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SYMBOLISM OF PUSHKIN WORKS IN THE AESTHETIC-CRITICAL HISTORICAL PARADIGM

This studio is dedicated to the analysis of the symbolist Pushkiniana, represented in the aesthetically-critical works of Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Andrei Bely, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Alexander Blok and others. The author argues that D. Merezhkovsky's article «Pushkin», which deals with the first symbolist conception of the creativity of the great Russian poet, became the basis for subsequent symbolic interpretations of his work.

Key words*: symbolism, Pushkiniana, symbolist criticism, art, poet's ideal.*

The main approaches of artistic, aesthetic and scientific researches in Russia at the end of the XIX and at the beginning of the XX centuries were marked by the phenomena, which stimulate the creation of definite synthetic theories, aimed to build a joint cultural and historical, religious and moral, and psychological and mental complex, oriented at defining the universal sense of existence. The majority of the contemporary researchers consider the affinity of fiction literature and social philosophy to be the main feature of the cultural development of the last quarter of the XX century. It means a whole mutual penetrating and mutual absorbing which allows to speak about a definite type of consistency and recurrence of the stages in the history of culture. In the process of its development, the Russian symbolism acquired the features of such distinctive character, that allows to speak about it as a unique phenomenon which had a great influence on the world literature development. The issues of aesthetics of the XX century include the views destroyed by the Russian symbolists: about the myth and creation of myths, about the art as one of the most important factors of transformation of the world and a man, about the fateful role of the artist.

The representatives of the Russian symbolism realized the innovative character of their spiritual search, in the previous world literature they searched for the roots of the art and found them first of all in the Russian classical literature. And a special part here was assigned to Pushkin – not only as «the very beginning of all» in the Russian literature, but also as «a forerunner» of a new hypothetical Pushkin, who in his works will carry out the highest act of «spirit» and «flesh» synthesis and will tell a new word of the saved truth. The study of the subject «Pushkin in the Aesthetic Concepts of the Russian Symbolists» allows to comprehend the true content of the Russian symbolism, to define the main directions of

the development of this difficult literary phenomenon, to understand its genesis, national roots. The development of this subject which is greater than the main problem – the Russian symbolism in relation to the literary predecessors – also allows to enlighten a problem of a ratio of a classical tradition with the aesthetic experience of the first manifestation of modernism. Therefore, the researches of the symbolists' interpretation of O.S. Pushkin's personality and creativity, their perception of the major ideas of Pushkin's aesthetic heritage, are really actual for the modern literary criticism.

The study realized a complex analysis of the aesthetic and literary and critical works of the representatives of the Russian symbolism devoted to O.S. Pushkin's personality, which allowed the author to considerably expand the knowledge about the aesthetic, historical and literary and philosophical aspects of symbolism, to substantially specify its definite aesthetic ideas, to objectively investigate the aesthetic concepts of symbolism in Russia. The history of the Russian «Pushkin studies» begins with D.S. Merezhkovsky's works «About the reasons of decline and about the new developments in the modern Russian literature» (1893) and «Pushkin» (1896), in which a new view on the concept of the poet's works was formed. There Pushkin is defined not only as the founder of a new Russian literature, but also as one of the greatest representatives in the world literature.

D.S. Merezhkovsky proposes to investigate Pushkin's works in the context of important aesthetic and historical and literary problems: the aim and the content of art, the originality of the process in artistic works, the correlation of ethical and aesthetic ideals, the synthesis and opposition of art and scientific forms of a world cognition (in D.S. Merezhkovsky's interpretation, it is a problem of intuition and rationality, Pushkin – the poet and Pushkin – the thinker, etc.). The most important aesthetic category of Pushkin's works by Merezhkovsky is harmony which is «the most rare fruit of thousand-year aspirations» for all people, and which distinguishes the Russian poet among the greatest geniuses of the world literature (*Merezhkovsky, 1994: 517).*

The awareness of greatness of a creative role of art aimed D.S. Merezhkovsky to investigate O. Pushkin's personality as the only artist in the world literature that realized the idea of synthesis in his works, showed to the world not only the Russian concept of beauty, but also the universal sensitiveness and sympathy. In his aesthetic concept, referring to the Kant's triad, D.S. Merezhkovsky complements it with the highest and the most important, from his point of view, category: God – people. The category of nationality is the evidence of not only the reality and truth, but also, the most important, that divine essence that is expressed in the formula «the voice of the people – the voice of God». The true art is born from the bosom of a folk art, which does not know the frustration and disharmony, the art – the prophecy leads to emerging an absolutely new model of the artist and people's merging. Pushkin's works are characterized by merging with the national culture as the highest, ultimate goal of art.

