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Yevgeny Boratynsky as the Forerunner of Fyodor Dostoevsky: About One Topos in Literary Studies

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Abstract

This article is intended to answer the question of why researchers of E.A. Boratynsky often call him F.M. Dostoevsky's forerunner – despite the fact that Dostoevsky's statements about the poet have not yet been found, nor evidence that unequivocally indicates which works of Boratynsky Dostoevsky was familiar with. The material for this study was the work of literary critics and philologists of the XX–XXI centuries such as I.L. Al'mi, S.G. Bocharov, E. Vinokurov, V.V. Kozhinov, D.S. Merezhkovsky, G.A. Meyer, S.V. Rudakova. The article shows that the research thought reveals similarities in the worldview and aesthetic attitudes of the poet and writer, in their artistic methods, as well as in the character of the depiction of the inner world of heroes. It is noted that, paradoxical as it may seem, scientists find similarities in the works of Boratynsky and Dostoevsky, even at the level of artistic and expressive means. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the constructions of G.A. Meyer, who directly raised the question “Boratynsky and Dostoevsky” in the title one of his articles.

Keywords

Evgeny Boratynsky – Fyodor Dostoevsky – history of Russian literature – literary criticism – poetry – philosophy

Introduction

Evgeny Boratynsky is not one of the “eternal companions” of Fyodor Dostoevsky, those poets and writers by whom he was guided or with whom he polemicized.

In this sense, the surname of Boratynsky cannot be included amongst the number of the great names of Shakespeare, Voltaire, Goethe, A.S. Pushkin, M. Yu. Lermontov, F.I. Tyutchev. Among them, Boratynsky turns out to be “superfluous”, because Dostoevsky, it seems, does not mention this poet anywhere and there is no information proving that the writer was familiar with Boratynsky’s lyrics. Nevertheless, in works about Boratynsky, the “poet of thought” often appears as the forerunner of Dostoevsky. The question is: what exactly allows scholars to characterize the poet in this way? What brings the writer and the poet closer, according to the researchers? To understand this, it is necessary to analyze and systematize the works of philologists who consider Boratynsky to be the forerunner of Dostoevsky. This is the main task of this article.

Boratynsky and Dostoevsky: Points of Convergence

The view of reality is one of the points where the romantic poet and the realist writer are considered to coincide. For example, D.S. Merezhkovsky drew attention to this. In his book *L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* it is shown that Dostoevsky, like Boratynsky, strove to see the implicit, outline the unobvious connections between the phenomena of life, notice the details and, recreating these recognized facets of the surrounding reality in the literary word, show their beauty. Therefore, defining exactly what principle Dostoevsky embodied when creating the image of St. Petersburg, Merezhkovsky recalls Boratynsky’s program poem *Muza (The Muse)*: «<...> умеет Достоевский силою любви своей делать трогательным, жалким, почти милым и родным, почти прекрасным, хотя бесконечно-болезненной, но зато и не всем доступною, “необщей” – как теперь сказали бы, “декадентскую” красотою» [Dostoevsky knows how, by the power of his love, to make touching, pitiful, almost sweet and dear, almost beautiful, although infinitely painful, but not accessible to everyone, ‘uncommon’ – as they would say now, ‘decadent’ beauty].¹ The reminiscence from Boratynsky’s poem not only characterizes Dostoevsky’s method, but also shows that Merezhkovsky saw in the poet a kind of predecessor of the writer. Merezhkovsky reveals Boratynsky’s closeness to Dostoevsky not only in their artistic attitudes, but also in their worldview: according to the critic, doubts that civilization is an undoubted good are united by the poet and the

1 D.S. Merezhkovskii. *L. Tolstoy i Dostoevskii*. Izd. podg. E.A. Andrushchenko (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2000), 164.

writer.² Academic literary critic V.V. Kozhinov also noted that in the world outlook Boratynsky and Dostoevsky agree: both perceive being as a tragedy. He wrote: «В литературе о Боратынском много говорилось о его заведомом пессимизме, подчас это повторяют и теперь но в действительности творчество поэта – подобно творчеству Достоевского – так же далеко от пессимизма, как от поверхностного оптимизма. Оно в полном и глубоком смысле трагедийно, а подлинная трагедия всегда содержит в себе не только стихию гибели, но и ее преодоление» [In the works about Boratynsky, much was said about his deliberate pessimism, sometimes this is repeated even now, but in reality, the poet's work – like Dostoevsky's – is as far from pessimism as from superficial optimism. It is tragic in the full and deep sense, and a true tragedy always contains not only the element of death, but also its overcoming].³

