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Rainer Grübel (Oldenburg)

The Third Renaissance and the Pre-Socratic Parmenides in Russian Modernism and Avant-Garde

The Third Renaissance and the pre-Socratic Parmenides in Russian Modernism and Avant-Garde

This article aims to reconstruct the reception of pre-Socratic philosophy, especially that of Parmenides, in Russian modernism and avant-garde literature. In doing so, it places this reception into two contexts: the contemporary discussion of pre-Socratic ideas in Russian, European and American philosophy, on the one hand, and the proclamation of a third, a Russian and/or Slavic Renaissance, on the other. This Renaissance has been conceived as the intense discussion and reconsideration of ideas, notions, and expressions of ancient Greek thinking. It aimed also to avoid the reduction of Greek philosophy to Plato, as had been practiced by the Russian Orthodox Church and largely pushed through in Russian culture. One of the main points of this reconsideration concerned the quest of the relation between the word, the process of thinking, and human life, while another one connected with it involved the (re-)establishment of a close bond between the poetic word, its meaning, and its sense. The integration of this productive discussion with pre-Socratic Greek philosophy enriches and improves our knowledge of Russian modernism and avant-garde literature.

Keywords: Parmenides, Heidegger, Popper, Bakhtin, Viacheslav Ivanov, Khlebnikov, Kuzmin, Kharms, Brodsky, Third Renaissance, poetical language, prose language



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The development of western philosophy was once said by A. N. Whitehead to have consisted in a series of footnotes to Plato. In a similar vein, and with hardly more exaggeration, Plato's own writings might be said to have consisted in footnotes to Parmenides of Elea. David Gallop¹

*The Pre-Socratic Parmenides and the Russian/Slavic concept
'Third Renaissance'*

“What was it she [Sandra] said – the Third Renaissance? Anyhow, it sounds like an unreal world. A beautifully fuzzy world.” Clifford Donald Simak²

“Thinking and being are the same” – “to gar auto noein estin te kai einai”³ – what a radical and provocative idea! This monistic thesis of Parmenides, which we can also formulate as “Real knowing and real being are the same”, is one of the Pre-Socratic philosophical concepts that we shall trace in Russian Modernism and more concretely in the avant-garde. Identifying thought and existence, this monism also appears in the shape of his philosophy, his epos “On Nature”, which presents philosophy in the language of poetry. Other of Parmenides' basic concepts were the ideas that only being has a being, that not-being, “mê eonta”, cannot be, and that hence nothing can be created out of nothing.⁴ This is the first known reflection on nothingness. Due to Popper, Parmenides exemplifies his idea that every truth is stable and cannot change by the moon, which only seems to change its form, but is in reality always round.⁵ Part of our everyday knowledge about the world is his discovery that the earth has the form of a sphere. This was not common knowledge at his time.

The last concept that we shall trace in modern Russian literature is Parmenides' suggestion that all being is characterized by eternal presence, complete

¹ Gallop (1984: 3).

² Simak (1982: 64).

³ τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι, Parmenides fr. B 3.

⁴ Parmenides fr. B 2 and B 8.

⁵ In his article “The Moon and the Two Ways” (Popper 1998: 79-93), Popper puts forward four theses relevant in this context: „(i) The moon (Selene) is a sphere; (ii) the moon receives her light from the Sun; (iii) the waxing and waning of the moon is unreal: they are shadowplay and can be modeled with the help of a little globe exposed to light from the Sun or a lamp; [...]“ (Popper 1998: 80). In the same contribution Popper even sees Parmenides' general conviction about the unchanging state of the world possibly grounded in his view of the stable Moon: „The great discovery that the Moon is an unchanging spherical body is generalized by Parmenides to the view that perhaps the whole world is unchanging and immovable“ (Popper 1998: 85).

wholeness, and unchanging identity. He expressed this idea by the figure of the perfect sphere, which he saw as the form not only of the Earth but also of the universe.

Before we look at the relation of Russian Modernism to Parmenides' Pre-Socratic ideas, we shall situate the reference of Russian culture to Greek philosophy in the context of the Slavic project of a Third Renaissance'. That project was the most prominent concept of a relation between the antique world and Russian culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

At the end of the 19th century the Polish-Russian classical philologist Tadeusz Zieliński, the author of thrilling lectures like "The Antique World and We"⁶ (he taught at the St. Petersburg State University), proclaimed the thesis that after the Romanesque Renaissance of the 16th century and the Germanic ditto of the 18th, the 20th century would see a Slavic Renaissance, with which the development of European culture would culminate. Soon he received assistance from the philosopher of culture and symbolistic poet Viacheslav Ivanov and the impressionist poet, dramatist and teacher of Ancient Greek Innokentii Annenskii. Others followed, for instance the brothers Nikolaj and Mikhail Bakhtin, the former of whom became a Hellenist and Professor of Greek Philology and Archeology in Birmingham (GB) and the latter a philosopher of culture in minor positions in provincial universities of the Soviet Union. His books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais can easily be read as exemplifications of the ongoing process of Renaissance in European cultures.⁷

In this context the label "Renaissance" was also used, though more rarely, in its Russian form, "vozrozhdenie", which also means "rebirth"; however, the more often used foreign calque form "Renessans" also represents by its verbal Romanic root the First Renaissance, with which the "Third" should be connected again by its content. The construction of this Third Renaissance was intended to replace the religious idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, which defined the (then former and now again actual) Russian capital after Latin Rome and Byzantine Constantinople as the last protector of true Christianity. Behind Rome stands Jerusalem, and we shall see that the alternative of Jerusalem or Athene, of Christianity or classical Antiquity, plays an important role in the later discussions.

The concept of *rebirth* implies a moment of secondarity, which in the project of a new beginning is intended to release energy by referring to a primordial *first* birth. This appeal of a new phenomenon to an old one is also present in the discourse of and on Romanticism. But the notion of "Third Renaissance"

⁶ Zieliński (1905).

⁷ Bakhtin (1929); idem (1965).

is mostly an alternative to Romanticism, which provides the recourse to the old times not so much of a foreign culture as of one's own.

The idea that in European cultures the intense reference to Antiquity is a repeating process was also proposed by Ernst Cassirer. In his book "Philosophy of Symbolic Forms" (1923 Part One, 1925 Part Two, 1929 Part Three), however, he did not share the conviction of his Slavic colleagues that a Slavic or Russian Renaissance would be the last one. According to Cassirer, Renaissance was a never-ending process in European culture.⁸

The problem of the Russian Renaissance was emphatically pointed out by Konstantin Leont'ev, who wrote in his article of 1875, "Byzantinism and Slavicism" ("Vizantizm i slavianstvo"), that in the 15th and 16th centuries Russia, differently from other contemporary European countries, "did not enter a period of flowering complexity and manifold harmonic creation."⁹ Such a period, he argued, which at that time was present in all European countries and all European cultures, was in Russia to be seen only in the 17th century, at the time of Peter the Great – and its first gleam, possibly, at the time of Peter's father.¹⁰ In 1923 the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev agreed with this judgment about the absence of a Renaissance in Russian culture in the 15th and 16th centuries, complaining that the Russians missed all the joys of a Renaissance: "They never knew the true pathos of humanism [...] the gladness of the free play of an overabundant creative strength".¹¹ But as opposed to Leont'ev, Berdyaev finds the first possibility for a Renaissance in Russian culture only in the early 19th century, in the art of Aleksandr Pushkin, during the reign of Aleksandr I, when in Russia "something like a Renaissance slightly opened".