The critic insists on the independence of poetic inspiration and creativity from the crowd with its utilitarianizm, satisfaction, dualism. He refers to the poem by Pushkin «The poet and the crowd», in which the founder of the new Russian literature protects the right of art to be a special sphere in a spiritual life of society, to be free from the utilitarian harassments of «a crowd», because only a really free art is capable to see and approve the truly great values of life. The following stage of the investigation of O. Pushkin's personality and works by the theorist of the Russian symbolism is his article «Pushkin» (1896). Speaking about Pushkin's life and death, D.S. Merezhkovsky connects the poet's life with the level of consciousness and development of the society, whereby the chosen critic's aspect has no vulgar-sociological colouring at all. Thinking beyond the certain fact

of Pushkin's duel with Dantes and the reasons which led to the duel, Merezhkovsky sees Pushkin's death as a natural result of the genius's fight with his barbaric Motherland.

Thinking over the poet's drama, in which his fight against the world is seen, D.S. Merezhkovsky considers Pushkin's death a logical conclusion of this conflict, with the development of which the poet became more and more lonely and odd, uncomprehending to the average Russian of that time. The critic draws an accurate line between Pushkin's images of «poor people» and «people», and he consequently claims that the poet in his development, moving away from the «high» society, with each step approaches the people: the movement of the poet is his returning to people's heart. Speaking about the simplicity and clearness of Pushkin's works, D.S. Merezhkovsky compares them to Homer. Childishly direct and clear, his consciousness of the world is like a breath of the world; in Pushkin's and Homer's poetry, the critic states, the calmness of nature is felt.

A truly great thing means constant work, and this statement of Pushkin is perceived by the critic as a major will. It should be noted that in their theory the symbolists, not denying the thesis of Pushkin's aesthetics, at the same time considered theurgy in art to be the main criterion of inspiration, which in its turn assumes intuitively- irrational condition of spirit in the perception of the world. This obvious contradiction is explained, as may be supposed, by the task which they set to symbolism: not only the reflection of the world in artistic (symbolical) images, but its transformation, the statement of the God's Kingdom on the Earth. The criterion of any truth, namely, the distinctive feature of wisdom, is, according to the critic, the question of the relation to death.

D.S. Merezhkovsky seems to comprehend this Pushkin's wisdom. His general interpretation of O. Pushkin's attitude to death is of great interest, especially in the context of general symbolism aesthetics, focused on its interpretation of death according to evangelical motive of a grain that dies to revive. The founder of the Russian symbolism explains through a prism of the evangelical parable Pushkin's harmonious feeling of the circulation in nature, changes of generations, which soften the tragic element of death. No doubt, it is possible to state that Merezhkovsky's article «Pushkin», in which the first symbolist concept of the great Russian poet's works is proposed, became a basis for the following symbolist interpretations of his works.

Fairly noting the leading role of Pushkin in the further development of the world literature, the theorist of symbolism sees «the decline reason» of the Russian literature of that time in Pushkin's deviation from his way. D.S. Merezhkovsky tells about the domination of the formal theoretical approach concerning Pushkin's heritage, Pushkin's official definition as the first poet of Russia, utilitarian-ideological attitude of the literal-democratic criticism to the poet's works, the attitude to Pushkin as to the poet «behind superiority» by the representatives of «pure art» and some others (V. Solovyov, in particular).

Finally, D.S. Merezhkovsky proclaims namely the symbolists to be the real followers and Pushkin's descendants in the Russian literature, approving Pushkin to be the uniting beginning, because in Russia the position of any writer was always defined by their attitude to the Russian poet-genius.