The aesthetic credo of Boratynsky and Dostoevsky, as the researchers show, are similar. Philologist and poet E. Vinokurov in the article *The Poetry of Thought* compared Boratynsky's poem *Blagosloven sviatoe vozvestivshii..* and Dostoevsky's famous self-determination from his diary for 1881: «Меня зовут психологом: неправда, я лишь реалист в высшем смысле, т.е. изображаю глубины души человеческой» [They call me a psychologist: that is not true, I'm only a realist in the higher sense; that is, I portray all the depths of the human soul]. Vinokurov considers Boratynsky's poem as a declaration of the closeness of the poet's work to scientific research. In this poem, according to Vinokurov's wording, «с Ньютоном сравнивается поэт, постигающий хотя не законы небесной механики, но законы человеческой психики»⁴ [a poet is compared with Newton, who comprehends, although not the laws of celestial mechanics, but the laws of the human psyche]. The epistemological fearlessness of the poet lies in the fact that his thought is directed not only to “the lofty aspirations of the human spirit”, but seeks to know its “dark depths”. This kind of fearlessness in striving to learn a person unites, according to Vinokurov, Boratynsky and Dostoevsky. The nature of the searches of the poet and the writer, and the very essence of their thinking – the duality, the infinity of internal struggle, are recognized as similar. So ; S.V. Rudakova, a modern Russian philologist, one of the leading experts in the work of Boratynsky, exploring the figurative and ideological structure of the poem

2 See: D. Merezhkovskii, 'Pushkin', in *Pushkin v russkoi filosofskoi kritike: Konets XIX – pervaya polovina XX v.* (Moscow: Kniga Publ., 1990), 109.

3 V. Kozhinov, *Kniga o russkoi liricheskoi poezii XIX veka. Razvitiye stilya i zhanra.* (Moscow: Sovremennik Publ., 1978), 100.

4 E. Vinokurov, 'Poezii mysli', *Oktiabr'* 2 (1975): 204–208.

Vse mysl', da mysl'! Khudozhnik bednyi slova..., concludes that the thought that the poet sings is ambivalent. Thought subjugates the poet to itself, and as a result he «отдает себя на “растерзание мысли”, становясь ее мучеником»⁵ [gives himself up to the ‘tearing of thoughts’, becoming its martyr]. In the same time it is thought that opens up the horizons of an unknown life for the poet. This kind of duality is inherent, according to Rudakova, and the thinking of Dostoevsky.⁶ From the point of view of a researcher, the poet and the writer would agree with each other in their views on the meaning of beauty in the world. The researcher notes that in Boratynsky’s poem *Sculptor* the category of beauty is especially significant, and in this text «красота предстает одним из ярких явлений жизни»⁷ [beauty appears as one of the brightest phenomena of life]. Rudakova shows that this work expresses the idea of beauty as a reconciling, harmonizing beginning: «Тот, кто способен ее [красоту] увидеть, насладиться ею и раскрыть ее значение для других, способен и себя, и окружающих сделать счастливым, ибо он оказывается причастен к высшей земной гармонии»⁸ [The one who is able to see it [beauty], enjoy it and reveal its meaning for others, is able to make himself and others happy, for he is involved in the highest earthly harmony]. Such an interpretation of the poem allows the researcher to correlate Dostoevsky’s well-known statement: «Красота спасёт мир» [Beauty will save the world] with it. Rudakova believes that Boratynsky, like Dostoevsky, but long before him embodied in his works the idea of the grandeur of the surrounding reality, showed that it was given to man as a heritage. The researcher writes: «Боратынский понял величие красоты земного мира, осознал, что она – дар вечной жизни человеку»⁹ [understood the greatness of the beauty of the earthly world, realized that she is a gift of eternal life to man]. The affinity of the poet and the writer is manifested not only in the artistic tasks that they set for themselves, but also, as the research thought notes, also in the fact that their heroes – lyrical and novel – are paradoxically close in their “structure of feeling”. This point of view was shared by Inna Lvovna Al’mi, who noticed that the hero of the novel *The Idiot*, Ippolit Terentyev, is close to the lyrical subject of Boratynsky’s poem *Nedonosok*. Both heroes feel like strangers, superfluous in the world, “at a

5 S. Rudakova, *Kniga stikhov Sumerki Ye.A. Boratynskogo kak kak liricheskoe edinstvo*. (Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Publ., 2011), 186.