In 1987, during the period of "Glasnost" and "Perestroika", the well-known Russian medieval specialist, Dmitrii Likhachev found the first glimpses of a Russian Renaissance at the end of the 14th and at the beginning of the 15th centuries, but, he argued, by the fall of Constantinople and the breaking of contact with Byzantine culture the further development of these elements in Russian culture was slowed down and delayed until the end of the 17th century. And then, he was convinced, they were mixed up with phenomena of the culture of the Baroque.¹² Five years later Likhachev wrote about a "pre-Renaissance, which [however] did not lead to a Renaissance"¹³ in Russian culture. We leave this repeatedly

⁸ Cassirer (1923-1929); idem (1955-1957, vol. 3.).

⁹ Leont'ev (1912, vol. 5: 115).

¹⁰ Leont'ev (1912: 115-116).

¹¹ Berdyaev (1969: 220.); all translations, if not indicated otherwise, are mine, R. G.

¹² Likhachev (1987, vol. 4: 343).

¹³ Likhachev (1992: 60). Cf. also Arutiunian (2001: 89-101).

discussed question open, as we are much less interested in the problems of modelling a “first” Renaissance in Russian culture than, due to the subject of this article, in the concept of a “Third” European Renaissance in Russian culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

Returning, then, to the “Third Renaissance”, we note that this term was used for the first time in 1899 in Zieliński’s article “The Antique World and the Poetry of A. M. Maykov”.¹⁴ By this date, at the turn of the century, the concept had an ingredient of fundamental cultural change; and, indeed, it would later on be combined by other writers even with phenomena of the Russian Revolution. Zieliński himself was convinced that all the European literary genres were already present in early Greek culture, and he believed traces of that culture could still be explored by studying modern Greek folklore.¹⁵ According to Zieliński, Greek literature was the nucleus of all European literatures.¹⁶ Furthermore he thought that the acquisition of the Greek language with its logical and intellectual structure would enrich the thinking of the Russian people, whereas their own language, as he believed, was characterized by a sensualistic fundament that strengthens not a logical but a psychological way of thinking.¹⁷ The study of the Greek language at school could prepare all pupils for a scientific attitude towards the world and thus for any course of study.

In 1907, shortly after the first Russian Revolution, Viacheslav Ivanov published his article “On Gay Craftsmanship and on Smart Gladness”.¹⁸ Here, from a somewhat different point of view, Ivanov developed a complementary concept of a “Third Renaissance”, which alluded to Nietzsche’s “Gay Science”¹⁹ and, doing so, integrated Nietzsche’s model of knowledge into the project of a “Third Renaissance”. Both Zieliński and Ivanov drew on the value-opposition of Hellenism vs. barbarism, in the context of which Hellenism was in concurrence with Nietzsche’s Apollonian model and barbarism with the Dionysian. It was in this particular framework that Ivanov created the notion of the people as an artist, which later, after the third Russian Revolution of November 1917, would be transferred into the practice of proletarian culture, Russian ‘proletkul’t’. After the Russian revolutions of 1917 and after the First World War, in his book “The New Middle Ages” (1924) the already mentioned Russian émigré philosopher

¹⁴ Zelinskii (1899: 138-158).

¹⁵ Zelinskii (1915). Cf. on the concept of a Third Renaissance: Makhlin (1995: 132-154).

¹⁶ Zielinski (1905). Zelinskii (1910).

¹⁷ Zielinski (1911, vol. 2: 5-11, 24-25, 31, 34-35).

¹⁸ Ivanov (1979a, vol. 3: 61-77). Ivanov’s concept of the Renaissance has been traced back to German classical philology, primarily to Friedrich Wilhelm Dörpfeld (1853-1940); cf. Vakhtel (2008: 48-56).

¹⁹ Nietzsche (1980: 343-652).

Berdyayev interpreted the situation of that time as a new barbarism, having its parallel in the downfall of the Antique world.²⁰ Optimism regarding a coming Renaissance had turned upside down into a pessimism that would soon prove in unexpected ways to have been prescient of Soviet and Nazi totalitarian cultures. Already in 1917-1918 Vasilii Rozanov, who had been very sceptical of the positive effect of the old Greek language in the Russian gymnasium and argued for a return to the Ancient Egyptian culture, published his work “The Apocalypse of Our Time”²¹ in a series of booklets as the swan song of and an elegy for a Russian culture.

It was Mikhail Bakhtin, who recognized for Russian culture the possibility of returning to the culture of Antiquity. In his answer to questions put to him in an interview by the Soviet journal “Novyi Mir” in 1970, speaking of cultural units of the past that offer valuable possibilities, he introduced the example of Antiquity:

Каждое такое единство (например, античность), при всем своем своеобразии, входит в единый (хотя и не прямолинейный) процесс становления культуры человечества. В каждой культуре прошлого заложены огромные смысловые возможности, которые остались не раскрытыми, не осознанными и не использованными на протяжении всей исторической жизни данной культуры.²²

Each such unity (for example, classical antiquity), with all its uniqueness, enters into the single (although not linear) process of the evolution of human culture. In each culture of the past lie immense semantic possibilities that have remained undisclosed, unrecognized and unutilized throughout the entire historical life of a given culture.²³

As one of these hitherto unused elements of antique times Bakhtin, for sure, considered carnival a way of permanent democratization by periodically turning the rules of society and government upside down. He had developed this element in detailed terms in his book “Rabelais and His World”.²⁴

His brother, living in Great Britain, retrospectively saw the study of antique times in Russia as a potential for destroying the old tsarist order. He was alluding to the 11th of Marx’s famous “Theses On Feuerbach”: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”,²⁵ when he wrote that like everything else in Russia also Antiquity was not so much a subject of pure science as a means to change the world. According to Nicolai Bakhtin, to become a researcher of Greek culture meant to take part in a dangerous and delightful conspiracy against the foundations of modern society in the name of

²⁰ Berdiaev (1994: 411); (Berlin 1924).

²¹ Rozanov (1917-1918).

²² Bakhtin (2002, vol. 6: 456).

²³ Bakhtin (1986: 6).

²⁴ Bakhtin (1984).

²⁵ Bakhtin (2002): 456.

the Greek ideal.²⁶ It certainly was thought to be an alternative to the terroristic corruption of the old society.

The relevance of the concept of a “Third Renaissance”, which continues in late Soviet culture, becomes obvious when we take into account the statement of the Russian poet Gennadi Aigi, who himself came from the Chuvash culture, about the difference between the Acmeists Akhmatova and Brodsky on the one hand and the Futurists Pasternak and Mayakovsky on the other:

Я долго не понимал, почему у Ахматовой скрытая неприязнь к Пастернаку, и был ошеломлен, когда Бродский сказал, что Маяковский – второстепенный поэт. Потом я понял: им не нравилась именно невероятная жизненность Пастернака и Маяковского. Ахматова и Бродский насквозь литературны, где-то они идут от античности. А в поэзии Маяковского и Пастернака – сама жизнь кипит, как сад за окном. Это то, что постепенно растеряла наша поэзия, ставшая декларативной.²⁷

For a long time I could not understand why Akhmatova nourished latent hostility towards Pasternak, and was stunned when Brodsky said that Mayakovsky is a minor poet. Then I realized that precisely what they did not like was Pasternak and Mayakovsky’s incredible vitality. Akhmatova and Brodsky, who are through and through literary, come somewhere from Antiquity. But in the poetry of Mayakovsky and Pasternak – life itself boils like a garden outside the window. This is something that has gradually been lost by our poetry, which has become declaratory.

In this assertion the ‘declaratory’ quality refers to Russian Conceptualism, from which Aigi consistently steers clear. In the middle between the intellectuals, depending on the antique tradition and those outside of this prison house of convention, Aigi saw Osip Mandel’shtam, who on the one hand shared the appeal of antique memory but on the other “always explodes from some agony” («всё время взрывается какой-то мукой»)²⁸ And indeed, in 1922 Mandel’shtam wrote: “Russian language is a Hellenic language” («Русский язык – язык эллинистический»)²⁹ During the 1920s and 1930s, as it happens, the question of a Third Slavic or Russian Renaissance had receded somewhat into the background in the face of the idea of Eurasianism, the, as it were, natural bridge that Russian Culture forms between European and Asian cultures. This movement plays a role again in the ideology of Aleksandr Dugin,³⁰ who is nowadays said to be an adviser of Putin.

