

“The Trout Breaks the Ice” by Mikhail Kuzmin: Verse and Grammar

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Abstract: The author explores various compositional levels of the Russian modernist author Mikhail Kuzmin’s long poem “The Trout Breaks the Ice”. The levels are: (1) the grammatical tenses vs. the astronomical time (non-finite verb forms (imperative) are also assumed to indicate time); (2) the meters of this polymetric poem; (3) realistic vs. symbolic and (4) static vs. dynamic narrative modes. The analysis is done by the chapter, and the data are summarized in five tables. It turned out that certain features regularly co-occur, thus supporting the complex composition of the poem. In particular, the present tense and time regularly mark the realistic and static chapters written in various meters, whereas the past tense and time are specific to the realistic and dynamic chapters written in iambic pentameter. The article sheds new light on the compositional structure of Kuzmin’s poem and the general principles of poetic composition.

Keywords: grammar of poetry, tense and time, metrical semantics, poetic composition

Mikhail Kuzmin’s longer poem “The Trout Breaks the Ice” (“Форель разбивает лёд”, 1927) has provoked numerous comments and interpretations (see a summary in Panova 2012: 112–115). However, the verse structure of the whole text in its relation to the grammar of poetic language – and, in particular, to the composition and distribution of the verb forms – has never been a matter of special attention (compare the definitions of the meters of the poem in relations to their semantics in Panova 2012: 122–126; the description of the meters in Kuzmin’s poem was made by M. L. Gasparov, but it was published later: Gasparov 2015: 310).

Meanwhile, grammatical tenses seem to be of considerable importance for Kuzmin, especially in “The Trout”.¹ There are at least two indications of that importance. The first indication is the use of a verb in the present tense in the title, while in the Russian poetry of the nineteenth century titles

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¹ Compare other observations on verb forms in Kuzmin’s poetry: Malmstad 1989; Berson 2000.

containing verbs are very rare.² Verbs in the titles began to appear at the very end of the nineteenth century and – even more frequently – in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They appeared mostly in the first person singular, the past tense and the imperative,³ e.g.: “Скажи” (“Tell”, Viktor Gofman, 1902–1904), “Я люблю другого” (“I Love Another Man”, Valery Bryusov, 1896), “Не пришел на свиданье” (“He Did Not Come to the Date”, Aleksandr Blok, 1908). Poets also began to create titles with an overt subject and the predicate in a personal verb form, e.g.: “Корабли идут” (“The Ships are Going”, Blok, 1904), “Весы качнулись” (“The Balance Swung”, Bryusov, 1905), “Лепестки оживают” (“Petals Come to Life”, Igor Severyanin, 1908), “Скорбь воскрешает” (“The Grief Revives”, Maria Moravskaya, 1915), “Цех ест Академию” (“The Guild [of Poets] is Devouring the Academy [of Poets]”, Vladimir Ruast, 1909–1916).

In Kuzmin’s poetry, except “The Trout”, there are only six (!) more examples of verb forms in the titles:

1) “Плод зреет” (“The Fruit is Ripening”), a cycle of lyrical poems (1915–1917),

2) “Пушкин едет на дуэль” (“Pushkin is riding to the duel”, 1927, dubia), and headers of four short poems inside the cycle “Панорама с выносками” (“A Panorama with Footnotes”, 1926) from the book *The Trout Breaks the Ice* (1929)⁴:

3) “Мечты пристыжают действительность” (“The Dreams Shame the Reality”),

4) “Уединение питает страсти” (“The Solitude Nourishes Passions”),

5) “Темные улицы рожают темные чувства” (“Dark Streets Generate Dark Feelings”),

and 6) “Добрые чувства побеждают время и пространство” (“Kind Feelings Conquer Time and Space”).

² The exceptions are the headers that describe or summarize a poem and its addressee (e.g. “Надпись на день коронавания ее величества 1754 года, где добродетели ее прекрасной и великой горе уподобляются” [“An inscription written on the occasion of the coronation day of Her Majesty, 1754, in which her virtues are compared to a beautiful and great mountain”], Mihail Lomonosov, 1754; “К матери, которая сама воспитывает детей своих” [“To a mother who brings up her children herself”], Gavriil Derzhavin, 1807), and incipits (i.e. headers that contain the first line of the poem).

