

“Grammatical Seeing” in Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* and Anatoly Gladilin’s *Tomorrow’s Forecast*

Abstract

In my essay, I will explore the differences and similarities between American and Russian Literary Postmodernism, a variety of literature characterized by the use of unconventional narrative techniques such as an unstable narrator, paradox and fragmentation, with Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and Anatoly Gladilin’s *Tomorrow’s Forecast* (1972). As *Tomorrow’s Forecast* has not been translated into English, my analysis will be based on the German translation. I will first trace the different historical circumstances and literary movements that have given rise to these works which share similar characteristics. A literary movement reacting against the socialist realist aesthetic by breaking literary conventions, Mauvism, a movement associated with *Tomorrow’s Forecast*, is similar to postwar Literary Postmodernism in America. Yet, Mauvism is dissimilar to American Postmodernism in that it operates on explicit aesthetic principles, whereas American Postmodernism is characterized by thematic concerns for Cold War paranoia and the impact of the rapidly developing media. Then, drawing from literary techniques and plot structures, I will show that protagonists in both works use linguistic techniques to construct a realites to take refuge from listless and repetitive lived realities. Finally, I will conclude by drawing literary examples from Fin-de-siècle Europe to show that Oedipa and Martynow’s confusions can be seen as an epistemological problems – namely, the failure of language to commensurate with reality. I will conclude by suggesting that this phenomenon can be dealt more exhaustively in the philosophy of language or skepticism.

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1. Introduction

In my essay, I will explore the similarities and differences of American and Russian literary postmodernism with an analysis of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and Anatoly Gladilin's *Tomorrow's Forecast* (1972), a work that has not yet been translated into English. While the two works share characteristics of literary postmodernism, namely, the use of unstable narrators, paradoxes, and other unconventional narrative techniques, their postmodernisms stem from very different historical circumstances. Despite arising from different historical circumstances and of different aesthetics, both Oedipa and Martynow use literary techniques to construct realities to take refuge from listless lived realities – for Oedipa, reality fails to exhibit the literary structure of symbolism. Martynow, on the other hand, shields himself from an unagreeable reality by associating lived episodes with lyrics, repeating aphorisms to himself, and by the use of *reductio ad absurdum* logic. Because of the failure of their literary techniques to correctly characterize and thus penetrate reality, the plot structures of both works are circular – that is, without resolution – as their literary strategies fail to solve their problems. Despite coming from very different historical circumstances, the protagonists of both works ultimately become disillusioned and skeptical of their ability to know reality through language and science. In realizing the futility of language and methodologies of knowing, it becomes apparent that the problem lies in the egocentrism of the protagonists – in trusting language to be able to accurately portray the truth, and thus its ability to alter it, they fail to step outside of themselves and act.

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drawing from literary techniques and plot structures, I will show how Oedipa and Martynow construct their virtual realities. Finally, I will conclude by drawing literary examples from Fin-de-siècle Europe to show that Oedipa and Martynow's confusions can be seen as an epistemological problems – namely, the failure of language to commensurate with reality. I will conclude by suggesting that this phenomenon can be dealt with more exhaustively in philosophy of language or philosophy of skepticism.

2. Historical and Theoretical Overview

Tomorrow's Forecast descends from the tradition of Mauvism, a literary "school"¹ innovated by Kataev. Like the French word "mauvais", which means bad, "Mauvism" is the literary school of writing badly. To write "badly", according to Kataev, is to subvert all given literary convention,² such that art is offered release from the straitjacket of the intellectual Soviet aesthetics to an "immediacy of feeling".³ Evidently, Mauvism is an ironic reaction, rebelling against the formal characteristics of social realism by being "bad". As Kataev himself remarks, "no, mauvisme was not just a joke. In a sense, it could even be described as a higher stage of socialist realism."⁴ Rebelling against literary convention and hoping to reawaken the sense of immediacy and life in art, Mauvist writers tend to write impressionistically without mediation.

Named by Kataev as "Mauvist number one",⁵ Anatoly Gladilin stands at the forefront of Mauvism. Gladilin's work was brought to the fore in the Mauvist literary magazine *Iunost*. As

¹It is questionable whether Mauvism can of itself consist of a "school" - see Richard Borden's *The Art of Writing Badly*, Ch.1.

²Richard C. Borden, *The art of writing badly: Valentin Kataev's mauvism and the rebirth of Russian modernism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 23.