²⁶ Bakhtin (1963: 33).

²⁷ Aigi (2005).

²⁸ Aigi (2005).

²⁹ Mandel’shtam (1987: 58).

³⁰ Dugin (2014).

The reception of Parmenides in European and Russian philosophy of the 20th century

It was, for all I know, the first deductive theory of the world, the first deductive cosmology: One further step led to theoretical physics, and to the atomic theory.

Karl R. Popper: *The World of Parmenides*³¹

When at the beginning of his dictum Parmenides calls the goddess ἀλήθεια, this is not, as the philologists think, a kind of the introduction to his so-called “teaching poem” imitated by the poets, but it is the name of the place of being in which the thinker stands as a thinker.

Martin Heidegger: *Parmenides*.³²

As in the history of East Slavic cultures because of the Byzantine theological tradition and the ongoing ideological control function of the Russian Orthodox Church the reception of Plato was clearly dominant, it is obvious that it would be very attractive for the representatives of a ‘Third Renaissance’ to turn in an complementary movement towards the reception of Aristotle on the one hand and of pre-Socratic philosophy on the other. In our case we shall concentrate on the reception of the philosophy of Parmenides, whose poem “On Nature” is not only said to be the earliest philosophical text to survive in lengthy passages, but also the first philosophical cosmology and the first epistemology, and possibly also the first metaphysics. But being also a philosophical text, written in the language of poetry, it may have had the function of a model for new literary texts. Before we analyse the impact of Parmenides’ writing on Russian modern and avant-garde literature, we shall consider the reception of Parmenides’ thoughts in 20th century European and Russian philosophy as the background for its reception in literature.

Parmenides has been a rather constant topic of philosophical and philological reflection in European cultures of the 20th century. In 1916, right in the middle of the First World War, the German book titled “Parmenides and the History of Greek Philosophy” came out in Frankfurt. It was written by the philologist Karl Reichardt,³³ and it has been studied by Ernst Cassirer, by Martin Heidegger, and by Karl Popper as well. In the years 1942-1943, that is during the Second World

³¹ Popper (1998: 143).

³² „Wenn Parmenides im Beginn seines Spruches die Göttin Ἀλήθεια nennt,“ (B1, 29. B2, 4) „dann ist dies nicht, wie die Philologen meinen, eine den Dichtern nachgemachte Art der Einleitung seines sogenannten ‚Lehrgedichtes‘, sondern ist die Nennung des Wesensortes, an dem der Denker als Denker steht.“ (Heidegger 1982, Band 54: 188). Cf. Marten (1990: 1-15).

³³ Reinhardt (1916).

War, Heidegger for his part read his “Lectures on Parmenides”, which appeared in print only in 1982.³⁴

In Russian philosophy the most detailed discussion and the most rigid thesis about Parmenides’ philosophy is found in the first chapter of Lev Shestov’s booklet “Parmenides in Chains” (“Skovannyi Parmenid”) published in 1932. It has the subtitle “On the Sources of the Metaphysical Truths”³⁵ and in 1937 became a part of his more comprehensive work “Athens and Jerusalem”. Shestov refers to Aristotle, who argued that together with other philosophers Parmenides was “constrained by the truth itself”.³⁶ The Russian philosopher not only agrees with Aristotle, he even says: “It is not the great Parmenides who rules over the truth but the truth that is the master of Parmenides”.³⁷ According to Shestov, Parmenides gave up his freedom, as he was convinced that “being and thought are one and the same”³⁸ and that to think like that means “to take cognizance of the necessity of everything that forms the content of being.” Shestov, however, insists: “Being, despite what Parmenides says, is not the same as thought.”³⁹ Unlike Parmenides, Shestov is not convinced that truth is eternal; he argues that it can change with every concrete state of being. Changing the truth is in Shestov’s view, as it were, the indispensable freedom of God.

According to Shestov, not only Parmenides, but also Heraclitus, Anaxagoras and Plato, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel are “constrained by the truth itself,”⁴⁰ as they all do not choose and do not decide. He complains: “Someone has chosen, someone has decided, someone has commanded – without them. And this is what is called the truth.”⁴¹ The book ends with a sentence protesting against such an acceptance of necessity: “Let the promise be realized: ‘Nothing will be impossible for you!’ ”⁴² Shestov tried to temper the violence of the truth discourse; what was true yesterday, can turn out to be untrue tomorrow and vice versa. In a conversation with Husserl he complained that philosophy is always carried out as a reflection, which is looking back at something already existing, and is never looking forward to something that never yet existed. Whereas

³⁴ Heidegger (1982); English translation Heidegger (1992).

³⁵ Shestov (1932).

³⁶ Aristotle, “Metaphysics”, 984 b 10.

³⁷ L. Shestov (2011: 24. Cf. on the history of Shestov’s concept about ‘Parmenides in Chains’ A. Khol’cman (2010: 513-520).

³⁸ Shestov (2011: 31).

³⁹ Shestov (2011: 31).

⁴⁰ Shestov (2011: 24, 74).

⁴¹ Shestov (2011: 74).

⁴² Shestov (2011: 75).

Husserl asserted the subject of philosophy to be thought, Shestov claimed that the object of real philosophical thinking is life.

In 1963 Giorgio Diaz de Santillana, the American historian of knowledge, presented the lecture “Prologue to Parmenides”.⁴³ He was convinced that the roots of modern knowledge can be traced back to the Pre-Socratic philosophers. In 1965 Leonardo Tarán published his “Parmenides. A Text with Translation, Commentary, and Critical Essays”,⁴⁴ which made the text easily accessible. Most relevant in our context, however, are Karl Popper’s Parmenides papers, which under the title “The World of Parmenides” came out in 1998, which is only six years after the English translation of Heidegger’s Parmenides lectures was published.⁴⁵ Not only because of this coincidence in time is it fascinating to compare these two Parmenides interpretations; they exhibit conflicting understandings of the Greek philosopher and can be directly related to our subject.

Both philosophers are full of admiration for their Greek predecessor. Charles Kahn, who was in close contact with Popper, wrote:

If we except Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, Parmenides is perhaps the most important and influential of all Greek philosophers. And considered as a metaphysician, he is perhaps the most original figure in the western tradition.⁴⁶

Popper, a fervent critic of logical induction, considered Parmenides to be the creator of the first system of logical deduction. And, of course, he stressed the rejection and denial of empirical knowledge in the fragments by the Greek philosopher. Popper traces the problem that Parmenides had pointed out in truth, which is based on empirical experience, back to language. This point is crucial for us. In Popper’s eyes Parmenides’ world of appearance, that is the sham world, the pseudo-world, is “invented not even by the senses but by the tongue: by human name-giving, by the largely arbitrary conventions that constitute human language.”⁴⁷ It is not our task here to decide whether this verdict against language can really be traced back to Parmenides’ text itself, but we find it most intriguing that in his lectures Martin Heidegger came to the opposite conclusion. He even founded his interpretation of Parmenides’ notion of “aletheia” – and with it his own epistemology – on an etymological analysis of a single word used by Parmenides. He interpreted Greek “a-letheia”, truth, as un-hiddenness,

⁴³ Diaz de Santillana (1964).

⁴⁴ Tarán (1965).

⁴⁵ Popper (1998). Cf. Graham Harman’s (2013: 129) remark: „Heidegger ist der moderne Parmenides“ (“Heidegger is the modern Parmenides”).

⁴⁶ Kahn (1969: 700).