³ I am truly grateful to Boris Orekhov who prepared a special programme that makes it possible to work with the Poetic sub-corpus of the Russian National Corpus (ruscorpora.ru) and collect all examples of verbs in the poetic titles.

⁴ Not to be confused with the eponymous poem, which opens this book.

All these titles contain the third person present verb forms and consist of a grammatical subject and a predicate, similarly to "The Trout Breaks the Ice"⁵

The second point that should be taken into consideration as we approach the grammatical composition of the poem is the repetition of the whole title phrase throughout the text. Appearing in some places on different levels of the development of the plot, the sentence about the fish becomes the main motif of this poem, because it is a narrative poem about a trout that breaks up, or is breaking up, ice. In the table below we see how the title sentence is used in the episodes of "The Trout".

Table 1. The Words from the Title in the Chapters of the Poem

First Introduction	a) Ударь, форель, проворней! = Strike faster, trout!	a) Imperative
	b) Форель разбивает лед. = The trout breaks the ice.	b) Present
Second Introduction		
1	a) ...Как будто рыба бьет хвостом о лед. = ...As if a fish is beating on ice with its tail.	a) Present (in comparison)
	b) Как сильно рыба двинула хвостом! = How powerfully the fish had moved its tail!	b) Past (single movement)
2		
3		

⁵ Notice the proverbial or sentential nature of Kuzmin's titles containing verbs in the present tense: here the imperfective aspect adds to the present tense the semantic component of 'being out of time' (see Paducheva 1996: 25; cf. Bondarko 1971: 69–71), of generalization and of a rule. In the context of such titles, the phrase "Форель разбивает лед" ("The trout breaks the ice") means that it "always" happens, rather than it is happening "at the present moment". Compare the proverbial character of the poet Leonid Trefolev's titles: "На бедного Макара и шишки валятся" ("All the cones are falling on poor Makar", 1872; the meaning of the proverb is 'troubles always befall an unlucky person'), "На то и щука в море, чтоб карась не дремал" ("The pike is in the sea to keep the carp awake", 1877; the proverb's meaning is 'dangers keep people on the alert'). This manner might be a throw-back to the playwright Alexander Ostrovsky's practice of giving proverbial titles to his famous plays: *На всякого мудреца довольно простоты* ('Even a wise man stumbles'), *Бедность не порок* ('Poverty is no sin'). Another meaning of the imperfective aspect of the present tense that may be implied by Kuzmin's title is "the habitual present", which is generally used for repeated actions. Here it refers to the events of a particular season of the year (this subject deserves a special study).

4		
5		
6		
7	Серебряная бьется Форель, форель, форель!.. = The silver [fish] is thrashing – The trout, trout, trout!..	Present Continuous
8	...И бьюсь, как рыба! = I exert myself in vain (like a fish)!	Present (in idiom)
9		
10	a) В воде форель вилась меланхолично И мелодично била о стекло. = In the water the trout was gyrating melancholically and melodiously beating the glass. b) Она пробьет его, не сомневайтесь. = It [the trout] will break it through, don't doubt. c) А рыба бьет тихонько о стекло... = And the fish is beating the glass softly... d) А рыба бьет, и бьет, и бьет, и бьет. And the fish is beating, and beating, and beating.	a) Past Continuous b) Future c) Present Continuous d) Present Continuous
11	Форель, я вижу, разбивает лед. = The trout is breaking the ice, as I see	Present Continuous
12	То моя форель последний Разбивает звонко лед. = That is my trout which is sonorously breaking the last ice.	Present Continuous
Conclusion	я верю, Что лед разбить возможно для форели. = I trust that it is possible for a trout to break ice.	Present in the main sentence and a modal verb in the subordinate clause

The verb *разбивать* ('to break') varies in the tense forms (present, past, future), in the mood (indicative and imperative), in grammatical forms (personal forms, infinitive and reflexive forms) and in its morphemic composition, with prefixes: *раз-*, *про-*, and with a zero prefix. The phrase *Форель разбивает*