6 Ibid.

7 S. Rudakova, (2014). *Sistemnost' khudozhestvennogo myshleniia E.A. Boratynskogo – lirika*, Phd., Department of history of Russian literature. Magnitogorsk, 455.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

common celebration of life” («на общем пиру жизни»). At the same time, this kind of arrangement of feelings leads both heroes to revolt against the world order: the Nedonosok is burdened by “meaningless eternity” (“bessmyslennoi vechnost’iu”), and Hippolytus asks the question proudly: «Что мне во всей этой красоте?» [What is to me in all this beauty?]. The similarity between these characters noted by Al’mi also interested the Russian philologist S.G. Bocharov, who traced the “literary path of Nedonosok” to the hero of the novel *The Idiot*.¹⁰ The closeness of Boratynsky’s and Dostoevsky’s heroes is revealed both in the sphere of sensations and feelings, and in the nature of their philosophical constructions. The lyrical hero of the poem *Osen’* [Autumn] and Ivan Karamazov, according to Al’mi, are related by the fact that their reasoning combines “the hopelessness of their conclusions and the non-stop of the intellectual movement” [«безысходность их выводов и безостановочность интеллектуального движения»].¹¹ The consonance of the conclusions that the heroes come to in an effort to resolve philosophical questions, Al’mi discovered by comparing the culminating stanzas of the poem *Osen’* – the twelfth and thirteenth – with the apogee of Ivan Karamazov’s confession. The heroes, in poem and in novel, believe that the establishment of absolute harmony in the universe is possible, but neither one nor the other considers this idea to finally justify being. Both, according to Al’mi, admit the possibility of an all-redeeming heavenly harmony, but even this’ ultimate ‘argument in defense of world order does not remove the contradictions of their present, and therefore is not perceived by them as a way out.¹² Not only the philosophical ideas of Dostoevsky and Boratynsky appear consonant, researchers find similarities in the spectrum of artistic and expressive means used by the writer and poet. In particular, this manifests itself in the nature of visual imagery – in the semantics and functions of color. S.V. Rudakova notes this. The researcher shows the variety of functions of yellow in the artistic world of Boratynsky using the example of the poems *Padenie list’ev* [Falling Leaves], *Cherep* [Skull], *Osen’*. For example, yellow gives an autumn landscape a special emotional background, corresponding to the melancholic reflections of the lyrical hero:¹³ «Картина замирающей природы у Боратынского создает чувство щемящей тоски,

10 S. Bocharov, “O bessmyslennaiia vechnost’!” (Ot *Nedonoska* k *Idiotu*). In *Filologicheskie siuzhety*. (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul’tur Publ., 2007), 263–293.

11 Al’mi, I., ‘Sbornik E.A. Boratynskogo *Sumerki* kak liricheskoe edinstvo’, in *O poezii i proze*. (Sankt-Petersburg: Semantica – S.Skifia Publ., 2002), 191.

12 I. Al’mi, 190.

13 S. Rudakova, (2014).139.

душевного надрыва»¹⁴ [The picture of dying nature in Boratynsky's poem creates a feeling of nagging melancholy, emotional distress]. At the same time, the yellow color of the skull from the poem *Cherep* has a philosophical dimension: it becomes a symbol of the finiteness of being. A similar ambivalence in the semantics of yellow, according to the researcher, is expressed in the works of Dostoevsky. In his novels, yellow is perceived «как символ надрыва, болезненности, смерти»¹⁵ [as a symbol of anguish, morbidity, death]. The researcher finds another example of this kind of similarity in the portraits of female characters, namely, in the correlation between the color of the eyes and the character of their owner.

An analysis of Boratynsky's poems *Liubliu ia krasavitsu ...* [I love a beauty] leads Rudakova to the conclusion that the heavenly eye color emphasizes the "divine nature" («божественную природу») in a woman, and black eyes betray a passionate, even "demonic" nature.¹⁶ As S. Rudakova notes, similar correspondences of eye color to the character of the heroine are found in Dostoevsky's novels. She writes: «схожую трактовку данной коллизии находим спустя десятилетия и у Ф.М. Достоевского, неоднократно сравнивающего в своих произведениях черные и голубые глаза и так же отдающего предпочтение последним».¹⁷ [We find a similar interpretation of this collision for decades and in F.M. Dostoevsky, who repeatedly compares black and blue eyes in his works and also gives preference to the latter]. As an example, the blue eyes of Sonya Marmeladova and the "big black eyes" of Nastasya Filippovna are given.