The reaction of symbolists' opponents was extremely negative. Thus, in his article «D.S. Merezhkovsky and his «Eternal followers» (1897), V.D. Spasovich criticizes D.S. Merezhkovsky that he «creates his own Pushkin to his taste, similar to him and puts forward those features, noticed by him, which most of all correspond to his own mental organization» *(Spasovich, 1897: 579).*

The concept of Pushkin's works, suggested by Merezhkovsky, caused reproaches both from the representatives of progressive criticism (Yu. Aykhenvald, V. Spasovich), and from the greatest conservatives (M. Menshykov). Such unity in assessment of interpretation of Pushkin's works, affected by the symbolist criticism, demonstrates the extent of the problem and, first of all, the fact that D.S. Merezhkovsky not only outlined the key problems of Pushkin studies, but also proposed a nonconventional approach to its comprehension.

The following symbolists's statement, this time «a massive» one, is connected with the celebration of 100-th anniversary since Pushkin's birth in 1899. The journal «The World of Art» devoted all May issue (No 13-14) to this event, suggesting its pages to D. Merezhkovsky, M. Minsky, F. Sologub, V. Rozanov.

The assessment of this statement was also traditionally negative: the representative of the right wing of the Russian criticism M. Menshykov reproached D. Merezhkovsky in dishonesty, as his interpretation of Pushkin's works contains the judgements, which allow to accuse the poet of hostility to the people *(Menshykov, 1899: 187).* V. Solovyov, in his sketch «Special Honour of Pushkin». The Letter to the Editorial Office of «the Bulletin of Europe» (1899), presents a derisive characteristics of the symbolist articles published in the journal «The World of Art» and asks such a question: «In what way does the rejection of the «unnecessary Pushkin» in «The World of art» correspond to its idolatrous interpretation?» (*Solovyov, 1996: 220*). He accused V. Rozanov of his strong rejection of Pushkin, D. Merezhkovsky – «of ambiguity and obscurity of his reflections», M. Minsky – of assigning his, Minsky's, tastes and opinions to Pushkin, and as for F. Sologub, he spoke about him by the way, like «the fourth musketeer of this symbolist four» (*The same*).

No doubt, it is possible to state that V. Solovyov laid the foundation of one of the most widespread in the scientific literature approaches to the problem «Pushkin and the Russian symbolism» which includes such theses: the symbolists, having no real support in the Russian literature, appealed to the authority of Pushkin and, interpreting him, declared the Russian poet as their predecessor. It was the point of view on the problem of Pushkin studies.

These statements in the anniversary number of the journal «The World of Art» showed two approaches of symbolists in their assessment of Pushkin's personality and works: apologetic and negative, which alternately prevailed in the symbolist criticism throughout the whole development of this literary school.

The representatives of the first approach, formulated most fully in D.S. Merezhkovsky's works, comprehended Pushkin's works in the context of the symbolist aesthetics and declared the poet to be the forerunner of the Russian symbolism; the reason of the decline of the Russian literature was seen in the deviation from the wills in Pushkin works; and returning to the way, specified by Pushkin, was considered to be the condition of recovery from the crisis. D.S. Merezhkovsky saw Pushkin's harmony in synthesis of paganism and Christianity, spirit and flesh, Christ and Antichrist. The achievement of this harmony was thought as the aim and ideal of a really high art.

Besides D. Merezhkovsky, this approach in symbolism was represented by F. Sologub, M. Minsky in the 1890-s; and in the 1900-s and 1910-s both V. Bryusov and K. Balmont gradually passed to these positions. «Young symbolists», were represented, first of all, by O. Blok and V. Ivanov, a bit later – by Andrey Bely. They were consecutive supporters of D. Merezhkovsky's concept, at the same time introducing their amendments and specifications. The second tendency of a negative assessment of Pushkin was seen in V. Rozanov's statements in the years of 1890-s – 1900-s. In the anniversary number of «The World of Art» *(Rosanov, 1889: 1-10),* V. Rozanov speaks of Pushkin as about the poet

whose works became outdated and are suitable «only for school education», but not as the live «leader of a crowd».

