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CHODASEVIČ'S PUŠKIN

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Abstract

An overview of Khodasevich's studies of Pushkin and his contemporaries, as collected in *Pushkin i poety ego vremeni* (Vols. 1-3; Berkeley, 1999-2014). Includes an attempt at defining Khodasevich's critical method, which was often devoted to determining the angles of refraction of autobiography in Pushkin's works.

Keywords: *V.F. Khodasevich; A.S. Pushkin; Pushkin Studies; Research; Criticism*

Between 1913 and his final illness and death in 1939, Vladislav Chodasevič published upwards of 120 articles, miscellaneous notes, reviews, essays and chapters of an unfinished biography dealing with Aleksandr Puškin.¹ The present writer thought it appropriate to collect and publish – in a first, trial edition – the corpus of these writings as a contribution to the commemorations of the bicentennial in 1999 of Puškin's birth. It was decided additionally to include Chodasevič's essays on Puškin's contemporaries, both Russian and Polish, as related material; his critical appreciations of them almost invariably involved a context supplied by Puškin's life and literary production. These two categories were supplemented by a limited number of his essays on poetics and aesthetics, since these too were so frequently based on the example of Puškin. The first of three volumes did indeed appear in 1999; in the event, the project was completed only in 2014.²

What follows below is an attempt to highlight the landmarks in Chodasevič's career as a Puškin scholar.³ They emerged gradually as we under-

took an investigation of his research, writings and publications about his great progenitor while compiling the contents and annotations for a comprehensive edition of Chodasevič's *puškinistika*.

Chodasevič himself kept a general register (not always completely accurate) of his publications in newspapers and other periodicals after his emigration to Berlin in 1922 and, thereupon, Paris in 1924. This "chronicle" (authoritative so far as it goes) – although incomplete and devoid of items published before his émigré period – greatly facilitated the establishing of a bibliography of his Puškin studies. As is inevitable with texts from so many disparate sources, many of them from ill-edited daily newspapers and periodicals, multiple textological difficulties cropped up.⁴ Yet, another problem arose: it soon became clear to the editor that to annotate even minimally and to establish the context for each item, it would be necessary to dive into the flood of scholarship and multifarious publications in the periodical press surrounding the Puškin centennial of 1899. This meant delving into publications of primary material, periodicals and the flow of memoir writing that were published in the latter half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Chodasevič, the poet-scholar as ardent Puškin enthusiast, was to the extent possible an avid reader of such publications. Gradually, a good deal of primary material located in institutional and personal archives came to our attention, and it was used to construct the background of the writing and publication of many of the component parts of the collection. Additionally, an attempt was made to outline the often bitter polemics which were so often provoked by Chodasevič's methodologies and his views of the critical writings of others. We were aided in this effort by another partial listing compiled by Chodasevič, 'About me' ('Obo mne'). Of quite particular value were the surviving scrapbooks of Chodasevič's journalism on deposit in the B.I. Nikolaevskij collection in the archives of The Hoover Institution, Stanford. (N.N. Berberova compiled a preliminary inventory of these publications in the 1980s.)

Chodasevič's devotion to Puškin was manifest as early as his second collection of poetry, *Happy Little House* (*Sčastlivyj domik*, 1913): the title is drawn from an early Puškin lyric, and the poetry employs images and intimate, domestic subject matter in common with the more restrained verse of his predecessor. (The poetry of this volume represents a move away from the decadent/symbolist aesthetic of his youth.) It was while producing the texts eventually to be collected in his third book of poetry, *Way of the Grain* (*Putem zerna*, 1920), that he immersed himself in Puškin. That period saw his first substantial and enduring contribution to Puškin interpretation, 'Puškin's Petersburg Tales'; it was published belatedly in *Apollon* early in 1915. The imaginative study traces the metaphysical underpinnings of a cluster of works Puškin set in St. Petersburg. This ground-breaking essay establishes a paradigm within which a number of disparate texts – 'Little House in Kolomna',

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