

# The history of humanities as reflected in the evolution of K. Vaginov's novels

**Ekaterina Velmezova**

Faculté des lettres, Bâtiment Anthropole (bureau 5096),  
Université de Lausanne,  
Quartier UNIL-Dorigny, CH-1015 Lausanne, Suisse / Switzerland  
e-mail: Ekaterina.Velmezova@unil.ch

**Abstract.** In the late 1920s – early 1930s, the Russian poet and novelist Konstantin Vaginov (1899–1934) wrote four novels which reproduce various discourses pertaining to the Russian humanities (philosophy, psychology, linguistics, study of literature) of that time. Trying to go back to the source of the corresponding theories and “hidden” quotations by identifying their authors allows us to include Vaginov’s prose in the general intellectual context of his epoch. Analysing Vaginov’s prose in the light of the history of ideas enables us to understand how a number of philological and philosophical trends were interpreted by particular groups of Soviet intellectuals (for instance, writers and poets who were Vaginov’s contemporaries). Besides, it allows us to propose a new interpretation of Vaginov’s novels and their evolution which corresponds to his perception of humanities around him: their many tendencies and peculiarities become unacceptable for the writer in the 1930s.

## 1. From the search of prototypes to the search of ideas

Between the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Russian poet and novelist Konstantin Vaginov (1899–1934) wrote four novels: *Kozlinaya pesn'* (*The Goat Song*, published in its entirety in 1928), *Trudy i dni Svistonova* (*The Works and Days of Svistonov*, published in 1929), *Bambochada* (*Bambocciada*, published in 1931) and *Garpagoniana* (*Harpagoniana*, written in 1933, but published only in 1983). All these novels are considered to be among the so-called “literary works with keys” (cf. Ivanov 2000), i.e. works with easily recognizable prototypes. Much has already been written about the prototypes of Vaginov’s characters: for instance, philologists have considered Vaginov’s characters as

being “copied from life” [*spisany s natury*] (Gerasimova 2008: 12). Nevertheless, one should now admit the absence of any one-to-one correspondence between the characters of Vaginov’s novels and real people. If, for instance, it is often said that Teptyolkin’s prototype was L. Pumpyanskij<sup>1</sup> (sometimes P. Medvedev is also mentioned<sup>2</sup>), Misha Kotikov can be “identified” not only with Medvedev, but also with V. Voloshinov and P. Luknickij. In the Philosopher, there are traits of M. Bakhtin, A. Mejer, S. Alekseev-Askol’dov, while certain particular features of Vaginov himself have been “incarnated” either in the Unknown Poet, or in Svistonov and Evgenij Felinlein (the latter character seems to have embodied also some traits of O. Tizengauzen and S. Muhin).

Therefore, one can propose a somewhat different approach to Vaginov’s novels, which will presuppose an analysis of various discourses pertaining to the Russian humanities of the 1920s–30s. Vaginov’s novels are riddled with quotations and theories of thinkers of his time and trying to go back to their source by identifying their authors will allow us to include Vaginov’s prose in the general intellectual context of his epoch. It is only in this sense that we shall discuss the prototypes of Vaginov’s characters, without focusing much on their biographical details. In this way, the notion of prototype will be considerably restricted (otherwise, one could infinitely extend the potential number of persons whose features could have been reflected in one or another literary character).

Vaginov’s novels are difficult to study from this point of view already due to the fact that small fragments of quotations and theories are spread out through the texts, rather than “concentrated” in more or less extensive extracts as in

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the surname *Teptyolkin* itself, as a designation of something negative, came to Vaginov from Pumpyanskij (Nikolaev 2000a: 23), cf. the following quotation: “[...] perhaps, Teptyolkin himself made up his unbearable surname [...]” (Vaginov 2008: 28). Later on, referring to Vaginov’s novels, we shall indicate only the numbers of pages in the edition Vaginov 2008. The English translation of *The Goat Song (Satyr Chorus)* is, in case of the majority of quotations, by Chris Lovett, available at <http://www.nnnonline.org/vaginov/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Among other more or less established correspondences of this kind, let us mention the following: Kostya Rotikov – I. Lihachev, the poet September – V. Mart, Mar’ya Petrovna Dalmatova – M. Yudina, Svechin – S. Kolbas’ev, Asfodeliev – P. Medvedev, Troitsyn – Vs. Rozhdestvenskij, Psihachev – B. Zubakin, Lokonov – A. Egunov, Toropulo – L. Savinov, Zaevratskij – N. Gumilev, Varen’ka Ermilova – Lidiya Ivanova, etc.

some other literary works.<sup>3</sup> In this article (which does not claim to be an exhaustive treatment because of its limited volume – therefore we shall only set up some landmarks for a future study of a larger scope in which these problems will be analysed), we shall concentrate, first of all, on various researches and theories pertaining to Russian humanities in the 1920s–30s, as they were reflected in Vaginov's novels – or, more precisely, in the evolution of these four novels.<sup>4</sup> This way, we shall study the “real [...] dialogue” of Vaginov's novels with their “time” (Bakhtin 1997–... [1959–1960], V: 324). This direction of analysis has recently been chosen by some Vaginov specialists. For example, O. Shindina (2010) has found some parallels between Vaginov's novels and certain ideas and theories of those who are counted among the members of the so-called “Bakhtin Circle”<sup>5</sup> (Bakhtin,<sup>6</sup> Pumpyanskij, etc.). Shindina insisted particularly on the fact that not only was Vaginov as a writer and poet under the influence of their discussions, but that he could himself have influenced the process of formation of their theories, too.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, in V. Kaverin's novel *Skandalist, ili Vechera na Vasil'evskom ostrove* (*The Troublemaker, or Evenings on the Vasil'evskij Island* [1928]).

<sup>4</sup> Evolution of Vaginov's prose as such has already been studied (cf. for instance Nikol'skaya 1991; Tichomirova 2000; Gerasimova 2008, etc.); in this article, we shall include it in a larger context of the history of ideas.

<sup>5</sup> The (in)adequacy of this expression to the real historical situation is now discussed (cf. for example Sériot 2010), which explains the fact that we shall use inverted commas mentioning this Circle in our work. Among members of this Circle there were M. Bakhtin, P. Medvedev, V. Voloshinov, L. Pumpyanskij, I. Sollertinskij, M. Kagan, B. Zubakin, M. Yudina, A. Mejer, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin and Vaginov got acquainted in 1924. At that time, Bakhtin was working on the problems of Menippean satire, considering a “carnival perception” of the world as one of the peculiarities of this genre. It explains partly Bakhtin's interest in Vaginov's literary works: Bakhtin appreciated Vaginov's novels highly and considered him as a “true carnival writer” (Nicol'skaya 1991: 8). Sometimes the theme of the carnival appears manifestly in Vaginov's novels – for instance, when, in *The Goat Song*, Mar'ya Petrovna finds herself outside after a night service in the St. Isaac's Cathedral, “it seemed that she was taking part in a carnival procession” (p. 166). Cf. also Shindina 1989 about the influence of the Bakhtinian conception of carnival on Vaginov, and Shindina 2007 about other “carnivalesque” aspects of Vaginov's prose (in a more general sense, in all Vaginov's novels the theme of the carnival correlates with a mixing of high and low, tragic and comic aspects of life). With time, Vaginov became a friend not only of Bakhtin, but also of some other members of the “Bakhtin Circle”. (However, after the publication of *The Goat Song*, Vaginov quarrelled with some of his acquaintances, including Pumpyanskij, who had recognized themselves in the personages of this novel and did not like it.)