³Borden, 22.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Borden, 23.

the name of the magazine suggests, Gladilin wrote in the style of ‘youth prose’, imitating the way the youth of his age spoke, with puns, references to western culture, breakdowns in logic. This style of writing was an attempt to find self-identity, a reaction to the previous generation which venerated the romantic ideals of socialism. Another characteristic of Gladilin’s prose is his use of different types of documents, creating a disjointed narrative that dissociates the writing from the narrator. With a fragmented voice, Gladilin creates a narrator who lacks an ontological center, such as that of Martynow in *Tomorrow’s Forecast*. Entangled in work, relationship and family problems, Martynow attempts to exert control over his life by using different narratives, such as lists, aphorisms, shopping lists, and absurd logical statements to mediate or explain their causes. I will expand upon his techniques in the next part of the paper.

Oedipa is similar to Martynow in her ontological ambiguity. While Oedipa does not seem to be directly affected by regime changes, her ontological instability is caused by her paranoia and inability to understand and interpret the signs around her. The lack of ontological stability of the subject reflected by narrative fragmentation is one of the characteristics of American literary postmodernism, a literary movement that fermented in the late 60s which Pynchon took part. Unlike Mauvism, which was caused by a reaction to socialist realism, a set of aesthetic ideals, literary postmodernism in America rose because of the rapid development of media technologies. The attitude towards the advancement of information technology is twofold. First, as this age of literary postmodernism occurred during the height of the Cold War, media was distrusted, appearing to be a means for the powerful to disseminate their ideologies through manipulative image-making, rather than as a means to advance knowledge.⁶ Secondly, in reaction to the

⁶Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

decline of print capitalism, anxieties about the imminent obsolescence of the novel is also a theme that has preoccupied authors, as it forebode their loss of power in American culture. In Jonathan Franzen's famous essay *Perchance To Dream*,⁷ he explicitly expresses anxieties about losing power as a novelist and meditates upon about the place of the novel in American culture future and past. Similarly, Don DeLillo's novels meditates on similar themes. *Mao II*'s is about a famous, isolated novelist who travels into the jaws of terrorists for the sake of pulling a publicity stunt, because he becomes convinced that ideologies and images in the news exert a more powerful pull on the imagination than words. While literary postmodernism in America does not react to a specific set of aesthetic ideals (i.e. that of socialist realism), authors in both literary movements are motivated by an attempt to break and revolutionize literary conventions such that it would reassert its force in the reader's minds. Thus, engaging with the form of the novel directly, American literary postmodernism, like *Mauvism*, exhibit metafictional qualities. Like his other books, Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is an allegory to the act of reading. Known for the structural and linguistic difficulty of his books, Pynchon's books are very much about the difficulty of 'reading' as a way of making sense of the world.

Because both writers and movements challenge narrative forms by breaking literary conventions and using new literary techniques, problems formulated in this unconventional language become reduced to epistemological problems – a complicated linguistic or grammatical formulation that needs to be interpreted and disentangled. In *Tomorrow's Forecast*, Martynow, the narrator, attempts to stabilize his a confusing external reality by his own logical and literary formulations; in *The Crying of Lot 49*, living a boring suburban life, Oedipa attempts to project a

⁷Jonathan Franzen et al., "Perchance to Dream," Harper's magazine, , accessed January 20, 2017, <http://harpers.org/archive/1996/04/perchance-to-dream/>.

conspiracy into reality through seeing symbolism where none exist. While both share the common problem of being removed from lived reality through language, the internal mediation of external phenomena is directionally reversed - in *Tomorrow's Forecast*, the narrator mediates external reality through his own formulation, reducing what would have been objective external reality to subjective images and associative internal logic; in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa projects a false reality onto lived reality. Thus, unable to bridge mind and world, both are trapped in circles in both physical and metaphorical levels.

3. Circularity and Grammatical Seeing in The Crying of Lot 49

In this section, I will show how the thought processes of Oedipa and Martynow, as figured in literary techniques, have led them in circles. For both Oedipa and Martynow, their tendency to exercise literary techniques in interpreting the world has crippled them from being able to engage directly with the world. To them the world is an epistemological surface which they can articulate and interpret, but not penetrate and engage with.