лед varies also lexically: the verb *двинуть* ('to move forcibly') can be understood as a synonym of the verb *бить* ('to hit'). It also varies in terms of the syntactic construction in which it is used: it may occur either in independent sentences or in subordinate clauses. It expresses several grammatical meanings of tense, aspect and modality. Importantly, in the "Conclusion" Kuzmin reveals a second grammatical meaning of *разбивать*, which in Russian has perhaps a component of modality, so that the sentence *Форель разбивает лед* means not only 'the trout is breaking/breaks the ice', but also 'the trout is able to break the ice' (the same meaning is expressed in the finale of the poem: *...что лед разбить возможно для форели* '...that it is possible for the trout to break the ice').

Two key words of this sentence, *форель* (trout) and *разбивает* (breaks), are repeated in two instances: "Серебряная бьется / Форель, форель, форель" ('The silver fish is thrashing / The trout, trout, trout') и "А рыба бьет, и бьет, и бьет, и бьет" ('And the fish is beating, and beating, and beating'). Such a variation of the motif makes it a leitmotif, in a musical sense of the term associated with Richard Wagner, who coined it. This is why I find it productive to compare the elaboration of the themes in "The Trout" with music technique (compare Malmstad, Shmakov 1976: 146–147, 151, 154–155; Shmakov 1989: 34–35 et passim; B. Gasparov 1989: 93–95, 97; Dmitriev 2016: 136–144). Similarly to a piece of music, the *trout*-motif runs through the whole text accumulating predicates and motifs of actions.

As one can easily notice, the main verb *разбивать* 'break' is mostly used in the Present tense. Furthermore, there is an increased use of this verb in the second half of the poem. The verb occurs most frequently (four cases) in the "Tenth Stroke" – the climax of the lyrical plot. After that, in the Eleventh and Twelfth "Strokes", the *trout*-sentences appear only in the Present tense, reinforced by the authorial "I see" and the possessive pronoun *my* ("my trout"), as if the poet wants to convince the audience that the story about the trout did actually happen, that it is real and true.

The dynamics of the key verb in the poem seems to partially correspond to the use of other verb forms throughout the poem. To prove or disprove this hypothesis, I will analyze the distribution in the poem of the tense forms of verbs other than *разбивать*. I will also try to find a correlation between grammar and other domains of poetic form in the text.

The principles of the analysis of the verb system are as follows. In order to find a link between grammar and verse, I had to define one predominant tense in each chapter, or "stroke" (*удар*), as they are called by Kuzmin. There are, of course, other poems by Kuzmin (and not only by Kuzmin) where it is impossible to decide which tense predominates: tenses may vary, so all their occurrences can be of equal importance and in equal number. Such is the use

of tense forms, for example, in some fragments of “Lazarus” (1928), particularly Episode Four (“Edith”). There is a quick change of tenses in “The Sixth Stroke” of “The Trout”. However, in most episodes it is possible to single out the predominant tense. To formalize the analysis, I will formulate four rules.

Rule 1. In complicated cases, where there are few or no tense indications, I used the criterion of a “point of reference”, that is, the position of the observer in the narration. As the whole poem is written in the first person singular, one can easily grasp the point in time from which the storyteller sees the action. The narrator can describe the situation as going on in the present or in the past, as “close” to him or as “distant” from him, and this *point de vue* does not normally change throughout the chapter.⁶

Rule 2. While defining the predominant tense, we disregard verbs in subordinate clauses.

Rule 3 requires that we disregard verbs in direct speech if the utterances occupy a relatively short space in the text (no more than 25% of the lines).

