Lydia Ginzburg has been compared to Bakhtin. Both critics were shaped in the days when Formalism was the reigning fashion in literary practice in Petrograd, and both grew into independent thinkers with a clearly marked approach to literary study which was simultaneously historical, comparative, philosophical, and moral in its focus and grounded in distinct assumptions about the nature of language. But Ginzburg and Bakhtin were souls from different worlds. In his early years Bakhtin shied away from the fashionable formalists and sought intellectual nourishment from the religious intellectuals of Petrograd. He later came to dwell in the realm of Rabelaisian extremes and was drawn to the intense eccentrics who populate Dostoevskii’s universe. For him the privileged past was Greek and Roman antiquity, especially in its most syncretic moments, the Hellenistic period and the Renaissance. He was inspired by the epiphanic revelations of the upsidedown world he called Carnival and seemed to believe that truth could only be approached by following the path he called polyphonic and dialogic. In Bakhtin’s taste, interests, and method we can see what Ginzburg herself calls the “personal meaning of his scholarly works,”1 and we may even agree with her assertion that “as a person Bakhtin was obviously polyphonic and dialogic.”

As a person Lidiia Ginzburg was quite different from Bakhtin. She began her career as a student of Eikhenbaum and Tynianov for whom she retained admiration all her life. Although she knew the work of Vladimir Solov’ev and a number of the thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance, she remained a convinced atheist. Her privileged past was post-Renaissance, especially the eighteenth-century French world of Saint Simon and Rousseau. She herself defined her literary taste, almost in opposition to Bakhtin: “In literature rarities do not interest me. In the conventional world of eccentrics, geniuses, criminals, saints, madmen and poets . . . I do not feel any unyieldingness of the material, any power of resistance, which is a most necessary condition for aesthetic joy. Saints, freaks and geniuses can quickly and absolutely strike any pose. In man and in the fate of man one cannot analyze the uniquely personal, because it is the last and irreducible boundary of our psychic mechanism, nor the typical, because typification overwhelms the mate-

1. Lidiia Ginzburg, Chelovek za pis’mennym stolom (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1989), p. 328. Further references to this work are cited as PS plus page number.
rial, but one can analyze everything that is psychophysically and historically regular [zakonomernoe], the fate of man as the point of intersection of universal [vseobschestvo] tendencies. . . . The most important thing for a writer is to reflect the spirit [pafos] of regular human fate" (PS 67). Her key writers, then, were not Rabelais and Dostoevskii, but Herzen, Proust, and most especially Leo Tolstoi.

For Ginzburg Tolstoi occupies a special place in the development of Western literature. "The works of Tolstoi are the high point of the analytical psychologism of the nineteenth century, all of whose possibilities Tolstoi realized with a power and consistency which represent not so much an outgrowth or development of what came before, as a revolutionary change." Ginzburg’s revolutionary Tolstoi looks to the twentieth-century: "In him one can find the kernel of everything that twentieth-century literature earnestly worked out and considered its own — the stream of consciousness. . . . the unconscious, the subterranean currents of conversation, the use of enlarged and vividly delineated details" (pp. 312-13). From all that Tolstoi "in his gigantic productivity” discovered in passing, the twentieth century created its literary “system.” Ginzburg is well aware that this assessment of Tolstoi goes against at least the Western grain. "In the West Tolstoi, unlike Dostoevskii, is treated as a classic firmly buried in the past. But this is like forgetting the air which one breathes. Tolstoi discovered the foundations of the general psychological experience of modern man, and modern man does not even notice that he understands himself according to Tolstoi and that in fact he has no other choice. To be sure, he finds it more interesting to understand himself according to Dostoevskii, since doing so allows him to focus his attention on himself.” (PP 313). What distinguishes Tolstoi from Dostoevskii for Ginzburg is their different approaches to what is her central concern, the literary problem of causality and psychological conditioning. “Dostoevskii’s hero is extremely free in his acts, since the motives for these acts flow directly from his governing idea. In Tolstoi . . . man is always conditioned in his ‘everyday’ behavior,” and this conditioning becomes in Tolstoi’s hands “incredibly multifaceted, intense, and plurisignificant” (PP 335-36). Tolstoi’s representation of the human condition as a state of psychological, sociological, and historical conditionedness is what marks him for Ginzburg as the central figure in the realist tradition.

The characteristic feature of this conditionedness is its paradoxicality. For Ginzburg literary psychologism in general begins “with the non-coinci-

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3. Lidiia Ginzburg, O literaturnom aeroe (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1979), p. 82. Further references to this work are cited as LG plus page number.