

Chapter Title: Modernism/Modernity in the Postrevolutionary Diaspora

Book Title: Russians Abroad

Book Subtitle: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919–1939)

Book Author(s): GRETA N. SLOBIN

Book Editor(s): katerina Clark, Nancy Condee, Dan Slobin, Mark Slobin

Published by: Academic Studies Press. (2013)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zxsjrg.12>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. Funding is provided by Knowledge Unlatched.



JSTOR

Academic Studies Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Russians Abroad*

Part III

*Modernism
and the Diaspora's Quest
for Literary Identity*

Chapter IIIA

Modernism/Modernity in the Postrevolutionary Diaspora

“*Nikogda nichei ia ne byl sovremennik.*”

(I have never ever been anyone’s contemporary.)

— Osip Mandelstam

In its last decades, the twentieth century occasioned passionate debates in the West about its beginning—about modernism, its definition, aesthetics, and politics. The importance of a stocktaking of the modernist legacy acquired new urgency in the swiftly approaching turn of the twenty first century. As Marshall Berman noted in his seminal book on modernism, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1983), “we don’t know how to use modernism.”¹ Berman’s explicit purpose was to restore the memory of modernism and its promise: “This act of remembering can help us bring modernism back to its roots, so it can nourish and renew itself, to confront the adventures and dangers that lie ahead.”² This work, concerned with the relation between modernity and revolution, was one of the first that included an extended discussion of the Russian contribution and its distinct history in the context of European modernisms.

Modernism for Berman is revolutionary in its break with the past artistic traditions. His main concern is to reveal “the dialectics of modernization and modernism” in the interwar period.³ In a subsequent discussion of Berman’s book, Perry Anderson provides a useful clarification of terms: “Between the two lies the key middle term of ‘modernity’—neither economic process nor cultural vision but the *historical experience* mediat-

¹ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 24.

² *Ibid.*, 36.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

ing one to the other.”⁴ The question Anderson asks is one that has great relevance for the Russian experience: “What constitutes the nature of the linkage between them?”⁵ He then singles out *development* as “the central concept of the book and the source of most of its paradoxes.” In the context of the postmodern critique, Andreas Huyssen questions the belief in “the relationship of modernism to the matrix of modernization which gave birth to it and nurtured it through its various stages.”⁶

The terms modernism, modernity, and development, debated in Russia since the early twentieth century, became crucial after the October Revolution in the passionate polemics concerning the shape and role of Russian literature in the young Soviet Union. A direct relation of art to social transformation, tied to development, was vital for the Soviet avant-garde, for whom this was an opportunity for a fusion of revolutionary politics and aesthetics. However, as Sheila Fitzpatrick points out, “within the creative intelligentsia ... there were profound splits between avant-gardists, traditionalists, preservationists, realists, symbolists, Marxists, and those who either were or were not prepared to be ‘Fellow Travelers’ of Soviet power.”⁷ Those writers and intellectuals who were part of the prerevolutionary modernism and found themselves in exile, outside the USSR and “outside of history,” faced a different set of challenges in the conditions of life abroad. For them, the connection between the aesthetic experiment of modernism, its social implications, and the matrix of modernity and modernization was particularly complex.

This chapter examines how the diaspora considered its role in the culture debates, where modernism and modernity were the disputed terms, understood as distinct by some and as conjoined by others in the years following the revolution. The Russian example represents a special case history in the study of cultural politics of a divided nation. Understanding the use of key terms and the attitudes they engendered holds further implications for understanding Russian modernism as it continued well

⁴ Perry Anderson, “Modernity and Revolution,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited with an introduction by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL./Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 318.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 55-56.

⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 4.

beyond the revolution at home and in the diaspora.⁸ The diaspora stance on these issues was inevitably ambivalent, since, as Paul Gilroy affirms, “consciousness of diaspora affiliation stands opposed to the distinctively modern structures and modes of power orchestrated by the institutional complexities of nation-states.”⁹

At the same time, the situation in the homeland provided a context for critical positions in the diaspora, where people from different sides of the political spectrum debated the events in Soviet Russia, set on an evolving platform of progress that would create a modern nation out of a backward tsarist empire. One of the polemical issues in the history of Russia Abroad was a concern with the role of literature in sustaining a sense of national identity. As the Soviet political situation began to change in the mid-twenties, the challenge of cultural continuity and artistic creativity became more acute. The questions concerned such issues as “here or there?”; “one or two literatures?”; cultural preservation vs. literary craft and innovation; the “how” vs. “what” argument; the problem of “center” and “periphery”; and the problem of readership.¹⁰ These were part of the process that, according to Gilroy, constitutes the diaspora’s “social ecology of identification,” created in a “relational network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering.”¹¹

The result of the social ecology of dispersion was the overriding concern with the preservation of the great Russian literary tradition, seen as threatened in the homeland. This contributed to the predominantly conservative stance among the writers and critics in the diaspora. Émigré conservatism was noted in an early seminal collective study by Frank Boldt, Lazar Fleishman, and Dmitry Segal.¹² In a later history of the Russian diaspora, Marc Raeff registered the general “ambivalence” of modernism among the émigrés as they questioned its dual nature, its aesthetics and politics in the aftermath of the revolution: “... Were

⁸ For the notion of the continuity of Russian modernism beyond the Revolution, see Mark Lipovetsky, *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*, ed. Eliot Bornstein (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 7.

⁹ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 124.

¹⁰ See, for example, V. Khodasevich: “Tam ili zdes?” *Dni* 804 (25 September 1925).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹² Bol'dt, Fleishman, Segal, “Problemy izucheniia literatury russkoi emigratsii pervoi treti XX veka,” 75-88.

not the anarchism and nihilism of extreme modernism legitimate heirs to symbolist experimentation?”¹³ The social implications of modernism thus became associated with “the political and moral destructiveness of the Silver Age, and this stood in the way of a full appreciation of, for example, the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva (or of Boris Pasternak, while he lived abroad)....”¹⁴ Indeed, Tsvetaeva and Remizov, who continued as innovators, often had to defend themselves against their critics in emigration.¹⁵

Indeed, the dizzying richness of the artistic revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia brought a sense of infinite possibilities, which also entailed individual and social emancipation in the land, where the need for change was fueled by an attenuated sense of an impending cataclysm. In *Russian Modernism: The Transfiguration of the Everyday*, Stephen Hutchings offers striking readings of Bely, Rozanov, and Remizov, whose autobiographical fictions represent an apotheosis in the transfiguration of the everyday, where *byt* emerges as a significant cultural category. By blurring the boundaries between the aesthetic and the counter-aesthetic, the modernists sought to overcome the division between self and other, while retaining the primacy of “the word” in Russian culture. According to Hutchings, this distinguished Russian modernism from European.¹⁶

The social implications of modernism are discussed in a foundational essay, “Modernity—an Incomplete Project,” where Jürgen Habermas reviews the long history of the term “modern” in the West, “which appeared and reappeared exactly during those periods in Europe when the consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients.”¹⁷ Since the Enlightenment, the idea of being “modern” was tied to the belief “inspired by modern science, in the infinite prog-

¹³ Raeff, *Russia Abroad*, 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Marina Tsvetaeva complains about the attitude of contemporary critics to her and Remizov’s work and sees this as a problem for future historians of emigration: “Poet o kritike,” *Izbrannaia proza v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1, 236-237.

¹⁶ Stephen C. Hutchings, *Russian Modernism: The Transfiguration of the Everyday* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity—An Incomplete Project,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. with an introduction by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 4.

ress of knowledge and in the infinite advance towards social and moral betterment.”¹⁸ For Habermas, as for Berman, “modernity revolts against the normalizing function of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative.”¹⁹ Habermas proclaims the modernist belief in the power of art to transform reality as a “failed” or “incomplete” part of its project in Western Europe. Once again, the Russian situation differs from the West. A part of the modernist “emancipatory project” of the utopian left avant-garde, in which art was to transform or affect life, was indeed fulfilled. However, as David Bethea points out in *The Shape of Apocalypse*, the “emancipatory project” tied to the Symbolist attempt to combine apocalyptic spiritual revelation of the end of Old Russia with the revolutionary anticipation of the birth of a new Russia failed.²⁰

