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Лѣстница Николаевскаго бульвара.
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ABOUT THE COVER

The Nikolaevskii Boulevard (Primorskii) steps in Odessa were originally designed in 1826 as a monumental entry to the city from the Black Sea port; at the summit stands a statue of the Duke de Richelieu, Odessa's first mayor, dressed in a Roman toga. Further improvements in 1837–41 created the optical illusion of seeing only the landings from the top of the staircase and only the stairs when looking up from the bottom. The steps were later renamed after the Potemkin mutiny in 1905 and were immortalized in Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). This is an example of how an iconic urban image is remembered for its cinematic and literary representation, rather than its original historical context. That is how the Odessa myth worked, overwriting history with popular cultural narratives and ideological discourses that shaped collective memory and competed with a rival Petersburg text for a place in the Russian literary canon, as Efraim Sicher explains in his article on Babel's "Odessa Tales" in this issue. (Souvenir album, ca. 1910; source: Wikimedia Commons.)

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Contributors to This Issue 2

Child of the Age or Little Napoleon?
Two Russian Responses to *The Red and the Black* 7

Jonathan Brooks Platt

On Disappointment in Terrorism, War, and Revolution:
Boris Savinkov's *What Didn't Happen* and
Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* 30

Lynn Ellen Patyk

Sino-Soviet Confessions: Authority, Agency, and
Autobiography in Sergei Tret'iakov's *Den Shi-khua* 47

Edward Tyerman

Isaak Babel's "Odessa Tales":
Inventing Lost Time and the Search for Cultural Identity 65

Efraim Sicher

Vladislav Khodasevich in the Emigration:
Literature and the Search for Identity 88

Pavel Uspenskij

Political Economy, Civic Virtue, and the
Subjective World of the Elite, 1780–1825 109

Andreas Schönle

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BOOK REVIEWS

LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

Thomas G. Marullo *Fyodor Dostoevsky: In the Beginning (1821–1845). A Life in Letters, Memoirs, and Criticism*
Olha Tytarenko 131

Jillian Porter *Economies of Feeling: Russian Literature under Nicholas I*
Michael Wachtel 132

Michael Düring et al. *Russische Satire: Strategien kritischer Auseinandersetzung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*
Karoline Thaidigsmann 133

Sibelan E. S. Forrester, and Martha M. F. Kelly, eds. *Russian Silver Age Poetry: Texts and Contexts*
Daniel Brooks 134

Lynn Ellen Patyk *Written in Blood: Revolutionary Terrorism and Russian Literary Culture, 1861–1881*
Ludmilla A. Trigos 135

Brian Boyd, and Marijeta Bozovic, eds. *Nabokov Upside Down*
Shoshana Milgram Knapp 136

Duncan White *Nabokov and His Books: Between Late Modernism and the Literary Marketplace*
Anna Brodsky 138

Dmitrii Kuzmin *Russkii monostikh: Ocherk istorii i teorii*
Ilya Kukulin 139

Steven Shankman *Turned Inside Out: Reading the Russian Novel in Prison*
Natasha Kolchevska 141

Ksana Blank *Spaces of Creativity: Essays on Russian Literature and the Arts*
Jefferson Gatrall 141

Rosalind P. Blakesley *The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russia, 1757–1881*
Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier 142

Irina Sirotkina and Roger Smith *The Sixth Sense of the Avant-Garde: Dance, Kinaesthesia and the Arts in Revolutionary Russia*
Elizabeth Kendall 143

Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen *Central Asia in Art: From Soviet Orientalism to the New Republics*
Rosamund Bartlett 144

Jane Sharp, ed. *“Thinking Pictures”: The Visual Field of Moscow Conceptualism*
Alexandar Mihailovic 145

HISTORY

Jan Hennings *Russia and Courtly Europe: Ritual and the Language of Diplomacy, 1648–1725*
David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 147

Botakoz Kassymbekova *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*
Yulia Uryadova 148

Lev Mikhailovich Dameshek et al. *Istoriia organov samoupravleniia buriat v XIX–nachale XX v.*
Robert W. Montgomery 148

Michel Niqueux, ed. and trans. *L’Occident vu de Russie: Anthologie de la pensee russe de Karamzine a Poutine*
Jonathan Beecher 150

Steven Sabol *“The Touch of Civilization”: Comparing American and Russian Internal Colonization*
Ilya Vinkovetsky 151

Krishan Kumar *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World*
Kees Boterbloem 152

S. An-sky *Pioneers: The First Breach*
Brian Horowitz 154

Mariusza Sawa *Ukraiński emigrant: Działalność i myśl Iwana Kedryna-Rudnyckiego (1896–1995)*
Yuri Radchenko 155

Yuri Slezkine *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*
Kevin McDermott 157

Anita Pisch *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953: Archetypes, Inventions, & Fabrications*
Andrew M. Nedd 158

Mark Iunge et al., comps. *Chekisty na skam'e podsudimyykh: Sbornik statei*
Dónal O’Sullivan 159

Mark Edele *Stalin’s Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler’s Collaborators, 1941–1945*
Jonathan M. House 160

Kiril Feferman *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*
Sean Martin 161

Golfo Alexopoulos *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin’s Gulag*
Daniel P. Todes 162

Emily D. Johnson, ed. and trans. *Gulag Letters: Arsenii Formakov*
Jeffrey S. Hardy 163

Publications Received

174

Jeffery S. Hardy *The Gulag after Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Krushchev’s Soviet Union, 1953–1964*
Oana Popescu-Sandu 165

Kathleen E. Smith *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring*
Robert Hornsby 166

Per Högselius *Red Gas: Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence*
Boris Barkanov 167

SOCIAL SCIENCES, CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA, AND OTHER

Jeff Meyers *The Criminal-Terror Nexus in Chechnya: A Historical, Social, and Religious Analysis*
Jean-François Ratelle 168

Nozima Akhrarkhodjaeva *The Instrumentalisation of Mass Media in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes: Evidence from Russia’s Presidential Election Campaigns of 2000 and 2008*
Robert W. Orttung 169

Anika Walke et al. *Migration and Mobility in the Modern Age: Refugees, Travelers, and Traffickers in Europe and Eurasia*
Alena K. Alamgir 170

Timm Beichelt, and Susann Worschech *Transnational Ukraine? Networks and Ties that Influence(d) Contemporary Ukraine*
Nicolai N. Petro 172

Vladislav Khodasevich in the Emigration: Literature and the Search for Identity

PAVEL USPENSKIJ

Vladislav Khodasevich spent the final third of his life in emigration.¹ Having left Soviet Russia in 1922, he hoped for a swift return, but by the spring of 1925, when the poet had to settle permanently in Paris, it was clear that return to Russia was impossible. From that moment, Khodasevich painfully suffered the necessity of remaining in emigration and was profoundly and almost constantly disenchanted with his life. Khodasevich's psychological state between 1925 and 1939 may be characterized as an extended crisis of identity (*krizis identichnosti*). This crisis did not prevent him from remaining a professional writer (he published memoiristic sketches, critical articles, and reviews in the émigré press) or from occupying the important role of poet and authoritative critic in the "literary sphere." The strategies of Khodasevich's literary behaviors in emigration might best be described from a sociological point of view, but this article concentrates on the psychological aspect of the poet's work in emigration.² The fact that Khodasevich occupied a particular niche in the literature of the emigration and "outwardly" found conditions for self-realization (that is, he remained a writer and did not become, for example, a taxi driver) does not negate the psychological dimension in which Khodasevich perceived his life as a sequence of

This article was supported by the Academic Fund Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2016–17 (grant №. 16-01-004) and by the Russian Academic Excellence Project "5–100." The author expresses his gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers, whose questions, observations, and judgment made it possible to improve this article.

¹Much has been written both about Khodasevich in emigration and his about émigré writings. See David Bethea, *Khodasevich: His Life and Art* (Princeton, 1983); Nikolai Bogomolov, *Russkaia literatura pervoi treti XX veka: Portrety. Problemy. Raziskaniia* (Tomsk, 1999), 81–131; Emmanuel Demadre, "La quête mystique de Vladislav Xodasevič: Essai d'interprétation de l'œuvre du dernier symboliste russe," *Revue des études slaves* 71, no. 3/4 (1999): 763–74; Valerii Shubinskii, *Vladislav Khodasevich: Chaiushchii i govoriashchii* (St. Petersburg, 2011). Khodasevich's life and work in the emigration, however, have not yet been examined in the context of his search for identity and his experience of trauma.