This trend of analysis seems important, first of all, for the fact that during a long time, in spite of the growing interest in the works of the “Bakhtin Circle”, Bakhtin was often drawn from the intellectual context of his epoch and studied as a “lone star on a scientific firmament” (Koval’ski 2001: 77) – which not only was methodologically wrong, but also led to a misinterpretation of Bakhtin’s works. That is why today it is necessary to “return” Bakhtin – with Vaginov – to the large “philological” (and philosophical) context of their time. Nevertheless, we shall only touch upon this large theme in our article, focusing on the evolution of Vaginov’s novel prose analyzed in the light of Russian humanities in the 1920s–30s.

## 2. Vaginov’s novels reflecting the social sciences of his time

### 2.1. Towards a concept of “interrelatedness”

Studying all Vaginov’s novels as a single metatext<sup>7</sup> (by this we mean that, taken and analysed together, the four novels form a new text and therefore they become “texts in a text”<sup>8</sup>) –, the first thing which attracts attention, at least in Vaginov’s first three novels (*The Goat Song*, *The Works and Days of Svistonov* and *Bambocciada*) is his characters’ surprising versatility, wide reading in various fields. Teptyolkin – like his main prototype Pumpyanskij whose erudition was “exceptional” (Nikolaev 2000a: 9) – seems to be interested in everything at once: “If you had the money, you’d probably buy my whole library”, a street vendor tells him (p. 37).<sup>9</sup> That is why Teptyolkin can deliver lectures on diverse subjects (p. 77–78):<sup>10</sup> “Now he was reading with someone

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<sup>7</sup> It can be justified already by their common themes – such as “the tragedy of a generation which found itself in a breach between “old” and “new” worlds”, “the tragedy of people who found themselves in a breach between exterior and interior worlds” (Gerasimova 2008: 12; cf. also Shindina 2010), as well as by the fact that some characters, objects and phenomena (even some characters’ dreams) reappear from one novel to another.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Torop 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Vaginov was also a passionate bibliophile who devoured books from various centuries.

<sup>10</sup> Teptyolkin’s main prototype Pumpyanskij gave more than a thousand public lectures on very different subjects (Nikolaev 2000a: 27). The first lecture in Teptyolkin’s series was on Novalis, and from time to time, Novalis is mentioned by Bakhtin (cf. Bakhtin 1997–... [1923–1924], I: 80; 1997–... [1922–1927c], II: 327; 1997–... [1965], IV/2: 133, etc.); Pumpyanskij spoke about the influence of Novalis upon Tyutchev (Pumpyanskij

about love and interpreting a pregnant turn of phrase. Now, at the same time, analyzing Dante<sup>11</sup> and, coming up to the middle of the fifth canto, to Paolo and Francesca, he was pacing the room, bowled over. Now he was doing commentary on Hector's parting from Andromache, now giving a lecture on Vyacheslav Ivanov".<sup>12</sup> Also Evgenij, the central character of *Bambocciada* who can outshine any professor by his erudition (p. 352) is "extremely" well-read. These and many other of Vaginov's characters – like the members of the "Bakhtin Circle" – are interested in history (p. 47, 120), archaeology (p. 98), American civilization (p. 27, 98), physics (p. 75), mathematics (in particular, in the relativity theory [p. 87]), music (*ibid.*) etc.

In addition, many spheres of knowledge are interrelated, for them. Even in *Harpagoniana*, Vaginov's novel with the most ignorant characters (cf. below), one can discern some pitiful attempts to link – at least via comparisons and metaphors – architecture and music (p. 464) as well as music and cookery (p. 457) (this idea arises already in *Bambocciada*, [p. 285, 296]). Such implicit relatedness of everything with everything becomes apparent even in the need

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2000[1928]: 252), etc. (Since it is impossible to find references to *all* the discourses that Vaginov could know and "transpose" to his prose, we shall confine ourselves to mentioning only some of them in the present article. Besides, although – here and below – some relevant works appeared after the publication of Vaginov's novels, the ideas contained in them could have been formulated as early as the 1920s: this concerns especially the members of the "Bakhtin Circle".)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. in this regard Pumpjanskij (2000[1924]: 532; 2000[1925b]: 538; 2000[1929–1930]: 501; Bakhtin 1997–... [1923–1924], I: 79–80, 134, 184, 221; 1997–... [1929], II: 34–35, 39–40, 42; 1997–... [1940a], IV/1: 115–117, etc.) – E. V.

<sup>12</sup> Once again, to a greater or lesser extent, all this was interesting to many humanists in the 1920s. For instance, as to Vyach. Ivanov, Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1997–... [1922–1927c]; 1997–... [1929]), Pumpjanskij (2000[1925b]), Medvedev (1928: Part II, Chapter 2; Part III, Chapter 1) and other members of the "Bakhtin Circle" wrote and gave talks about him (Nikolaev 2000b: 768). Showing their vivid interest in Ivanov (Ivanov was probably Bakhtin's favourite author in general [Bocharov, Melihova, Pul 2000: 562]), at the same time they insisted on the "absence of literary future" of Ivanov's poetic system (Nikolaev 2000b: 769). In connection with the concept of interrelatedness which we discuss in this part of our work, is worth mentioning the "general question" which, according to Pumpjanskij, should be asked about Ivanov who linked scientific culture with poetry in his writings: Why has so much knowledge merged with poetry? (Pumpjanskij 2000[1925b]: 538). (Of course, in the 1920s–30s, interest in Ivanov's works – and in the works of other thinkers, poets and writers admired by Vaginov's characters – went beyond the "Bakhtin Circle"; also Vaginov himself was interested in Vyach. Ivanov; cf. Kozyura 2005; Shindina 2010.)

to find analogies between various aspects of the outer world – for instance, between nature and cookery (Toropulo draws analogies in forms, colours etc., p. 307). In *The Works and Days of Svistonov*, Svistonov “unites” physics, geography, history and philosophy “in historical perspective”, considering them as “one enormous memoir of humanity” (p. 247).

In *The Goat Song*, the idea about interrelatedness of various sides of human spiritual activity, as we shall see later, is even more evident. As Teptyolkin records in “his life’s basic work” (p. 48), aesthetics is “a harmonization of nature and history” (p. 49), which supposes there is a harmony between natural sciences and humanities.<sup>13</sup> That is why, probably, Teptyolkin’s lectures are attended by specialists in very different domains of knowledge: “an expert in Sumero-Acadian letters”, “a little old man with a passion for antiquity” and even “a biologist” (p. 77);<sup>14</sup> in general, Vaginov’s personages often “merge into nature” (p. 152, cf. also p. 164) – Kostya Rotikov proposes to “go listen to fatherland’s aspens changing their language” (p. 72), Teptyolkin mentions “tree-trunks” as “prototype[s] of columns” (p. 88) etc.