Rule 4 describes the peculiar features of the Russian tense system. In Russian, each of the three tenses, Past, Present and Future, has a variety of meanings, which also depend on the aspect of the verb. In fact, there are quite numerous meanings of tenses defined in different ways (in the standard grammar, the functional grammar, and the semantics and logics of grammar; see Bondarko 1971; Shvedova 1980: 583–611 [§§ 1386–1454], 626–634 [§§ 1490–1515]; Bondarko 1990: 11–24; Paducheva 1996: esp. 10 sq., 286 sq.; Krasukhin 1997; Knyazev 1997; Panova 2000). For the aims of this research it is not necessary to use such detailed systems of describing the Russian verb. I used only two narrow meanings of the Past and Present tenses: the Russian equivalents of the English Present Perfect and of the English Present Continuous. The meaning of the English Present Perfect is expressed in Russian by the form of the Past tense of the verb in the perfective aspect as well as lexically, syntactically and contextually. If such an instance of the Past form occurred, I marked it as an equivalent to the English Present Perfect, and I counted this verb with other cases of the Present. Let us take an example. The “Second Introduction” begins with the following lines:

⁶ As we deal with a work of fiction and not with everyday speech, we cannot interpret any reference to action as a real “moment of speech”, that is, to the actual moment when Kuzmin composed the poem. We are talking here about the references inside the *plan de l’histoire* (Émile Benveniste), inside that “epic *tunc*” (Yuri S. Maslov), where the fictional “I” and his dramatis personae are situated (see Bondarko 1990: 11–12). Thus, the distinction between the present and past in the poem coincides with the distinction between “synchronic and retrospective points of reference”, as described in Paducheva 1996: 12–15.

Непрошенные гости
 Сошлись ко мне на чай...
 (= Unexpected guests
 have come to have tea with me...)

Here the verb *сошлись* is in the Past form, but it has the meaning of Present Perfect: '... guests have come to me'. Other verbs in this fragment are either in the Present, or in the equivalent of the English Present Perfect.⁷ That is why I consider the predominant tense here to be the Present.⁸ Imperative mood has also been interpreted as referring to the Present.⁹ The Russian equivalent of the English Present Continuous has the same semantic element of an action that lasts at the moment of speech, which follows from the context.¹⁰ Thus, the semantic feature "Present" follows either from the grammatical form of the

⁷ In Russian, the perfective meaning is one of the regularly expressed additional meanings of the past tense of the verbs in the perfective aspect (совершенный вид). In such cases the action itself refers to the past, but the results of this action refer to the later time, present or future. Viktor V. Vinogradov noticed that there are numerous examples where "the idea of a present result or a condition definitely overweighs the thought about an action performed in the past" (Vinogradov 1947: 565, quoted in Bondarko 1971: 96). In a narrow context verbs in the past tense with a perfective meaning may stand next to verbs in the present (Bondarko 1971: 95–97). I relied on these and other distinctive signs of the perfective meaning, as defined by Bondarko (1971: 97–98) and Paducheva (1996: 54, 57–58, 86–87, 294–295), to identify the meaning of the past tense verb forms in "The Trout".

⁸ Relating his real dream that underlies "The Second Introduction", Kuzmin mostly uses Present: "The room is new, big but very solitary [...] I am alone. However, the silence is full of sounds. The doors are extremely small and far. Music. Suddenly – lots of mice and Litovkin, a ballet dancer who had cut his throat, and now, as a Lilliputian, is playing the flute, and the mice are dancing. I am looking at them with an interest and a sort of fear. There is a knocking at the door. [...] This is a guest. [The guest is] unfamiliar; I remember something, vaguely. [...] There is something I do not like, something that fills me with fear and disgust" (quoted in Bogomolov 1995: 176–177). In this fragment, the "present of narration" with its specific meaning is realized (on настоящее изложения see Bondarko 1971: 72–73).

⁹ Russian imperative has no morphologic category of tense, but the action expressed by a verb in the imperative refers either to the future or to the present (like in: *закрой окно* 'close the window' or *работай дальше* 'go on working, continue to work'). At the same time the basic semantics of expressing and performing the will (волеизъявление, see Bondarko 1990: 199–200) with different modalities (desire, advice, prohibition, etc.) is firmly connected to a given communicative situation (ibid.: 92), that is, to "now".

¹⁰ In the Russian descriptive grammar this regular type of meaning is mostly called the "actual present" (настоящее актуальное). It has two main semantic elements: a definite time point and the attribution to the present. If imperfective aspect is used, it acquires the semantics of a process (see Bondarko 1971: 65).

verb in the present tense, or from the meaning of the present which is not expressed grammatically but is revealed in the context.