²For an analysis of Khodasevich's critical articles written in emigration from the point of view of tactics and pragmatics of literary behavior see Leonid Livak, "Kriticheskoe khoziaistvo Vladislava Khodasevicha," in *Diaspora: Novye materialy* 4 (Paris-St. Petersburg, 2002).

misfortunes; thus his literary work represented for him an attempt to change his self-image (*samovospriiatie*). Presumably, the shadow of his identity crisis falls on all of his émigré works. In Khodasevich's case, the specifics of the identity crisis consisted of this: life in emigration was for him a traumatic process, and exposure to such trauma, day after day, prevented him from finding a new and positive self-image.

The use of the term "trauma" infers that trauma theory must be taken into account. Following the important albeit contradictory work of Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trauma theory became a full-fledged scientific trend by the end of the twentieth century.³ The branch of the humanities called trauma studies involves the use of philological as well as psychological toolkits and allows us to analyze text as a product of psychological trauma. Typically, we find the focus of scholarly interest directed at obviously traumatic historical phenomena, such as the Holocaust or the Gulag.⁴ Although emigration does not *a priori* appear to be a traumatic phenomenon, it, too, may be considered in this context.⁵ In one of the first studies to consider emigration in the context of psychoanalysis, León and Rebeca Grinberg identified the fundamental aspects of the psychological state of the emigrant: an abrupt change in the cultural, social, and linguistic milieu and constant stress, associated with new life circumstances, can result in a crisis of identity and—not infrequently—frustration. Some emigrants are unable to deal with the aforementioned circumstances and to work out a psychologically healthy self-image. Emigration for them proves to be a trauma (cumulative trauma, tension trauma) that is extended over time and diffused throughout their daily existence. According to the Grinbergs, the traumatic nature of emigration in such cases is often connected with the fact that emigration bring into focus psychological traumas experienced earlier.⁶

The theory proposed by the Grinbergs offers sufficient material for a working definition of emigration trauma. In Khodasevich's case, this was a continuous state in which the poet was unable to cope with new and stressful circumstances and to find a healthy self-image. The psychologically trying context of emigration compelled Khodasevich to perceive himself as an invalid, which attests to a profound experience of one's own inferiority and to the formation of a defective identity. The Grinbergs' suggestion that there may have been an earlier psychological trauma is possibly valid for Khodasevich, although we have no way of discovering it. Far more important is the fact that the poet himself considered emigration to be the cause of his particular psychological state. Consequently, this article will emphasize not the genesis of the traumatic state, but the manner in which the traumatic state determined the nature of Khodasevich's work in emigration. Accordingly, the article first examines the poet's attempts to find a new self-image, turns next to the trauma of emigration, and only then analyzes the way in which this trauma is reflected in his texts.

³Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2000).

⁴Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, 2001); Alexander Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Stanford, 2013).

⁵See, for example, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, 1996), 10–24.

⁶León Grinberg and Rebeca Grinberg, *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile* (New Haven, 1989), 10–15.

EMIGRATION: A CRISIS OF IDENTITY

Change in customary daily habits, social ties and practices, and the cultural and economic patterns of life forced every emigrant to master new social niches and to find a new world view. Working out a new self-perception in emigration turned out to be particularly difficult for Khodasevich. This was largely due to the fact that Khodasevich, being of Polish-Jewish descent, did not have a well-defined national identity. I remind the reader of the poet's famous phrase in a letter to Boris Sadovskoi of November 1914, associated with the events of the First World War: "Do you believe it, it seems that *we, the Poles*, are to some extent now slaughtering *us, the Jews*."⁷ Khodasevich's identity was more culturally determined: he defined himself through an essential connection with Russian literature and through literature with the empire, a position very clearly expressed in one of his poems, which begins, "Not by my mother, but by the Tula peasant woman/ Elena Kuzina was I nursed.") Still, both the revolutionary events of 1917, as a result of which the Russian Empire ceased to exist, and Khodasevich's departure abroad, that is, his displacement into a foreign-language milieu, undermined his self-image.⁸ To this it must be added that in the "Petersburg" period of his life (1920–22), Khodasevich had assumed the place formerly held by Aleksandr Blok and was considered one of the most important poets by the Russian reading public; he was constantly aware of his literary popularity.⁹ For this reason it became particularly difficult for Khodasevich to work out a new self-image in the emigration.¹⁰ Khodasevich was initially hostile to the Russian diasporas in Berlin and Paris. In 1922 he viewed many of the emigrés who settled in Berlin as "big-bellied boors" and "idlers" and characterized the local Russian-language literature as provincial. "Russian" Paris, according to his observations of 1924, was up to its neck "in unadulterated Blackhundredism."¹¹

Although Khodasevich subsequently began to participate actively in the literary life of the Russian emigration and felt himself responsible for "Russian literature in exile," he still perceived himself as a loner.¹² Not by accident did Mark Vishniak, the editor of the journal *Sovremennye zapiski*, compare him to one of Dostoevsky's heroes: "Khodasevich was by nature an insufficiently social being: he had something of the 'Underground Man' about him. Not without pleasure did he mock anyone and everyone."¹³ The comparison to

⁷Vladislav Khodasevich, *Pis'ma V. F. Khodasevicha B. A. Sadovskomu* (Ann Arbor, 1983), 27.

⁸Khodasevich's understanding of identity in the 1910s is important, as is his understanding of the phrase, cited above, from his letter to Boris Sadovskoi. See Edward Waysband, "Vladislav Khodasevich's 'On your New, Joyous Path' (1914–1915): The Russian Literary Empire Interferes in Polish-Jewish Relations," *Slavic and East European Journal* 59:2 (2015): 246–69.

⁹For more detail see M. G. Ratgauz, "1921 god v tvorcheskoi biografii Khodasevicha," *Blokovskii sbornik X* (Tartu, 1990), 117–29.

¹⁰On the impact of traumatic experience on identity and wholeness of the personality see Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York, 1958), 120–41.

¹¹Vladislav Khodasevich, *Sobranie sochinenii (SS4)*, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1996–97), 4:447–48, 480–81.

¹²This comes through in Khodasevich's critical articles, which reflect the political arguments about the future of Russia and of the emigration. For more detail see Livak, "Kriticheskoe khoziaistvo," 391–456; as well as Khodasevich's unexpectedly politicized poem "Pamiatnik," discussed in Pavel Uspenskij, "'Na perekrestke' publitsistiki i poeticheskoi traditsii: K prochteniiu 'Pamiatnika' Khodasevicha," *Voprosy literatury*, 2012, no. 5:215–39.

¹³Anatolii Berger, ed. and comp., *Sovremenniki o Vladoslave Khodaseviche* (St. Petersburg, 2004), 310.

the antisocial hero of *Notes from Underground* indicates that at times Khodasevich intentionally distanced himself from the émigré community and sometimes defied understanding even in his close intellectual circle. In this way Khodasevich at least partially repudiated a collective diasporan identity.

For Khodasevich, the search for identity in the émigré setting was linked to a distinctive form of escapism—displacement into a different era. His humorous letters, verses, and even his dreams indicate that, for him, nineteenth-century literature was the specific sphere of his symbolic projections, in which he alternately identified himself with the great poets of the past or thought of himself as a forgotten man of letters, of no use to anyone.

