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RE-CHECKING FOR THE KEY (A NOTE ON GANDLEVSKIJ AND CHODASEVIČ)

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Abstract

In this note the poems of Vladislav Khodasevich “Pereshagni, pereskochi...” (“Step over, jump over...”) and of Sergei Gandlevskii “‘Ili – ili’ – ‘I – I’ ne byvaet” (“‘Either – or’ – ‘both – and’ do not happen...”) are compared.

Keywords: *V.F. Khodasevich; Sergei Gandlevskii*

Timur Kibirov and Sergej Gandlevskij – two contemporary Russian poets often perceived by readers in tandem – clearly have developed their poetical strategies, respectively, from Aleksandr Blok and Vladislav Chodasevič. The trajectory of Kibirov’s poetical art is traceable in his books, which retain and represent chronologically the stages of his creative career.¹ On the other hand, Gandlevskij works in sets of two or four (more rarely, three) poems, which, as it were, are offshoots of his collections *Prazdnik (Holiday)*, 1995) and *Konspekt (Summary)*, 1991), which constitute, each in their turn, extended versions of his earlier book *Rasskaz (Story)*, 1989).

As is always the case, the method both authors use to present their poems to the reader stems from the profound properties of their individual poetics. Setting aside Kibirov’s verse for the time being,² we shall explore

below a component of Gandlevskij's poetic paraphernalia that is derived from Chodasevič.

Gandlevskij has devoted an essay, 'Orfej v podzemke' ('Orpheus in the Underground', 1997), to the author of *Tjaželaja lira* (*Heavy Lyre*). There he writes, in particular:

The extraordinary impression produced by the lyrics of Chodasevič, to my mind, can be explained by the totally relaxed and breathtaking tone of his verse, as well as by his combining the incompatible: an elevated style with every-day matter like a lost pince-nez or the funeral of a common floor-polisher named Savelyev (Gandlevskij 1998: 82)³

Although the poem about a lost pince-nez is among Chodasevič's best known, let us recall the text:

Перешагни, перескочи,
Перелети, пере- что хочешь –
Но вырвись: камнем из пращи,
Звездой, сорвавшейся в ночи...
Сам затерял – теперь ищи...

Бог знает, что себе бормочешь
Ища пенсне или ключи.

Step over, jump over,
Fly over, over... anything you wish –
But break free: like a stone from a slingshot,
Like a star breaking loose and falling in the night...
You lost it – now go and look for it...

God knows, what you're muttering to yourself
As you look for your pince-nez or keys.

We consider it appropriate to interpret the following poem by Gandlevskij as a reply to what Jurij Tynjanov called this "almost Rozanov-like message" from Chodasevič (Tynjanov 1977: 173):

"Или – или" – "и – и" не бывает.
И, когда он штаны надевает,
Кофе варит, смолит на ходу,
Пьет таблетки, перепроверяет
Ключ, бумажник, электроплиту
И на лестницу дверь отворяет,
Старый хрен, он уже не вздыхает,
Эту странность имея в виду.

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