“The Trout” is divided into 12 poems-chapters preceded by two poetic “Introductions” and followed by a “Conclusion”. The table below presents the distribution of tense forms in the chapters. Only the predominant tense is indicated.

Table 2. The Distribution of Verbal Tense Forms in the Chapters

First Introduction	Present
Second Introduction	Present
1	Past
2	Present
3	Present
4	Present
5	Past
6	Present
7	Present
8	Past
9	Present
10	Past
11	Present
12	Present
Conclusion	Present

At the first glance most of the chapters refer to the Present as the “main” tense. However, the semantics of the Present tense varies. Somewhere it is analogous to the English Present Indefinite used for everyday events or for habitual actions. In some cases it is analogous to the English Present Continuous; this ongoing present is used when something very important for the whole story is happening. The author brings himself and the reader to the center of the event described in the utterance. We find it in the “Second Stroke”, which is very dramatic, featuring horse-riding, shots, and a mysterious castle, where blood is flowing and the blood oath ritual is reminiscent of a murder (Paperno 1989: 67–68).

We also find the ongoing present in the “Tenth” and in the “Eleventh Stroke”, where the story’s climax is located. The “Tenth Stroke” begins in the Past, as a distant narration, but after a while the author transfers himself and the reader into the Past that changes into the Present, so that in the “Eleventh

"Stroke" the resurrection of a drowned man is happening in front of our eyes. We hear what they are talking about, and their replies are all in the equivalent of Present Continuous, for they are commenting on the immediate present moment:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ты дышишь? Ты живешь? Не призрак ты? - Я – первенец зеленой пустоты. - Я слышу сердца стук, теплеет кровь... - Румяней щеки, исчезает тлен... - Таинственный свершается обмен... - Плотнеет выветрившаяся ткань... - Вскожу на следующую ступень! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you breathing? Are you living? Are you not an apparition? - I am the first born of the green void. - I can hear the heart beating, the blood is getting warm... - The cheeks are getting rosy, the decay is disappearing... - A mysterious exchange is taking place... - The weathered, worn out tissue is getting dense... - I am stepping onto the next rung! |
|---|---|

The last – twelfth – "Stroke" manifests the triumph of the Present: the partners are together at the moment of speaking, and this is the only chapter where there is no other tense form. Here we encounter one of the basic features of Kuzmin's artistic vision: his great concern about the Present. This point of his aesthetic theory was described by John Malmstad, who wrote that it is "not the past or future" that "always concerns Kuzmin", but "the absolute unrepeatable uniqueness of the present" (Malmstad 1989: 135).

We can see now that the Present of the title phrase, varying in different chapters, performs two functions at once: it both represents an independent theme of the present (which perhaps symbolizes the truth) and serves as a contrast to, and later leads to, the tense forms of other verbs. In the "First Stroke", it is a contrast to the general Past of the fragment, and it also anticipates the Present of the "Second", the "Third" and the "Forth Strokes". In the "Tenth Stroke", the present of the lines "And the fish is beating the glass softly" and "And the fish is beating, and beating, and beating" rushes into the narrative in the Past, turns it into the Present and then, in the next fragment, transfers the narration to the final – victorious – Present.

From the versification point of view, Kuzmin's poem is a polymetric composition, each chapter, or "stroke" of which is written in a different meter. Verse forms change from one chapter to the next, and, like in classical examples of Russian polymetry, the very fact of this change is relevant.¹¹ Kuzmin uses polymetricity to tell the story, so he follows the tradition that goes back to the poetry of Nikolai Nekrasov (and perhaps to even earlier poetry). Nekrasov's memorable combination of polymetry with the changes in plot and narrative style contributed a lot to the formation of this tradition (Rudnev 1971: 216). Kuzmin's orientation toward the music polymetry is also possible but we need more evidence to confirm this hypothesis. Almost every poem in the 1929 book (*The Trout Breaks the Ice*) is polymetric. Therefore, the narrative polymetry in the text under consideration is typical of the Russian poetic tradition, as well as of Kuzmin's 1929 book.