The very same pattern appears in two ironic letters written eight years apart: Khodasevich represents himself as a third-rate, forgotten poet whose name means nothing in the history of literature. In a November 1927 letter to Ivan Bunin, Khodasevich constructed the figure of a superannuated poet-debutant named Feoktist Petrovich Mushkin. Mushkin seeks the patronage of Bunin, who is ostensibly deserving of “flattering sympathy” in receiving Mushkin’s “first literary endeavor.” The biography of Mushkin is in no way notable, as the author of the letter himself readily admits: “By birth, I am a collegiate councillor, by education an official of the Department of Police. ... I’m seventy-six years old, and on my third marriage. And now that we have, so to speak, become acquainted, allow me to inform you that I have nothing at all interesting to tell you about my life.” This completely unknown writer invented by Khodasevich lives in the literary sphere of the emigration (he reminisces about the “novice writer Antonin Ladinskii,” for example), and at the same time he is a child of the last century. The letter’s phraseology is maintained in the epistolary style of the nineteenth century. Mushkin sees himself as a part of the Golden Age of Russian literature to such an extent that he considers it necessary to clarify proudly that he is not Pushkin: “Mushkin, not Pushkin: there is a one-letter difference.”¹⁴

In a letter to Raisa Blokh of October 24, 1935, Khodasevich sent a humorous verse, “Amor’s Complaint,” signed with the pseudonym “Anton Miaukin” and accompanied by a facetious commentary from the future:

Editor’s notes to the edition of 2035:

The manuscript is without marks. It dates presumably to 1974, when the poetess R[ozha?] Blokh married M[atvei?] Gorlin, doctor of medicine. One senses the influence of Bogdanovich, Otsup, and other classics. ... It remained unpublished during the poet’s lifetime. The author’s hopeless love for R[ozha] Blokh apparently found expression in the work—this hopeless love, as is well known, served as the cause of the poet’s illness and led him to an early grave.

From the critical reviews:

“... Mme Blokh was called, obviously, Raisa, as we see from the letter that contains her signature. The editor could have figured this out for himself. Unfortunately, we were unable to establish the nature of the relationship among R. Blokh, O. Khodasevich (?), and Anton Miaukin.”¹⁵

¹⁴Ivan Bunin and Vladislav Khodasevich, “Perepiska I. A. i V. N. Buninykh s V. F. Khodasevichem,” in *I. A. Bunin: Novye materialy*, vyp. 1 (Moscow, 2004), 177.

¹⁵Khodasevich, *SS4* 4:525–26.

It is telling that, from the perspective of the future, the name of Khodasevich is so insignificant that it is impossible to establish his correct initial—"O. Khodasevich (?)." Khodasevich's anxiety about his place in the history of Russian literature is visible behind these humorous hoaxes.¹⁶

By happenstance, these humorous verses appear as the inverse of Khodasevich's "serious" poetics, which are built on a complex and multidimensional dialogue with the Russian poetic tradition, something his contemporaries keenly sensed.¹⁷ If, however, Khodasevich masters the literary tradition of the Golden Age in his serious verse, in his humorous poetry he frankly mimics it.

Khodasevich sometimes assumed the mask of Pushkin and Batiushkov in his humorous texts. Thus he borrowed from Pushkin the name of his epigrammatic cycle, "Imitations of the Ancients," written in the 1930s. His first epigram begins with the first lines of a Pushkin epigram ("In the Academy of Sciences/ Prince Dunduk sits in conference"), while the second begins with the start of a well-known poem by Konstantin Batiushkov ("Do you remember what you uttered/ As you bid farewell to life, silver-haired Melchizidek?").¹⁸ Khodasevich's very identification with the poets of the Golden Age—even if carried on in an ironic and playful discourse in which he appropriates for himself the lines of classic writers—apparently bears witness to a psychological desire to project the glory and talent of the classic writers of the nineteenth century onto his own literary fate.

In some cases, Khodasevich's humorous poems are written from the point of view of a forgotten writer of the eighteenth or nineteenth century—not coincidentally they are signed with fictitious names. Thus the author of an epistle requesting a medicinal salve ("Alec, so that in harmonious hymn ..."; 1928) turns out to be "Leper" ("Prokazhennyi"); the author of an "anthological" poem ("He, who pasted on his door an announcement that every Wednesday ..."; 1930) is signed "Dudkin"; while a poetic epistle to Aleksandr Bakhrakh (1927), imitating the doggerel of the seventeenth century, is signed "Felitsian Masla."¹⁹ The fictitious authors of the poems not only amplify the ironic nature of the text, but also play off Khodasevich's worries and anxieties about his literary fate in a humorous vein.²⁰

¹⁶See also the signature on a December 1925 letter to Mark Vishniak: "The Stranger from Chaville," in Khodasevich, *SS4* 4:459. Compare this with Khodasevich's humorous letter to Grigorii Lozinskii in August 1935, which Khodasevich signed with his real name, but in which he mixed together the literary life of the nineteenth century with of the emigration, just as he did in the letter to Ivan Bunin. It is noteworthy that in that letter Khodasevich dons the mask of Pushkin, recasting Pushkin's poem "To the Slanderers of Russia" to fit the present reality (Ivan Tolstoi, "Nenuzhnyi Pushkin: Istoriia odnogo pis'ma Vladislava Khodasevicha," *Russkaia zhizn'*, 2007, no. 17:15–19). The facetious identification with Pushkin might explain the associations that arise in reading these epistolary mystifications.

¹⁷See, for example, Vladimir Veidle, "Poeziia Khodasevicha," *Russkaia literatura*, 1989, no. 2:148.

¹⁸Vladislav Khodasevich, *Sobranie sochinenii (SS8)*, 8 vols. (Moscow, 2009–), 1:339. On the epigrammatic cycle see Nikolai Bogomolov, *Sopriazhenie dalekovatykh: O Viacheslave Ivanove i Vladislave Khodaseviche* (Moscow, 2011), 191–97.

¹⁹Khodasevich, *SS8* 1:336. Translator's note: "Felitsian" was Khodasevich's father's name and his own patronymic; his grandfather used the name Masla-Khodasevich.

²⁰Khodasevich often signed his critical articles with fictitious names; see the commentaries to his critical and publicistic articles (1905–27) in Khodasevich, *SS8* 2. This fact may in part be explained by his psychology, but more importantly, pseudonyms in criticism are, as a rule, exclusively the result of strategies of literary behavior.

Their names, like the names of Miaukin or Mushkin, communicate little, while their literary legacy—from the perspective of the future—consists only of a single, insignificant, chance text.

Thus several of the humorous letters and poems that Khodasevich wrote in emigration reflect the poet's identity crisis. Inventing multiple authors for his more frivolous texts, Khodasevich did more than merely sharpen his wit. What comes through in these works is his anxiety about how readers and literary historians would perceive his life and literary work in the year "2035." This "retrospectivist" view may explain why the humorous works associatively gravitate, in one way or another, toward the Golden Age of Russian literature.

Khodasevich's identity crisis is occasionally visible in the retelling of the poet's dreams. The dreams that we know of are not connected with the subject of return to the homeland, which is characteristic of emigrant dreams; they are also distinguished by their refined literariness.²¹ Iurii Terapiano recalls one characteristic dream from 1928, when "once Khodasevich complained: 'Today I woke up in a cold sweat—I dreamt that I was a Persian poet and that Tkhorzhevskii was translating me.' Not long before this, Ivan Tkhorzhevskii had published translations of Omar Khayyam, and the verses of the unhappy Omar Khayyam were, truly, translated very badly."²² In another dream (apparently, from the 1930s), which Iurii Mandel'shtam recounted, Khodasevich "dreamt that he had to write a poem about d'Anthès—this for a Pushkinist! And Khodasevich wrote a quatrain in his dream: 'My first obligation is as an officer,/ In service and in all a model./ Let nannies' voices silent fall,/ We conjure thee, Pushkin, arise!'"²³ The structural design of both dreams is similar: each has a hero who is a great poet and victim (Omar Khayyam, Pushkin) and an antagonist-tormentor or murderer (Tkhorzhevskii, d'Anthès). In one dream Khodasevich identifies himself with the hero, and in the other, with the antagonist, but both projections turn out to be painful. Becoming Omar Khayyam, Khodasevich apprehends the distortion of his poetic legacy in the future. His identification with Georges d'Anthès is more ambivalent. The Pushkinist Khodasevich becomes the slayer of Pushkin, at the least he speaks for d'Anthès. His one desire (evidently unrealizable) is to annul the deed he has committed and resurrect the slain poet: "We conjure thee, Pushkin, arise!"

Moving deeper into the interpretation of the dream, we may surmise that the poetic incantation in the dream is largely a message from Khodasevich to himself. If we view the actors in the dream as projections of Khodasevich's ego, then we have reason to say that the poet in him has died, and the blame for this lies with the non-poetic part of Khodasevich's personality, or self (*lichnost'*). Unable to identify with the personality's poetic part, Khodasevich attempts to contact the destructive force within himself and use it to send a

²¹For more detail see Pavel Uspenskij and Artem Shelia, "'Liubov' k otecheskim grobam': Sny emigratsii i son Berberevoi," in *Russkaia filologiya: Sbornik nauchnykh rabot molodykh filologov* (Tartu, 2014), 302–17. In my subsequent discussion of the poet's dreams I will not differentiate between the dream as a phenomenon and the narrative about the dream. Although these phenomena are of different orders, the important point is that Khodasevich himself wanted to construe his dreams in this narrative mode—with all its inherent difficulties.