According to Vaginov’s characters, “everything in the world is connected” (p. 305), “everything in the world is surprisingly interrelated” (p. 435) – and these opinions seem to echo the reasoning about the “vanity of one-sidednesses” [*tsheta odnostoronnostej*] and the aspiration for a “Great Synthesis” in A. Losev’s novel *Zhenschina-Myslitel’* (*Woman-Thinker*) (1933–1934).<sup>15</sup> In

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<sup>13</sup> As to the boundaries between natural sciences and humanities, many intellectuals considered them as very relative in the 1920s–30s (cf. Velmezova 2010). In his later works, Bakhtin also shared this view (Bakhtin 1997–... [1966–1967?], VI: 407). However in Vaginov’s earlier short prose *Monastyr’ Gospoda nashego Apollona* (*The Monastery of Our Lord Apollo* [1922]) culture and art are *opposed* to “chemistry, mechanics and physics” (Vaginov 1991[1922]: 481). Therefore it is perhaps no coincidence that some of Vaginov’s characters in the last two novels (where high culture is more and more forgotten, cf. below) also have *technical* occupations – Toropulo is an engineer (p. 293) (and Ermilov, probably, too [p. 284]), Punshevich is a professor of physics (p. 323), etc.

<sup>14</sup> Probably, in this way biologist I. Kanaev – a member of the “Bakhtin Circle” – found himself in the *The Goat Song* (according to literary critics, in this novel he appears as “the pharmacist” walking with “the philosopher” [p. 74], cf. Nikol’skaya, Erl’ 1999: 524).

<sup>15</sup> It was the notorious pianist M. Yudina (who was a member of the “Bakhtin Circle”, too) who served as a prototype for Radina in the *Woman-Thinker*. Losev reflected upon problems of interpenetration of various fields of human spiritual activity also in his other literary works – as, for instance, in the narrative *Trio Chajkovskogo* (*Tchaikovsky’s Trio* [1933], where the character of Tomilina once again incarnates some traits of Yudina), etc. Cf. Taho-Godi 2004 about the correlation of Losev’s philosophy and literary works.

some respect, all these statements can be considered as a quintessence of one of the models of semiotic (or philosophical) knowledge in Russia in the 1920s–1930s: semiotics could be interpreted not only as a science which deals with signs,<sup>16</sup> but also as a synthesis or a dialogue of various branches of knowledge and of human (spiritual) activity in general. And this aspiration “to create a science of everything”, typical of many Russian intellectuals in the 1920s–30s, was reflected in Vaginov’s novels.

On the other hand, in this interrelatedness of everything we may discern an echo of the later Bakhtinian conception of dialogue – in this case, a dialogue between various domains of science, culture and art. In Bakhtin’s works, the word *dialogue* referred to several phenomena, and if its broader meaning (supposing the sense in general and its transmission – for instance, a dialogue between different fields of knowledge) appears only in the 1950s, Bakhtin’s writings from the 1920s already contained some germs of his future theory of dialogue (cf. Velmezova 2012c). In accordance with Bakhtin’s “dialogical conception”, all words and ideas of the past are (or will be) always necessarily reflected in later works and theories in one way or another – exactly as the books of Svistonov, the central character of Vaginov’s second novel, “are born from everything”, arising from “hideous marginal notes”, “stolen comparisons”, “skilfully copied pages”, “intercepted conversations”, “twisted gossips” (p. 176). The same thing was sometimes said about Vaginov himself: “Vaginov has no words of his own. All his words are repeated”, “aired by literature”; these are “borrowed words, borrowed images, borrowed phrases” (Buhshstab 1990[1926]: 275, 277).

## 2.2. Life and culture: opposition or interpenetration?

If Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue arose, to a considerable degree, from his thoughts about the interrelated nature of everything (concerned with meaning), in all Vaginov’s novels, on the contrary, art and culture on the one

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<sup>16</sup> In the context of interrelatedness of everything and of semiotics interpreted as a science of signs, cf. Medvedev’s definition of the study of literature as a field belonging to a larger domain dealing with ideologies: the notion of ideology was connected with that of superstructure and had evident semiotic orientation, supposing sense, meaning, and “inner value” (Medvedev 1928); in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1930[1929]), Voloshinov also insisted on a “semiotic” definition of ideology, based on signs.

hand – and reality on the other, hand – are opposed: “Art is rapture, it is an objective phase of being. In the esthetic [*sic.* – E. V.] there is neither nature, nor history, it is a sphere of its own” (p. 49), according to Teptyolkin. Svistonov also thinks about this distinction between art and life when he considers art as more real than life itself and “transposes” real people into his prose (p. 194).<sup>17</sup> The well-educated characters of *The Goat Song* lock themselves away from life in a tower – both in a figurative (they are in an *ivory tower*) and literal sense (they meet in a tower in Peterhof):<sup>18</sup> ““The tower – that’s culture,” he [Teptyolkin – E. V.] reflected. “On the summit of culture – that’s where I stand”” (p. 27; cf. also p. 66–67, 76, 95). As the narrator points out, “strictly speaking, the idea of the tower was inherent in all my heroes. It wasn’t a specific trait of Teptyolkin. They would all gladly cloister themselves in a Petersburg [*sic.* – E. V.] tower” (p. 118). Other metaphors are used in parallel to the tower for Vaginov’s characters: a temple (p. 34), a castle (p. 69), an “island” in the “sea” (p. 13, 47), an (intellectual) “garden” with “fruits” (of culture) (p. 76). Finally the tower – once again, both in the figurative and literal sense of this word – is destroyed (p. 158) and high culture in Vaginov’s novels, as we shall see, turns into ignorance and lack of any education, into senseless classifications, into the loss of essence of classified objects and a pathetic triumph of nothing more than their obscure differential features.

The question of the relations between art, culture and life is also reflected in Vaginov’s earlier works, where he manifestly opposed culture to life. The former can literally “gorge” living people – that was the main subject of Vaginov’s small prosaic work *The Monastery of our Lord Apollo*. Wounded by modern civilization and sheltered by a fraternity, the ancient deity (= Culture)

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<sup>17</sup> The theme of the relationship between the author and his characters was touched upon already in *The Goat Song*. Besides, in the 1920s it was discussed by M. Bakhtin, L. Pumpyanskij, I. Lapshin, A. Lappo-Danilevskij, T. Rajnov and many other Russian writers, philologists and philosophers. The problem of the interpenetration of literature and reality also interested many philologists-formalists. Both in the behaviour of Svistonov who “transfers” real people to literature and in his above-mentioned technique of collage as a particular method of creation of literary works (“from hideous marginal notes, stolen comparisons”, etc.: one should simply write, and “coherence and sense will appear afterwards” [p. 176]) one may discern an allusion to the ideas of early OPOYAZ (*Obschestvo po izucheniyu poeticheskogo yazyka*, Society for the Study of Poetic Language) which considered art as a simple set of hooks (cf., in particular, V. Shklovskij’s “Art as a technique” [Shklovskij 1990 (1917)]).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also Vyach. Ivanov’s famous literary salon known as “The Tower”.



recuperates by devouring, one after another, all those who worship it. In general, the problem of opposition versus interpenetration of life and art was discussed in the 1920s–30s both in philosophical treatises and in literary works.

For example, this question was in the centre of Bakhtin's first published article, *Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost'* (*Art and Responsibility*) (Bakhtin 1997–... [1919]). There, Bakhtin stands up for a “unification” of these two realms (art and life) in individual responsibility. Otherwise, a tragedy – like the one of Vaginov's characters – is inevitable. That is why it is no coincidence if some quotations from Bakhtin's article seem to have been directly transposed to Vaginov's novels. Here is an example of this parallelism: “When a man is in the art, he is not in the life, and vice versa” (Bakhtin, *ibid.*: 5) – “Art is an extraction of people from one world and drawing them into another sphere” (Vaginov 2008: 194).