This is not an extraordinary set of meters: there are only two cases of non-classical meters, the rest is iamb, which is abundant, and trochee, which appears only twice, closer to the end of the poem. It is worth noting that unrhymed iambic pentameter appears five times, and it always accompanies a narration about some events in the past, the main story of the poem. This function of iambic pentameter is found in Kuzmin's other polymetric compositions, for example in one of the earliest "Харикл из Милета" ("Charicles from Miletus", 1904), in "Новый Гуль" ("The New Hull", 1924) and in the epic poem "Лазарь" ("Lazarus", 1928).

If we now correlate meters with verb forms, we discover that unrhymed iambic pentameter always correlates with the Past tense, whereas iambic trimeter in both cases correlates with the Present tense. Two fragments in iambic trimeter, "Second Introduction" and "The Seventh Stroke", correlate not only metrically, but also by the number of lines (24), the theme of a bathing/drowned man, and some oppositions: interior (room) vs. exterior (nature); "faded" eyes vs. "offended" eyes; the "gloss" of shabby clothes vs. the glimmering "mica" of the naked body; memory (память) vs. recollections (воспоминание); Dorian vs. Narcissus. Not only "The Second Introduction", but also "The Seventh Stroke" reads as lyrics for Schubert's romance "Die Forelle" (cf. Shmakov 1989: 35). The latter, and not the former, could be a better parallel to the content of Schubert's piece, to the lyrics of Ch. F. D. Schubart.

¹¹ The meter of a fragment does not change in the next fragment only twice ("Strokes" 3–4 and 10–11). Indeed, meter in the narrow sense of the term (iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter) does not change in the following fragment, while the line endings, rhymes and strophes do change. In this way, the author achieves different acoustic impressions of the adjacent chapters.

Everything mentioned above may prove the hypothesis that the co-occurrence of time and meter in these two fragments is not accidental.

Table 3. Meters used in "The Trout"

First Introduction	Syllabic verse (7 syllables per line) or isosyllabic dolnik (trimeter), unrhymed ¹²
Second Introduction	Iambic trimeter, quatrains, half-rhymed <i>XaXa</i> (alternation of feminine and masculine endings, feminine lines unrhymed)
1	Iambic pentameter, unrhymed
2	Logaoedic verse (two anapaestic feet + an iamb in the same line; isomorphic to dolnik trimeter), sixains (6-line-stanzas), <i>AAxBBx</i> (masculine lines unrhymed)
3	Iambic tetrameter, quatrains, cross-rhymed <i>aBaB</i> (alternation of masculine and feminine endings)
4	Iambic tetrameter, huitains (8-line-stanzas) with sporadic rhymes, masculine endings
5	Iambic pentameter, unrhymed
6, subtitled "A Ballad"	Iambic tetrameter regularly alternating with trimeter, cross-rhymed <i>abab</i> (masculine endings)
7	Iambic trimeter, half-rhymed <i>XaXa</i> (alternation of feminine and masculine endings, feminine lines unrhymed)
8	Iambic pentameter, unrhymed
9	Trochaic pentameter <i>AbAb</i> + the concluding lines <i>AA</i> + a septaine (7-line-stanza) of iambic tetrameter, monorhyme <i>aaaaaaa</i> (masculine endings)

¹² There is a controversy in defining the meter of "The First Introduction". It is very close to dolnik if we admit missing syllables between ictuses and a variety of ictuses per line (2, 3, 4) or extra stressed syllable in a line. Actually, only two (adjacent) lines violate the metrical pattern of a dolnik trimeter: "*Chem krúche szhimáeshsja – / Zvúk rézche, vozvrát drúzhy*". In the first line there are two metrical stresses instead of three, and in the second line a syllable is omitted between adjacent ictuses, creating a zero inter-ictic interval (*vozvrát drúzhy*); the first word (*zvúk*) could be regarded as bearing an extrametrical stress. M. L. Gasparov described it as an example of dolnik trimeter with violations (Gasparov 2015: 310). Although James Bailey believed that the absence of a syllable between stresses is a rare (and therefore admissible) exception (Bailey 2004: 311; cf. 1981: 116), the interpretation of the meter of "The First Introduction" as dolnik seems to be overcomplicated. It is easier and more natural to interpret isosyllabic lines with arbitrary placement of stresses as syllabic verse.