²²Iurii Terapiano, *Vstrechi* (New York, 1953), 107. The dream apparently dates to 1928, since Tkhorzhevskii's translations appeared in that year. For Khodasevich's review see his "Nechaiannaia parodiia," *Vozrozhdenie*, no. 1058 (April 26, 1928).

²³Iurii Mandel'shtam, "Zhivye cherty Khodasevicha," *Vozrozhdenie*, no. 4189 (June 23, 1939): 9.

message to the poet-self, who yearns for nothing more than to begin writing poetry again. Thus the dream may be explained as Jungian dissociation, which often signals traumatic experiences.²⁴

THE TRAUMA OF EMIGRATION: A DEFECTIVE IDENTITY

On a profound level, the poet was unable to clarify who he was and to find a healthy self-image in emigration. During the émigré period Khodasevich lacked a sense of the wholeness (*tseľ'nost'*) of his personality. This is revealed in his choice of traumatic images and metaphors to describe his own situation.

We observe this in the poetics of Khodasevich's last cycle, "European Night," which includes poems written between 1922 and 1927. One need only recall the armless man in the 1925 "Ballad," the armless John Bottom in the poem of the same name, and the persona's severed head in "Berlin Scene" to understand that Khodasevich repeatedly performed imaginary amputations on his heroes and on himself in his émigré poems. In addition to the invalids of "European Night," there are many monster-heroes—repulsive or disgusting people who bring out the poet's aggression. Here, too, one can see Khodasevich's attempt to repudiate the experience of emigration.²⁵

The poet's defective identity is even more clearly revealed in his personal correspondence. I will cite two excerpts from Khodasevich's letters, written fourteen years apart. In November 1922, Khodasevich, in a letter to his friend Mikhail Gershenzon, tried to find a metaphor for the state of emigration:

We are all here anomalously, inappropriately, we can't breathe as we would wish—we won't die from this, of course, but we will damage something in ourselves, we will experience a dilation of the lungs. A plant kept in darkness doesn't grow green, but white: that is, everything about it is as it should be, but it is a freak. Here I am not the equal of myself; instead, here I am myself minus something left behind in Russia, and that something is aching and itching, like an amputated leg that I can feel intolerably and distinctly, but for which I can in no way compensate. ... I bought myself a very fine cork leg, like your Krivtsov, and I dance on it (i.e., I write verse), and it is hardly noticeable—but I know that I would have danced differently on my own leg, possibly worse, but at least in my own way. ... God grant that this will all pass, but for the time being, it is frightening.²⁶

The metaphors Khodasevich uses in a letter to his friend A. S. Tumarkin in 1936 are surprisingly reminiscent of the images found in the earlier letter:

²⁴One may interpret the first-mentioned dream, in which Khodasevich appears dissociated, not integrated, in a similar way. Simply put, if the poet remains alive, then he experiences symbolic coercion by the non-poetic side of his personality.

²⁵For a discussion of "European Night" in terms of the trauma of emigration see Pavel Uspenskij, "Trauma emigratsii: Fizicheskaia ushcherbnost' v 'Evropeiskoi nochi' V. Khodasevicha," *Acta Slavica Estonica* 7. *Blokovskii sbornik XIX* (Tartu, 2015), 192–210.

²⁶Khodasevich *SS4* 4:454.

I am completely and irrevocably knocked off balance, because I am so tired that my mind and nerves are shattered. I'll be honest: I would prefer your society to anyone else's, if I were at all capable of social intercourse. I can do two things: I can write, in order not to die of hunger, and I can play bridge. ... I'm like a victim of shell-shock. To sit in one place for more than an hour is real torture. I, you understand, have become incapable of conversing. If only I could quit the appalling profession of émigré writer, I would again become a human being. But I don't know how to do anything. ... The sad thing is that I've gone all to pieces.²⁷

Divided by fourteen years, the two letters attest to the defective self-image intrinsic to Khodasevich the émigré. In both letters the poet's condition evokes the strongest dread: "for the time being, it is frightening," "an appalling profession." Khodasevich either feels the threat of illness or perceives himself to be ill and diagnoses himself. Most importantly, the metaphor of his own physical, bodily disability is associated with the state of being in emigration: the amputated leg, comparing himself to a "victim of shell-shock." This state produces a sense of losing the mainstay of one's life ("I've gone all to pieces") and a sense of agonizing pain—"aching and itching, like an amputated leg," "real torture." This image of the body reflects the perception of the self. In addition, the trauma of emigration proves to be connected with literary creativity: "I purchased for myself a very fine cork leg ... and I dance on it (i.e., I write verse)"; "If only I could quit the appalling profession of émigré writer."

One major difference exists between the two letters: in the 1936 letter, Khodasevich records the tragedy of his life without having recourse to literary projections; however, in the earlier letter he selects the historical-cultural space of the nineteenth century as the space for his symbolic projections. The metaphor of the amputated leg in the letter to Gershenzon is immediately contextualized in the nineteenth century, as Khodasevich identifies himself with Nikolai Krivtsov, who lost a leg at the Battle of Kulm in 1813. According to a study by his friend Gershenzon, this Krivtsov, having lost his leg, was able to overcome the psychological trauma of being wounded and to learn "not only to walk, but even to dance."²⁸ The poet's self-identification with Krivtsov hints at the possibility of overcoming the trauma of emigration.

This excerpt has another, ironic, slant. Although Khodasevich identifies himself on a symbolic level with Krivtsov, he himself actually bears a closer resemblance to the ludicrous and parodic Lebedev from Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, who only imagined that a French *chasseur* had "shot off his leg." (Khodasevich, as a connoisseur of Russian literature, could not but be aware of this.) In the dialogue in which Prince Myshkin and General Ivolgin discuss the improbability of Lebedev's life history, another detail arises that is also reflected in Khodasevich's letter. Prince Myshkin exclaims: "Oh, yes, they say that one can dance with a leg made by Chernosvitov."²⁹

Khodasevich's traumatic identity thus turns out to be deeply ambivalent: it is simultaneously tragic and ludicrous. This mental model resembles the identity structure

²⁷Berger, *Sovremenniki*, 318–19.

²⁸Mikhail Gershenzon, *Dekabrist Krivtsov i ego brat'ia* (Moscow, 1914), 10.

²⁹Fedor Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (PSS), 30 vols. (Leningrad, 1972–90), 8:411.

described in a previous section of this article: the poet in his humorous verse both attempts to identify himself with Pushkin and ironically views himself as a forgotten, third-rate writer of the early nineteenth century.

This ambivalent self-image, emerging early in the emigration period (1922), was acutely exacerbated after 1927, revealing the amplification of the trauma of emigration. The amplification of trauma is connected with the fact that by this time Khodasevich as a poet had become mute: his poetic creativity had fallen under the destructive influence of the trauma of emigration.³⁰ Poetic muteness is a tragedy for any poet. Although an entirely rational explanation of creativity and poetic muteness is hardly possible, it is beyond doubt that in European culture overcoming a creative crisis is a necessary condition of normal existence for any writer and poet (assuming that the muteness is not associated with the experience of revelatory transcendence and cognizance of the “final verities”). Khodasevich never did succeed in overcoming his poetic crisis, although he attempted to do so toward the end of his life. In his case, he encumbered the literary tradition of which he perceived himself to be a part with a particular symbolic meaning and subjectively perceived that tradition as the source of the creative force that would overcome his crisis. Khodasevich’s critical articles and his famous émigré polemics with Georgii Adamovich about the literary heritage and the pathways of literary development—these were not just the explication of literary positions in the struggle for readers and for the “symbolic capital” of the critic.³¹ Viewing himself as the successor of the Russian literary tradition, Khodasevich imagined a literary space in which Derzhavin and Pushkin stood at one end, and he himself and several other contemporary writers stood at the other, having passed through rigorous screening filters. Being part of this literary space generated a sense of psychological compensation, the essence of which came down to an experience of being one of the elect. He who writes about a tradition becomes its bearer, particularly if there exists the possibility of building a narrative about one’s own past in accordance with the biography of a genius: then it turns out that the life experiences of the biographer “by chance” repeat episodes in the life of a great poet. This was how Khodasevich the biographer symbolically rubbed elbows with the talents of Derzhavin and Pushkin, which gave him strength to overcome his creative crisis and an opportunity to resurrect the poet within himself (see Khodasevich’s dream about d’Anthès and Pushkin).