In the 1920s–30s, other philosophers (even those who had rather opposite theoretical opinions to Bakhtin's views, in general) dealt with the subject of art and culture and their relationship with life – for instance, Losev. Taking the topic of humanities as they were reproduced in literature, the enigma of the relationship between art and life was central in Losev's novel *Woman-Thinker*. Its several characters (Telegin, Vorobyov and the narrator himself, Nikolaj Vershinin) hold different opinions on this question and in their reasoning (art is a “retirement” from life versus life and art are one and the same), once again, they sometimes seem to repeat whole lines of Bakhtin's *Art and Responsibility*: “[...] a man leaves, for a time, for creation as for another world, away from “everyday agitation”” (Bakhtin 1997–... [1919], I: 5) – “[...] already due to the fact that art is art, it is a resignation from life” (Losev 1993[1933–1934], 5: 82).<sup>19</sup> And the following is a contrary point of view: “Art and life [...] must become [...] one thing” (Bakhtin, *ibid.*: 6) – “[art is] human life in its concrete manifestation” (Losev, *ibid.*: 94).<sup>20</sup>

On the whole, at the beginning of the 20th century, isolation of art from life was considered as one of the most vital and pressing problems both by West European and Russian thinkers – not only by M. Bakhtin and A. Losev, but also by P. Medvedev, G. Shpet, E. Zamyatin, as well as H. Rickert, E. Husserl, etc.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Medvedev 1928 on a “semiotically” closed essence of art (Medvedev 1928).

<sup>20</sup> All these questions were also discussed in other of Losev's literary works – *Tchaikovsky's Trio*, *Theatregoer* (*Teatral* [1932]) – and in his own philosophical papers (cf. Taho-Godi 2004).

### 2.3. Philosophy, psychology, philology...

Some fields of humanities are particularly well “presented” in Vaginov’s novels. Like many thinkers of the early 20th century, Vaginov’s characters did not draw boundaries between various domains of humanities in which they were interested. Here, once again, we can remember Bakhtin’s words, this time about his own researches which were characterized as “philosophical” only for lack of a better definition, while *de facto* they were neither linguistic nor philological, nor literary, nor any other, but were at the intersection of all corresponding disciplines (Bakhtin 1997–... [1959–1960], V: 306).

As to the spheres of knowledge “exposed” in Vaginov’s prose in detail, his characters were particularly interested in philosophy, psychology, study of literature, languages and linguistics.

#### 2.3.1. Philosophy

To begin with, the Unknown Poet and Troitsyn – like S. Frank, F. Stepun, N. Berdyaev, Ya. Bukshpan, M. Bakhtin and many of their contemporaries – speak about O. Spengler and K. Leont’ev (p. 58)<sup>21</sup> (in the general context of Spenglerianism, such discussions could probably have been focused on the latter’s Slavophile ideas). “In the year of Spenglerianism” (p. 59)<sup>22</sup> everybody was discussing Spengler – even “some Ivan Ivanovich” and “some Anatoly Leonidovich” (p. 58).

Teptyolkin reads various books on philosophy and its history (p. 37–38), meditates – like the Unknown Poet (p. 81) – about the appearance of new religions (p. 38), and philistines call him “philosopher” (p. 66). Meanwhile, in *The Goat Song* there is a hero bearing “officially” the nickname of “Philosopher” – this is Andrei Ivanovich Andrievsky (p. 67). He recalls Marburg and

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<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin, for instance, considered cultures as being open (and not closed) to each other and therefore he used to object to Spengler (cf. Bakhtin 1997–... [1918–1924], I: 51 and especially Bakhtin 1997–... [1970], VI: 455).

<sup>22</sup> The first volume of Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes* [1918]) was translated into Russian in 1923; the corresponding chapter in *The Goat Song* is entitled “Some of my heroes [in] 1921–1922”. (Vaginov began to compose this novel, most probably, in the second half of 1926.) Represented in Vaginov’s prose, the decline of the “last generation of Saint-Petersburg pre-revolutionary intelligentsia” (Sergievskij 1928: 284) seems to echo Spengler’s “decline of the West”.

“the great Cohen” (p. 68), gives lessons on the methodology of artistic theory (p. 73)<sup>23</sup> and believes that “the world is set, the world is not given; reality is set, reality is not given” [*mir zadan, a ne dan; real'nost' zadana, a ne dana*] (p. 70). As it has already been pointed out, even if Bakhtin “recognized himself” in this extract (Nicol'skaya, Erl' 1999: 524),<sup>24</sup> the Philosopher's thoughts most likely reproduced a criticism of the notion of given [*dannost'*], undertaken by H. Cohen, head of the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism: according to Cohen, the object of cognition is not “given” (as a “thing”), but is only “set” (“conceived”), because cognition is possible only as a series of approximations going into infinity, and it never results in any final, definite answer (Korovashko [quoting V. Asmus] 2003: 31).

### 2.3.2. Psychology

Vaginov's characters discuss the “bifurcation of consciousness” (p. 27), speak about consciousness and subconsciousness (p. 114) – in particular, displaying interest in Freudianism (p. 75, 190). Their liking of Freud's theories can also be seen in their collecting, buying and selling of dreams, in *Harpagoniana*. One of

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Bakhtin's *K voprosam metodologii estetiki slovesnogo tvorchestva* (English translation: *On the Question of the Methodology of Aesthetics in Written Works*) (Bakhtin 1997–... [1924]).

<sup>24</sup> Analyzing Bakhtin's biography, A. Korovashko (2003) comes to the conclusion that Bakhtin could not be the prototype of Vaginov's “Philosopher”. Once again, it brings us to the necessity of narrowing the notion of prototype speaking about the history of ideas as it was reflected in literature (cf. Part 1 of this article).

Many members of the “Bakhtin Circle” were interested in Cohen's philosophy: Pumpyanskij wrote about him (cf. for instance Pumpyanskij 2000[1931]), Medvedev discussed his notion of aesthetics (Medvedev 1928: Part I, Chapter 2); Kagan was his disciple, etc. In general, many Russian philosophers of the early 20th century considered Cohen to be one of the few thinkers who were able to comprehend the “Self – Other” relation as being an asymmetrical and irreversible one. Bakhtin's deep interest in Cohen's works can be explained partly by his confidence in the philosophy of the Marburg School. Bakhtin considered this trend if not able to solve the whole problem of the “Self and Other”, then at least to be oriented towards solving of this problem (cf. Velmezova 2012c). On the whole, at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia, the problem of the “Self – Other” relationship interested not only philosophers and historians of philosophy (B. Vysheslavcev, I. Lapshin, A. Vvedenskij, N. Losskij, etc.), but also psychologists (V. Behterev, L. Vygotskij), etc.