Pynchon points this out in an allegory with Remedios Varo's painting "Bordando el Manto Terrestre." The painting depicts female weavers, imprisoned in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry that depicted the world. Like the girls in the painting, Oedipa projects her own world in her own mind and is trapped in her own projection, unable to let herself out nor let anyone in. As she looked at the painting with Pierce, her then dead boyfriend, she had secretly cried, realizing that she was trapped in her own mind, a world which Pierce could not penetrate and take her away from. It is not so much the failure of communication that she mourns, than the failure of life to excite her. *The Crying of Lot 49* is

filled with description of the bland despair of American suburban life: “the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know.” The collection of waste articles, the “salads of despair”⁸ found in the back of Mucho’s used cars - “clipped coupons promising savings of 5c or 10c, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts...yellow pages torn from the rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes”,⁹ is a synecdoche of Oedipa’s bland, meaningless suburban existence. Travelling to San Narcisco, she hopes to escape the stale characterisations and clichés of ‘speed, freedom and wind-in your hair’.¹⁰ In pursuing the Trystero sign, she is literally forced to recycle these images of ‘waste’ into something conspiratorial and fantastic by pursues the W.A.S.T.E carrier in order to find out the meaning behind the Trystero post horn. Ironically, the answer had been there all along in her bland quotidian life, as realizes with disappointment that it was invented by her now dead ex-boyfriend Pierce Inverarity. It is thus ironic that the layout of San Narcisco from above had “the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had” had fascinated her with “a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate”,¹¹ as her search for meaning, like a closed current of a circuit card, flows unidirectionally back to its first place.

The ironic, circular plot structure of this book is caused by her tendency to see symbols where there is none. Feeling that “she was meant to remember”,¹² Oedipa tries to read reality beyond the images that they confer to her, as one reads a work of literature beyond its literal meanings. Like an inscrutable text, San Narciso is surrounded by “miles of fence topped with

⁸Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Perennial classics, 1986), 5.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Pynchon, 15.

¹¹Pynchon 14.

¹²Pynchon, 95.

barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers".¹³ With its narrow and claustrophobic spaces, it resembles the imprisoning and dogmatic systems of meaning of New Criticism, a mode of literary discourse that trended in the 60s which Oedipa's way of interpretation resembled.

A feature of New Criticism is that the symbols and signs within a text should work integrally together like parts of a machine, or a circuit. Like a New Critic, she insists on conferring meaning where there is none, such that the system of meaning would work integrally. Oedipa agrees when Cohen suggested an absurd explanation as to why the dandelion wine became clearer than it did a few months ago: "It's clearer now...A few months ago it got quite cloudy. You see, in spring, when the dandelions begin to bloom again, the wine goes through a fermentation. As if they remembered." It is absurd that Springtime is correlated to the blooming of the dandelions, as they, being fermented into wine, are dead. And yet, the symbolism of seasonal change makes logical sense in this isolated context to explain the change in color of the wine, despite it may not correspond to empirical reality. For her, reality in San Narcisco is a language of symbols that function in a sealed, integral manner, that isolated from and has no correspondence with lived reality.

Because of her insistence in believing that reality is a system of symbols that function integrally together like a machine, Oedipa is disturbed by chaos and disorder, as it seems impossible to her that things can just happen at their own accord without an elaborate conspiratorial intention or motive. It is not natural to her that large events can occur through mere natural cause, that man's mind can be a mere 'pool table'¹⁴ where the positions of the balls

¹³Pynchon, 15.

¹⁴Pynchon, 127.

occur through pure accident. This is why she has an aversion to the inexplicable convergence of crowds and mass mobilizations, “where revolutions break out spontaneous and leaderless, and the soul’s talent for consensus allows the masses to work together without effort, automatic as the body itself.”¹⁵ In the death-mute dance, she left because she felt suspicious, thinking that ‘there would have to be collisions,’¹⁶ and the lack of which struck her as a “mysterious consensus”,¹⁷ leading her to flee. Similarly, Oedipa feels alienated by the children’s ‘own unpenetrated sense of community’, thinking that what they were chanting were a conspiracy that she does not take part of.

4. Circularity and Grammatical Seeing in *Tomorrow’s Forecast*

Like Oedipa, Martynow’s life is stuck in the listless routines of relationships, life and work which he is unable to extract himself from. This listless routine is characterized as a circle, a motif that is repeated in Martynow’s internal dialogue to characterize the tiresome routine of shopping, family and relationship crises, the opaque bureaucracy of work that he cannot extract himself from. He writes: “I’m always going around in a circle. / as I have done so in my work in the sciences, I make a huge effort to remove myself from my family, from the mire of the daily routine”.¹⁸ These are the conditions he had failed to escape, as he had characterized his move to Tiksi and eventual Rückkehr back to Moscow: “it is not the first time that I left a place in which I

¹⁵Pynchon, 97.