Writing on the modernism/modernity matrix in the chapter “The Hidden Dialectic: Avantgarde—Technology—Mass Culture,” Andreas Huyssen reiterates “the historical avantgarde’s insistence on the cultural transformation of everyday life.”²¹ He notes that, while in Dada, “technology mainly functioned to ridicule and dismantle bourgeois high culture and its ideology,” it took on “an entirely different meaning in post-1917 Russian avant-garde.”²² Huyssen states that “the Russian avantgarde had already completed its break with tradition when it turned openly political after the revolution.”²³ It thus accomplished the emancipatory project that remained “incomplete” elsewhere in Europe: “the avantgarde’s goal to forge a new unity of art and life by creating a new life seemed about to be realized in revolutionary Russia.”²⁴ Many years later, this utopian moment in art would lead Boris Groys to conclude that the avant-garde had prepared the path for Stalinist Socialist Realism.²⁵

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ David Bethea, “Introduction: Myth, History, Plot, Steed,” in *The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 7.

²¹ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

The importance of chronology for writers on both shores is of critical significance. The aftermath of the October Revolution and the Civil War was a brief time of relative openness regarding the directions of literature, as writers both in the homeland and in emigration struggled with historical change and a scarcity of resources. The situation remained in flux in the early twenties while the borders and joint publishing venues remained open. At the same time, Soviet cultural leaders paid attention to the intellectual and literary life of Russians abroad. Mark von Hagen points out that the émigré culture provided an important “countermodel and context for the development of Soviet culture.”²⁶ Sometimes the response was quick. For example, Robert Maguire shows that the revival of the venerable tradition of the “thick journal” that first occurred when *Contemporary Notes* (*Sovremennye zapiski*) began publication in Paris in 1920, presented a challenge to the Soviets. It was met by Aleksandr Voronskii’s efforts to create *Red Virgin Soil* (*Krasnaia nov’*), in 1921, with the support of Lenin, Krupskaja, and Gorky.²⁷ Among its tasks was to provide a serious venue for established and young writers, as well as to deny “the émigré taunts that the Bolsheviks ruled a cultural desert.”²⁸ Most significantly, the notion of “contemporariness” as the journal’s stated requirement sent a clear message abroad that the choice to leave Russia was “a choice against history, and therefore against art, and would be punished by artistic sterility and death.”²⁹ Despite the differences, there was continuity in the debates on both sides of the border up to 1925, in the years immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution.³⁰

An acute consciousness of this transitional moment in Russian culture was signaled by Ivanov-Razumnik, an important prerevolutionary critic of Russian modernism who remained in the country, in his collection of essays *Sovremennaia literatura* (1925), published with delay and without his name.³¹ In the editor’s introduction, Ivanov-Razumnik expressed a need for stocktaking: “a critical appraisal of the immediate past is alone

²⁶ See Mark von Hagen, “Toward a Cultural and Intellectual History of Soviet Russia in the 1920s,” *Révue des études slaves* 68 (1996): 299.

²⁷ Robert A. Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920s*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁰ See S. Fitzpatrick, “The Soft Line on Culture and Its Enemies,” in *The Cultural Front*.

³¹ A. V. Lavrov and John Malmstad, “Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik: Preduvedomlenie k perepiske,” in *Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik: perepiska*, 22.

capable of explaining the phenomena of today and map out the plausible path of tomorrow.”³² In his essay in the volume titled “A Look and Something” (*Vzgliad i nechtto*), signed by the pseudonym Ippolit Udush'ev, he drew a line between the art of prerevolutionary modernism and the work of younger authors, declaring that “it is not unlikely that, following a great surge of the creative wave in Russian literature of the first quarter of the century, we would not be (and already are) facing its fall, which can extend over some decades.”³³ In this essay, Ivanov-Razumnik differentiates two stages of modernist literature, considering the first quarter of the century as its Golden Age.

Thus, it is not surprising that 1926 was a decisive year for polemical discussions of modernism and modernity as it registered the sense of change and a realization of a divide between the diaspora and the homeland, where cultural groupings were coming to grips with the increasing Party control.³⁴ Two new journals made their appearance and positioned themselves clearly on the stage of cultural politics of Russia Abroad: the Paris-based Eurasian journal, *Mileposts* (*Versty*, 1926-1928), edited by D. S. Mirsky, published in three issues; and *The Well-Intentioned* (*Blagonamerennyi*, 1926), edited by Dmitrii Shakhovskoi, with two issues published in Belgium. Their polemical stance shows how cultural politics in the homeland affected the diaspora stance towards the modernism/modernization matrix.

