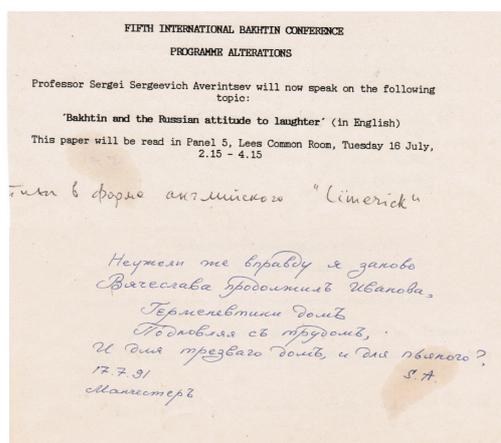


VIACHESLAV IVANOV'S MULTI-DIMENSIONAL HERMENEUTICS:  
THE METHOD OF A CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS OF LITERARY TEXTS

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It has been nearly a quarter of a century since I first began dealing with the topic "The Hermeneutics of Viacheslav Ivanov". Evidence of this is Sergei Averintsev's funny comment in the form of a limerick created during my lecture in Manchester in 1991. Subsequently I have lectured and written extensively on Ivanov's hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> However, now I am addressing this topic again. I find it essential, first of all, because even today the signposts of Ivanov's hermeneutics are practically unknown to contemporary theorists of hermeneutics and are not even mentioned by research specialists of Ivanov's versatile oeuvre.



<sup>1</sup> 1) *Проблемы герменевтики в славянском литературоведении XX в. (Фрагмент)*, "Studia Slavica Hungarica", 38 (1993), С. 173-183; 2) *The Problems of Hermeneutics in 20th Century Slavic Literary Criticism*, in *XI Medzinárodný zjazd slavistov. Zborník resumé*. Bratislava, 1993, pp. 502-503; 3) *Vjaceszlav Ivanov hermeneutikája*, "Helikon. Irodalomtudományi szemle", Budapest, 1997. № 3. P. 177-194; 4) *Четырехмерная герменевтика как базовый метод анализа текста*, in *Конгресс, посвященный Сяо Ингуа*, Пекин, 2007, pp. 1-7 (in Chinese translation); 5) *Четырехмерная герменевтика и ее наследие*, "Studia Slavica Hung.", 53 (2008) 2, С. 467-481.

Secondly, I would like to remind all my fellow researchers of Ivanov as well as the wider public that alongside being a poet, a philosopher, a culturologist, a religious philosopher and a thinker V. Ivanov was, last but not least, our colleague, a philologist!

Let me note that in an ‘autobiographical letter’ written in Sochi in January-February 1917 Ivanov remarked with a slight irony that as a student he had received letters of recommendation from Russian historians addressed to their German colleagues. He, however, did not use them because his first foremost “choice of heart was antique philology” (II, 16).

Viacheslav Ivanov based a multitude of his works (written both on classical and contemporary authors) on classical philology. In my opinion, they represented a versatile and fruitful manifestation of his methodology which had been *explicitly* described (as required by its academic genre) in his dissertation written in Baku in 1923. It was in this work that V. Ivanov remarked that these principles had been *implicitly* applied in his articles – articles, I might add, on a plethora of works by other authors and phenomena (trends) of world culture. But, he remarked, these works were perceived by “colleagues” and lay readers alike at all times as phenomena of free essayism, created by a poet, and not as a consistent manifestation of a new type of methodology in research.

I have had the opportunity to write about the principles of V. Ivanov’s hermeneutics emphasizing the realization of the different levels of description of literary texts. The uniqueness of V. Ivanov’s statements regarding hermeneutics elaborated in his dissertation of Baku, lies first and foremost in the fact that V. Ivanov consistently and steadily differentiates and contrasts four different levels of hermeneutics stating that two fundamental levels (1. and 2.) are those of “*lower hermeneutics*”, out of which the first is pointed at specifically *linguistic* features of the text and represents the “most exact part of philology making it an example of *scientific rigour*”. The second level is higher and moves via the levels of generalization from the emendation and interpretation of the text to the explanation and evaluation of the whole work. It then proceeds to the explanation and evaluation of the author, then the literary form represented by him or her and finally the characterization of the spirit of the era. It is completed by the philosophical interpretation of this or that side ...of the artistic creation as a whole”.<sup>2</sup>

The second level leads, whether or not the author had been conscious of them, to highest hermeneutics i.e. the analysis of the (3) mythopoetic roots

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<sup>2</sup> Вяч. Иванов, *Дионис и прадионисийство*. СПб, Алетея, 2000, С. 261.

of culture, in which (4) the “cultic” (as V. Ivanov put it) bases of mythopoeics i.e. those which are embedded in rituals, shine through.