¹⁶Pynchon, 107.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸ Anatolij Gladilin, *Und morgen wechselnd wolkig: Roman* (Graz, Wien, Köln: Verlag Styria, 1978), 92. ‚ich gehe im Kreis herum./ eben der Wissenschaft bemühte ich mich, von der Familie fortzugehen, aus dem Alltagsmorast herauszukommen..‘

had gotten used to and had a good job...and from my friends. I was never going to back to my old circles - but that was not true. I was always going in circles. I am circling around myself.”¹⁹

While Oedipa mediates reality through interpreting what she sees as symbols, Martynow associates and allows the events of his life to be interpreted by the emotional lyrics of a song, which the lyrics and melody create the imagined dimensions of the routines from which he cannot escape. Not only does he use the method of repetition to highlight the routine he is stuck in, he also connects the repetitive and tiresome parts of his life with lyrical refrains. To evoke the dilemmas in his life, he uses primarily the song of the Goldwasher:

There flows and flows a stream
Over bright sand.
It washes a young rogue
There gold with a nimble hand.
He asks the warden,
'Boss, you boss of all bosses'
...
'Let me go, let me run,
My darling in freedom has been longing for me,
Even worse: she hurts and will drink '
...
I'd let you run,
But you will steal away, right?
Drink water, drink beautiful cold water -
You will quickly forget your love.²⁰

¹⁹Gladilin, 10. „Nicht zum ersten mal verließ ich einen Ort, an den ich mich gewöhnt hatte, und eine gute Arbeit...von meinen Freunde. Ich kehrte nie ‚zu meinen alten Kreisen‘ zurück...Doch das ist nicht wahr. Ich ging stets im Kreis. Ich kreiste um mich selbst“.

²⁰Gladilin, 40.

Es fließt und fließt ein Fließchen
Gar über hellen Sand.
Es wäscht ein junger Gauner
Dort Gold mit flinker Hand.
Den Aufseher, den fleht er an:
'Chef, du Chef von allen Chefs'
...
'Ach laß mich, laß mich doch laufen,
mein Liebchen in Freiheit hat Sehnsucht nach mir,
Noch schlimmer: sie hurt und wird saufen'
...
Ich würd' dich ja laufen lassen,

Specific lines from the Goldwasher song are repeated in the book to be emotionally associated with scenes related to love and work, over which he has no control. For love, lyrics are repeated in the song when he faces a dilemma of having to choose between Ira and his wife Natashka. Despite he tries to distance himself from Irka throughout the book and lay his love for her to rest because of family responsibilities, he could not do so. Through the refrain of the Goldwasher lyrics towards the end of the book,²¹ he shows his dilemma of being unable to choose between Irka and Natashka. The emotions expressed by the rogue through the lyrics parallels his despair of being tied down by their work and his family and unable to pursue his love for Irka. One day, bothered by the fact that Irka had not slept at home, he dreaded that she was going to marry the young man she was engaged with. Despairing, he referenced the lyrics, “Boss, let me go” to express his desperation and longing for Irka. Repeating the line “drink cold water”²² he tried to convince himself to douse his love for Irka and turn back to his responsibilities. And yet, even if he succeeded in running away and releasing himself from his longing, he would still be trapped in the stagnancy of his life, where he would be beleaguered with his family responsibilities, “Right. What is the point of letting me run away? Nothing will change...I will run back home again. I have two girls - how should they survive at all without

Doch stehlen würdest weiter du, gell?
Trink Wasser, trink schön kaltes Wasser –
Die Liebe vergißt du dann schnell

²¹Gladilin, 176.

²²Ibid.

me?”²³ This melody of despair is strengthened by the lyrical refrain that Ira sings in counterpoint to his lyrics: “Volodya, Volodya my Volodya, love me, as long as I am young.”^{24 25}

This lyrical refrain is also repeated when he describes the tiresome bureaucracy that he has to overcome in work, which he again, characterizes as a circle from which he has no exit: “How could he have guessed that I had long been trying to get into his department, groping, without giving in to myself - one can say that I had been circulating around it for my whole conscious life.”²⁶ In his observatory, his colleagues predict the weather intuitively without resorting to scientific means. His supervisor Kerospjan, making weather reports through arbitrary intuition, has predicted the weather with his ‘liver’²⁷ and has consequently caused a train accident.²⁸ Describing the utter inaccuracy and irresponsibility of the weathermen in the observatory, he comments ironically, “no one knows, when science stops and intuition begins”.²⁹ And yet, the higher administrative levels do not raise any objections to unpredictable weather predictions, suggesting that weather reports matter only to the extent that the public needs them to feel a sense of security offered by the numbers in a weather report.³⁰ While he thought that the higher administrative levels “simply do not understand. One has to go to him and explain”³¹ it is

²³Gladilin, 177. “Richtig. Was für einen Sinn hat es, mich lafenzulassen? Das wird nichts ändern...Ich werde wieder nach Hause zurücklaufen. Ich habe zwei Mädchen – wie soll sie denn ohne mich leben?”

