The Core of "The Triangular Pear"

The beatnik poetry of Andrei Voznesensky shows an evolving image of America from a Russian standpoint. In his poem "The Triangular Pear," Voznesensky has no agenda to show the positive nature of Russia, or the negative effects of capitalism. Instead, his sole concern is to discover the core of America, to answer the age-old question, "What is America? Where can she be found?" To do this, he must search both extrinsically and intrinsically. Voznesensky shows this search throughout the poem by constantly scaling. His imagery goes up and down, as does his presentation of the piece. Furthermore, this poem is fast paced, which adds to the feeling of constant movement. "The Triangular Pear" is split into two parts, Prelude I and II. The first prelude talks about the speaker's search for America, while the second prelude focuses on what he sees and finds in America. Clearly, Voznesensky sees America in a way Russian writers before him had not, and using his unique lens he adds to one's understanding of America.

The first six lines show Voznesensky's urgency and hurried pace with the way they appear on the page, as well as using two exclamation points. Voznesensky even writes, "I measure, explore, / discover, all out of breath…" In these first few lines, Voznesensky utilizes the American mood of always rushing around, to discover something new, in order to show his need to understand America, and therefore he shows the grasp he has on at least one aspect of the American spirit. In lines five and six he uses repetition when he writes "In America, America,/ In myself, myself…" Here the speaker shows his need to find America and himself. By putting the "Americas" on the line above and lining them up to be "on top" of the "myselfs" he shows them as connected. Also then America is the outer or top layer while he is the bottom or inner core. To a certain extent, the discovery of America is also a discovery of himself. The speaker reminds the reader of the title in lines 7-11. In these lines, each line is a step he must take in order to travel downwards. He "peel[s] the skin from the planet" and "Cut through the crust/ and go down/ into the depths of things" (7 and 9). Once again there is double imagery of scaling, in his words and the presentation of those words. When the speaker goes "down/ into the depths…" he is doing so metaphorically and searches for the truth. The speaker brings America back into the equation with his next line by using the subway in a simile to describe the idea of having to go down and travel to the location of truth. Line 13 is the only time that reader actually sees the triangular pears. "Down there grow triangular pears;/ I seek the naked souls they contain." So while within the depths of the Earth, the speaker must go through even more layers to find the "souls." He stubbornly continues to seek understanding by "incessantly" prying into the fruit and not "relent[ing]" (18-19). The speaker shows his independence from old ideas and his need to discover his own truth when he admonishes the reader, "Do not be misled/ if they say your watermelon’s green when in fact it’s red." The next two lines are images of determination and stubbornness; a dog and cleaver both will chew until there is nothing left. In the last part of prelude one, one continues to see the speaker’s determination to find the truth. He compares himself to Columbus, who people thought was a "hooligan," with his idea of finding India. Voznesensky plays further into Columbus’ story in lines 24-31.

"You’re looking for India-
look a bit more-
You’ll find
America!”

Once again, the reader sees how the lines form downward “steps” on the page to show the speaker finding America. Also searching for India, but in the end finding America shows how the truth is often unexpected and one finds it in the most unanticipated places. By spending the first 31 lines of the poem on simply sighting America, Voznesensky, shows how the journey can be just as important as the destination.

In the beginning of prelude II, Voznesensky writes of what has captivated so many Russian authors, technology. “I adore/ the blaze of your buildings shooting up to the stars, / to heaven’s outskirts” (32-34). On line 33 the buildings “shoot up,” but on the next line they are only at the bottom of heaven. However, he does not dwell on this symbol of America, but continues, this time as a greyhound, to search for the genuine America. It is on the bottom that he sees America, represented by a “a barefoot, beatnik girl!” (39). He describes her as barefoot to show that he has now dug far enough to see below the top layer of America and is in the process of tearing off America’s shiny “wrapping paper.” Also, the truth cannot be found in America’s technological advances, but is more simple and pure. Furthermore, he chooses a beatnik as a symbol of change and a person who does not accept the status quo. The girl runs past storefronts, here the speaker does not accept that capitalism is the real America.

In lines 40-46, the speaker describes America and yet he still finds himself lost.

“And under the firehoses of the thundering highways
My ears like millwheels whirl
Round over godless
baseball-crazy
gasoline-hazy America!
Coca-Cola. Clangarola….Where
The hell am I?”

After examining this section one can hear the beat and feel it getting faster. When he says “Clangarola,” one thinks of a train that has steadily been chugging along and gaining speed. Moreover, one can imagine getting this mixed up impression of America by watching the country roll-by. However, all it is is an impression of America; no epiphany comes from baseball or coca-cola, so the speaker finds himself symbolically lost on his search for America.

In the next part of Prelude II, Voznesensky continues his imagery of the speaker chasing after the girl, America. He starts at the top, in “penthouses,” but then goes “down alleyways/ and gutters” (47-48), once again showing that the speaker is always closest to finding the truth when he is in the depths of things. For the second time in the poem, Voznesensky refers to capitalism in a negative way like many other writers. Unlike many writers, he sees these wares simply as a distraction to the real America, not as the real America.

"From shop windows your whoring goods hurled them-
Selves at my neck."
But searching for your soul,
I thrust them back (51-54)."
For the speaker, merchandise is used in an attempt to lure him away from this chase; he goes so far as to describe the goods as whores. He refuses to be stupefied by the heights of our buildings or the multitudes of goods and instead “dived under Broadway” (55). Once more, the speaker must go into the depths to ascertain the essence of America. Interestingly he goes under Broadway, the American street that epitomizes fantasy. It is in a basement, the lowest part of a building, that he almost catches up to America.

"...in a basement,
one of your Negro women swayed!
I’d almost caught up with you
But, quivering you got away (56-59)."
Here, he once again describes America as a woman, but instead of a beatnik she is a Negro. As shown in Voznesensky’s poem, “Negroes Sing,” he considers blacks to contain the soul of America. An understandable perception, after all soul food and soul music are both associated with African-Americans.

The end of “The Triangular Pear” is confusing, yet maintains the theme of opposites,

"A gnome on a roof I perch; below, New York, unfurled.
And your sun, on my little finger,
sits like a ladybird. (62-64)"
A gnome is small, and this one is looking far below at the vastness of America. Then he, a small creature, is holding a sun, a huge object. Furthermore, the speaker, using a simile, describes the sun as a ladybird (or ladybug): something fragile and apt to leave at any moment. These images are surrealistic and not completely understandable. Perhaps that is the point; America, with all it’s ideas, opulence, spiritual and material poverty can seem surrealistic. In addition, Voznesensky wrote only lines earlier “Read this and forgive:/ if I grasped nothing in the heat of the chase....” (60-61). He so much as admits that he has yet to make a puzzle out of all these pieces that are America.

Clearly, Voznesensky sees America in a way Russian writers before him had not, and using his unique lens he adds to one’s understanding of America. In the end, one feels as though Voznesensky never does grasp the spirit of America, but that’s all right. He enjoys the chase and in accepting the fact that he does not know what America is, he finds a truth of sorts: The truth that America cannot and will not be easily quantified. The point is not to find the treasure trove, but to gain a treasure’s worth of understanding while experiencing the journey. To say he had found America would have been a great injustice to his experiences and to the richness of humanity, part of which is represented with the “triangular pear” that is America.