10	Iambic pentameter, unrhymed
11	Iambic pentameter, rhymed couplets with masculine endings
12	Trochaic tetrameter, quatrains, cross-rhymed <i>AbAb</i> (alternation of feminine and masculine endings)
Conclusion	Iambic pentameter, unrhymed

“The Trout” is among those of Kuzmin’s polymetric poems where the grammatical tense, or set of tenses, changes with the change of the meter. Apart from “The Trout” it occurs in such poems as “Charicles from Miletus”, “Lazarus”, “Зеркальным золотом вращаясь...” (1923), and “Встала заря над прорубью...” (1923). At the same time quite often, in his polymetric compositions of the 1920s, Kuzmin prefers not to change the time setting with the change of the meter, and in these cases he works mostly with the Present tense (“В осеннюю рваную стужу”, 1923; “Ко мне, скорее, Теодор и Конрад...”, 1924; “Пальцы дней”, 1925; “Панорама с выносками”, 1926; “Для Августа”, 1927). Against the background of the 1929 book of poems, *The Trout Breaks the Ice*, the eponymous poem and with “Lazarus” – the two narrative poems at the beginning and at the end of the book – stand out with their successive change of tenses in every chapter.

Yet it is still not quite possible to affirm that the change of tenses depends on the change of meters, or vice versa; probably, other features played their role. To see their possible influence, two more parameters dealing with the idea of time were included into the analytical description of the poem. These are the symbolic vs. realistic planes of a fragment, and its static vs. dynamic character.

Scholars have previously written about an interrelation of two visions in “The Trout”: poetry of objects/things vs. mysticism and religion, plot-building elements (images) vs. symbolic, mysterious and mythological images (Malmstad, Shmakov 1976: 133, 161–164), objective vs. subjective existence, classic vs. barbaric, the real vs. the occult, physical vs. ideal, the word as a thing vs. the word as a symbol (слово-вещь vs. слово-символ, see B. Gasparov 1989: 106, 110), this world vs. the other world (Paperno 1989: 61, 70; cf. Babayeva 1996: 129–131). I describe these oppositions as realizations of one dichotomy: realistic vs. symbolic planes. They may be combined in one chapter; however I think it possible to interpret different chapters as more or less symbolic or more or less realistic. I consider to be “realistic” every fragment that tells the main story as if it were true. In such fragments we find a narrator with his “I” and in his ordinary world. All the rest is “symbolic”, including the *trout*-theme.

Table 4. Symbolic and Realistic Planes of the Poem

First Introduction	symbolic
Second Introduction	realistic
1	realistic
2	symbolic
3	realistic
4	realistic
5	realistic
6	symbolic
7	symbolic
8	realistic
9	realistic + symbolic
10	realistic / symbolic
11	realistic / symbolic
12	realistic
Conclusion	realistic

One more parameter that could be related to the verb forms is the distinction between static and dynamic scenes. There are chapters in “The Trout” where nothing new is really happening. The situation remains the same in the last lines of a metrical fragment compared to the first line of the same fragment. I call such chapters static. Dynamic chapters are those that develop the plot and tell a story. The situation changes from the first lines of a fragment to its last lines. The distribution of static and dynamic fragments throughout the poem is presented in the table below.