Mirsky was one of the most eloquent advocates of artistic experimentation and appeared unambiguously impatient with the dominant conservative attitude. For him, artistic modernism is inseparable from modernity, where the notion of development is key. His introduction to the first issue of *Versty* was a concise statement that called for a closer scrutiny in this context. At the outset, Mirsky states that the journal does

³² Ivanov-Razumnik, *Sovremennaia literatura. Sbornik statei* (Leningrad: Mysl', 1925), 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁴ The year 1925 marked the end of the journal *Colloquy* (*Beseda*), a collaborative venture, organized by Maxim Gorky along with Vladislav Khodasevich, and published in Berlin. 1926 marked the end of LEF (the Left Front in Art) as a representative of the avant-garde wing of revolutionary art, as well as the end of *Sovremennyyi Zapad*, edited by K. Chukovskii and E. Zamyatin, a short-lived journal that supported modernism and modernity in its cosmopolitan perspective and featured translations of contemporary European modernists, as well as reviews of publications by Russia Abroad.

not pretend to “unite all of the best and the most alive (*vsego, chto est' luchshego i samogo zhivogo*) in contemporary Russian literature.”³⁵ While suggesting that a journal published abroad can only point the reader's attention to the best, he also claims that would be easier to realize from “the outside” or “the periphery” (*so storony*) [could be understood as either], than in Russia. Paradoxically, while setting definite limits for such a journal, Mirsky nevertheless points to its advantages, even as he disdains émigré writers, with the exception of Tsvetaeva and Remizov.³⁶

The “supranational” argument for this task of understanding “the whole” leads Mirsky to his main point that “Russian is greater than Russia itself” (*russskoe bol'she samoi Rossii*). Moreover, Mirsky equates “Russianness” with “modernity” (*sovremennost'*) as its “particular and most acute expression” (*osoboe i naibolee ostroe vyrazhenie*). “Modernity” is also to be understood in cosmopolitan terms, since the journal would be concerned with foreign literature as well. His bibliographical survey in the first issue shows how *Versty* positions itself amidst existing émigré journals. Mirsky's review of the Parisian *Contemporary Notes* sees the journal as stuck in a time warp, its conservatism tied to “the inertia of prerevolutionary Russia.”³⁷

Particularly important for our discussion is the implicit semantic opposition of the terms “contemporary” and “contemporaneity” (*sovremennyi/sovremennost'*), which reveals the author's underlying message that “contemporaneity” is superior to and displaces the retrograde aesthetic literary criteria. In this Mirsky appears close to the editorial position of the *Red Virgin Soil*, cited above. He is disparaging in consigning *Contemporary Notes* to the category of “a museum and often a panopticum.”³⁸

However, Mirsky favors the left-wing Prague journal *Volia Rossii* (“Russia's Will”), edited by Marc Slonim, calling it the most “alive” and “free” of émigré publications, since it includes the best in contemporary Soviet literature. He notes that there is no such journal in the USSR since the end of LEF. In conclusion, Mirsky states in no uncertain terms that

³⁵ *Versty*, ed. by Count D. P. Sviatopolk-Mirskii, P. Suvchinskii, S. Efron, with the close participation of Aleksei Remizov, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Lev Shestov, no. 26 (1926): 1.

³⁶ Struve, *Russskaia literatura v izgnanii*, 74.

³⁷ D. S. Mirsky, “Bibliografiia,” *Versty* 1 (1926): 207.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

it in this journal “Russia is alive not only within the borders of the Russian world, but in the kingdom of the Spirit, beyond all borders.” Like *Mileposts*, this is a supra-national and supra-temporal journal in Mirsky’s understanding of time that encompasses temporality, contemporaneity, and the future cultural legacy.