⁴⁷ Popper (1998: 124).

un-concealment, un-seclusion, in German: „Unverborgenheit“.⁴⁸ This means that words do not hide the truth but show it and offer it to us if we read and understand them properly. In his article of 1951-52 “What does thinking mean” („Was heißt Denken?“), Heidegger even wrote: “The language of Parmenides is the language of thinking, it is this thinking itself.” („Die Sprache des Parmenides ist die Sprache eines Denkens, ist dieses Denken selber.“)⁴⁹ This identification of language and thinking, which replaces Parmenides’ identity of being and thinking, and thus is based on Heidegger’s interpretation of Parmenides’ fragments, is indeed the opposite of Popper’s findings that these texts disclose the falsehood of the world of appearance as created by language. Popper founded this conclusion in his analysis of the ‘second way’ of knowledge in Parmenides’ poem, which is related to incorrect opinions about truth, grounded on the deceptiveness of experience, whereas Heidegger related his positive verdict about the truth of words on Parmenides’ ‘first way’ to knowledge, which is grounded on the identity of “thinking” (νοεῖν) and “being” (εἶναι). The Greek word, which Parmenides uses to refer to thinking, “noein”, is interpreted by Heidegger not as active reflection, but as the passive process of “Vernehmen” or “perceiving”. Heidegger uses the poetical concept of the word, the word outside of prosaic perspective, of extraverbal context, and of rational calculation, due to which one can think ‘out of the words’ themselves, and he projects this concept onto the first part of Parmenides’ fragments. Contrary to Heidegger, Popper works with the prosaic concept of the word, which is formed by perspectives, focuses on and refers to extraverbal contexts and therefore depends in its truth on these perspectives and contexts. In her recent article on Popper’s Parmenides papers Neretina⁵⁰ draws attention to the fact that Popper, referring to Bühler, omits the ontological function of language. It is precisely this ontological function that is the basis of Heidegger’s understanding of Parmenides’ language and of language in general.

It is worth noting that one of the most important inspirers of Russian Modernism and especially Russian avant-garde, the thinker Nikolai Fedorov, was himself influenced not only by Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Plato but also by

⁴⁸ Heidegger (1982: 13). Cf. M. Heidegger (2004: 188): „Wenn wir *aletheia* statt mit ‚Wahrheit‘ durch ‚Unverborgenheit‘ übersetzen, dann ist diese Übersetzung nicht nur ‚wörtlicher‘, sondern sie enthält die Weisung, den gewohnten Begriff der Wahrheit im Sinne der Richtigkeit der Aussage um- und zurückzudenken in jenes noch Unbegriffene der Entborgenheit und der Entbergung des Seienden.“ (“If we translate *aletheia* instead of ‘truth’ as ‘unconcealment’, this translation is not only ‘more literal’, but contains the instruction to rethink and revert to the accustomed concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of the statement back to the uncomprehended of the disclosedness and the disclosure of being.”)

⁴⁹ Heidegger (1954: 114).

⁵⁰ Neretina (2010). Cf. also: Neretina (2012: 88-130).

Parmenides.⁵¹ In his early work Michail Bakhtin, surely not without implicit reference to Parmenides, wrote about the integration of thinking into being. His famous “happening of being” (sobytie bytija),⁵² and “being-happening” (bytie-sobytie),⁵³ which imply a view on the world as happening and deny the possibility of considering the world as pure being, cannot be thought without the unity of being and thinking, though Bakhtin (as opposed to Parmenides) always respects the involvement of the acting person in the act of being. In his work “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”, Mikhail Bakhtin refers to Parmenides when he explains the fact that we are not able to ‘see’ the picture of a human being in the fine arts without paying respect to the body of the depicted person as the representation of an axiological and semantically relevant phenomenon. Parmenides’ “aimless eyes” (ἄσκοπον ὄμμα) and his “echoing ears” (ἠχήεσσαν ἀκουήν)⁵⁴ are quoted by the Russian philosopher with respect to Heinrich Gomperz’ ‘doctrine of worldviews’.⁵⁵ Now we shall consider the reception of Parmenides’ philosophy in Russian Modernism and Russian avant-garde.

Parmenides in Russian Modernism and Russian Avant-Garde

In 1918, some months after the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and a few months before his own death, the Russian writer Vasilii Rozanov noted in “Apokalipsis nashego vremeni”, which he devoted “to my dear Pavel Flo[renskii]”, a close friend and correspondent of the author:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| – Мои страны теплые ... | – My lands are warm ... |
| – Мои страны древние ... | – My lands are old ... |
| – Я немножко из Фригии ... | – I come a bit from Phrygia ... |
| – Я немножко из Лидии ... | – I come a bit from Lydia ... |
| [...] | [...] |
| – Я немножко помню и Атиса ... ⁵⁶ | – I also remember Attis a bit ... |

These verses, which do not mention Parmenides’ homeland Elea, are spoken in the voice of the addressee, the theologian, philosopher, and all-round-genius Pavel Florenski and refer to his admiration for antique Greek philosophy. They show that even at this time of radical change, after the breakdown of the tsarist regime of Nicholas II and the failure of Kerensky’s interim government, in this

⁵¹ Young (2012: 83).

⁵² Bakhtin (2003a, vol. 1: 41).

⁵³ Bakhtin (2003a, vol. 1: 31).

⁵⁴ Parmenides fr. B 7, 4.

⁵⁵ Cf. „blickloses Auge“, „brausendes Gehör“: Gomperz (1905, vol. 1: 80); cf. “nevedjashchego glaza i shumjashchego slukha”: Bakhtin (2003b, vol. 1: 308, 849).

⁵⁶ Rozanov (2000: 279).

context of tentative democratization and the already noticeable new dictatorship of the Soviets, the appeal of old Greek culture was still felt in Russia.⁵⁷

The ways in which elements of Parmenides' philosophy or of its reception in later European culture were actualized, and how thereby Russian literature referred not only to his actual philosophy, but also to the genre of his philosophical poem are arranged in five parts below. The first of them is eponomasia, that is the invocation of the name "Parmenides" itself in intertextual allusions; the second is the application of Parmenides' monism, his identification of being and thinking in the definition of the poet; the third is the concept of literary language due to either Heidegger's or Popper's view on Parmenides; the fourth is the creation of new phenomena by the principle of mixing or rearranging already existing phenomena; and the fifth and last is the motif of the sphere, which refers to Parmenides' vision of the earth.

Eponomasia – the invocation of Parmenides

The Russian Modernist musician, poet, and writer Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936), who was close to the Russian Symbolists at the beginning of the 20th century, but would help to give rise to the new avant-garde movement of Acmeism in 1913 with his declarative article "On beautiful clarity"⁵⁸, opened his (historical) "Story of Eleusippus", told by himself (1906), with an eponomasia, addressed to Parmenides. In the epigraph the narrator, who is at the same time the hero of the historical story, praises the philosopher Parmenides for his knowledge of astronomy. He asserts that there is no other possibility than to laud this extremely wise man, who was the first to recognize the fact that the planet Venus despite its seemingly different appearance as morning star and as evening star is always one and the same:

О, Парменид, мудрейший среди мудрых, не ты ли первый сказал людям, что звезда, отмечающая конец и начало дня, зовущая любовников к лобзаньям и расторгающая страстные объятия, несущая покой работникам и снова призывающая их к трудам, – одна и та же? Как же мне не вспоминать твоё имя при начале повести моей долгой, полной превратностей жизни, о, мудрый?⁵⁹

⁵⁷ However, whereas Rozanov preferred his Ancient Egypt as the promised land instead of the Russian Orthodox Church, in Pavel Florenskii's thinking the church prevailed above the philosophy of Ancient Greece, which consisted in his case mostly of the ideas of Plato. Parmenides is mentioned in P. Florenskii's chief book only twice – as the author of the expression "the undaunted heart of immutable Truth" («бестрепетное сердце непреложной Истины»); Florenskii (1914: 60, 154).

⁵⁸ Kuzmin (1910: 4, 5-10).

⁵⁹ Kuzmin (1994: 411).