This Rozanov's article caused the hottest and, perhaps, the most fair reproaches from V. Solovyov and others. V. Rozanov speaks about Pushkin's merits for the literature of the next generations, meaning only his formal achievements, and rejects the value of Pushkin for the future of his moral ideals: «the world became better after Pushkin, since so much in this world, that is, in the sphere of his thoughts and feelings, he presented a real perfection. But after Pushkin the world did not become richer, finer» (*Rosanov, 1989: 245*). According to V. Rozanov, the modern reader feels more deeply and thinks more widely, and as for Pushkin he is not able «to respond» to the most important problems of modern criticism of life, he is blind «as the aged man Homer» (*Rosanov, 1989: 246*). Rejecting Pushkin's ability of a deep intuitive comprehension of the world, V. Rozanov accuses him of rationalism: «Pushkin is more a mind, than a poetic genius» (*Rosanov, 1989: 244*).

Rozanov's concept was supported by K. Balmont and V. Bryusov in his early period. K. Balmont develops Rozanov's statement on discrepancy of Pushkin's world perception with the demands of the modern person. He calls Pushkin's art manner as «art naturalism», accusing the poet of his excessive commitment to the material world, of his creating only the «external features» of the real world.

K. Balmont goes in his speculations even further than V. Rozanov, declaring Pushkin an ordinary observer unable to depict the complexity and versatility of the world. In his article «About the Russian Poets» (1904) Balmont compares Pushkin's and Lermontov's poetry to Tyutchev's and Fet's poetry, giving the first place to the modern poets whom he ranks to symbolists. According to him, Pushkin and Lermontov look at the world with their «sober views», while Tyutchev and Fet get into the essence of the nature. In his early works V. Bryusov states the opinion about the backwardness of the art form and poetic language of Pushkin's works, and, above all, about the typological difference of Pushkin's poetry from the poetry of Tyutchev, Fet and the poetry of symbolists. In his diary records of 1893 he states the impossibility to express the feelings «in Pushkin's language» by the person, living in the era of the end of that century (*Bryusov, 1927: 13*). In his «The Answers to Andrievsky», placed in the 5th volume of «The World of Art» (1901), he develops this thought: «isn't, for example, the tetrameter yamb in Pushkin's poems tiresome and monotonous…», and right here: «Didn't Pushkin complain that there are few rhymes in the Russian language?» (*Bryusov, 1927: 246*).

In his article «A Sacred Victim» (1905), not taking into account Pushkin's separating the private life of the poet from his works, Bryusov interprets Pushkin's poem «A Poet» in such a way: «the poet has to commit reverentially his "sacred sacrifice", and at other time he may be "worst of all"» *(Bryusov, 1975: 94).* And, summarizing further on: «Pushkin, who so often forsaw by his sensitive ear the future shivering of our modern soul, has few works which, to such an extent, would be so strange to us like these poems about the poet» *(Bryusov, 1975: 95).*

Developing his opinion, Bryusov claims that the formula of Pushkin's freedom of art directly leads to the «pure art»: «Parnassians are those who bravely declared the extreme conclusions of Pushkin's image of the poet, which agreed to be "worst of all" until he is demanded "by Apollo's Call"» *(The same).* However, at the end Bryusov says that these conclusions would have horrified Pushkin. But the polemical idea concerning namely Pushkin's view, is evident in this article. On the basis of the given judgments and of Bryusov's other early literary and critical statements («The World Outlook of Baratynsky»

(1898), «Vladimir Solovyov. The Sense of His Poetry» (1900), «Slandered Poem» (1903), etc.) his extreme subjectivity in assessment of Pushkin's works is traced.

And this view is the most clearly expressed in his article «Vladimir Solovyov. The Sense of His Poetry» (1900). In it, V. Bryusov suggests his own view on poetry: «There are two kinds of poetry. One is content with the image which can be comprehended by the mind, the expression of the feelings available to a clear consciousness» *(Bryusov, 1975: 218),* it is – «a classical kind of poetry». The critic refers to it the works by A. Pushkin, A. Maykov, A. Tolstoy. «The poetry of another kind incessantly develops from visible and external to supersensual…» *(Bryusov, 1975: 219)* – this poetry, the romantic one, «is consecrated» for Bryusov by the names of Tyutchev and Fet. Even by the character of the author's attitude towards the representatives of classical and romantic poetry, one can reveal at once that all Bryusov's preferrences are on the romantics' side. This concept formed the basis of the theory created in the 1920-s by V. Zhirmunsky and B. Eykhenbaum, according to which, Pushkin and the symbolists were considered to be two opposite types of the art creation.