According to V. Ivanov in the latter the “higher hermeneutics” approaches the methods of the “sciences of the spirit” (Geisteswissenschaften). As such “it ceases to compete with the sciences which have justly acquired the right to be called exact.” Its form of conclusions inescapably gains a hypothetical character to a higher or lesser degree” and it demands the activeness of a “higher intuitive element”, becoming thus a “trans-scientific (инонаучный) form of knowledge”.

I found it important to quote these excerpts from the Baku dissertation, because they, in essence, represent a secularized<sup>3</sup> form of the principles of the four-dimensional hermeneutics of Saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.) which was prevalent for centuries during the Middle Ages<sup>4</sup> and which is different from the hermeneutics that emerged later in Europe.

Protestant hermeneutics (the most influential among them and also quite versatile) with an orientation on the “authentic understanding” of the text, focused first and foremost on its linguistic aspects, its linguistic body, a characteristic feature which was continued, in principle, by F. Schleiermacher (1768-1834).

And although Ivanov makes references to Schleiermacher (and also to Boeck in the German version of his dissertation) – in the system of Ivanov, as was said before, the analysis of the linguistic level of the text represents an essential, basic but at the same time lowest level of hermeneutics, upon which is built the research of its spiritual foundations. Thus it seems that for Ivanov St. Augustine’s well-known quote from the New Testament was of paramount importance: “...the written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians).

At the same time the connection between “higher“ and “lower“ hermeneutics in the system of Ivanov is evidence to the fact that the contrasting of the “sciences of the spirit” and the “sciences of nature,” which stood in the centre of V. Dilthey’s postulates on hermeneutics and which was adopted by the journal *Logos*, was unacceptable for V. Ivanov.

Also, the basic principles of V. Ivanov on hermeneutics differentiate him from Friedrich Karl von Savigny (Berlin, 1840) who, not on the basis of

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<sup>3</sup> By secularization I mean Ivanov’s adaptation to the Soviet academic circumstances which, although to a lesser degree, dominated the academic scene even in Baku (Azerbaijan) situated far from Moscow.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Clement of Alexandria (around 150-215 AD) distinguished five meanings of hermeneutics in the Script.

Dilthey's example, also defined different types of hermeneutics, but stressing typological differences rather than those of levels.

One must conclude as well that the principles of Ivanov's hermeneutics, the way they are unfolded, have an orientation almost emphatically towards Origen, more precisely towards the historical tradition of Origen's biblical hermeneutics, although the Baku dissertation, for obvious reasons, could not openly manifest an orientation towards biblical hermeneutics.

Origen, as is well-known, sharply differentiated the levels and hierarchy in the ascent from the body to that of the soul and to that of the spirit.

As we know, the principle of ascent (and more precisely the ascent of the spirit of Man) in correlation with its descent was of paramount importance in Ivanov's system. (This was formulated already in his article of 1905 "On the Ascent"). But, let me repeat, the differentiation and correlation of the levels of the physical, the soul and the spirit was also emphasized and was of no less importance.

I would like to remind the reader that it is most likely that Ivanov's interest in Origen originated in the fact that Origen, this founder of biblical hermeneutics was much valued by Grigorii Skovoroda, a thinker held in high esteem by symbolists. Moreover, it must have been also motivated by the fact that Vladimir Soloviev wrote about Origen with particular interest, which made Losev include in his book on Soloviev a small, somewhat superficially written chapter "VI. Soloviev and Origen".