O Parmenides, wisest among the wise, was it not you who first told men that the star which marks the end and the beginning of the day, calling lovers to kisses and thrusting apart passionate embraces, bearing rest to workers and once again summoning them to their labors, is one and the same? How then could I fail to recall your name at the beginning of the tale of my lengthy life, filled with vicissitudes, o wise one?⁶⁰

This invocation of Parmenides must have appeared as a provocation to the norms of Russian official culture, in which Plato, primarily in the frame of Orthodox theology, but still in the remarkable philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ev, was the pre-eminent Greek philosopher.⁶¹

Kuzmin's tale, which is composed in the style of Longos' late-antique novel "Daphnis and Chloe" and of the "Aethiopica" by Heliodoros of Emesa, consists of 23 prose miniatures, which create an imitation of Ancient Greek sound in a Russian text.⁶² As Kuzmin came into contact with Viacheslav Ivanov just at the time when he wrote this stylized prose, we may conclude, that this text can also be seen as an example of the project addressed above of a "Third Renaissance". It is noteworthy that at this time Kuzmin also changed his habits and his way of dressing. He took off the clothes of an Old Believer, shaved his beard, and appeared in public in the suit of a Russian dandy.

It was Roman Jakobson, who in 1935 articulated a very critical opinion about this stylization from the very point of view of a radical avant-garde, which we can still perceive in Aigi's statement, quoted above:

Bis auf wenige Ausnahmen ist die berufsmäßige Kunstprosa dieser Epoche eine typische Epigonen-Produktion, eine mehr oder weniger erfolgreiche Reproduktion klassischer Muster; das Interesse dieser Machwerke liegt entweder in der gelungenen Nachahmung des Alten oder in der grotesken Verwilderung des Kanons, oder aber es besteht das Neue in der schlaun Anpassung neuer Thematik an vererbte Schablonen.⁶³

With few exceptions, the professional prose art of this era is a typical epigonous production, a more or less successful reproduction of classic patterns; the interest of these concoctions is either the successful imitation of the old or the grotesque barbarization of the canon, or the novelty consists of the clever adaptation of new themes to inherited templates.

⁶⁰ M. A. Kuzmin (2002: 12.12.2015, Internet Collection).

⁶¹ Hegel's philosophy of history was prominent mainly in the unofficial circles of the revolutionary democrats and Mill's liberalism and utilitarianism were present mostly in the academic philosophy of a few universities. Cf. Tschizewskij (1961) and Nicholson (1998: 464-496).

⁶² In 1920, Boris Éjchenbaum characterized the mixture of styles in Kuzmin's prose of this time: "In his work French elegance is combined with some Byzantine intricacies, 'beautiful clarity' – with ornate patterns of life and psychology, 'not thinking about the purpose' of art – with unexpected tendencies". Éjchenbaum (1924: 196).

⁶³ Jakobson (1935: 357-358).

Another instance of the invocation of Parmenides is to be found in a very hybrid monological and dialogical epistle by Viacheslav Ivanov. As it was produced more than a quarter of a century later than Kuzmin's eponomasia of the same Greek philosopher, we are considering it after the case of the "Story of Eleusippus" – though Kuzmin is considered as an early representative of Russian avant-garde, whereas Ivanov considered himself a symbolist until his death in 1949. In "Thesis 13" of his "Soliloquio", his "Letter to Myself" («Письмо самому себе»), Ivanov wrote, using the name of Parmenides in a very prominent place:

Бог принуждает меня говорить «я есмь» и «мы есмы» и «мир есть». Я же противлюсь Ему и говорю: «Ты Один Сущий, и мира нет, и нет меня». С бесстрашным сердцем Парменида⁶⁴ я отрицаю мир и себя в своем вздыхании о Боге. Он же отвечает мне: «Я не хочу твоего бесстрашного сердца; трепета твоего и страха передо мной хочу я, ибо вот я с Тобой и в Тебе, и нет прерывности между нами, – таково чудо Моей любви».⁶⁵

God forces me to say "I am" and "we are" and "the world is". I resist Him and say: "You are the Only Being, and there is no world, and there is no me." With the fearless heart of Parmenides, I deny the world and myself in my sighing about God. He replies to me: "I do not want your fearless heart; and your awe and your fear of me I want, as here I am with You and in You, and there is no discontinuity between us, – of such kind is the miracle of My love."

Here the name of Parmenides is used as an example of a person without fear. This figure is not far from the example (cf. the imitatio Christi), but in fact the Symbolist uses the brave heart of the early Greek philosopher in order to say "no" to the world (which nota bene has been created by God) and to himself (who, more or less, is also a result of God's creation).⁶⁶ As Ivanov's project was to synthesize Dionysos and Jesus Christ, Ancient Greek cultural tradition and Christianity, his use of the Greek thinker as an argument against the Judeo-Christian tradition (the proposition that the world is good because it was created by God and that as good it has to be accepted by Man) is remarkable.⁶⁷ This reflection is founded on Parmenides' saying that being and thinking are the same.

⁶⁴ It is the very same expression of Parmenides, quoted by Florenskii (1914), (above, note 55).

⁶⁵ Ivanov (2016: 436).

⁶⁶ We should note here that Ivanov's thesis about the exclusive existence of God is not consistent with Parmenides' idea about the principle of the unity of being. Moreover, in Ivanov's text the invocation of Parmenides goes along with an antithesis to his philosophy: In Thesis 16, by the "fear of God" ("strakh Gospoden") expressed there, Ivanov's text even renounces the earlier explicitly stated fearlessness of the "I"; Ivanov (2016: 445), (above, note 63).

⁶⁷ Cf. Ivan Karamazov's saying that he returns the ticket to the earth to its creator because of the suffering of guiltless children. (Dostoevskii (1976, vol. 24: 223): «Не Бога я не принимаю, Алеша, а только билет Ему почтительнейше возвращаю». "It is not that I do not accept God, Alesha, but I most respectfully return the ticket to him.").

It is here transformed into the (implicit) thesis that God's being and all appropriate thinking – which in European context comes from the Greek tradition – are the same.

Poetical thinking makes the poet

The Russian poet Inokentii Annenskii, whom in the beginning of the article we have listed as a representative of the concept of a “Third Renaissance”, applied Parmenides' sentence, “Being and thinking are the same” to the concept of the poet itself. He wrote: “I probably would be a poet, / If I myself had thought up me” («И был бы, верно, я поэт, / Когда бы выдумал себя»)⁶⁸. Of course, the idea that the poet invents, creates himself, is not an exact application of Parmenides' thesis. But we could reformulate it more closely to Parmenides' sentence by saying: Thinking as a poet makes the poet a poet.⁶⁹ The idea of the poet who invents himself is congruent with the concept of innovation, of the aesthetic necessity of the new in Modernism, and it rejects Parmenides' idea about the external stability of being. It is at the same time much closer to Parmenides' basic concept of the identity of thinking and being than to the Symbolists' thesis about the very difference between the concrete world and the abstract idea. And it shows that the Renaissance and, surely, the Third Renaissance were not conceived by their inventors as an identical repetition of early Greek culture.

As one consequence of the reception of Parmenides' monism in Russian Modernism we can consider its idea of life-art, which in Russian avant-garde has been developed into the project of “life-construction” (zhiznestroenie).⁷⁰ We have already mentioned that Kuzmin had chosen the self-performance of a dandy.

Poetical language tells the truth

The concept of language developed by the Russian Futurists and called by them transmental language (zaum') can be seen as an idea of a verbal medium, which as opposed to deceptive everyday speech always tells the truth. As in the line of his monism Parmenides saw a principle of congruence between being and thinking, the Russian Futurists were convinced that the poetical language practices

⁶⁸ Annenskii (1990: 134). Cf. Kustov (2017). Internet Source 2.1.2017: <http://annensky.lib.ru/notes/kustov.htm>\#\%EF\%CC\%C5\%C7_\%EB\%D5\%D3\%D4\%CF\%D7

⁶⁹ The Russian philosopher M. K. Mamardashvili (1992: 32) wrote just in this sense: “Poetry is the feeling of one's own existence. This is a philosophical act.” («Поэзия есть чувство собственного существования. Это философский акт.»).