Before proceeding to an analysis of his book *Derzhavin* and the unfinished biography of Pushkin, we should mention that Khodasevich, as a critic and literary scholar, wrote about many writers of the nineteenth century. Attempts at personal projection and identification are evident across the entire spectrum of his texts. Thus at the end of his article “On Tiutchev” (1928), Khodasevich emphasizes the suddenness and the catastrophic quality of the poet’s new love, observing that “everything went wrong” in Tiutchev’s “happy

³⁰Khodasevich, by the way, did not stop writing humorous and occasional poetry, but he evidently did not consider this to be genuine poetry.

³¹For a discussion of the polemics see Roger Hagglund, “The Adamovič-Xodasevič Polemics,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 20:3 (1976): 239–52; Bethea, *Khodasevich*, 322–31; and Galin Tikhonov, “Russkaia emigrantskaia literaturnaia kritika i teoriia mezhdv dvumia mirovymi voïnami,” in *Istoriia russkoi literaturnoi kritiki: Sovetskaia i postsovetskata epokha*, ed. Evgenii Dobrenko and Galin Tikhonov (Moscow, 2011), 335–67.

life” because of his “blind, excessive” love for the young Elena Denis'eva.³² This description resonates with Khodasevich's own history. Having barely put his life with a second wife in order after the difficult revolutionary years, in 1921 Khodasevich unexpectedly fell in love with the twenty-year-old poet Nina Berberova. Dropping everything, he emigrated with her. In an autobiographical outline composed in 1922, Khodasevich wrote: “The year 1921—Disk and so on. Bel'skoe ust'e. Books. *Catastrophe*.”³³ “Catastrophe,” “everything went wrong”—these are the very words that appositely describe Khodasevich's representation of Tiutchev's experience and clearly correlate his own life with the biography of the classic writer.

From this point on, this article concentrates on Khodasevich's major attempts to find in the biographies of the great poets of the past an inner foothold that would allow him to change his self-image and recover his poetic voice. The textual analysis of the biographies is sustained in a psychological key, which in no way denies their literary value—that discussion remains outside the scope of this work.

DERZHAVIN VS. CAPTAIN LEBIADKIN

Khodasevich wrote *Derzhavin* over the course of two years (1929–31). This was his first major biography of another poet, and it may therefore be viewed as an attempt take stock of one's self, based on the model of another's life. Derzhavin's and Khodasevich's biographies and world views are maximally distant from each other. If we assume that Khodasevich projected the image of Derzhavin as an integrated and natural genius onto himself, then his treatment of the great poet of the eighteenth century compensated for his own defective self-image as a poet of the twentieth. In writing the biography of the “bard of Felitsa,” Khodasevich in certain cases narratively correlated his own life and Derzhavin's.³⁴

Khodasevich humorously and ironically gave himself away about his self-comparison with Derzhavin in his 1933 memoiristic essay “Childhood,” in which he related the story of his first word: “At that moment a kitten came in. Seeing it, I ... clearly uttered, ‘Kitty, kitty!’ According to legend, the first word spoken by Derzhavin was ‘God.’ ... When speaking one's first word, I understood what I was saying, but Derzhavin did not.”³⁵ Although Khodasevich superficially compares himself to Derzhavin, it is clear that for him the biography of the eighteenth century poet serves as the exemplar, while he describes his own life as a departure from it.

Scholars have previously noticed the autobiographical projections in *Derzhavin*. David Bethea noted the autobiographical nature of an excerpt in which Khodasevich discusses how

³²Vladislav Khodasevich, *Pushkin i poety ego vremeni*, 3 vols. (Oakland, 1999–2014), 2:173.

³³Nina Berberova, *Kursiv moi* (Moscow, 2009), 165. Translator's note: “Disk” refers to the Petrograd House of Arts (Dom iskusstv); Bel'skoe ust'e is the name of the Novosil'tsev estate in the Pskov region where Khodasevich spent two months in the summer of 1921 and which provided the title for his 1921 poem.

³⁴For literary context, which this article does not examine, see John Malmstad, “The Historical Sense and Khodasevich's *Derzhavin*,” in Vladislav Khodasevich, *Derzhavin* (Munich, 1975), v–xviii; Andrei Zorin, “Kniga Khodasevicha *Derzhavin*,” in Vladislav Khodasevich, *Derzhavin* (Moscow, 1988), 5–37; and Valerii Cherkasov, *Derzhavin i ego sovremenniki glazami Khodasevicha* (Belgorod, 2009).

³⁵Khodasevich *SS4* 4:192.

Derzhavin became a poet, correctly connecting his reasoning about poetry with Khodasevich's own creative evolution in the 1910s:

In the life of every poet (provided he is not fated to be eternally an epigone) there is a moment, semi-conscious, semi-sentient (but unerring), when he suddenly apprehends within himself a system of images, ideas, feelings, and sounds, connected in a way that no one has hitherto connected them before. His future poetry suddenly sends him a signal. He divines it not with his mind, but with his heart. This moment is ineffable and tremulant, like the moment of conception. If it did not occur, then one cannot pretend that it did: the poet is either conceived in that moment or is never conceived at all.³⁶

Andrei Zorin broadened this comparison, pointing out that, in Khodasevich's view, a great writer must inevitably experience the storms of life and historical events in order to discover himself. For Derzhavin this formative moment turned out to be his work at the time of the Pugachev Rebellion; for Khodasevich, it was the 1917 Revolution. Scholars also have traced autobiographical motifs in the concluding chapters of the book about the elderly Derzhavin, working both on his *Notes* and on explications of his poems. Derzhavin's memoiristic *Notes* correspond to Khodasevich's memoirs (*Necropolis*), while Derzhavin's *Explications* of his lyric verse, dictated to Elizaveta L'vova, correspond to Khodasevich's personal commentaries to his *Collected Verse* of 1927, compiled at Nina Berberova's request.³⁷ The observations of these scholars are valid not only in regard to Khodasevich's memoirs and personal commentaries to his poems. Derzhavin in later life, from the perspective of Khodasevich's psychological projections, is also significant for his relations with younger writers. "It was a decline not of talent but of inspiration. In all probability, both age and infirmity played their role in this, but the important point is that in this new age both the good and the bad were alien to Derzhavin. ... But just as he loved to see young faces around him when he nodded off and then woke suddenly in the midst of a conversation, he also constantly sought youth in poetry, he clung to it."³⁸ This is how the mute poet Khodasevich (cf. "decline of inspiration") observed the Derzhavin of the 1810s. In his words we may read autobiographical projection, since Khodasevich was the unofficial *maitre* of the poets who belonged to the Crossroads (Perekrestka) group.³⁹

Derzhavin's life in the early nineteenth century, when the poet felt himself to be superfluous in a new era and took stock of his accomplishments, in many ways became a model of literary life for Khodasevich. Still, it was not only the life of the poet in old age that became a field for Khodasevich's autobiographical projections. Speaking of Derzhavin's early years, Khodasevich time and again gives his attention to card-playing as a means of earning money. "He [Derzhavin] stopped chasing the big win," Khodasevich remarks in a

³⁶Khodasevich *SS4* 3:191 (trans. M. Carlson). See also Bethea, Khodasevich, 102.

³⁷Zorin, *Derzhavin*, 25–26, 27. See also Malmstad, "Historical Sense," x. Khodasevich's own annotations to his poetry were first published in his *Sobranie stikhov (1913–1939)*, ed. Nina Berberova (Munich, 1961). They are now included in all authoritative editions of Khodasevich's poetry.

³⁸Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:372.