From this aspect Ivanov's article *On the Latest Theoretical Research in the Field of the Literary Word* is of significance. In this work V. Ivanov responds to the article of Andrei Bely *Aaron's Rod – On the Word in Poetry*<sup>5</sup> with the following comment: "The present-day chasm in the word in the sound-body and meaning covered by the schematism of reasoning has to be acknowledged, revealed and conquered. But the concrete spirit-filled word belongs to the "man of spirit". We, however, are only "beings of soul (душевные)" (IV, 635).

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<sup>5</sup> V. Ivanov's quote from Andrei Bely: *Aaron's Rod (Zhezl Aarona)* in *Skify*, 1917, p. 172: "We will either become speechless forever or speech will become once again a "hermeneutic" cult, and the gift of explanation (*hermeneuein*) will unite for us glossology (the primary elements of language) with the gifts of spiritual edification and concrete reason (разумность). <...> The author leads us to the boundary after which the hermetism of the article begins in its meaning as a mystical doctrine. These hints are understood by the reader to the extent of his/her resonance and inner experience with the author's innermost perception of the world (мирочувствование). The way out of the crisis is determined by metaphysical terms. Symbolism in the person of Andrei Bely stays true to itself in any case and confirms an organic unity of form and content on the one hand, and artistic perfecting on the other" (IV, 635).

Now let me turn to the ideas, which according to Ivanov's notes, do not belong to the explicit, i.e. theoretical generalizations of the dissertation written in Baku, but which are connected to the implicit usage of this method in V. Ivanov's articles on literature, an aspect which is still awaiting its interpreter.

Among the plethora of these articles<sup>6</sup> the article on Dante, mysteriously entitled *On the Limits of Art*, merits particular interest. This text clearly demonstrates the principles upon which he set up a distinction among authors according to their creative directions and their levels of ascent to the higher realms (*realiora*).

This scheme emphasizes a principally important distinction between the levels of ascent in grasping the higher realities:

a. The highest level of "the intuitive grasp of higher realities" i. e. the spheres of "realiora" is achieved by Dante. The representatives of "higher symbolism" approach but do not attain this level.

b. This level is achieved even less by Flaubert, the representative of realistic art, as although he overcomes the sphere of "subjective mirroring" and enters the realm of "transcendental contemplation of the reality which has to be overcome", nevertheless he is stuck in the space of the desert.

c. The emphatically emotional description of this desert in the article suggests the idea that the whole locus of the desert represents a dangerous "land of illusions",<sup>7</sup> penetrated by the "shroud of mirage-like reflections" – a reflection (and expression) of the "mirror-like temptation of clear subjectivity", on the level of which (the lowest sphere) remains "subjective creation".

As the scope of this essay does not make it possible to elaborate this scheme in further detail, I find it essential to stress that the train of thought discussed here (which was superficially perceived by many of V. Ivanov's contemporaries within the symbolist group in the polemics about the two elements), can at present be understood as truly prophetic, especially as far as V. Ivanov's repeated distinction between mirroring and transparency are concerned.

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<sup>6</sup> Among others see *О поэзии Иннокентия Анненского* (II, 573-586), *Simbolismo* (II, 652-669); The Diary entry of 14 April of 1910 (II, 806-807) – "будь теургом"; *Мысли о поэзии* (III, 660-673, esp. 668-669, 679; *Forma formans e forma formata* (III, 674-686); articles on Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Byron, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Dostoevsky, L. Tolstoy, A. Bely, etc. in volume IV.

<sup>7</sup> V. Ivanov, *Selected Essays*, Translation by Robert Bird, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2001, p. 84

I am very certain about the importance of this problem, especially in light of the present-day (21<sup>st</sup> century) epidemic of “narcissism” which concerns all strata of contemporary society, if one is to believe American psychologists in particular. It seems that by foreseeing exactly this preoccupation of many with the “mirror temptation of pure subjectivism” of the “solitary consciousness” (that is the contemporary hypertrophy of individualism) Viacheslav Ivanov was aiming at emphasizing that “the richer is the content of the revelation of higher realities, the more effective it is relative to the matter it liberates of matter”.<sup>8</sup>