The issue of "Boratynsky and Dostoevsky" in the Perception of G.A. Meyer

The idea of the closeness of the artistic worlds of Boratynsky and Dostoevsky is most consistently expressed in the works of Georgy Meyer, who was a literary critic and philosopher, he left Russia in 1923. Both Boratynsky and Dostoevsky were "eternal literary companions" of Meyer, many of his articles published in the magazine *Vozrozhdenie* are devoted to them. One of his works is called *Boratynsky and Dostoevsky*: in it Meyer shows that the cases of similarity in the artistic worlds of the poet and the writer are explained by the closeness of

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid. 153.

17 Ibid. 153.

their spiritual paths. Since the question of the closeness of the artistic worlds of Boratynsky and Dostoevsky was of particular interest to Meyer, a separate section of this work is devoted to the analysis of his article.

Meyer's article *Baratynskii i Dostoevskii* was originally conceived as introductory chapters to the book on *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* [Crime and Punishment]. The author saw his main task in approaching thinking about the novel through establishing the origins of the writer's artistic world and referring to his predecessors. Meyer considered Pushkin and Boratynsky to be the main predecessors of Dostoevsky: «Родство свое с Пушкиным он чувствовал и сознавал вполне, а о своей связи с Баратынским, и это любопытнее всего – совершенно и ничего не знал»¹⁸ [He felt and was fully aware of his kinship with Pushkin, but he knew nothing about his connection with Boratynsky, and this is most curious of all]. The recognition of the fact that Dostoevsky was deliberately not guided by Boratynsky does not prevent Meyer from identifying a number of similarities between them.

In particular, Meyer notes the similarity of the epistemological views of Boratynsky and Dostoevsky: both believe that it is possible to come to an original idea and find an appropriate form of expression for it only as a result of complex spiritual experience, and not simply by logical constructions. Meyer notes the closeness of the line of reasoning of the lyrical subject of Boratynsky's epigram *Podrazhateliam* [To Imitators] to the logic of the hero of Dostoevsky's story "Notes from the Underground". Meyer quotes the following lines from Boratynsky: *Ne napriazhennogo mechtan'ia / Ognem uslužhlyvym sogret, / V bor'be s tiazheloiu sud'boiu / Poznal on meru vyshnikh sil, / Serdechnykh sudorog tsenoiu / On vyrashen'e ikh kupil*. In these verses, the literary critic saw the poet's attack on imitative art, generated only by the mind. Meyer associates these lines with the statement of the hero of Dostoevsky's story *Zapiski iz Podpol'ia* [Notes from the Underground], the critic recalls his words about the one-sidedness of rational knowledge: «Рассудок знает только то, что успел узнать...; а натура человеческая действует вся целиком, всем, что в ней есть, сознательно и бессознательно» [Reason knows only what it has learned ...; and human nature acts as a whole, with everything that is in it, consciously and unconsciously]. Boratynsky's lines allow Meyer to more accurately express his own view of the essence of Dostoevsky's work: «Искусство Достоевского – его мера вышних сил – родилось белые петербургские и каторжные, сибирские ночи из сердечных судорог и основалось на

18 G. Meier, 'Baratynskii i Dostoevskii', *Vozrozhdenie* 9 (1950): 84.

таинствах страдания»¹⁹ [Dostoevsky's art – his measure of higher powers – was born of the white Petersburg and hard labor, Siberian nights from heart cramps and was based on the sacraments of suffering]. Here the phrases “mera vyshnikh sil” [the measure of the higher powers] and “tainstvo stradaniia” [the sacrament of suffering] are allegories from the poem *Podrazhateliam*. It was said above that Dostoevsky and Boratynsky, according to Meyer, passed in many ways similar spiritual paths. Meyer considers, that both were familiar with the state of social rebellion, “manifested <...> in Dostoevsky's revolutionary actions, in Boratynsky's violations of generally accepted moral principles” («проявившееся <...> у Достоевского революционными действиями, у Баратынского нарушениями общепринятых моральных устоев»)²⁰ The literary critic is referring to Dostoevsky's participation in the Petrashevsky circle and Boratynsky's participation in the “society of robbers” (it was organized by the poet during his studies at the Corps of Pages). The rebellion generated by pride, according to Meyer, gave power over both of them to “demonic forces”. Meyer saw the expression of the influence of these forces in *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (the murder of an old woman-lender), as well as in Boratynsky's poems *Buria* [The Tempest] and *V dni bezgranichnykh vlechenii ...* [In the days of boundless desires...] – in the rebellious spirit of a lyrical hero.