³⁹Terapiano, *Vstrechi*, 105. Valerii Shubinskii, the poet's biographer, observed that Khodasevich also projected his own predilection for literary intrigues on Derzhavin (Shubinskii, *Khodasevich*, 604).

noteworthy passage, “and then the tenth muse, the muse of gaming, who, like all of her sisters, demands simultaneously inspiration, and skill, and daring, and measure, smiled on him with favor.”⁴⁰ Khodasevich’s own passion for card-play is well known, and cards regularly figure in the outline of his life between 1906 and 1911.⁴¹ In his early years, gaming allowed the poet to improve his distressed financial status, although he also played a great deal in emigration. In the excerpt above, cards are compared to poetry, and in this we see Khodasevich’s representation of himself. Compare the above with this passage to a line from one of his humorous poems of the late 1920s: “It’s been a year since I’ve played with the Muse,/ the hand is friendlier with a deck than with a lyre.”⁴²

Little is said in *Derzhavin* about verse and the history of poetry in the eighteenth century. In those rare moments when Khodasevich does discuss Derzhavin’s poetics, he presents the poet as a radical reformer of the new poetic system, declaring his innovation to be a “disruption” of the odic tradition of Russo-French classicism.⁴³ The poetic formation of Khodasevich himself was associated with the radical transformation and triumph over another influential and established poetic language—“Russo-French” symbolism.⁴⁴ The similarity here may be not much more than a hint, but I maintain that Derzhavin’s genius, which changed the poetry of an era, made an impression on Khodasevich, who was trying to make sense of his own literary path.

Several of Khodasevich’s autobiographical projections thus stand out against the background of his hero’s fate in *Derzhavin*. Earlier I noted that the image of the great eighteenth-century poet, the burdens of whose life’s path were redeemed by his poetry, served a compensatory function. Khodasevich’s *Derzhavin* is remarkably whole. Even his last, inconsolable verses (“In its rush, the river of time ...”) are treated not as a manifestation of despair, but as a reflection about a higher divine origin.⁴⁵ The one tragic part in the biography of the great poet—his age and gradual decline—is redeemed by his great, unfinished poems. Khodasevich’s recourse to the personality and creative experience of Derzhavin was nevertheless unable to show him the way out of his own creative crisis.

Khodasevich finished *Derzhavin* on January 6, 1931, and on January 31, according to his working notebooks, he had a new idea, later realized in his article “The Poetry of Ignat Lebiadkin.”⁴⁶ This apologia for the poetic works of one of Dostoevsky’s characters in *The Possessed* seems unexpected, but this abrupt, almost travesty-like refocusing of attention may be explained by the trauma of emigration.

Khodasevich perceived Lebiadkin through the prism of Derzhavin’s poetry. Characterizing Lebiadkin as a fallen man and a “scoundrel,” Khodasevich turns his attention to what the hero says about himself, using the words of the eighteenth-century poet: “I am

⁴⁰Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:149.

⁴¹Berberova, *Kursiv moi*, 164–65.

⁴²Khodasevich, *SS8* 1:338.

⁴³Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:223.

⁴⁴Pavel Uspenskij, *Tvorchestvo V. F. Khodasevicha i russkaia literaturnaia traditsiia 1900-e gg.–1917 g.* (Tartu, 2014).

⁴⁵Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:393.

⁴⁶Vladislav Khodasevich, *Kamer-fur'erskii zhurnal* (Moscow, 2002), 357; idem, “Poeziia Ignata Lebiadkina,” *Vozrozhdenie*, no. 2079 (February 10, 1931).

a slave, a worm, but not God, the only way in which I differ from Derzhavin.”⁴⁷ Khodasevich also links both Lebiadkin’s poem, “To the Perfection of the Maiden Tushina,” and its prose postscript to Derzhavin: “Can the sun be angry at an infusorium if it composes verses to the sun from its drop of water, where you see multitudes of them when you look through the microscope?”⁴⁸ In this comparison, Lebiadkin becomes a caricature of the great poet: “Derzhavin says that God depicts Himself in him, ‘like the sun in a small drop of water.’ ... [Lebiadkin] could have said that, just as Derzhavin with delight ‘lost himself in the immeasurable difference’ between himself and God, so he, Lebiadkin, lost himself in the difference between himself and Liza.”⁴⁹

In addition, Lebiadkin unexpectedly becomes Khodasevich’s contemporary in the article: “Several years ago, in Petersburg, I posed this question to young poets many times: ‘And the star flutters on a steed, in a round dance of other Amazons. ... Whose verses are these?’ And each time to a man they answered—Blok.”⁵⁰ It is impossible to check Khodasevich’s memory, but the comparison of Lebiadkin with a symbolist poet is characteristic. Not only does the comparison “elevate” Lebiadkin as a poet, but it also draws together—through Blok’s poetics—this comic figure of Lebiadkin and Khodasevich himself. In the emigration, Khodasevich was frequently compared with Blok, and this comparison was very important to him. Thus on a symbolic level the poets Lebiadkin, Blok, and Khodasevich appear side by side.⁵¹

In Lebiadkin, a caricature of Derzhavin whose verse could unexpectedly be attributed to Blok, Khodasevich found something that resonated with his own émigré experience. Earlier I expressed the view that Khodasevich was troubled by the sense that his creative work was insignificant and negligible. Here Khodasevich identifies himself with a completely talentless rhymester and therefore sympathizes with him: “Lebiadkin’s poetry is the deformation of poetry, but only in the sense and to the extent that he himself is a tragic deformation of the human image. The discrepancy between form and content in Lebiadkin’s poetry is essentially tragic, although on the surface it appears parodic.”⁵² This tragic element is of the same nature as Khodasevich’s view of himself as “Mushkin” or “Miaukin,” forgotten poets who achieved nothing in literature. Recall that the metaphors Khodasevich uses to describe emigration also contain within themselves the “tragic deformation of the human image.”

An additional reason exists for Khodasevich’s self-identification with Lebiadkin—the imagined amputation of a limb. The character from *The Possessed* imagines that he heroically lost his arm during the war in Sebastopol.⁵³ Khodasevich sees in this absurd deception a

⁴⁷Khodasevich, *SS4* 2:195–96. See Derzhavin’s 1784 ode “Bog” (line 87): “Ia tsar’ – ia rab, – ia cherv’, – ia bog!” Translator’s note: The other Derzhavin references in this paragraph are to the same ode.

⁴⁸Dostoevskii, *PSS* 10:106.

⁴⁹Khodasevich, *SS4* 2:197–98

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 198–99.

⁵¹See Veidle, *Poeziia Khodasevicha*, 160; Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, “Zakholust’e,” *Vozrozhdenie*, no. 968 (January 26, 1928); and Georgii Ivanov, “V zashchitu Khodasevicha,” in Georgii Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1994), 3:515.

⁵²Khodasevich, *SS4* 2:199.

⁵³“And again he wept with bitter anguish/ The armless man wept for Sebastopol,” as Lebiadkin writes about himself (Dostoevskii, *PSS* 10:95).

poetic manifestation: “There he is, the illusory, ideal Lebiadkin, understood by no one and unfairly despised—that is the poet.”⁵⁴ This recalls both the metaphor of the amputated leg in Khodasevich’s letter to Gershenzon and the conversation of the characters in *The Idiot* about Lebedev, who resembles Lebiadkin in his imagined disability.

Combined in the tragicomic figure of Lebiadkin are the primary components of Khodasevich’s identity: the forgotten poet of the nineteenth century (prior to Khodasevich, no one had looked seriously at the poems of this character from *The Possessed*), who is compared to the genius (Derzhavin), and who views himself as an invalid. Here Khodasevich’s simultaneously bitter and ironic view of himself from the outside stands revealed.