⁷⁰ Cf. Schahadat (2004: 99-110), Stüdemann (2008: 91-110).

the principal identity of things and words. The meaning of a word is, so to speak, a part of the quality of the phenomenon itself to which the word refers. There is no perspective, no context that separates the word from its meaning. In Velimir Khlebnikov's view every letter has a fixed meaning, which unchangeably corresponds to its form, and the meaning of a word is nothing else but the sum of the meanings of its letters. Differently from late Wittgenstein, for whom the use is the meaning of a word, and in accordance with Heidegger's Parmenides, Khlebnikov is convinced that there is a basic meaning of a word that defines the fundament for all its possible occasional meanings. It is not by chance that Khlebnikov's concept of a truth-language coincides with Heidegger's interpretation of Parmenides' idea of language and his own concept of the language proper to philosophy. Both are part of the discourse on truth in European Modernism.

This concept of poetical language is also articulated in Joseph Brodsky's Nobel Prize speech of 1987. The poet rejects the possibility of using everyday language (in his opinion, the language of prose) in poetry. Parmenides had bound this concept to the untrue vision of "doxa", that is to the second, the wrong way of truth, which is represented in human opinions. As the goddess tells Parmenides the undeniable truth in his poem, so Brodsky's poet is told the truth by the poetical language itself:

[...] а поэт всегда знает, что то, что в просторечии именуется голосом Музы, есть на самом деле диктат языка; что не язык является его инструментом, а он – средством языка к продолжению своего существования. Язык же – даже если представить его как некое одушевленное существо (что было бы только справедливым) – к этическому выбору не способен.⁷¹

[...] a poet always knows that what in the vernacular is called the voice of the Muse is, in reality, the dictate of the language; that it's not that the language happens to be his instrument, but that he is language's means toward the continuation of its existence. Language, however, even if one imagines it as a certain animate creature (which would only be just), is not capable of ethical choice.⁷²

Later on we shall see that Brodsky's favourite antique philosopher was – Parmenides.

Poetical language creates new things by mixing existing phenomena

Here we need to return to Parmenides' idea concerning the stability of the existing, which involves the consequence that new phenomena can only be created by mixing already existing phenomena. The Greek philosopher illustrated this opinion by referring to the coming into being of a child. His embryology can be called the first concept of hybridization. A child comes into being as a

⁷¹ Brodskii (2000: 52).

⁷² Translated by Rubin (22.1.2015).

consequence of the mixing of parts from his mother and his father. In Russian avant-garde, and here we can use again the example of Russian Futurism, new styles, new genres, new themes, new motifs very often, if not always, are created by a mix of its already existing predecessors. “Zangezi”, a work by Khlebnikov, which, alluding to Nietzsche’s superman, he called a “superstory” (“sverchpovest”),⁷³ creates a new genre by mixing poetry with prose and drama with non-fiction.

The eponymous protagonist of this ‘superstory’ is a poet who is at the same time a prophet and a philosopher. As the poet and philosopher Parmenides is said also to have been a lawmaker, Zangezi is a legislator as well. Further, he is a politician and a warrior for all mankind. In a world that is characterized by the differentiation of positions, roles, and functions, he presents a character that integrates all these different positions, roles, and functions in one and the same person. His name can be read as a hybrid of the river names Zambezi and Ganges, and this means as a mix of Africa and Asia. Many other neologisms, for instance the name for the representatives of the new development of Russian Futurism, “budetljane”,⁷⁴ can be seen as hybrids, as mixes of already existing words. In this case we have a future form “budet” (“he will be”) and the suffix -(i)ane, referring to a group of people. This integration of the future into the present, which is the basic project of the Russian Futurists, is something we cannot, of course, find in Parmenides’ fragments. But we can relate this hybridization of the future and the present to his basic tendency to unify possibly different phenomena in his monism.

Like Parmenides’ philosophical poem Khlebnikov’s text also has a cosmic and a political, a poetical, an epistemic, and an ontological dimension. To imagine the world in poetic language and to be is in Khlebnikov’s view one and the same thing. We can interpret this literary concept as a variation of Parmenides’ philosophical project.

Other instances of philosophical poems in the period of Russian Modernism and avant-garde are two texts entitled “The Human Being” (“Chelovek”), one written by the symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov,⁷⁵ the other written by the futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky.⁷⁶ Both were created during the First World War and the revolutions of 1917, Mayakovsky’s poem between 1916 and the summer of 1917 and Ivanov’s not later than 1918.

⁷³ We might also call “Zangezi” a hyper-story were there not a risk of an anachronistic attribution of concepts.

⁷⁴ V. Khlebnikov “My i doma,” (idem 1986: 595-602, 595). V. Khlebnikov “Deti Vydry,” (idem, 2004c, vol. 5: 264).

⁷⁵ Ivanov (1979b: 195-205).

⁷⁶ Maiakovskii (1918).

The sphere as a basic body in Parmenides' poem and in Russian avant-garde

The last type of reference to Parmenides' philosophy that we look at here is the most risky one because it thematizes a vision that has been a commonplace in the worldview of Europeans and North Americans for some centuries. One might ask: Why attribute the sphere as the form of the earth to the poem of the Greek philosopher if this concept had been used hundreds of times in other texts? In addition to Parmenides, Thales, Anaximander, Epicurus and Pythagoras were also convinced that the earth has the form of a sphere, but in Parmenides' case the knowledge about the spherical shape of the earth was central as an illustration of his basic concept that observation, that is sensory perception, can deceive. As Thinking and Being are one and the same thing, the truthfulness of the knowledge that the earth has the form of a sphere cannot come from deceivable perception but only from philosophical thought. This monistic conviction provides the phenomenon, since it is derived from thought and existence at the same time, so to speak, with some ontological pathos. The sphere, which is not the form of the earth by chance but by necessity (of course, Lev Shestov would have complained about this statement), and which is by the same necessity also the form of the world and the form of the human head, is endowed in Khlebnikov's cosmological, anthropological, and ontological view with a world- and text-creating sense.

The second part of Khlebnikov's super-poem "The Children of the Otter" ("Deti Vydry") starts with the words "There burns the candle, called 'mind' in the candlestick of the skull; after it is a sphere, throwing on all – a sphere of black shadow." («Горит свеча именем разум в подсвечнике из черепа, за ней шар, бросающий на все шар черной тени»⁷⁷). Thanks to the painter Malevich, a friend of Khlebnikov's, the skull is considered equal to the universe. And for the creator of objectless art, the sphere is the combination of objectlessness (bespredmetnost') and the absence of sense – it is un-sense (nemysl). The *un*-sense of all things, which is not *non*-sense, is only accessible to God. If the limit of all sense, all meaning, is in God Himself, then on the other side of this limit there exists un-sense. Universe and un-sense together form endlessness. Therefore immediately after the quoted description in Khlebnikov's text follows the statement: "Full stop, as Bošković has taught". («Точка, как учил Боскович.»)⁷⁸ This is spoken by the scholar and refers to the 18th century astronomer and mathematician Ruđer Josip Bošković of Ragusa, who among other works wrote a «*Theoria philosophiae naturalis redacta ad unam legem virium in natura existentium*»

⁷⁷ Khlebnikov (1986: 433).

⁷⁸ Khlebnikov (1986: 433).

(1758), which can be read as an equivalent to Parmenides' philosophical poem "On Nature". He also drafted a poem in six songs, called « Les éclipses » ("The Solar Eclipses", 1779). In geometry the extension of the point is equal to endlessness. And so the points in Bošković's words refer to infinity.