In Bryusov's notes placed in «Miscellanea» (1913 – 1924), the implicit opposition of Pushkin to Tyutchev is seen in section IV.I: «Pushkin in "Boris Godunov" is not original, he copies Shakespeare, while Tyutchev belongs to the poets, who try to lay a new way». *(Bryusov, 1975: 390).* And the phrase from section VI.I: «Choose the hero to yourself – catch up with him, leave him behind» *(Bryusov, 1975: 399),* which belongs to Suvorov and is taken by Bryusov as the motto of his creative activity, is applied to Pushkin as such hero, who is very good, but the one, who is necessary «to be caught up and left behind». However, the following seems to be strange: together with it, Bryusov constantly appeals to Pushkin as to the highest authority and the most part of his researches devotes to him.

Bryusov had been working at the issue «Pushkin and the Russian literature» for a quarter of a century. Three directions of Bryusov's researches are traced: the textual criticism of Pushkin's works, Pushkin's poetic technique and his biography. In the first Bryusov's work about Pushkin the principles of the publication of poet's works are analysed. Being devoted to the publication of Pushkin's collection of works, edited by A. Maykov, Bryusov's critical review «What the academic publication of Pushkin's works gives» (1899) causes a discord in the scientific communities by such formulation of the question: whether to publish Pushkin's lyceum poems in the original or to take into account the amendments made by the poet later on. The discussion, which arouse with a helping hand from the young researcher, had been lasting for several years and caused the responses of the outstanding pushkinists of that time (S. Vengerov, P. O. Morozov and others).

A bit later Bryusov decides to remove the textbook brilliancy and to present a really live Pushkin to the readers. In the articles of biographic character «Pushkin and Baratynsky» (1901), «From Pushkin's Life» (1903), he defines the principle of selection of materials about the poet's life as follows: «It is necessary to employ intuition, inspiration to choose from the stories of contemporaries what is really true and what only seems true – and to get to know Pushkin» *(Bryusov, 1903: 84).*

If a polemic attitude to Pushkin was characteristic of early Bryusov, then over the years, as a result of his hard textual and bibliographic work, new analyses of Pushkin's texts, he gets a real understanding of the greatness of Pushkin's poetry. In his articles «Pushkin's Poetic Technique», «Pushkin's tone painting», «Pushkin's Radicalism in Rhymes», «Prophet». «The Analysis of the Poem», Bryusov investigates the «mystery» of the poetic craft of the ingenious poet and gets convinced that Pushkin poetics foresaw the forthcoming changes in the Russian versification.

A great amount of modern literature, devoted to the problem «Bryusov and Pushkin», allows to reveal the real value of the researches of this theorist of symbolism. However, and it is no less important too, his works about Pushkin reveal to us «Bryusov's Pushkin», helping to define the point of view on the problem «the poet and poetry».

The senior generation of symbolists laid the foundation of judgment of Pushkin's creative work. That is why the young symbolists (Andrey Bely, V. Ivanov, A. Blok) that relied on their predecessors' opinions, had an opportunity to analyse more deeply and convincingly the same issues: about the world value of Pushkin, a ratio of Pushkin's tradition with the experience of symbolists' poetry, the «mysteries» of Pushkin's creativity.

One of the major tasks, gaining the right of «Pushkin's» task, young symbolists saw in comprehending and developing Pushkin's heritage, in need to return to poetry the art prestige lost by it after Pushkin. This thought is proved in Andrey Bely's article «The Apocalypse in the Russian Poetry» (1905).