On the psychological level, then, the biography of Derzhavin could have helped to overcome the trauma of emigration: Khodasevich the poet could have projected the image of Derzhavin onto himself (the constant “intersections” in the poets’ biographies would have facilitated this), and in this manner he could have “come back to life”; that is, he could have started to write verse again. But the trauma took its own: the compensatory image of the great poet did not fulfill its role. Khodasevich’s identification was deflected onto Dostoevsky’s parodic and unhappy Lebiadkin instead of onto Derzhavin. A second attempt to reanimate the authentic poet within himself followed: Khodasevich returned to an idea that had emerged long before, writing a biography of Pushkin.⁵⁵

PUSHKIN AND “THE CURSE OF TUTANKHAMUN’S TOMB”

Khodasevich, like almost every poet and writer of the Silver Age, saw Pushkin as the premier Russian poet whose creative work became the foundation of the contemporary Russian literary tradition and whose life and conduct became an important reference point for subsequent generations.⁵⁶ Thus it is not surprising that at various times Khodasevich saw in his own life the repetition of certain circumstances of Pushkin’s biography and at times even emphasized his own orientation on Pushkin in his poetry. Scholars have consistently taken notice of the Pushkinian allusions, citations, and reminiscences in Khodasevich’s verse.⁵⁷ Among them, reflections of Pushkin’s “Prophet” play a special role in Khodasevich’s 1921 “Ballad,” the work that initially elevated him into the lofty tradition of Russian poetry. Not accidentally, and greatly owing to the “Ballad,” the poet was perceived to be the successor to the poetic line of Pushkin and Blok.⁵⁸ No less significant is the reflection

⁵⁴Khodasevich, *SS4* 2:196.

⁵⁵Ibid., 526.

⁵⁶For Pushkin’s reception by the culture of the Silver Age see articles in *Cultural Mythologies of Russian Modernism: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, ed. Boris Gasparov et al. (Berkeley, 1992). See also P. Debretseni [Paul Debreczeny], “Zhitie Aleksandra Boldinskogo: kanonizatsiia Pushkina v sovetskoi kul'ture,” in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: Issledovaniia amerikanskikh uchennykh* (St. Petersburg, 1993), 258–83; Vladimir Musatov, *Pushkinskaia traditsiia v russkoi poezii pervoi poloviny XX veka* (Moscow, 1998); Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin: Russia’s Myth of a National Poet* (Stanford, 2004); and Alexandra Smith, *Montaging Pushkin: Pushkin and Visions of Modernity in Russian Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Amsterdam, 2006).

⁵⁷See Iurii Levin, “Zametki o poezii Vl. Khodasevicha,” *Wiener Slavistischer Almanach* 17 (1986): 43–130; Bogomolov, *Russkaia literatura*, 359–75; and the commentaries to Khodasevich, *SS8*, vol. 1.

⁵⁸For more detail, see Pavel Uspenskij, “‘Liry labirint’: Pochemu V. F. Khodasevich nazval chertvertuiu knigu *Tiazhelaia lira*?” *Lotmanovskii sbornik* 4 (Moscow, 2014), 450–67, with bibliography.

of the myth of Pushkin's nanny in Khodasevich's "Not by my mother, but by the Tula peasant woman ..." (1917, 1922), which correlates with Pushkin's work.⁵⁹ Irina Surat has also drawn attention to Khodasevich's "Don Juan catalog," composed on the model of Pushkin's own.⁶⁰

Khodasevich's deep-seated identification of himself with Pushkin impelled him to attempt Pushkin's biography. In 1932–33, Khodasevich published three chapters from the biography: "Starting Life," "My Grandfather the Writer," and "Youth." These chapter-essays take the poet's biography only to 1820; moreover, they omit Pushkin's residence at the Lyceum. Although these chapters are extensively annotated, the autobiographical projections they contain have not received scholarly attention, but they are worth considering.⁶¹

Speaking of the poet's childhood, Khodasevich touches on the theme of childhood fears. According to Khodasevich the biographer, Pushkin "for a long time could not fall sleep at night"; he fell asleep thanks only to his nanny, who "out of old habit came to his bed," taught him to say his prayers, and then told him tales "about the walking dead, rusalkas, house spirits, and serpents."⁶² Pushkin's childhood fears are reminiscent of the childhood fears of Khodasevich himself, which are known to us, however, only from his own memoirs. Describing them, Khodasevich similarly begins with a religious theme ("I was afraid ... of hell, to which God sends sinners") and then moves on to his fear of the unclean powers—he was frightened by the "devils" that appeared at midnight.⁶³

The third chapter of the unfinished biography, "Youth," proves to be the most interesting for what it reveals about Khodasevich's projections. Significantly, it has the very same title as Khodasevich's first collection of poetry, published in 1908. Thus the title already signals the presence of autobiographical projections, which are subsequently realized in the chapter.

Describing Pushkin's life in Petersburg between 1817 and 1820, Khodasevich begins by introducing two types of society people—the "rackety people" (*shumnye*) and the "intelligent people" (*umnye*). "Rackety people" pass their days in idleness, while "intelligent people" are serious and patriotic, their minds taken up with political and social issues. According to Khodasevich, "the spirit of revolution already soared" above them.⁶⁴ The phrase "spirit of revolution" is certainly associated with the coming Decembrist movement, but there can be no doubt that Khodasevich introduces it in a way that allows him to project the start of the nineteenth century onto the start of the twentieth, when the "spirit of revolution" was no less palpable.

In Khodasevich's treatment of the material, Pushkin was torn between these two social circles. But although he admired the "intelligent people," he nevertheless attached himself

⁵⁹Irina Surat, *Pushkinist Vladislav Khodasevich* (Moscow, 1994), 50; Bogomolov, *Sopriazhenie dalekovatykh*, 175–84.

⁶⁰Surat, *Pushkinist Vladislav Khoasevich*, 50. Another question that calls for consideration concerns the correlation between Pushkin's poetic principles, which Khodasevich formulated in his book *Poeticheskoe khozaistvo Pushkina* (1924), and Khodasevich's own poetics. I do not examine it here because the topic is more appropriate for Khodasevich's Petersburg period, during the writing of the poems of *Tiazhelaia lira*.

⁶¹Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:526–39.

⁶²Ibid., 62.

⁶³Ibid. 4:195.

⁶⁴Ibid., 76.

to the society of the “rackety” idle young and “became a Petersburg dandy.”⁶⁵ Khodasevich also constantly notes Pushkin’s lack of means and his attempts to improve his material circumstances by card-play:

And so he, unattractive, badly dressed, and poor, lived squarely among the richest, best-dressed, and most brilliant people of the capital. He was drawn into card-play: at first while still at the Lyceum, in imitation of others, then because he was captured by its incomparable magical power, and now—for money. ... He was always without a kopek, always in debt. He experienced his poverty as a great humiliation.⁶⁶

Khodasevich’s understanding of Pushkin’s personality here was autobiographical. The memoirs of his second wife, Anna Chulkova-Khodasevich, allow us to surmise that the poet identified with Pushkin even as a young man:

In those years Vladia was a quite a smart dresser himself. ... He was often seen in the Literary Circle at the card table, where they played *Chemin de fer*. Vladia was always thin and pale. Gambling at cards alternated with creative work, socializing with Briusov, Andrei Belyi, Ellis, Nina Petrovskaiia, and Sergei Sokolov, who at that time was publishing the journal *The Pass (Pereval)*. ... Vladia took up residence in furnished rooms in the “Balchug” apartments, where he lived and worked in more humble conditions.⁶⁷

Dandyism, gambling at cards and poverty, proximity to the literary *maitres*—this is what Khodasevich experienced himself and what he emphasized in his biography of Pushkin. The Pushkin circle of “rackety people” no doubt corresponds to the symbolists and their predilection for games of “life-creation.”⁶⁸ But the “intelligent people,” who corresponded to the twentieth century’s revolutionary intelligentsia, were also important to the poet. Khodasevich’s 1912 anti-symbolist lecture about the poet Semen Nadson, idol of the civil intelligentsia, unambiguously attests to this. In Khodasevich’s view, it was imperative at the time that symbolism and all aesthetic verse recede into the shadows, “so that it would not unwittingly deter people from the path bequeathed to them by history and by the consecrated blood of victims, sacrificed on the altar of Freedom.”⁶⁹ There can be no doubt that in these words (as in the lecture as a whole) Khodasevich spoke out against symbolist principles in favor of revolutionary ones.

⁶⁵Ibid. 3:78

⁶⁶Ibid., 81.