its characters, Anfert'ev, even intends to sell the dreams to the Institute of the Brain (p. 402 etc.).<sup>25</sup> In *The Works and Days of Svistonov* Ivan Kuku speaks about dreams (p. 206); in his time, he was “inspired” by Freudianism (p. 190). However, Vaginov’s prose contains an implicit criticism of Freudian doctrine. Teptyolkin, for instance, thinks “that even a finger could have a Freudian interpretation, that lo and behold, a disgusting concept had sprung up so recently. If he was reading a philosophical poem, a phrase would suddenly rivet his attention, and even a favourite poem by Solovyov: *No replies long silence since, no need of speeches, // I strive toward you, just like a stream toward the sea*, – took on for him a disgusting meaning” (p. 121). At the beginning of the 20th century, Freudianism was very popular among many Russian intellectuals<sup>26</sup> and, in particular, among the members of the “Bakhtin Circle”: for example, Sollertinskij (cf. “a young man with a passion for Freudianism” [p. 75] [Nikol’skaya, Erl’ 1999: 524]) and Pumpyanskij were very interested in S. Freud’s and O. Rank’s discoveries (Miheeva 1988: 49, 51–55; Vasil’ev 1995: 11; Tutaeva 2007; Tylkowski 2010). The members of the Circle (including Bakhtin himself) gave various lectures on Freud’s theories and discussed them during their own meetings in 1924–1925. Nevertheless, this interest in Freudianism did not prevent the members of the “Bakhtin Circle” from criticizing Freud. Without disputing the importance of successes of Freudianism in psychiatry, to Freudianism as spread out to social sciences Voloshinov opposed the idea that there existed no abstract “biological individuals” outside particular societies, but believed that people were always determined by concrete socio-economical conditions (cf. *The Goat Song*: “[...] every age has its one characteristic form or consciousness of surroundings” [p. 85]). Voloshinov (1925; 1930[1929]; 1995[1927]) saw in Freud’s theories an extreme manifestation of biologism (biological determinism) that was “fashionable” in the 1920s, and he refused to interpret phenomena of culture “à la Freud”. The indignation of Teptyolkin who did not want to read Freudian theories in poetry (cf. above) can be compared with that of Voloshinov who – on the example of I. Ermakov’s interpretation of *The Nose*, a short story by N. Gogol – criticized the attempts to apply psychoanalytical methods to the study of literary works (cf.

<sup>25</sup> In Petrograd, the Institute of the Human Brain was founded in 1918, on V. Behterev’s initiative.

<sup>26</sup> This situation lasted till the late 1920s, when Freud’s theories were severely criticized, for political reasons (Stalin’s struggle with Trotskij, one of Freud’s fervent admirers in the Soviet Union), among others, cf. Lejbin 1999[1991: 253, 258].

Voloshinov 1995[1927]). On the other hand, according to Voloshinov, there is no reason to follow Freud in dividing the psyche into two parts: “consciousness” and the “subconscious” (Voloshinov 1925: 203); in its extreme formulation, this thesis means that there exists no subconscious, as it was defined by Freud.<sup>27</sup> In *The Goat Song*, the Unknown Poet tries to implement this point, “abolishing” the “boundary between consciousness and the subconscious” (p. 114) – even if he acts in an opposite way, compared with the one outlined by Voloshinov, destroying his consciousness (and not his subconscious: “I must abolish the boundary between consciousness and the subconscious. To let in the subconscious, give it a chance to swamp a glowing consciousness” [p. 114]), which leads to his degradation.

Other members of the “Bakhtin Circle” also criticized Freud, and psychoanalysis in general. If in his article written in 1924 Pumpyanskij mentioned Freud in a relatively neutral context while analysing V. Bryusov’s poetry (Pumpyanskij 2000[1924]: 533–534), in 1925 Pumpyanskij wrote a work entitled *K kritike Ranka i psihoanaliza* (*Towards a criticism of Rank and psychoanalysis*) in which he belittles the importance of psychoanalysis even for medicine (Pumpyanskij 2000[1925a]). Later, in *Literatura sovremennogo Zapada i Ameriki* (*Literature of modern West and America* [1929–1930]), Pumpyanskij – like Voloshinov – criticizes Freud for his anti-historical approach and for taking people out of their particular social contexts (cf. the comments of M. Tutaeva [2007: 490–491]). Medvedev’s attitude towards psychoanalysis was also negative (Medvedev 1996[1925]). Finally, several decades later, in his conversations with V. Duvakin, Bakhtin (to whom Voloshinov’s *Freudianism* and other above-mentioned works dealing with Freud had been attributed for a long time) acknowledged that Freud was a “great, brilliant discoverer”, but at the same time he pointed out that Freud’s views were alien to him and that there did not exist “any considerable successors of Freudianism” “on Russian soil”, in general (Besedy 1996[1973]: 204).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> According to Voloshinov, the phenomenon of consciousness was closely connected with the notion of social background (cf. Tylkowski 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Even if Bakhtin almost never mentions Freud in his works (cf. however Bakhtin 1997–... [1940a], IV/1: 441; 1997–... [1959–1960], V: 307), his PhD work on Rabelais was severely criticized as being “methodologically pseudoscientific [and] Freudian” (Popova 2008: 916). As in the case of other theories and discourses reflected in Vaginov’s prose, not only the members of “Bakhtin Circle” commented on Freudianism: at that time, for different reasons (lack of any sociological component, simplistic approach, “biologism”

### 2.3.3. Study of literature

Kostya Rotikov's toast "To literary scholarship!" (p. 98) could have been proposed by many other Vaginov's heroes. The characters of *The Goat Song* enjoy studying literature, which is nevertheless qualified as the "most meaningless and most useless occupation" (p. 26): Teptyolkin writes "a treatise about some unknown poet" (*ibid.*, cf. also p. 38, 46, 47) and probably, devotes lectures to him ("I'm doing a paper on a remarkable poet" [p 27]).<sup>29</sup> The Unknown Poet also meditates about poetry (p. 89, 93): his imaginary allusions to Gogol's and Juvenal's laughter (p. 84) remind us of the works by Bakhtin (1997–... [1940b]; 1997–... [early 1940s?]; 1997–... [1940; 1970]) who also spoke about Juvenal's and Gogol's laughter and satire. Besides, along with Kostya Rotikov they "pore" for hours "over Spanish, English, Italian poets [... ] and exchange ideas" (p. 90). Even Misha Kotikov is interested not only in factual accounts when he tries to restore every minute of Zaevfratskij's life (p. 147–148), sometimes he asks what his idol's opinion was "about assonances" (p. 63). Like Bakhtin or Pumpyanskij, whose "indispensable" distinguishing feature of research style and methods consisted in "historical and literary confrontation" (Nikolaev 2000a: 10),<sup>30</sup> the heroes of Vaginov's first novel are keen on comparative study of literature – especially when they analyse Pushkin's works. Teptyolkin "compares [him] against" Chénier (p. 105)<sup>31</sup>

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etc.) Freudianism was criticized by other Russian researchers – such as V. Yurinets, N. Karev, A. Deborin, etc. (Etkind 1993).

<sup>29</sup> It is a clear reference to Pumpyanskij's talk about the poetry of Vaginov, delivered in 1926 (Nicol'skaya, Erl' 1999: 516). Several unfinished drafts of writings (1922–1923) about Vaginov's poems have been preserved in Pumpyanskij's archives (*ibid.*, cf. also Nikolaev 2000a: 23). Vs. Rozhdestvenskij (prototype of Troitsyn in *The Goat Song*) analysed Vaginov's poetry too.

