts that leave the fiction behind altogether. The work’s first readers and critics read it with difficulty and considerable consternation. They had trouble identifying its genre, its themes, and even its main characters. To smooth this out now, to have gotten used to what is problematic, is to impoverish the experience of reading *War and Peace*, and more importantly, to obscure Tolstoi’s intentions.

Tolstoi’s innovation (and Morson’s great insight) is to allow the random to stand as absolutely random and accidental. Both author and critic staunchly oppose what Morson refers to (with terminological felicity) as "semiotic totalitarianism," a tendency to assign meaning to everything, to see every detail as the sign of an underlying order or system, to explain every accident as somehow logically entailed. Tolstoi’s principle of composition defies Chekhov’s later credo about the gun that had better go off by the last act or never have appeared. *War and Peace* is full of unfired guns because, as Morson reminds us, Tolstoi’s hero is Truth, and in life, most weapons we happen across are never wielded; they remain pure potential.

Because the principle of inclusion is "happenstance" rather than consequence, arbitrary detail undermines any firm sense of coherence, connection, and causality. The deliberate inclusion of episodes that may or may not "pan out" makes for a radically different reading experience, one which precludes the expectation of discernible significance in every incident. *War and Peace*, says Morson, is a lesson in "epistemic modesty."

It also explodes our usual assumption about significant action. Herioc exploits and cataclysmic upheavals are exception, not life. Tolstoi’s "novel" is a celebration of "prosaics—of the infinitesimal, of the accidental, of the trifling incidents on which everything ultimately depends." The truly significant, as
Morson reminds us by peppering his prose with his title phrase, is "hidden in plain view," too ordinary to draw our attention, yet disregarded only at our moral peril.

If Morson's enthusiasm for this world view is palpable, there are good reasons for it. One senses considerable excitement in a critic whose own earlier position was substantially more "semiotically totalitarian": "If a work is assumed to be complete, we are justified in hypothesizing the thematic and formal relevance of all its details," Morson had proposed in his Boundaries of Genre. "No detail... can be completely irrelevant." How liberating to discover that this may not be the case, that the reader's project need not be to explain each "hitherto unexplained detail." Tolstoi's commitment to the random and prosaic, moreover, has a relevance that goes beyond the text of War and Peace. It has much to teach us about the way we understand, remember, construct narratives about, and ultimately falsify the events of our own lives.

The implications of this epistemic modesty for historiography, with its goal of discerning patterns and meaning in the events of the past, are profound, and Morson's treatment of Tolstoi's historical polemics is especially suggestive. Battles, governed as they are by chance, characterized as they are by chaos, and "transformed," as they inevitably are, into purposeful activity by subsequent accounts, serve as a paradigm for history and its narrative treatments. Historians lie insofar as they perpetrate the illusion that events make sense.

Fictional narrative, too, distorts because it imposes order; Tolstoi contrives to be more truthful by not trimming the dangling ends, by starting and stopping arbitrarily, by presenting characters whose psyches are as unpredictable as battle scenes. But if the structure readers crave necessarily falsifies, and the pleasure of reading derives from the recognition of significance, must we relinquish the very possibility of a "good read" in favor of Truth? If coherent psychological portraiture is false, does Tolstoi himself lie by making Kutuzov so consistently wise (and so consistently available to Morson as the perfect example of epistemic modesty)? Morson's reader, having accepted his terms, wants to object to the totalizing, iconic portrayal of a character whose very excellence lies in his refusal to subject life to totalitarian scrutiny.

The one persistent source of confusion in Morson's book, however, is the Bakhtinian notion of absolute language addressed in the opening chapter. On the one hand, War and Peace is shown to be "saturated" with absolute language (indeed, this is part of what made it so difficult to read). Tolstoi, who aspires to be a prophet, attempts to speak non-historically and omnisciently, both in his life and his works. At the same time, insofar as he flouts novelistic convention and polemizes at every turn with existing historical approaches, his word, even his "absolute" word, is fundamentally dialogic, addressed always to other words. The status of Tolstoi's own "scriptural" pronouncements furthermore is unclear, given his disdain for all human attempts to impose meaning on reality. At first this seems to be resolved by limiting Tolstoi's omniscience to his "negative absolutes," his strategy of exposing the inadequacy of all who do presume to know. But many of the proclamations cited by Morson are affirmative ones. From his absolute perspective, for instance, Tolstoi identifies the happiest moment of Nikolai Rostov's life—something not even Nikolai himself could know.

Tolstoi's insight that no individual enjoys a perspective privileged enough to discern relevance, to notice what is by definition imperceptible, at once necessitates absolute perspective and precludes it. While Morson acknowledges