And Ivanov’s whole article commenting on the third chapter of the *New Life* of Dante speaks about one of the highest ascents of his soul into the realm of suprasensible consciousness, from which Man always returns with the riches of the gifts of this ascent: “when creating a work of art, the artist descends from spheres that he, as a spiritual man, attained in his descent”.<sup>9</sup> I would like to note that “spiritual man” is meant in an anthropological sense, according to Origen, and not in a church-religious meaning. Thus, the text of V. Ivanov about Dante represents an example of the ascent of the artist – the “spiritual man” – “to the certain point of higher realities” which the carrier of “solitary consciousness”, who is stuck in the “mirror temptation of pure subjectivism”, is unable even to approach.<sup>10</sup>

The section of V. Ivanov’s article on Dante devoted to the theurgical tasks of the artist is based on an emphatic distinction between the level of the “soul” and the level of the “spirit” in regard of the ability to ascend. It states that: “The *realiora*.... as a man, the artist must inhabit the higher realm to which he attains through ascent, in order that, when he turns towards the earth and enters onto lower steps of reality, he might show these latter to be genuinely existing and bring about their genuine actuality”.<sup>11</sup>

Thus in the works of true artists, *eternity* and *time* interact.

To support this idea I would like to refer to the poem of V. Ivanov *The Poets of the Soul* which opens V. Ivanov’s second collection of lyrical works: *Прозрачность* (Transparency).

Снега, зарей одеты  
В пустынях высоты,  
Мы – Вечности обеты

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., P. 86

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

В лазури Красоты.  
Мы – всплески рдяной пены  
Над бледностью морей.  
Покинь земные плены,  
Воссядь среди царей!  
Не мни: мы, в небе тая,  
С землей разлучены: -  
Ведет тропа святая  
В заоблачные сны.

The snows are dressed in dawn  
In the deserts of the heights;  
We are the pledges of eternity  
In the azure of Beauty.  
We are splashes of ardent froth  
Above the paleness of the seas.  
Abandon earthly captivity,  
Rule among the emperors!  
Do not imagine that, melting in heaven,  
We are separated from the earth:  
A sacred path leads  
To dreams beyond the clouds.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to see how the following stanza from Boris Pasternak's poem represents a transformation of the enigmatic symbolist images into a more explicit form, thus introducing it into and making it comprehensible for a wider audience.

Пастернак, *Ночь* (1956)  
(последняя строфа стихотворения):

Не спи, не спи, художник,  
Не предавайся сну.  
Ты – вечности заложник  
У времени в плену.

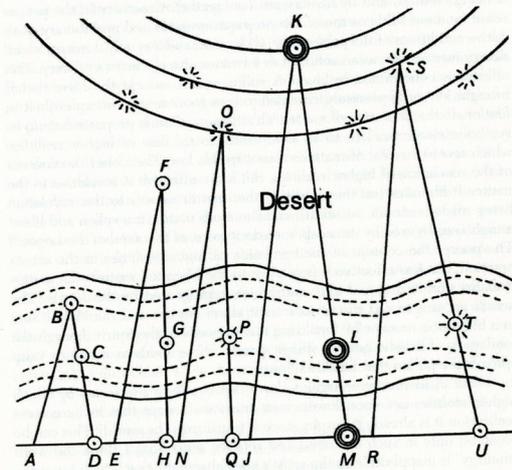
Don't sleep, don't sleep, o artist,  
Do not succumb to sleep.  
You are a captive of eternity  
In the prison of time.<sup>13</sup>

*(Translated by Emese Nyiri)*

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<sup>12</sup> Translation by Robert Bird.

<sup>13</sup> Translation by Robert Bird.



ABCD — subjectivist art.  
 EFCH — realist art (Flaubert).  
 JKLM — Dante's art.  
 NOPQ and RSTU — types of high Symbolism.  
 B — the point of subjectivist mirror reflection.  
 F — the point of the transcendent contemplation of the reality that is being overcome.  
 O, S, K — points of the intuitive comprehension of higher realities.  
 C, G, P, L, T — points of the Apollonian contemplation of the apogees of ascent, the artist's "dreams."  
 D, H, Q, M, U — points of artistic incarnation (e.g., M is *The Divine Comedy*).