Table 5. Static and Dynamic Chapters of the Poem

First Introduction	static
Second Introduction	static
1	dynamic
2	dynamic
3	static
4	dynamic (an event at the end)
5	dynamic
6	dynamic (a ballad)
7	static
8	dynamic
9	static
10	dynamic
11	dynamic
12	static
Conclusion	static

The static principle may have come to “The Trout” from the theatricality of the poem. The stage-settings and the exposition of the play do not move the action on but only present the actors, the situation and the plot. It is worth pointing out that in one of the draft versions of the poem the “First” and the “Second” introductions were called “The First Bow” and “The Second Bow”, referring to theatrical bows (although a walkdown is usually a final bow); and “The Conclusion” was initially called “The Exit”, i.e. ‘a walkdown’ or ‘a curtain call’. Many chapters of the poem begin with a kind of stage settings: there are details of a landscape or of an interior, names of dramatis personae and their typical occupations, descriptions of situations; and only in the second half or at the end of a chapter the author tells us something new that is happening. The static elements also correspond to the author’s intentions “to depict twelve months” (“двенадцать месяцев изобразить”), but the desire to tell the story violates this intention; as Kuzmin says, “everything is mixed up”. Accordingly, dynamic and static episodes alternate.

Table 6 below combines all the features together.

Table 6. Distinctive Features of the Chapters of the Poem

Chapter	Length (num- ber of lines)	Meter	Sym(bolic) vs. Real(istic)	Static vs. Dynamic	Tense
1st Intro	12	7-syllabic (dolnik trimeter?)	sym	static	present
2nd Intro	24	iambic trimeter	real	dynamic	present
1	44	iambic pentameter, unrhymed	real	dynamic	past
2	36	logaoedic verse (dolnik trimeter?)	sym	dynamic	present
3	20	iambic tetrameter	real	static	present
4	24	iambic tetrameter	real	dynamic	present
5	21	iambic pentameter, unrhymed	real	dynamic	present/ past
6 (a ballad)	92	iambic tetrameter + trimeter (regular alternation)	sym	dynamic	present/ past
7	24	iambic trimeter	sym	static	present
8	49	iambic pentameter, unrhymed	real	dynamic	past
9	29	trochaic pentameter + iambic tetrameter	real + sym.	static	present
10	89	iambic pentameter, unrhymed	real / sym	dynamic	past/ present
11	16	iambic pentameter	real / sym	dynamic	present
12	28	trochaic tetrameter	real	dynamic	present
Conclusion	16	iambic pentameter, unrhymed	real	static	present

First and foremost, we see a correlation between different layers of the text poetics.

1) [Green]. The Past tense and the narration in most cases correlate not only with iambic pentameter, as we have already found out, but also with the realistic plane and dynamic scenes (Ch. 1, 5, 8, 10).

2) [Purple]. The Present tense regularly occurs in the realistic and static chapters (The Second Introduction, Ch. 3, 9, 12).

3) [Blue]. Symbolic chapters tend to be dynamic and to be narrated in the Present (Ch. 2, 6, 10, 11).

4) [Yellow]. There are two more symbolic fragments, also in the Present, but static (The First Introduction, Ch. 7).

Fragment 9 is in its major part realistic, so it could be marked as having the already occurred combination of features, “realistic – static – present”.

Secondly, there is a remarkable alternation of chapters as combinations of distinctive features. The blue lines always follow the green ones, that is, the plot unfolds first as a story about real past events, and then continues as a symbolic scene in the Present. Twice the third set of features (no color) precedes the “green” and “blue”. It means that at first the narrator presents realistic events in the Present, after that he looks back and again presents “real” events, but in the Past, and finally gives them a symbolic interpretation. If we consider “The Ninth Stroke” to be mostly realistic, and if we believe that the “purple” chapters initiate the compositional “rhythm”, then we would receive three equal sequences of combinations of features: “realistic – static – present” scenes are followed, first, by realistic-dynamic narration of past events, and then continued by a “symbolic – dynamic – present” state of affairs. However, it would be disputable to include the fragment from the Introduction into the contents of the main story. It is tempting to interpret these three, or even four, steps in the development of the plot as corresponding to three or four seasons, remembering about Kuzmin’s initial intention “to depict 12 months”, but this subject requires special investigation.

Therefore, the interrelation of different features and their more or less regular repetition may prove several points:

1) The features chosen for the analysis are not fortuitous, but distinctive indeed.

2) Tense forms correlate not only with the meters but also with other domains of poetic form.

3) Tense forms, the meter, the characters of the narration form the compositional structure of the whole text.¹³

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