<sup>30</sup> It is in classical philology in particular that Pumpyanskij saw an example and model for European "national" philologies (Nikolaev 2000a: 16), insisting on the unity of the European culture going back to the antiquity (*ibid.*: 17), and, therefore, on the continuity of the European philological and cultural "traditions" (in *The Goat Song*, the image of Philostratus [a generalized image of a fine court writer of the epoch of late Hellenism] seems to embody this continuity – also, there is a likely connection to Lucius Flavius Philostratus [c. 170 – c. 247], Greek scholar and author of philosophical and historical books).

<sup>31</sup> Pumpyanskij was also interested in these comparisons, cf. Nikolaev 2000a: 23; Pumpyanskij 2000[1923–1924]: 37, 109–110, 114.

and Parny (p. 27), Kostya Rotikov “finds a huge similarity” between “Pushkin’s work” and “a sonnet by Camões” (p. 70).<sup>32</sup>

More generally, in his “life’s basic work” Teptyolkin intends to “give new definitions to the concept of the romantic and the concept of the classic” (p. 49). These categories (including in their relationship) were among fundamental ones, in particular, for Bakhtin and Pumpyanskij (cf. for instance Bakhtin 1997–... [1923–1924], I: 235 etc.; 1997–... [1922–1927b], II: 289; 1997–... [1929], II: 97–98; 1997–... [1940a]; 1997–... [1965]; etc.; Pumpyanskij 1935; 1947; 2000 [1923–1924]; 2000 [1939] etc.).

### 2.3.4. Languages and linguistics in their various aspects

Firstly, some of Vaginov’s characters have a good knowledge of many foreign languages – like Vaginov himself. Evgenij in *Bambocciata* is a polyglot (p. 276), Zhulonbin in *Harpagoniana* is several times referred to as “teacher of Dutch”<sup>33</sup> (p. 383, 392, 399), in *The Goat Song* Kostya Rotikov, “the Irish poet”, Agathonov and “the German student” speak “no longer [...] in one language, but in every language all at once” – in Greek, Latin, Italian, French... (p. 141); Kostya Rotikov used to teach English (p. 140). However the principal expert on foreign languages in Vaginov’s fiction is Teptyolkin. Not only does he give private lessons of German (p. 75), but also delivers “free lessons in Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese”, trying to “uphold a culture in decline” (p. 86). At his own university lecture he starts “reading the originals and, there and then, translating them and doing commentary, drawing on God knows how many poets and in how many languages” (p. 77).<sup>34</sup> Teptyolkin studies new foreign languages with considerable interest – for instance, he learns Sanskrit (in order to “penetrate into eastern wisdom” [p. 81]), perfects himself in “the Egyptian language of the classical period” (p. 88), reading “an

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Pumpyanskij 2000 [1923]: 208.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Wright 2010: 34–35 about this occupation as related to Zhulonbin’s passion for collecting (cf. the next part of this article).

<sup>34</sup> This way, the “culture in decline” was upheld, indeed: “Some students took up studying Italian, to read about the love of Petrarch and Laura in the original, others going over Latin to read the letters of Abélard and Héloïse. Others started devouring Greek grammar to read Plato’s Symposium” (p. 78).

Egyptian grammar in German” (p. 87)<sup>35</sup> and deploring that “in the whole wide world, there isn’t a complete dictionary of the Egyptian language” (p. 88).

Sometimes Teptyolkin also tries to make theories about languages – for example, about the inner form of certain words, including the “phonetic semantics” of proper names, in particular of his own surname: ““What would have happened,” he thought, “if my last name hadn’t been Teptyolkin, but totally different. The two syllables ‘tep-tyol’ are without a doubt onomatopoeia. The word ‘kin’ might have been ominous, a bit like ‘king’, but the consonant ‘l’ prevents this. And if the ‘l’ here combined for another syllable, you would have gotten ‘Tepteyolkin’. It would have been terribly lugubrious” (p. 169). Here we can draw a parallel with numerous works created in the 1920s–30s – in particular, those by Marrists and by adherents of the doctrine of *imyaslavie*, glorification of the name – which were based on the anti-Saussurean idea of the (implicit) influence of words’ forms on their semantics (cf. Velmezova 2007: 263–286): in this context, P. Florenskij’s study of the “phonetico-ontological structure” [*zvukovo-ontologicheskoe stroenie*] (Florenskij 1993[1926]: 18) of proper nouns is particularly relevant.

Besides, Teptyolkin correctly states that the Egyptian language belongs to the “Semitic-Hamitic” “group” of languages (p. 88).<sup>36</sup> Passing by “rather unruly corpulent gals who were mouthing off with some choice words” (p. 106), Teptyolkin is pondering over the phenomenon of argot: ““The dialect of robbers’ dens,” he decided. “It’s interesting to analyze from where and how this dialect appeared.” He went back in his mind to XIII century France, when argot was created” (*ibid.*). It is also worth mentioning that in the first third of the 20th century interest in argot as a particular “social dialect” in Russia was manifested mainly by linguists who (had) worked in Saint-Petersburg (Petrograd, Lenin-grad...), where Teptyolkin “lived”: I. Baudouin de Courtenay (Boduen de Kurtene 1963[1908]), B. Larin (1977[1928a; 1928b]), E. Polivanov (1928; 1931a; 1931b),<sup>37</sup> L. Yakubinskij (1930; Ivanov, Yakubinskij 1932), V. Zhirmunskij (1978[1936]). Sometimes these researchers understood argot differently; nevertheless from time to time they discussed the origins and evolution of the corresponding phenomena (including in France [cf. Larin 1928b]).

<sup>35</sup> It could be W. Spiegelberg’s *Demotische Grammatik* (1925).

<sup>36</sup> Today this designation is out of date; linguists speak rather about Afro-Asiatic family of languages than about a “Hamito-Semitic group”.

<sup>37</sup> Polivanov’s interest in argot was also reflected in Kaverin’s *The Troublemaker, or Evenings on the Vasil’evskij Island*, cf. Velmezova 2012b.



V. Zhirmunskij, for instance, would have shared Teptyolkin's opinion concerning the time of appearance of argot as a "dialect of robbers": according to him, in France, "the word "argot" in the sense of "dialect of criminals" [*yazyk prestupnikov*] goes back to the XIII–XIV centuries" (Zhirmunskij 1978[1936]: 121).

Also, Teptyolkin's thoughts about the single common language of "the Roman Empire once again taking wing" (p. 27) betray some sociolinguistic interests; besides, if "at the word "imperial" something poetic would awake in Teptyolkin" (*ibid.*), it can be an allusion to Pumpjanskij's idea about the connection between Russian versification and the very idea of empire or classical monarchy (Pumpjanskij 2000[1922]; cf. for instance his assumption about the "[c]onnection of Pushkin's poetry", "classical monarchy" and "[o]rigins of the state" [*ibid.*: 590, cf. also Pumpjanskij 2000[1923], etc.). A number of allusions to Soviet linguistic politics in the 1920s–30s can also be detected in *Bambocciata*: commenting on an inscription on a sweet wrapper which Evgenij sends to Toropulo, he mentions in passing the replacement of the Arabic alphabet by the Latin script in Tatar (p. 376), which indeed took place in 1927.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Teptyolkin's "life's basic work" is entitled *The Hierarchy of Meanings* (p. 48).<sup>39</sup>

#### **2.4. The Hierarchy of Meanings and other classifications: from high culture... towards distinctive features?**

In Part 2.1 we have already seen that many fields of knowledge interrelate for Vaginov's characters. It is at this intersection of linguistics, study of literature and, perhaps, philosophy that Teptyolkin creates his life's basic work, *The Hierarchy of Meanings. An Introduction to the Study of Poetic Works* (p. 48–49, 81).<sup>40</sup> The issue here is, in particular, that "words are a nest for meanings"

<sup>38</sup> In 1939, a Cyrillic alphabet was adapted for Tatar.