²⁴Gladilin, 58. „Wolodja, Wolodja, ach Wolodja mein, liebe mich, solange ich jung...”

²⁵I couldn't find any information about these songs, but I can imagine that these two songs may be related to each other one way or another, perhaps harmonically.

²⁶Gladilin, 47. „Wie hatte er erraten können, dass ich schon lange versuchte, in seine Abteilung zu gelangen, tastend, ohne es mir selber zuzugeben — man kann sagen, dass ich schon mein ganzes bewusstes Leben lang um sie kreiste.

²⁷Gladilin, 34. Er hat der Morgenfröste mit seiner Leber spürt.”

²⁸Ibid. „Und nun ruft Kerospjan...der über sehr viel Erfahrung verfügt und an den Wetterprognosen nicht nur einen Narren, sondern einen ganzen Trolleybus gefressen hat”

²⁹Gladilin, 31. „niemand weiß, wo die Wissenschaft aufhört und die Intuition beginnt.“

³⁰Gladilin, 46. “sie möchten uns glauben. Versuchen Sie einmal, uns Meteorologen abzustellen. Furchtbar, sich auszudenken, was dann wäre. Man braucht uns“

³¹Gladilin, 51. „einfach nicht verstünde. Man müsse zu ihm gehen und es erklären,“ (51)

only more than apparent that he himself, stuck in his old Stalinist ways, did not understand the new rules of bureaucracy in the new post-Stalinist age.

Feeling that he is led in circles, he associates his work supervisors with a lyrical refrain about the wardens of the Gold Washers, which he characterizes as strict, pitiless, and who can see through one's intentions.³² By characterizing the wardens in the lyrics this way, he indirectly expresses his discontent for his own work supervisors: "I have had many bosses before, but this one seems to me particularly special, a boss of all bosses"³³

As his cognition and values cannot commensurate with what was happening in his workplace and his career, he tries to change his own view of reality by repeating aphorisms to himself and using *reductio ad absurdum* logical forms. Because of the planned economy, his observatory makes a prediction four months before the said date. While Martynow recognizes the American short-term prediction results in more accurate predictions, he lets himself be confused by his own thought patterns to believe that science, such as that practiced in the Soviet Union, can be accurate despite it is a matter of intuition. He is puzzled by the fact that no one has rioted because their poor weather reports: "what is reported about [the weather] in the newspapers is reversed as to what's happening on the streets. And on my side it's a puzzle: why have the represents of unions not gathered and thrown a stone in the window of our office?"³⁴ Recalling an anecdote in Tashkent, where the elderly predicted earthquakes accurately by observing animal habits, he convinces himself that science can be a matter of intuition.³⁵ Instead

³²Gladilin, 40. 'streng, mitleidlos, er durchschaut einen'

³³Gladilin, 40. „und ich stellte ihn mir vor, ich hatte schon viele Chefs, doch dieser scheint ein ganz besonderer zu sein, ein Chef von allen Chefs.

³⁴Gladilin, 82. "In den Zeitungen steht es so, auf der Strasse ist es umgekehrt. Und fuhr mich ist es meinerseits ein Rätsel: Warum haben sich bis jetzt die Vertreter der Arbeiterschaft nicht versammelt und die Fenster in unserem Büro eingeschlagen?"

³⁵Gladilin, 74.

of faulting the doctors for their poor scientific practices that led Natashka to fall into a coma,³⁶ Natashka is led to think that science is a matter of making successful coincidences, “the medicine man want to brew a potion, the magician will spit on his finger and hold the wind, but both will claim categorically, “and that’s how it’s going to be!” And maybe it’s true?”³⁷