As a result, both came to the idea of humility. In support of this, Meyer cites Dostoevsky's words from his famous speech about Pushkin (“Smiris', gordyi chelovek” – “Humble yourself, a proud man”) and verses from poem *Vera i Neverie* [Faith and Unbelief] by Boratynsky: *В смириеньи сердца надо верить / И терпеливо ждать конца*. Boratynsky and Dostoevsky, from the point of view of Meyer, are united by the fact that both went from denial and rebellion to faith and the idea of humility.

The theme of suffering is also what unites Boratynsky and Dostoevsky, according to Meyer, who believed that the poet and writer saw a similar metaphysical meaning in the phenomenon of suffering. In Boratynsky's lyrics, the theme of suffering takes on different modes of embodiment and shades of meaning. Meyer briefly outlined how this theme evolved in the poet's work. If in the early period Boratynsky argued the need for unhappiness for the fullest sense of life (in a poetic message to Konshin and in a letter to his mother), then in later poems (*Akhill* [Achilles], *Kogda ditia i strasti i somnen'ia ...* [When a child and passions and doubts]) the meaning of suffering turns out to be different – cleansing, almost Christian. Meyer reflected on Boratynsky's Christianity

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ G. Meier, 84.

in connection with poems from the book *Sumerki* [Twilight]: *Kniaziu Petru Andreevichu Viazemskomu* [To Prince Pyotr Andreevich Vyazemsky], *Tolpe trevozhnyi den' priveten, no strashna ...* [An anxious day is welcome to the crowd, but terrible...], *Bokal* [The Glass]. These works remain unnamed, but it is to them that the quotes used by the author of the article are referred to: "kak by vo grobe", "syn fantazii", "ne v liudskom shumy prorok". Meyer saw in these poems, in which Boratynsky compares poets with Christian ascetics, the expression of the concept of spiritual life as "personal tension of the spirit" ["kak lichnom napriazhenii dukha"]. The understanding of Christian "practice" as a personal responsibility, through suffering and spiritual struggle to purification and enlightenment, unites the author of the book of poems *Twilight* and the author of *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*.

Conclusion

Researchers consider Boratynsky's later poems from his final poetic book *Twilight* to be especially consonant with Dostoevsky's artistic world. The poem *Vse mysl', da mysl'! Khudozhnik bednyi slova ...* is recognized by those close to Dostoevsky as expressing the duality of thinking inherent in the heroes of his novels. The programmatic poem *Blagosloven sviatoe vozvestivshii...* is compared with the diary entry of the writer that he defines himself as "a realist in the highest sense". In the lyrical hero of the poem *Nedonosok*, researchers see features close to Ippolit Terentyev from the novel *Idiot*, and reflections on being in the poem *Osen'* appear consonant with the rebellion of Ivan Karamazov. In works about Dostoevsky (Merezhkovsky) and Boratynsky (Al'mi, Vinokurov, Rudakova), it is shown that frequent cases of similarities between a poet and a writer are on the philosophical plane: their aesthetic positions, the idea of the place of their own literary creativity are recognized as close ones. Researchers find typological kinship in the emotional and psychological characteristics of Boratynsky's and Dostoevsky's heroes, as well as in the logic of their metaphysical reasoning.

How do researchers explain this, at first glance, unexpected philosophical and aesthetic relationship between Boratynsky and Dostoevsky? G.A. Meyer believed that the closeness of the poet to the writer "is based not on the literary influence exerted by the elder on the younger, but on the living organics of Russian culture." («основана не на литературном влиянии, оказанном старшим на младшего, а на живой органике Российской культуры»);²¹

²¹ G. Meier, 84.

I.L. Al'mi suggested that the closeness of *nedonosok* to Ippolit, and the lyrical hero of *Autumn* to Ivan Karamazov, "is apparently explained by the spiritual kinship of the subjects of speech and the concomitant parallelism of artistic tasks." («объясняется, по-видимому, духовным родством субъектов речи и сопутствующей ему параллельностью художественных задач»)²² S.G. Bocharov believed that this kind of similarity is an example of the phenomenon of "literary reminding" ("literaturnoe pripominanie") – when existing forms and ideas, once imprinted in writer's mind, suddenly find an original refraction in his own work. As for the question about the nature of this recollection, the scientist replies that the answer has yet to be found out: «Природа этих припоминаний – сам, того не сознавая! – ещё неясный вопрос для теории творчества (может быть, и предназначенный оставаться неясным)»²³ The nature of these reminiscences – not cognized consciously by the author – is still an unclear question for the theory of creativity (perhaps one intended to remain unclear).

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²² I. Al'mi, 191.

²³ S. Bocharov, 265.

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