<sup>39</sup> In connection with this, cf. the title of one of Pumpjanskij's articles: *Smysl poezii Pushkina* (*The sense of Pushkin's poetry*) which begins with the following words: "Thus, the hierarchy of symbols could be stable only as a classical (monumental) one..." (Pumpjanskij 2000[1919]: 564).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. in this regard the words of the Unknown Poet: "Poetry is a special occupation [...] It's a horrible and dangerous spectacle. You'll take some words, juxtapose them in an unusual way and you'll start to brood over them one night, a second, a third, you keep

(p. 49) – this metaphor of nest(s), used already by V. Dal', was widespread in the 1920s; it was used, among others, by N. Marr (cf. Velmezova 2007) and by Bakhtin (1997–... [1922–1927a], II: 356) referring to V. Vinogradov's work about A. Ahmatova.

The work which consisted not only in the description of the meanings of words (p. 70, 89, 93), but also in their sorting and ordering (cf. the word *hierarchy* in *The Hierarchy of Meanings*), reminds us once again of the early stages in the evolution of semiotic ideas in the Soviet Union: at least for a part of linguists, semiotic researches began with semantic ones in the 1920s–30s (cf. Velmezova 2010).

Any hierarchy presupposes a classification, an ordering or a sorting. At the foundation of *The Hierarchy of Meanings* is Teptyolkin's above-mentioned versatility. This erudition and the (even implicit) search for “integral knowledge” distinguish the heroes of Vaginov's first novel. Later on, his characters' interests become more and more utilitarian and down-to-earth – even if the word *culture* is still considered as a “great” one (p. 202). For instance, in *The Works and Days of Svistonov*, Svistonov also reads a lot and buys various books (p. 178, 246 etc.), he attends lectures of the Geographical society (p. 217), has a conversation about some phenomena which recall an (“artificial”) convergence of various biological species (they inoculate apple trees with birches, oaks, lime trees [p. 250] – which also reminds us of I. Michurin's horticultural experiments),<sup>41</sup> etc. However Svistonov behaves this way no longer for an abstract love for the beautiful, but only in search of plots for his prose (p. 178) – as Vaginov himself used to do. More or less well-read Kuku has interests that echo those of others (cf. for instance p. 190), or puts up his knowledge for show, trying to impress the public (p. 206). Even his seeming yearning for versatility is all put on (p. 190). As to pseudo-esotericist Psihachev, according to Svistonov he knows about everything that he speaks about (Isis and her priests, the school of Pythagoras, etc.) less than he would be

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thinking about the juxtaposed words. And you notice: the hand of a meaning reaches out from under one word and links with the hand that has appeared from under another word, and a third word will put out a hand and you're engulfed by a completely new world opening up beyond words” (p. 93–94). Teptyolkin's book remained unfinished, just like the conception of evolution of Russian literature worked out by Pumpyanskij (which was never made into a monograph).

<sup>41</sup> Discussions about convergence in biology were very frequent in Russia in the 1920s, mainly due to L. Berg's *Nomogenez (Nomogenesis)* (Berg 1922); about the phenomenon of convergence in humanities of that time cf. Velmezova 2007.

capable of (p. 233). The characters of Vaginov's third novel (*Bambocciada*), starting with Evgenij Felinflein, manifest interest not only in reading as such (cf. for instance p. 276–277), in music and its history (p. 278–279, 281 etc.), in painting (p. 291) – like Teptyolkin and other characters of *The Goat Song*, and, like members of the “Bakhtin Circle”, they often behave as *Kulturträger*s (p. 278, 290–291, 346, 349 etc.), – but (to a much wider extent than characters of the first two novels) in the material aspects of culture (in particular cookery and its history). It is the case of Toropulo who has studied history, geography and foreign languages (p. 292) and who reads a lot (p. 314, 315, etc.) only because of his interest in gastronomy (the lectures he delivers in his private circle are also about cookery and its history [p. 298]). He discovers cookery in the works of Goethe (p. 319), is interested in Pushkin as a heavy eater of cutlets Pozharsky (p. 334) and in China as a “cultural” (in the art of cookery, of course) nation (p. 334). Under the influence of Toropulo, Evgenij also develops an interest in gastronomy (p. 275–276). Besides, the characters of *Bambocciada* are keen collectors of objects from everyday life – for instance, tableware (p. 338), sweet wrappers and cigarette boxes (p. 305), soap wrappers (p. 326) etc. For them, these objects reflect a particular “domain of the human spirit” (p. 305) and they change with every passing epoch. This is how they decide to create a Society for collecting small things (p. 326).

Even if already in *The Goat Song* the educated and well-read Kostya Rotikov collects vulgar and tasteless objects (p. 126–127, 140 etc.), in Vaginov's last novel any high culture seems to be absent: heroes are interested only in collecting small things (the corresponding Society is “transposed” from *Bambocciada* to *Harpagoniana*, with some of its characters – Toropulo, Punshevich...). In this novel, heroes read much less – even if here again they undertake some attempts to see great things in small ones, to get access to culture via little objects (p. 458–459, 461). Besides, in the collections – real or potential – of Vaginov's characters, there are not only material objects, but also dreams and “verbal innovations”, at least a part of which is referred to as “postfolklore”, today. Vaginov's heroes collect anecdotes, beautiful phrases from books, slips of the tongue, language mistakes (p. 383), swearwords (p. 383, 386, 391), “holidays of new life” (p. 459), street songs (p. 400, 423), thieves' cant (p. 423), etc. Although collecting words is a novelty typical of the last novel, the interest in words and expressions appears in Vaginov's earlier works: in *Bambocciada*, Evgenij reads with much interest epitaphs at a horse cemetery

(p. 369) and inscriptions in a pavilion (p. 364–366),<sup>42</sup> and in *The Goat Song* Kostya Rotikov records vulgar epitaphs (p. 157) and words written on the walls of toilets (p. 122–123).

Comparing Vaginov's first and last novels, we notice that they contrast not only in the degree of their characters' versatility and education, but also in their intensity of reading (these two phenomena are interconnected, of course). For instance, at the beginning of the first novel, Teptyolkin visits book shops and book stalls (p. 79); like many members of the "Bakhtin Circle", he is interested in Boethius (p. 38),<sup>43</sup> Chateaubriand (p. 74), Petrarch and Boccaccio (p. 79) etc.; even once he has become philistine, he reads Ronsard, Petrarch, Poliziano (p. 119), Cicero (p. 161), Guarini (p. 162), a brief history of world literature (p. 132), muses upon Dante and Beatrice (p. 168), "hurries to the bookstore, as if to the water of life" (p. 160). The narrator, also a frequenter of bookshops (p. 97), looks for Dante, Philostratus and Bayle's encyclopedia<sup>44</sup> (*ibid.*). As the Unknown Poet observes, "[w]e all love books [...] Philological education and interests – it's that which distinguishes us from the new people" (p. 98), those "distinguished by the impossible form of exposition, the complete absence of the spirit of criticism, utter ignorance and out and out brashness" (p. 80) – as, for instance, characters of Vaginov's last novel, *Harpagoniana*, including classifiers.