Thus, with nonsensical, isolated atomic logical statements and metaphors, he reasons himself into thinking that there is no point in the practice of science. For example, he takes the scientific statement “Everything on earth is regulated by cyclical processes on the sun”³⁸ as a hypothesis which anyone can make, and brings it to an absurd conclusion: “there are many hypotheses. Every person has their own one. But we must bring forth [and assert] something. What is the point to orient oneself with a crane in the sky, when we don’t know its habits?”³⁹ One can see that he is making a fast but fallacious logical turn here. Between the first statement - referring to the hypothetical nature of science, he moves rapidly and fallaciously to the second, which reduces the practice of science to the absurd metaphor of trying to orient oneself in the sky with the activity of a crane, which movements are unpredictable. While scientific statements may be based on hypotheses, they are based on empirical observations. By reducing them to a grammatical form - a hypothesis - he is reducing scientific statements based on empirical observation to a linguistic problem - a problem that lies in the fact that this statement is named a “hypothesis”. While all sciences start from hypotheses, and there is no way to foresee that this statement stands eternally true, his equation of science to the absurd picture of science as a practice of orienting

³⁶Gladilin, 66.

³⁷Gladilin, 80. „Der Mediziner wird ein Kraut brauen, der Zauberer wird auf seinen Finger spucken und ihn in den Wind halten, aber beide werden kategorisch behaupten: ‚So wird es sein!‘ Und vielleicht trifft es auch tatsächlich ein?“

³⁸Gladilin, 102. Alles auf der Erde wird durch zyklische Prozess auf der Sonne reguliert.“

³⁹Gladilin, 103. “Es gibt viele Hypothesen. Jeder hat seine eigene. Doch wir müssen etwas hervorbringen. Was für einen Sinn hat es, sich nach einem Kranich am Himmel zu orientieren, wenn wir seine Gewohnheiten nicht kenne?“

oneself with a bird in the sky is equally absurd, for he attacks science for taking the grammatical forms of hypotheses rather than science as a practice based on an accumulation of empirical observations. He is literally parodying the way he himself parodies his fellow colleagues' scientific practices in his own absurd and reductive atomic and logical statements: "There will be light," says God // it will be warm in the end of November", said his representative Martynov."⁴⁰ Of course a bird's habit may be unpredictable, as human beings are, but the lack of certainty does not mean we cannot know anything or have a high degree of certainty about the future, just as it is not normal to expect to wake up as a beetle in the morning. There are many certainties in our lives which we depend upon, such that we trust our parents not to suddenly murder us. So are sciences, built upon years of practice, not an absurd field. If we can, as Martynow claims, only be able to trust what is apparent in extreme proximity: "is it not simpler to go from the level of observing mice, which you could hold in your hand and see how it quivers?"⁴¹ Why can't we also question whether what we see before our eyes is true or not? For if earth functions as cyclical process is merely a hypothesis, how is what is apparent to us not merely an illusion?

While he claims that we should make claims of certainty based on things that can be easily observed, he himself of course falls prey to a mistrust of viewed reality, as he fails to recognize individuals as beings with faces, but interposes the human face onto that of buildings: "First they will remind me of particular faces - then everything will start shimmering and become blurred, there will be more faces, only fluctuating, ghostly apparitions, wave after wave,

⁴⁰Gladilin, 38. „Es wird Licht“, sagte der Herrgott// „Es werde warme Ende November“, sagte sein Stellvertreter Martynow.

⁴¹Gladilin, 103. "Ist es nicht einfacher, von der Meise auszugehen, da wir sie in der Hand haben und sehen, wie sie flattert?"

without end.”⁴² Departing from the U-Bahn, however, he starts seeing faces in buildings, “the new buildings stretch themselves like soldiers, with the same, obedient physiognomies./ the new market in Cheremuscki has Asiatic-cut eyes ”.⁴³

Because he has successfully convinced himself that reality is but linguistic constructions that can find their solutions through interpretation, the repetition of aphorisms thus becomes a trusted method with which he tries to solve his problems. When truth is inseparable from intuition, what is the difference between external truths (such as scientific statements), from truths, such as aphorisms, that he tells himself? Indeed, how is this statement less truer than any other scientific proposition, when scientific theories based on empirical observation cannot even be true? In an attempt to accept the harsh reality that he has to live with, he repeats the formulation that repeats the phrase “A man needs very little.” : “A man needs very little. If one explains to him something reasonably and refers to a classical example, then everything will be accepted.”⁴⁴ or “I am telling you the truth, the clean truth. Men need very little”.⁴⁵

Having convinced himself that truth merely takes a logical (or grammatical) form⁴⁶ of cause and effect, and since cause always fails to explain effect, he logically comes to the misguided conclusion that there is no truth to be known: “nothing is clear. We can recognize the consequence, but we cannot recognize the causes.”⁴⁷ Thus, logically, for the grammatical form of explanations is based on cause and effect, there is no point in asking questions and for