The other new émigré journal this year, *Blagonamerennyi*, was an important, though short-lived, literary publication. Mirsky finds a forum here, alongside such established writers as Tsvetaeva and Remizov. Mirsky’s programmatic and polemical essay “On the Current State of Russian Literature,” published in the first issue, continues his polemics with conservative critics and asserts that political criteria alone should not dominate literary choices, either at home or abroad. In his estimation, the greatest living poets living in the Soviet Union are Akhmatova, Pasternak, and Mandelstam, along with Tsvetaeva in Paris. He does not include Mayakovsky in this list, considering him stuck and repeating himself, thus curiously missing Mayakovsky’s importance at this time. In this particular case, as we shall see later, Tsvetaeva was much more astute and attuned to modernity. Mirsky’s provocative concluding statement that “Russian literature finds more *joie de vivre* after the revolution, than before it” is an open challenge to the émigrés.

Two brief remarks in the essay are relevant to the problem of contemporaneity. One, concerning the Formalist school and its “enlivening action, which coincided with the fall of creative powers on Russian soil” (*ozhivliaiushchee deistvie formalizma sovpalo s upadkom tvorcheskikh sil russkoi pochvy*)³⁹ This remark made in passing is striking, first of all because, according to G. Smith, “in all of Mirsky’s writing there is not a single item devoted to the exposition of a theoretical position.”⁴⁰ It acquires added weight in the ominous concluding paragraph, where Mirsky states that “for a quarter of a century our literature (and not just literature?) has been preparing us for death” (*Chetvert’ veka nasha literatura (odna-li literatura?)*)

³⁹ D. S. Mirsky, “O nyneshnem sostoianii russkoi literatury,” in his *Uncollected Writings on Russian Literature*, 228.

⁴⁰ G. S. Smith, *D. S. Mirsky: A Russian-English Life: 1890-1939* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 120. Smith notes here that Mirsky published a single review of the Russian Formalists in *Sovremennye zapiski*, 24 (1925), written “with astonishing acuity,” where he acknowledged that they “laid the basis for a genuinely historical and also text-based approach to the literary work.”

gotovila nas k smerti).⁴¹ In a recent biography of Mirsky, Gerald Smith connects this statement with Mirsky's "notorious" lecture on "The Ambience of Death in Prerevolutionary Russian Literature," delivered in Paris in 1926 and published the next year in the second issue of *Versty*, with a footnote stating that his public lecture has occasioned the anger of the Paris émigré literary establishment.⁴² It is not hard to see why, since here Mirsky proclaimed that the literature of the last stage of the Russian empire was imbued with the sense of death and decomposition. He implied that such a sensibility was part of the collective unconscious, independent of historical process.⁴³ Not only does Mirsky contradict Ivanov-Razumnik's appraisal of the Golden Age of Russian modernism, but also his own rendering of its history in his excellent *History of Russian Literature*, published in England in 1926.

In a sharply polemical piece, "Dialogue on Conservatism" in the second issue of *Blagonamerennyi*, Mirsky admonishes the émigré conservationists, arguing that "there is nothing to conserve."⁴⁴ He comes out against the possibility of "restoration," no more possible in literature than it is in politics. He proclaims that art is revolutionary by definition, because it creates "new values" (*Iskusstvo — sozdanie novykh tsennostei*), and concludes with an ironic statement: "Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva may not be immediately appreciated, but I also have to make an effort to get to the British Museum from my house."⁴⁵ This clearly reiterates the necessity of change and the penchant toward the modern. As a literary critic, writing in English as well as in Russian, Mirsky had doubts about the ability of literature to thrive or sustain itself as an independent entity in exile. His early opinion, voiced in 1922, stated that "there is little or no first-class fiction in literature of the Russian Emigration," did not change while he remained abroad until 1932.⁴⁶ For him, émigré literature would remain on the periphery, with the center in Russia. This would become

⁴¹ Mirsky, "O nyneshnem sostoianii russkoi literatury," in his *Uncollected Writings on Russian Literature*, 229.

⁴² G. S. Smith, 135.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴⁴ *Blagonamerennyi* 2 (1926): 87.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁶ D. S. Mirsky, "Five Russian Letters." Originally published in six parts: "The Literature of the Emigration," *The London Mercury* 27 (1922): 276-285; reprinted in D. S. Mirsky, *Uncollected Writings on Russian Literature*, 84.

one of the points of argument between Mirsky and Khodasevich, up to the time when Mirsky returns to the Soviet Union in 1932.