The theme of ordering, sorting and classifying appears more or less explicitly already in Vaginov's first three novels: as we have seen, even Teptyolkin's *Hierarchy of Meanings* in *The Goat Song* is a kind of classification. In *The Works and Days of Svistonov*, Svistonov tries to sort his books classifying them in accordance with several different parameters (p. 247–248): it is hard work for him, because "every division is conventional" and therefore relative. In *Bamboc-*

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<sup>42</sup> Like Vaginov himself who was keen on urban folklore (Vaginov 1999[1933–1934]: 500–511). In general, there was much interest in postfolklore in the 1920s: they collected new proverbs, humorous rhymes, etc.

<sup>43</sup> According to Bakhtin, Boethius' *On the Consolation of Philosophy* (the book which Teptyolkin looks for) crowned the evolution of Menippean satire in antiquity. Also, the influence of Bakhtin's theories on Vaginov can be noticed here: as we have already stressed, Vaginov met Bakhtin when the latter was working on the problems of Menippean satire as a particular genre of classical literature – but this idea about *On the Consolation of Philosophy* was explicitly expressed only in the second, revised version of Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky's works (Bakhtin 1997–...[1963]). On parallels between *The Goat Song* and the genre of Menippean satire cf. Orlova 2009.

<sup>44</sup> P. Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1695–1697).

*ciada*, Toropulo outlines some principles of classifying of texts on signboards (p. 326). But it is in *Harpagoniana* that the passion of personages for classifying reaches its apogee and becomes a central idea of certain collectors. It is already all the same for them what they collect and classify – scraps of nails, cigarette ends, dry leaves, old medicines, empty bottles, clysters, pencil stumps etc. (p. 379–381): Vaginov's last novel took its title from the name of Molière's personage, stingy Harpagon; it could also be entitled "Plushkiniana", after a character in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, the miser Plushkin.

The issue here is the importance of classifications as such: classification is considered as "the greatest art", assuring the memory itself and the adequate comprehension of reality. Therefore, the classifier is "the best of people" (p. 435). As Vaginov himself commented on this, "it is possible to collect and to systematize everything, and everything is interesting" (cf. Nappel'baum 1988[1981]: 92).

Not only is it all the same for the characters what they collect, but the essence of the objects is left aside and forgotten: the only important thing now is their *distinctive features* which permit to classify these things and which are sought for and established by the classifiers. For instance, when systematizing various notes Zhulonbin does not even pay attention to their contents, but only counts the number of vowels, consonants, nouns and adjectives (p. 437). Expressing his credo, he says the following: "We must classify objects, study the objects immanently, so to say. What do we care about all these pictures? We are not children attracted by the diversity of colours and images" (p. 468); "for me, objects have no content; I am concerned only with systematisation" (p. 460).

Therefore, simultaneously with disappearance of high culture as opposed to life, Vaginov's characters develop an interest in various classifications, in establishing relationships between objects, while the essence of these objects is pushed into the background. In addition, the attention of the lecturer shifts from collectors and classifiers to their objects. Once again, speaking about the evolution of humanities, representatives of structuralism (appearing or already blossoming – depending on the country – at that time) were often reproached for this. By definition, structuralists were (and are) interested not in objects or phenomena as such, but in their relationships within the framework of a system / structure, and in their distinctive features which permit(ed) to establish such relations. This neglect of elements as such and particular attention to their relationships were typical especially of the early period in the evolution of structuralism, before the 1950s (Vinogradov 1990: 497). Metaphorically, this

tendency is reflected in Vaginov's last novel as switching the attention from objects to their classifying.<sup>45</sup>

The author's attitude towards this seems evident: for him, such a world is unacceptable, and it is seemingly not without reason that in Vaginov's last novel, no character incarnates the author's traits – in contrast to his first three novels where the Unknown Poet, Svistonov and Felinflein do. However this trend of evolution of Vaginov's prose can be foreseen already taking into account the unfolding of the first novel: Philostratus – the living picture of the antique culture and its continuity – was always at Teptyolkin's side at the beginning (p. 27), but he disappears in the end (p. 128).

As we can see, all of Vaginov's novels reproduce not only some theories and works of particular researchers of his time, but also general discourses which were specific to the Russian humanities in the 1920s–30s. The evolution of Vaginov's artistic world evidently corresponds to his perception of the humanities around him: their certain tendencies and peculiarities (for instance, a transition from “high culture” to “distinctive features”) become unacceptable for the writer in the 1930s.

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<sup>45</sup> Of course, in the Soviet Union at that time it was not yet possible to speak about any structuralism in the sense in which we understand it today. Even *Principles of Phonology* by N. Troubetzkoy (who emigrated from the Soviet Union) were published after Vaginov's death, in 1939. However, in the 1920s, works by E. Polivanov were already written, which anticipated many ideas of Troubetzkoy's great research – as for instance the idea of a “phonological sieve” of one's own mother tongue which conditions the perception of sounds (phonemes) of other languages. This idea is already very close to the interpretation of phonemes as it is presented in the structuralist (*par excellence*) research of Troubetzkoy (cf. Velmezova 2012a).

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### **Об отражении истории гуманитарных наук в романах К. Вагинова**

В конце двадцатых – начале тридцатых годов прошлого века русский поэт и писатель Константин Вагинов (1899–1934) пишет четыре романа, в которых воспроизводятся различные дискурсы, свойственные гуманитарным наукам (философии, психологии, лингвистике, литературоведению) в России в то время. Работа по реконструкции источников соответствующих теорий и “скрытых” цитат позволяет вписать прозу Вагинова в общий интеллектуальный контекст его эпохи. Анализ прозы Вагинова в свете истории идей дает возможность понять, как некоторые направления филологии и философии того времени интерпретировались в определенных кругах советской интеллигенции (например, среди писателей и поэтов – современников Вагинова). Кроме того, такое направление работы позволяет предложить новую интерпретацию эволюции прозы Вагинова, соответствующую восприятию писателем гуманитарных наук его эпохи: некоторые особенности советского гуманитарного дискурса со временем становятся для Вагинова неприемлемыми.

### **Humanitaarteaduste ajaloo peegeldumine K. Vaginovi romaanides**

1920ndate lõpus, 1930ndate alguses kirjutas vene poeet ja kirjanik Konstantin Vaginov (1899–1934) neli romaani, milles peegelduvad tolle aja vene humanitaarteadustes (filosoofias, psühholoogias, keele- ja kirjandusteaduses) levinud erinevad diskursused. Vastavate teooriate ja “varjatud” viidete allikaid uurides ning nende autoreid kindlaks määrates saame paigutada Vaginovi proosa selle ajastu üldisesse intellektuaalsesse konteksti. Vaginovi proosateoste analüüsimine ideede ajaloo seisukohalt aitab mõista, kuidas tõlgendasid filoloogilisi ja filosoofilisi suundi Nõukogude intellektuaalide teatud rühmad (nt Vaginovi kaasaegsed kirjanikud ja luuletajad). Lisaks saame sellele tuginedes esitada Vaginovi romaanide ja nende arengu uue tõlgenduse, mis kajastab Vaginovi vaateid tolleaegsetele humanitaarteadustele: paljud arengusuunad ja iseärasused muutusid kirjani-kule 1930ndatel aastatel vastuvõtmatuks.