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CHODASEVIČ AND BELYJ: A PARODY REVISITED

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between Andrej Belyi and Khodasevich, and focuses on an early parody of Belyi's *Second Symphony* written by Khodasevich in 1907. The text, from a manuscript in the author's hand, is published here.

Keywords: *V.F. Khodasevich; Andrej Belyi; 'Simfonii'; Parody;*

Может быть, не менее, чем его книги, оказалась влиятельна самая личность этого человека, до крайности сложного, очень часто не уживавшегося с общежитийским укладом, но таившего в себе обаяние единственное и незабываемое, лишь ему одному присущее.

So Vladislav Chodasevič wrote in January, 1934 upon learning of Andrej Belyj's death in Moscow on January 8.¹ Many people left memories of their encounters with the mercurial personality of Andrej Belyj, and the sheer number of them demonstrates the validity of Chodasevič's assertion.² Among them, three stand out for their particular authority and probity: Klavdija Nikolaevna Bugaeva's book length account of her husband's final years, Marina Cvetaeva's brilliant 'Plennyj duch', about her encounters with Belyj in Berlin, and the no less brilliant reminiscences that Chodasevič set down in January, 1934 and published in three issues of *Vozroždenie* on 8, 13 and 15

February under the title ‘Andrej Belyj. Čerty iz žizni’.³ There he wrote: “он повлиял на меня сильнее кого бы то ни было из людей которых я знал.”

Unlike either Bugaeva or Cvetaeva, Chodasevič knew Belyj at three very distinct periods of his biography. There is no need here for a detailed account of their relationship; Chodasevič has already given us that. Suffice it to say that he knew Belyj for nineteen years. They met in 1904 at the apartment of Valerij Brjusov, but did not become close until the early autumn of 1907, in Petersburg, where both had come after painful romantic reversals. That closeness, at a time of many of Belyj’s greatest accomplishments, lasted until the departure of Belyj and Asja Turgeneva for Western Europe in March, 1912. They met again in December, 1916, after Belyj’s return to Moscow and saw each other as often as the horrendous conditions of post-revolutionary Moscow permitted, when both men suffered from overwork, malnutrition, and illness. In November, 1920 Chodasevič moved to Petrograd and after Belyj came for a long stay in March, 1921, the two saw each other very frequently. In October Belyj left Soviet Russia for Berlin, and after Chodasevič arrived in the German capital in June, 1922, the two saw each other on an almost daily basis. It was in Petrograd and then Berlin that Belyj wrote two exceptionally thoughtful and insightful appraisals of the verse of Chodasevič; they have been equaled, but never bettered: ‘Rembrandtova pravda v poëzii našich dneĭ’ (*Zapiski mečtatelej*, 1922, 5) and ‘Tjaželaja lira i russkaja lirika’ (*Sovremennye zapiski*, 1923, XV). Chodasevič returned that critical favor, as it were, in 1927 when he wrote ‘Ableuchovy – Letaevy – Korobkiny’, one of the most penetrating analyses of Belyj’s prose ever penned, one which with time has lost none of its critical authority.⁴ Their relationship came to a dramatic end on September 8, 1923 in an “incident” about which Chodasevič wrote only this in ‘Čerty iz žizni’: “Поссорился и со мной. Слишком сложные подробности этой ссоры, публичной и нелепой, сейчас рассказать не хочу.”

In 1938 Chodasevič revisited his earlier reminiscences of Belyj (and others) for inclusion in the volume to be entitled *Nekropol’* (1939). By then he had encountered the vicious caricature of himself that Belyj included in *Meždu dvuch revoljucij*:

Я к Ходасевичу чувствовал вздрог; [...] капризный, издерганный, самоядущий и загрызающий ум развивался за счет разложения этики. Жалкий, зеленый, больной, с личиком трупика, с выражением зеленоглазой змеи, мне казался порою юнцом, убежавшим из склепа, где он познакомился уже с червем; [...] Только гораздо позднее мне открылся до дна он.⁵

Chodasevič had earlier reviewed *Na rubeže dvuch stoletij* in *Vozroždenie* (1930, 29 May, No. 1822), as well as *Načalo veka* (1934, 28 June and 5 July,

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