In contrast to Mirsky's provocative statements, Vladislav Khodasevich who, according to Smith, was Mirsky's worthiest opponent in emigration, presents a more balanced, if somewhat depressed, view of literary politics on both shores. In his article "There or Here?" he was critical of the émigré rejection of Soviet literature for political reasons and proclaimed both literatures as "ailing," hoping that "both will survive."⁴⁷ He was also critical of Mirsky's bias toward "the center" and, in his sharp response to *Versty*, he attacked the Eurasianists and their insistence on the presence of better conditions for fostering talent in the USSR, and Mirsky, specifically, for his readiness to ignore the suffering of writers and the intelligentsia in Soviet Russia.⁴⁸

Writing on behalf of Russian literature abroad, Khodasevich continues to argue with Mirsky after the latter's departure for the Soviet Union in 1932. His programmatic essay on "Literature in Exile," written in 1933, is an affirmation of the existence and productivity of émigré literature as a national literature, not only in Russian but in world history. Khodasevich appears closer to Mirsky on some points, as he reiterates his notion of a divided literature and rejects émigré conservatism, which for him equals "indifference to the literary process." And whereas in the past Khodasevich was critical of the Formalists, now his approach resembles theirs as he stresses the dynamics of literary evolution: "The spirit of literature is the spirit of eternal explosion and eternal renewal."⁴⁹ Arguing against "restoration," he continues to insist that one cannot learn from people who "look only to the past and who are not interested in the problems of literary theory," but asserts the possibility of great creativity in exile.⁵⁰

The argument for diaspora literature is made in the period between 1925-1939, which Gleb Struve considers as that of the "self-affirmation of diaspora." A year before Khodasevich, Marina Tsvetaeva takes up the dialogue concerning the relationship of modernism and modernity,

⁴⁷ V. Khodasevich, *Sobranie sochinenii v 5-ti tomakh*, vol. 2 (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1992), 368.

⁴⁸ V. Khodasevich, "O 'Verstakh,'" *Sovremennye zapiski* 29 (Paris, 1926): 433-441.

⁴⁹ V. Khodasevich, "Literatura v izgnanii," 267.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

and its implication for the artist, Soviet or émigré, in her brilliant essay “The Poet and Time.” The essay opens with a quote that echoes Mirsky’s “Dialogue on Conservatism,” cited above. The two phrases—“I really love art, but only not contemporary” and the counter-statement “I love verse, but only contemporary”—set up the parameters of her argument, exemplified by two seemingly antithetical great Russian poets, Pushkin and Mayakovsky.⁵¹ Tsvetaeva declares that “there is no art ... that is not contemporary” (*Ne sovremennogo... iskusstva net*). While agreeing with both Mirsky and Khodasevich that restoration is not art, she speaks of individuals who may be a hundred years ahead of their time, who are “outside time” (*vne-vremennye*).⁵² While assuming the poet’s relationship to history, “One cannot skip out of History” (*iz Istorii ne vyskochish*), Tsvetaeva insists, however, that “contemporaneity for a poet is not a declaration of the superiority of his time” (*sovremennost’ u poeta ne est’ provozglashenie svoego vremeni luchshim...*) and that the “contemporaneity” of verse is not in its contents, but often despite it, in its sound.⁵³

In terms of the modernism/modernity nexus that is central in the homeland, Tsvetaeva is clear that politics divide the poet and the people. If the theme of the revolution is the “social command” of the time, its glorification is the command of the Party.⁵⁴ She defines “contemporaneity” (*sovremennost’*) as “the sum total of what is best” (*sovokupnost’ luchshego*), but declares “the marriage of poet and time—a forced marriage.”⁵⁵ It is here that Tsvetaeva draws the striking distinction between “a revolutionary poet” and “the poet of the Revolution (*le chantre de la Revolution*).”⁵⁶ In this representative essay of aesthetic modernism, Tsvetaeva appears more attuned to modernity than Mirsky in recognizing Mayakovsky’s greatness. In her homage, written soon after the poet’s tragic death in 1930, she declared him to be a single example of the “poet