⁴²Gladilin, 13. “Zuerst werden Sie sich an einzelne Gesichter erinnern — dann wird alles verschwimmen, es wird keine Gesichter mehr geben, nur noch schwankende, geisterhafte Erscheinungen, Welle auf Welle, ohne Ende.“

⁴³Gladilin, 16. „Die Neubauten strecken sich wie Soldaten, mit den gleichen gehorsam Physiognomien./ Der neue Markt in Tscheremuscki hat einen asiatischen Augenschnitt.“

⁴⁴Gladilin, 24. „Ein Mensch braucht sehr wenig. Wenn man ihm etwas vernünftig erklärt und sich dabei auf die Klassiker beruft, wird er alles akzeptieren.“

⁴⁵Ibid.,,ich sage Ihnen die Wahrheit, die reine Wahrheit. Der Mensch braucht sehr wenig...

⁴⁶As in logical. See G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker’s Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity on Wittgenstein’s concept of Philosophical Grammar.

⁴⁷ Gladilin, 102. “Nichts ist klar. Wir erkennen Folgen, aber wir erkennen die Ursache nicht.”

explanations. Giving up his passionate faith in the sciences and his intellectual pursuits, he jumps back to his circle of futility, back to his wife, child, supermarket queues and long train journeys in Moscow of his daily Tätigkeiten: “one can asks limitless questions. Let's turn back around to our deeds.”⁴⁸ And of course, his attempt to resolve his life problems in grammatical forms fails, as he attempts to convince himself that he loves his family and his ordinary life with aphorisms. He writes, as a mortal unable to make it as a scientist, he must start in small steps to create worth in the world: “to start creating some sort of value for millions of millions of people, and so these millions begin with me with my two girls,⁴⁹ for “they cannot live without me, and me without them, and I cannot without them...without them I have no one and will not be needed by anyone.”⁵⁰ His worth in the world is defined by his family’s concrete need for him. Their existence literally depends on him, for neither Natashka nor his daughter earns any wages. He could give up his family and pursue a life with Ira, but “...I will again run back home. I have two girls - how should they otherwise (go on living) live without me?”⁵¹ By coming to this conclusion, he has found meaning and truth, “that is a primitive, simple truth, but these are the truths on which the whole world stands upon.”⁵²

Before the readers become lured deep into his poignant confession of love for his family, the book ends caustically with a shopping list Natashka had written, shaking the readers back to reality. A shopping list of only the most basic necessities of “butter, meat, sugar, mayonnaise,

⁴⁸Ibid. “Man kann bis zur Unendlichkeit Fragen stellen. Kehren wir zu unserer Tätigkeit zurück.”

⁴⁹Gladilin, 198. “[um] irgendeinen Wert für Millionen von Menschen dar[zu]stellen...so fangen diese Millionen von Menschen für mich bei meinen zwei Mädchen an.”

⁵⁰Ibid. “sie können nicht ohne mich leben, und ich kann es nicht ohne sie...ohne sie habe ich niemanden und ich werde von niemanden gebraucht.”

⁵¹Gladilin, 177. “...Ich werde wieder nach Hause zurücklaufen. Ich habe zwei Mädchen – wie soll sie denn ohne mich leben?”

⁵²Gladilin, 198. “Das ist eine primitive, einfache Wahrheit, aber darauf beruht alles auf dieser Welt.”

margarine, white bread, cigarettes”, he reminds the readers of the daily circumstances and the poverty that he is stuck in, in which pleasure, such as drinking beer, is something that he could scarcely afford. The book literally ends with the line: “in case there is still a bit of money left, but two more bottles of beer.”⁵³

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, both works show that the attempt to resolve real life problems with grammatical or linguistic strategies are doomed to failure. The problem of the failure of language or the mind to commensurate with the world is not uncommon and does not seem to be a symptom specific to postmodernism in late 20th century. For one, the characteristics of both *Tomorrow's Forecast* and *The Crying of Lot 49* share certainly repudiates Katherina Clark's deformation model of Russian literature. According to Clark, because “Socialist Realism has been the dominant mode in Soviet literature for the past fifty years,”⁵⁴ literature under Stalin led to a break with modernism and launched a development that cannot be described using the usual categories of cultural history. Thus, according to Clark, the deformation model views Soviet culture as an autarchic system that engenders a literature fundamentally different from and resisting comparison with that of the West.⁵⁵ For Clark, according to Eshelman, “the only way to escape from this “mode” would have been a return to modernism (which never occurred), or a rapprochement with Western literature, which was rejected by Soviet intellectuals.”⁵⁶ And yet,

⁵³ Gladilin, 200. “falls noch etwas Kleingeld übrig bliebe, auch zwei Flaschen Bier zu kaufen.