In Khlebnikov's super-story "The Children of the Otter" there is another sphere. It is a ball and an atom at the same time. If we assume, that the sphere has the meaning of unity, we can apply Malevich's reflection to Khlebnikov's poem:

[...] как вселенная со всеми своими возбуждениями, может быть, стремится к единству его центра, так и все его распыленные [предметы] составляют единство его центра, который в свою очередь движется по путям вселенского увлечения. Так единство за единством, включаясь друг в друга, стремятся в бесконечный путь беспредметного!⁷⁹

[...] as the universe with all its excitations, possibly, strives for the unity of its center, and all its atomized [objects] constitute the unity of its center, which in its turn moves along the paths of universal enthusiasm. So the unity behind unity, including each other, tends to the infinite path of the objectless!

Here, as also in Khlebnikov's vision of the world, which contains the book, which in turn contains the world, we observe a phenomenon that I have defined as co-implication.⁸⁰ Two phenomena both imply each other. This logical relation can be seen as an explication of Parmenides' sentence that thinking and being are the same: Thinking and being (co-)imply each other.

This idea is close to Malevich's reflection on unity at the beginning of his essay "God is not overthrown" ("Bog ne skinut", 1922), which is clearly fed by Parmenides' thinking about the unity of being and the unreliability of sensory perception:

[...] нет в ней [природе] единицы, которую возможно взять как целое. Все же то, что видим как будто отдельно, единично, ложь есть, все связано – и развязано, но ничего отдельного не существует и потому нет и не может быть предметов и вещей, и потому безумна попытка достигать их. / Что же возможно обнять, когда не существует ни линии, ни плоскости, ни объема; нет того, что возможно обмерить, и потому геометрия – условная видимость несуществующих фигур. Нет той точки, от которой возможно было бы провести линию, нельзя установить точку даже в воображении, ибо само воображение знает, что нет пустого места, нельзя также провести линию и другой фигуры, ибо все занято и заполнено [...] ⁸¹

... in it [nature] there is not a unit that we may take as a whole. Yet what we see there as seemingly separate, isolated, is a lie; all is connected – and disconnected,

⁷⁹ K. Malevich (1922: without pagination).

⁸⁰ Grübel (2008, vol. 1: 272).

⁸¹ Malevich (2001a: 150-151). Cf. Malevich's aphorism «Шар земной не что иное, как комок интуитивной мудрости, которая должна бежать по путям бесконечности.» ("The ball of the earth is nothing but a lump of intuitive wisdom that must run along the paths of infinity.") Malevich (2001b: 128).

but nothing exists separately, and therefore there cannot be objects and things, and therefore it is a mad attempt to reach them. / What can be reached at all, if there is no line or plane or volume? There is nothing that can be measured, and therefore geometry is the conditional visibility of nonexistent figures. There is no point from which it would be possible to draw a line; you cannot set a point, even in the imagination, because the imagination itself knows that there is no empty space, that it is also impossible to draw a line and another figure, for all is occupied and filled ...

Further on in Khlebnikov's text the reader becomes the witness of a ball game, which follows the principle of a pendulum. This principle represents the cyclicity of phenomena, their repeatability in time. Of course, this concept follows Nietzsche's idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, which is in itself a variation of Parmenides' idea that all being is stable.

In the Futurist super-story "Zangezi" from 1920 the very sphere of the earth, on which there is also our body and with it our hands, is at the same time lying on our hands. In this case the poet builds up the local co-implication of hands and globe: In Khlebnikov's fragment from 1916 "The Lion" ("Lev") the reader is

В великих погонях	In greatest chases
Бешеных скачек	Of wildest races
На наших ладонях	On the palms of our hands
Земного шара мячик. ⁸²	The global ball of the Earth.

told that in a process of education (in which Parmenides could also be involved) the poetic "I" is accorded the function of the head of the global sphere:

Ка стал моим учителем.
Под его руководством я постепенно стал начальником земного шара. Я получил письмо: «Начальнику земного шара», – больше ни слова.⁸³
Ka became my teacher.
Under his guidance, I gradually became the head of the global sphere. I got a letter, "To the head of the global sphere" – without any further word.

According to another text by Khlebnikov, called "Ka", "Ka is the shadow of the soul, its double" («Ka – это тень души, ее двойник»⁸⁴). And indeed, in other Khlebnikov texts, in his letters and notebooks, we are told that he was elected head of the global sphere at the end of December 1915, that one century ago on the same day he founded the "State of Time" (Gosudarstvo vremeni) and became the "King of Time".⁸⁵ This should not so much be condemned as megalomania as regarded as a readiness to take over political responsibility for the future of mankind. He was also the cofounder of the "Society of the Global

⁸² Khlebnikov (2004b: 344).

⁸³ Khlebnikov (2004b: 364).

⁸⁴ Khlebnikov (2004b: 122).

⁸⁵ Khlebnikov, "My, predesedateli zemnogo shara," (2005, vol. 5: 270); V. Khlebnikov, "Mysli i zametki," (2006, vol. 6.2: 85); E. Arenzon (2006: 260).

Sphere” (“Obshchestvo zemnogo shara”) and “Union 317” (“Soiuz 317”). The chiefs of 317 countries were to form the government of the world together. This is a utopian anticipation of the United Nations. On April 19, 1920 Velimir Khlebnikov was chosen in the Theater of Kharkiv as “Head of the global sphere”.⁸⁶ Already in the springtime of 1917, immediately after the second Russian revolution the Futurist poets Khlebnikov, and Vasili Kamenski and the translator Grigorii Pletnikov wrote a letter to Maxim Gorky, asking him whether he finds them qualified to be members of the government of the global sphere.⁸⁷

As there is a substantial book on Kharms by Jampol’skii, which also contains a detailed chapter on the motif of the sphere,⁸⁸ we need touch only briefly on the Absurdistic reception of Parmenides’ philosophy in the work of this poet. We shall limit ourselves to citing, as an example, a little poem which shows the difference between the consistently positive and serious sense of the sphere in the works of Parmenides himself as well as of the Russian Futurists on the one hand and its cheery, even funny representatives, the ball and the balloon, in the poetry of Kharms on the other:

Летят по небу шарики, летят они, летят, летят по небу шарики, блестят и шелестят.		Balloons fly in the sky, they fly, they fly, they fly, balloons fly, across the sky, they glisten and they rustle.
Летят по небу шарики, а люди машут им, летят по небу шарики, а люди машут им.	5	Balloons fly in the sky, and people wave to them, balloons fly in the sky, and people wave to them.
Летят по небу шарики, а люди машут шапками, летят по небу шарики, а люди машут палками ... ⁸⁹ (1933)	10	Balloons fly in the sky, and people wave with caps, balloons fly in the sky, and people wave with sticks ...

The spheres are brought here very close to the human beings (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11), who joyfully communicate with them (6, 8, 10, 12). In a way the symmetrical relation between man and God, which is demonstrated in Parmenides’ poem, is extended here to the relation of man with the earth and the universe.

However, there is also a more serious reference to Parmenides’ idea, that the world has the form of a sphere: One of the names Kharms had chosen as a pseudonym included also the Russian word for “sphere” (shar) – “Shardam”,

⁸⁶ Khlebnikov (2017). The scene is described in A. Mariengof’s novel “Roman vez vran’ja”, Moscow 1988; A. Marienhof, “A Novel without Lies”, Chicago 2000.

⁸⁷ Khlebnikov (2005: 266).

⁸⁸ Jampol’skii (1998).

⁸⁹ D. Kharms(1988: 143-144).

which means: ‘I will give the sphere’.⁹⁰ It can be read as the declaration that the poetic “I” himself is the creator of the/a universe.