Defining the type of Pushkin's art thinking as the «classical» one, «Apollonic», the young symbolists at the same time saw in this «Apollonic» clarity such depths, the knowledge of which caused a sense of fear in them : «What do these simple and terse words and very usual, almost unnaturally robustious and ruddy epithets mean? Also it becomes somehow disturbing due to Pushkin's clarity», remarks Vyach. Ivanov *(Ivanov, 1908: 232).*

Vyach. Ivanov finds an explanation of this «extraordinary» Pushkin's perfection in the fact that «the sweet sounds» – the speech of poetry, – is «the language of gods», and «Pushkin's poet remembers his duty – to be the religious organizer, to find out and strengthen the divine relations with reality, theurgy» *(Ivanov, 1994: 184).*

Unambiguously defining the comprehensive nature of Pushkin's creativity as the creativity of the genius, the indispensable components of which are «the shattered, but blinding beams of the internal experience», Vyach. Ivanov, however, does not consider this experience to be really symbolistic, does not include Pushkin into symbolists «in the closest meaning of this word». Such position of one of the leading theorists of the young symbolists demonstrates his overcoming of subjectivity in the assessment of the personality and works of the poet, the evolution in the symbolist judgment of Pushkin.

The relation of A. Blok to Pushkin was defined by two factors: his belonging to the family which kept high-level traditions of the Russian educated nobility, and his great artistic talent, which even among the symbolists, that differed in abundance and variety of their gifts, preserved the glory of «the poet from God». In spite of what Blok spoke about «Pushkin's mysteries» (the article «The Pedant about the Poet», 1906), his understanding Pushkin's creativity is represented as an ideal norm of assessment of one ingenious poet by the other. Blok, amazingly keenly and deeply, with his inherent responsiveness, interprets in his critical prose the most important statements of Pushkin's aesthetics. Whether Blok speaks about the creativity of the modern poets and writers in his articles «Creativity of Vyach. Ivanov» (1905), «About the Realist» (1907), «About Lyrics» (1907), «Letters on Poetry» (1908), «Heinrich Ibsen» (1908); or about the problems of modern literature development in his researches «Literary Conclusions of 1907» (1907), «Questions, Questions, Questions» (1908), «The Intellectuals and Revolution» (1918), «Humanity crash» (1921), «About Poet's Aspiration» (1921), «Without Deity, Without Inspiration» (1921), or addresses the past of the natonal or world literature (for example, in his works «The Knight-the Monk» (1910), «Apollon Grigoryev's Fate» (1916), «Heine in Russia» (1919), «Herzen and Heine» (1920)), – in his reasonings Pushkin always appears as the highest point of reference and the highest measure of artistry.

Summing up the results, it should be noted that, despite the diversity of estimates of Pushkin, the Russian symbolists rightly deserve credit not only for their aspiration to define his place among the greatest representatives of the world literature, but, first of all, for their attempt to comprehend «the mystery of genius» that, according to them, was the foundation of further development of the world literature, of history itself, of all mankind. The symbolist concept of creativity is generally focused on the most important statements of Pushkin's aesthetics, first of all, on the image of the artist as a prophet, of the artist as a creator, who is meant to personify the creative opportunities of mankind in relation to the Universe, on the freedom of artistic creativity as the most important condition of true art.

Noting in O. Pushkin's poetry rare uniting, a harmonious combination of two opposite principles, the theorists of the Russian symbolism saw in his creativity the Christian idea which displays itself in opposition of a primitive person to modern culture, in exclusion of various technological qualities or external forms. In Pushkin's works, they found a peculiar point of collision of paganism and Christianity: the traits of heroism and the traits of «Galilei's forgiving wisdom» that have the common source - the aspiration of a man to the other, the highest, nature. Symbolists proclaimed Pushkin the ideal of the poet as an admirable example of all-encompassing unity, of harmony that did not become available to any of the following representatives of the Russian literature in its entirety, as Pushkin's harmony is the result of synthesis, which is the condition of the emergence on the Earth the desired society of justice – God's Kingdom. According to the Russian symbolists, Pushkin is a folk poet, his creativity – is a free art creativity, the mystery of his harmony – is in the regulation of a spontaneous feeling and mind: Pushkin knew the «demonic» and «divine», life and death were comprehended by the poet as a wise compliance of the beauty with eternal uninspired nature and the beauty of inspired human life. Pushkin's attitude towards the traditions of the world art in the aesthetic-critical paradigm of the age is qualified as a role model.

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