⁵⁴Raoul Eshelman, *Early Soviet Postmodernism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 15.

⁵⁵Eshelman, 14.

⁵⁶Eshelman, 15.

Russian literature rapproches in the two examples I have given in a similar time frame with similar literary characteristics.

Secondly, while the problem of mind and world may have been more compelling in this period of time, it is not exclusive to this historical period. Both Hoffmanstaal and Rilke, writers of Fin-de-Siecle Vienna have both dealt with themes of epistemology - the failure of language and world, or mind and world, to bridge. Many scenes in their work that echo those of Martynow's dissolving visual imagery in the U-Bahn and of buildings. In Hofmannsthal's *The Letter to Lord Chandos*, Lord Chandos, after being trapped too long in his own world of books, not only fails to communicate through words, but also fails to see objects in the world as integral parts. Losing conviction that his words meant anything, he found it impossible to speak, that words "crumbled"⁵⁷ in his mouth "like mouldy fungi". Incapable of comprehending words any more, he feels that trapped in an inner self. Trapped in the lens of his "inner self",⁵⁸ his view of the world becomes distorted:

My mind compelled me to view all things occurring in such conversations from an uncanny closeness. As once, through a magnifying glass, I had seen a piece of skin on my little finger look like a field full of holes and furrows, so I now perceived human beings and their actions. I no longer succeeded in comprehending them with the simplifying eye of habit. For me everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts; no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea.⁵⁹

No longer being able to associate things with words, he loses perspective as his vision of his world starts to disintegrate. Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge*, a Danish poet from a noble family who lives in isolation in Paris experiences the similar condition, which seen reality dissolves, and

⁵⁷Hugo Von Hofmannsthal and Joel Rotenberg, *The Lord Chandos letter and other writings* (New York: New York Review Books, 2005).

⁵⁸Hofmannsthal and Rotenberg.

⁵⁹Hofmannsthal and Rotenberg.

each miniscule detail in reality begins to register at a deeper level: "I'm learning to see. I don't know what it's about, but everything is registering in me at a deeper level and doesn't stop where it used to."⁶⁰ As he is alone, he gains a sharper self-consciousness: "There's a place within me that I wasn't aware of. What's going on there I don't know."⁶¹ In void of company, the tension in the silence makes him become more aware of his surroundings:

Those are the noises. But here there's something that's more terrible: the silence. I believe that sometimes when a great fire occurs you can get a moment of extreme tension: the water jets slacken off, the firemen no longer climb, nobody stirs. Soundlessly a black cornice edges forward up above; and a high wall, behind which flames are mounting, tilts, also without a sound. Everyone stands, shoulders hunched, tense, with the part of their faces above the eyes pressed into into furrows, waiting for the awful crash. That's how it is with the silence here.⁶²

Knowing that he is growing and experiencing life alone, he loses faith and the ability of words to convey who he is or how he has changed to other people, because his experiences cannot be fully conveyed with words:

I wrote a letter today and while I was writing it struck me that I've been here barely three weeks. Three weeks elsewhere--say, in the country--that could be like a day, here it's years. I'm definitely not going to write any more letters. What's the point of telling anyone that I'm changing? I haven't remained who I was, I'm different from who I was before; so, clearly I have no friends or acquaintances. And writing to strangers, to people who don't know me, is simply not possible.⁶³

While they are obviously not dealing with the same historical circumstances (such as the advancement of media technologies), both Rilke and Hofmannstaal wrote under the tensions of technological modernisation and war in the late 19th century. By drawing the similarities between these two seemingly different literary movements, I am not suggesting they lay the

⁶⁰Rainer Maria Rilke and Stephen Mitchell, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (New York: Random House, 1983).

⁶¹Rilke and Mitchell.

⁶²Rilke and Mitchell.

⁶³Rilke and Mitchell.

grounds of a new genre, but that perhaps the theme of seeing grammatically or the ways of seeing can be explored more fully through engaging with the philosophy of language and skepticism,⁶⁴ for the dimensions of their epistemological problems common to all these authors seem to lie deeper than, or as the two analyzed works have suggested, *beyond* words.

⁶⁴Such as through an examination of Wittgenstein's concept of *Aspektwechsel*, a philosopher of language and skepticism who has incidentally arose in the same period as Hofmannstaal and Rilke of Fin-de-siecle Europe.

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