⁵¹ Marina Tsvetaeva, “Poet i vremia,” *Izbrannaia proza v dvukh tomakh: 1917-1937*, vol. 1, 367.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 369.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 370-371. Tsvetaeva follows the juxtaposition of the two poets made by Mirsky in his article “Dve smerti: 1837-1930,” in *Smert’ Vladimira Maiakovskogo* (Berlin: Petropolis, 1931), 47-66. However, she argues with Mirsky’s assertion that the poet’s suicide marked the end of an era of the artist as a supreme individualist.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 377-379.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 374.

of the Revolution.” With great acuity, speaking from the experience of writing in the homeland and in the diaspora, both before and after the Revolution, Tsvetaeva understood that modernism and modernity were almost never compatible.

The discussion of modernism and modernity was taken up by Tsve-taeva’s older contemporaries and senior modernists, Aleksei Remizov, a fellow émigré, and Andrei Bely, residing in the homeland. They began working on critical studies of Gogol independently on both shores in the early thirties, because for them Gogol was a “hypercontemporary writer” (*sovremenneishii pisatel*).⁵⁷ Remizov continued to work on Gogol in emigration, insisting that he “always read Gogol.”⁵⁸ The continuing dialogue between a twentieth-century modernist and the master from whom one can learn how to write by “following his verbal structure” remains uninterrupted.⁵⁹ Remizov’s approach to presenting the writer’s creative biography as “mythological” is inseparable from his conception of himself as a writer, whose biography is seen in terms of human history as a “struggle and succession of myths: the myth of the deity, the myth of freedom, the myth of love.”⁶⁰ As will Bely, Remizov takes this occasion to address the tension between writers and contemporary critics, both in Gogol’s time and in his own, in *Russia Abroad*. Thinking of difficulties with the émigré critics who do not understand his work, Remizov reminds his contemporaries that one has to learn to read Gogol.

The situation was different for Andrei Bely, who became actively involved in the reaction that accompanied Meyerhold’s staging of Gogol’s “Inspector General” in 1926. The ideological lines were sharply drawn in response to the event that turned into a great media scandal of the year. In his study of Meyerhold, Konstantin Rudnitskii confirms both the importance of the staging and the reactions to it: “There was nothing in the theater history like the discussion of the ‘Inspector General.’ Passionate disputes, numerous contradictory reviews, both positive and scorching, epigrams, feuilletons ...”⁶¹ The public speech Bely presented in 1926, “Gogol and Meyerhold,” gives a full flavor of the conflict: “It has

⁵⁷ A. Remizov, *Ogon’ veshchei*, 514.

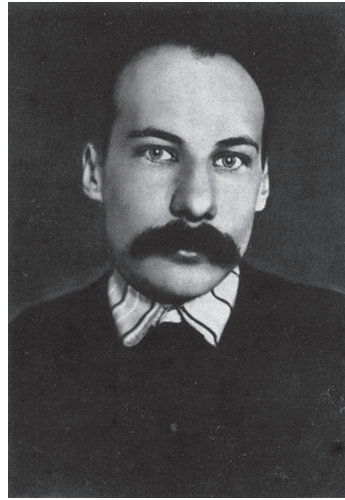
⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶¹ Konstantin Rudnitskii, *Meierkhold* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1981), 350.

been two month that the cry is heard in Moscow ‘Meyerhold insulted Gogol. Gogol laughed a healthy laugh: Meyerhold killed Gogol’s healthy laughter’⁶² Bely’s s sharply polemical tone is underscored by an ironically straightforward advice to his confused contemporaries to reread Gogol, since his text has not yet been torn apart by Meyerhold. This was precisely the advice that, along with Remizov, Bely followed in his book on *Gogol’s Artistry* (begun in 1931 and published in 1934), a model of a close critical reading and analysis.