The late Russian avant-garde in literature carried out a fluent transition to Postmodernism. One of the representatives of this development was the poet Joseph Brodsky, who came from the movement of Russian Acmeism. In the first part of the sixth of his “Twenty Sonnets to Mary, Queen of Scots” (1974) Brodsky quoted and varied the beginning of Pushkin’s famous poem “I loved you” («Я вас любил»)⁹¹ In its second part, the poetic subject expresses doubts about God’s readiness to create the fire of love a second time in the poetic “I” (10-14), which appeals in a calculated error to Parmenides (11) instead of Heraclitus; it was not Parmenides but the latter who said that you cannot enter the same river a second time.⁹² This “error” of attribution speaks about the fundamental difference between the concepts of the uniqueness vs. the repeatability of love. And it destroys the rhetorical figure of Eponomasia, which dominated in Soviet discourse as the appellation to Engels and Marx, to Lenin and Stalin, to an absurd end.

Of course, this play with the possibility of repetition is also a negation of the Postmodern illusion that you could say the very same, be it in prose or verse, a second time. In contrast to Pushkin’s text in which the speaker has left the other, the poetic “I” has in Brodsky’s probably been left himself and confesses even to having tried to kill himself (4). Also contrary to Pushkin, Brodsky relates the fire of love not only to sentiments but also to (modern) everyday phenomena like tooth fillings (13), and he even ‘corrects’ the possible content of the feeling from love to pain (2-3) and (in the Russian original) the object of his desire from the breast to the mouth of the beloved (14). The doubted (im)possibility of the second time is at least just as much about the chances of writing a second successful poem on the second time of love as about the discussed love itself:

Я вас любил. Любовь еще (возможно,
что просто боль) сверлит мои мозги,
Все разлетелось к черту, на куски.
Я застрелиться пробовал, но сложно
с оружием. И далее, виски:
в который вдарить? Портила не дрожь, но
задумчивость. Черт! все не по-людски!
Я Вас любил так сильно, безнадежно,

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⁹⁰ Jampol’skii (1998: 196).

⁹¹ Pushkin (1959, vol. 2: 259); cf. Zholkovsky (1994: 117-146). Zholkovsky interpreted the poem as an address of Humbert Humbertovich [main male character in Nabokov’s “Lolita”] Mayakovsky to the portrait of Marilyn Stuart by Velasquez-Picasso-Warhol” (144). Cf. also A. Leake (2016: 31-46).

⁹² Heraclitus A6 (= Plato, “Cratylus”, 402a): δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης.

как дай Вам бог другими – но не даст!
 Он, будучи на многое горазд, 10
 не сотворит – по *Пармениду* – дважды
 сей жар в груди, ширококостный хруст,
 чтоб пломбы в пасти плавилась от жажды
 коснуться – «бюст» зачеркиваю – уст!⁹³

I loved you. And my love of you (it seems
 it's only pain) still stabs me through the brain.
 The whole thing's shattered into smithereens.
 I tried to shoot myself – using a gun
 is not so simple. And the temples: which one, 5
 the right or left? Reflection, not the twitching,
 kept me from acting. Jesus, what a mess!
 I loved you with such strength, such hopelessness!
 May God send you in others – not a chance!
 He, capable of many things at once, 10
 won't – citing *Parmenides* – reinspire
 the bloodstream fire, the bone-crushing creeps,
 which melt the lead in fillings with desire.⁹⁴

Thirteen years later, in 1987, Joseph Brodsky wrote a poem called “From/After Parmenides” (Из Парменида), in which the poetical subject suspends common logic in line with Parmenides’ basic assumptions that being is the same as thinking, and all phenomena of being and thinking are mixtures of their basics: The observer is at the same the observed person, the witness the witnessed (1), the firebug the firefighter (3-4), the perpetrator the victim (3-5), the cause the consequence (9). At the end the poetical subject says farewell to memory for the benefit of the slaughters of the catastrophe (9-10). This catastrophe is in the beginning of the poem determined as the “wars in the Crimea” (1). This military action may just as well refer to the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the first battle the Russians lost after the victory over Napoleon’s army, as to the 1941-1944 battles between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. Some verses are directly correlated with texts of or about the Pre-Socratic philosopher, others refer more indirectly to them. The question marks (1) witness the initial uncertainty of the poetical subject, the exclamation marks (3) – its growing assurance in the shift from passivity to activity:

Из Парменида

Наблюдатель? Свидетель событий? Войны в Крыму?
 Масса жертв – все в дыму – перемирие полотенца ...
 Нет! Самому совершить поджог! роддома! и самому
 вызвать пожарных, прыгнуть в огонь, и спасти младенца,

⁹³ I. Brodskii (1992: 339). The translation has been done by Brodsky himself with the help of Peter France. Italics mine, R. G.

⁹⁴ Brodsky (1988: 20). My italics.

дать ему соску, назваться его отцом, обучить его складывать 5
тут же из пальцев фигу.
И потом завернув бутерброд в газету с родным лицом,
сесть в электричку и погрузиться в книгу
о превращеньях красавиц в птиц, и как их места
зарастают пером: ласточки – цапли – дрофы ... 10
Быть и причиной и следствием! чтобы, N лет спустя,
отказаться от памяти в пользу жертв катастрофы.⁹⁵

After Parmenides

Observer? Witness of events? The wars in the Crimea?
The mass of victims – all in smoke – the armistice of a towel ...
No! To commit to yourself arson! Maternity hospital! And to yourself
call the firefighters, jump into the fire, and save the baby,
give him a nipple, call yourself his father, teach him 5
to fold by his fingers at once to a fig.⁹⁶
And then having wrapped a sandwich in a newspaper with a native face,
get on the suburban railway and plunge into a book
about the transformations of beauties into birds, and how their places
grow with a pen/feather: swallows – herons – bustards ... 10
to be both, cause and effect! To abandon, N years later,
the memory in favor of the victims of the disaster.

The reader has to have some knowledge of Parmenides' concept of the unity of the being to be able to understand, how these verses continue the ideas of the early Greek philosopher. The mental figure of the end, the forgetting in favor of the victims seems not to be an element of Parmenides' philosophy. Strangely enough, just five years later, Brodsky himself could not forget the decay of the Soviet Union and accept the autonomy of the Ukraine. In 1992, he even wrote the satirical poem "On Ukrainian Independence" («На независимость Украины»), which in 2014 was chosen in Russia as the most important poem of the year 2014.⁹⁷ Brodsky died in 1996; he did not live to experience the Russian annexation of the Crimea only eight years later.

In 1997 the well-known Russian poet and artist Dmitrii Prigov said in an interview with Aleksei Parshchikov, that the nowadays dying anthropological culture started "with the Presocratics" ("s dosokratikov"⁹⁸) and finds its end even at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Being not a representative of Russian Modernism or avant-garde, but of Russian conceptualism, he related this long-lasting cultural period, which according to him has come into a crisis now, to the belief in the self-identity of the human being.

⁹⁵ I. Brodskii (1998, vol. 4: 24).

⁹⁶ In Russian culture the fig sign is a sexual gesture of contempt.

⁹⁷ Brodskii (1992).

⁹⁸ Prigov (2019: 484).

Conclusion

We have seen that Parmenides as a Pre-Socratic philosopher played an important role not only in 20th century European and Northern American philosophy but also in the poetry and prose of Russian Modernism and avant-garde. In the beginning, which was shaped by the concept of the Third Renaissance as a phenomenon of Slavic and/or Russian culture, poets and writers of prose used the name, the notions, and the ideas of the early Greek philosopher as an object for appellation, as examples for medial self-definition, and as a reservoir of motifs (for instance, the sphere) and ideas like the thesis that all being is one and the same. In later instances of intertextuality, when the project of the Third Renaissance was superseded by the concept of Eurasianism, the relation of the literary voices to Parmenides' writing and thinking became freer, even playful or just ironic. This is especially the case in the poems of Joseph Brodsky, who used the Greek philosopher as one of his bridges from avant-garde literature to Postmodernism.

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