Andrei Bely,
1880-1934

Bely’s letters to Ivanov-Razumnik during the period of writing provide insight into the dramatic conditions of work on the subject during the early thirties. Bely’s uncertainty about the project is revealed in some passages in the Gogol study, where Marxist rhetoric—the rhetoric of modernity in the Soviet context—makes a rare but striking appearance. Ivanov-Razumnik attributed Bely’s use of such terms as “class struggle” or “the dynamics of the capitalist process” in an otherwise brilliant book to his belief that it would be impossible to get the book past the censors “without rendering it Marxist” (*ne omarksitiv ee*).⁶³

In his attempt to disengage modernism from modernity, Bely comments on the conflict of his own time as he formulates the tragedy of Gogol’s last years, stating that the struggle “between social command and demand is a disease.”⁶⁴ Bely’s position, as that of Khodasevich and Tsvetaeva, appears close to Russian Formalists. In his article of 1927, “The Literary Everyday” (*Literaturnyi byt*), Eikhbaum declares with considerable acuity that “social command does not always coincide with the

⁶² Andrei Belyi, “Gogol’ i Meierkhol’d” in *Gogol’ i Meierkhol’d: sbornik literaturno-issledovatel’skoi assotsiatsii Ts.D.R.P.*, ed. E. F. Nikitina (Moscow: Nikitinskie subbotniki, 1927), 9.

⁶³ Quoted in Aleksandr Lavrov and John Malmstad, “Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik: Preduvedomlenie k perepiske,” in *Andrei Belyi i Ivanov-Razumnik—perepiska*, 22.

⁶⁴ A. Belyi, *Masterstvo Gogolia* (Moscow: Gos. Izd. Khud. Lit., 1934), 113.

literary one, as does the class struggle with the literary struggles.”⁶⁵ It also seems that the Russian modernists would be in agreement with the post-war critics Clement Greenberg and Theodor W. Adorno, for whom the theory of modernism “appears as a theory of modernization displaced to the aesthetic realm; this is precisely its historical strength, and what makes it different from the mere academic formalism of which it is so often accused.”⁶⁶ And at the end of the twentieth century, Habermas will confirm this, along with Tsvetaeva’s views, that “all attempts to level art and life, fiction and praxis, appearance and reality ... have proved themselves to be sort of nonsense experiments.”⁶⁷

In her recent book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym reiterates how crucial it is to “distinguish ‘modernism’ as a critical project from ‘modernization’ as a social practice and state policy.”⁶⁸ The insistence on the separate realms is important in relation to Russian Formalism, a critical school that represented the modern in its approach. In the Formalist theory of literary history, evolution as a complex term replaced *development* and *influence*. Iurii Tynianov understood the nature of “literary evolution” as dynamic, but not necessarily linear in terms of genre: “not a level evolution, but a jump, not development, but shifts” (*ne planomernaia evolutsiia, a skachok, ne razvitie, a smeshchenie*).⁶⁹ His collection of essays, *Archaisms and Innovators*, appeared at the end of the first revolutionary decade in 1929, when modernism was under attack, with a striking title that combined the term pertaining to modernity with its paradoxical counterpart. Already in his 1924 essay on “The Literary Fact,” included in the volume, the key factors constitutive of literary evolution are those of “struggle and change” (*bor’ba i smena*), but the process is not linear. But most importantly for this discussion, Tynianov perceived *contemporaneity* (*sovremennost’*) as a complex phenomenon: “the contemporary is subject to the same historical struggle between different layers and formations as historical phenomena at various times.”⁷⁰ In his thinking,

⁶⁵ B. Eikhenbaum, *Moi vremennik* (Leningrad, 1928). Quoted in Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 150.

⁶⁶ A. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 57.

⁶⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity—An Incomplete Project,” 11.

⁶⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 45.

⁶⁹ Iu. Tynianov, “Literaturnyi fakt,” *Arkhaisty i novatory*. Reprint of Leningrad edition, 1929 (Munich: W. Fink, 1967), 6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

Tynianov appears closer to the Russian modernist writers, Tsvetaeva, Bely, and Remizov, than he is to Mirsky's position.

In the statements surveyed here that belong to the continued tradition of prerevolutionary modernism in the diaspora, the complex experience of contemporaneity for critics and writers often appears contradictory, as it forces them to face problems of individual creativity in the newly formed context of Russian literature at home and abroad. There is a general agreement on the idea, put forth by Mirsky, that literary conservatism forestalls artistic development. However, as the writers cope with history at home and in the diaspora, their experience helps to articulate the notions of modernism, modernity and development that have been the subject of considerable discussion and critique in post-modern theory.