⁶⁷Anna Khodasevich, “Vospominaniia o V. F. Khodaseviche,” *Novo-Basmannaia* 19, ed. Nikolai Bogomolov (Moscow, 1990), 393–94. Pushkin’s autobiographical myth appears in one of the excerpts from Anna Chulkova-Khodasevich’s memoirs; she could only have known of the relevant events from Khodasevich himself. In 1904, Khodasevich wrote a poem in his niece’s album and signed it “Green monkey” (ibid., 392). His choice of signature reveals a playful identification with Pushkin; compare this with a fragment from the unfinished biography: “... he was not physically attractive. ... The make-up of his face, its habitual expression and fidgetiness, reminded many of a monkey” (Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:80). See also Pushkin’s own early poem in French, in which he compares himself to a monkey: “*Vrai démon pour l’espièglerie./ Vrai singe par sa mine./ Beaucoup et trop d’étourderie./ Ma foi, voilà Pouchkine*” (Aleksandr Pushkin, *Sobranie sochinenii (SS)*, 10 vols. [Moscow, 1959–62], 1:265).

⁶⁸For more on Khodasevich’s own games of life-creation see Uspenskij, *Tvorchestvo Khodasevicha*.

⁶⁹Khodasevich, *SS8* 2:101.

Another significant moment comes at the end of the chapter “Youth,” in which Pushkin leaves Petersburg to go into his southern exile. While working on this episode, Khodasevich retrospectively conceptualized his own departure into emigration:

He was leaving in profound tranquility, similar to that pleasant feeling of convalescence that he experienced after his first illness. During those three years ... he had wasted an enormous store of strength and emotions. ... It seemed to him that his youth had ended and that he would not even write poetry any more. ... He even fancied that he was fleeing Petersburg of his own free will, fleeing into a new, unseen land that beckoned to his imagination.⁷⁰

In reality, Khodasevich could not identify himself with Pushkin in this episode: the nineteenth-century poet was sent into exile by force, while Khodasevich went into emigration voluntarily. Moreover, Khodasevich’s attempt to see in Pushkin’s biography an event reminiscent of his own life resulted in the transference of his identification with Pushkin to the psychological plane: in describing Pushkin’s emotional state, Khodasevich attributes to the poet feelings associated with his own departure abroad, and the nineteenth-century poet’s exile turns out to be, as it were, voluntary.⁷¹ The hint at the poetic muteness which is to come is worth noting in the quotation above. Khodasevich decidedly ascribes his own experience with emigration to Pushkin.

Khodasevich never finished his biography of Pushkin. The circumstance of an unfinished project is usually associated with the lack of indispensable materials or with day-to-day literary demands that do not allow for the realization of such a large-scale effort. Without doubting the validity of such arguments, I will note a second, more or less obvious reason: the biography of Pushkin simply did not allow Khodasevich to completely identify with the great poet of the nineteenth century. It was the same with Derzhavin, but unlike Derzhavin, Pushkin represented a structurally formative part of Khodasevich’s internalized myth of himself. The subsequent unfolding of the myth of Pushkin into a logical biographical narrative undermined any further possibility of Khodasevich’s identification with Pushkin, since it would have revealed a considerable number of “discontinuities.” Khodasevich’s work was apparently doomed from the start. The failure of his project led to a sense of catastrophe: “I think that the last outbreak of illness and despair,” Khodasevich wrote to Berberova in July 1932, “was brought on by my farewell to Pushkin. I have placed a cross on the grave of this project, just as I did on the grave of my poetry. Now I have nothing.”⁷²

In 1937, the year of the Pushkin Jubilee and several years after he had abandoned the writing of his Pushkin biography, Khodasevich planned an article with the strange title “Tutankhamun.” Its outline has been preserved, and Nikolai Bogomolov has introduced it into the scholarship with detailed commentaries.⁷³ The task of this article, then, is only to

⁷⁰Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:93

⁷¹In this connection, it is interesting to consider one additional reflection of the Pushkin myth. In emigration Khodasevich regularly stressed that he should have been exiled from Petersburg for political reasons; this point of view, in all probability, did not correspond to reality (Bogomolov, *Sopriazhenie dalekovatykh*, 211). It is entirely possible that Khodasevich would have liked to see a repetition of the episode of Pushkin’s exile in his own biography, and more broadly, to see the model of the “victimized poet” realized in his own life.

⁷²Khodasevich, *SS4* 4:520–21.

⁷³Bogomolov, *Sopriazhenie dalekovatykh*, 201–5.

offer a psychological interpretation of Khodasevich's planned project. Bogomolov observes that the title of the article is connected with the 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's burial site and the subsequent legend of the "curse of the tomb" of the pharaoh. Bogomolov asserts that "Khodasevich wanted to liken contact with Pushkin's legacy to this 'curse of the tomb.'" In his outline for the article, Khodasevich catalogs the unfinished editions of Pushkin's works and links the handling of Pushkin's legacy with death. Thus, Semen Vengerov and Valerii Briusov died because of their work on Pushkin; Khodasevich also associates the deaths of Dostoevsky and Blok with Pushkin.⁷⁴

By 1937 the Pushkin myth had evidently died within Khodasevich. The mute poet, having suffered from the circumstances of émigré life and creative crisis, now sought an explanation for his fate. "The Curse of Pushkin" turned out to be a convenient explanatory model. It was in some sense a counter-myth that explained the failures of life and creativity on a symbolic level. Khodasevich's plan for the article, probably conceived in a moment of despondency, offers evidence that his traumatic identity had become so firmly rooted that even his perception of Pushkin's influence had changed from positive and "life-giving" to destructive.

"THE LIFE OF VASILII TRAVNIKOV"

Khodasevich's late masterwork, "The Life of Vasilii Travnikov," was a literary hoax, a fictional biography of a forgotten poet that appeared in the newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* in 1936.⁷⁵ I suggest that Khodasevich's ambivalent identity was finally resolved in this novella. The idea of inventing a forgotten great poet who lived in the time of Derzhavin and Pushkin and then writing his biography came to Khodasevich in April 1931, at the height of his work on Pushkin's biography.⁷⁶ He returned to the idea in February 1932, after he had despaired of ever completing the Pushkin biography.⁷⁷ The fact that he conceived of writing the biography of a fictitious writer while still in the process of writing Pushkin's biography permits us to suggest that originally Travnikov, with respect to Khodasevich's identification with Pushkin, played the same role that Lebiadkin played with respect to Khodasevich's identification with Derzhavin (the very recurrence of the subject further testifies to its traumatic character).

Above all else, Khodasevich's traumatic identity manifests itself in Travnikov's biography. In 1793, when young Vasilii was eight years old, dogs from his father's kennel attacked him and badly bit up his leg. The wound was severe: the right leg festered and

⁷⁴Ibid., 202, 204–5.

⁷⁵Khodasevich, "Zhizn' Vasilii Travnikova," *Vozrozhdenie*, nos. 3907, 3914, and 3921 (February 13, 20, and 27, 1936). For interpretations of Khodasevich's *povest'* see Khodasevich *SS4* 3:516–17; Inna Andreeva, "Svidanie 'u zvezdy,'" in Samuil Kissin (Muni), *Legkoe vremia: Stikhi i proza; Peregiska s V. F. Khodasevichem* (Moscow, 1999): 378–83; and Sergei Davydov, "Shishki na Adamovu golovu: O mistifikatsiakh Khodasevicha i Nabokova," *Zvezda*, 2002, no. 7:195–98. In the rest of this article I will concentrate on the key moments of the mystification, leaving a detailed analysis of the work in its historical-literary context for the future.

⁷⁶The antecedents of the fictional biography are already apparent in Khodasevich's humorous verses, which are signed with fictitious names.

⁷⁷Khodasevich, *Kamer-fur'erskii zhurnal*, 358, 365.

“then began to wither.” “A year later the leg had to be amputated at the knee.”⁷⁸ In this episode Khodasevich realizes the metaphor of the amputated leg from his letter to Gershenzon and endows his hero with a traumatic identity; now, however, this identity is not the consequence of emigration but of a psychological and physical childhood trauma, a turning point in the formation of the personality.

Travnikov’s private life developed tragically. His fiancée, who was younger than he was by eight years, unexpectedly died of smallpox. His hopes for personal happiness were dashed. In his unfinished poems Travnikov hopes to see his beloved beyond the grave, observing: “The fourth year of our parting has passed.”⁷⁹ “Travnikov” was written in 1936, four years after Khodasevich’s separation from his third wife, Nina Berberova, about whom he was thinking in the final moments before his death. Without doubt, Khodasevich resorts to tragic irony in the plot (after all, what we have before us is a mystification) to work through his grievous loss.

The description of Travnikov’s final years before his death is tragic and stands in direct contrast to its parallel episode in *Derzhavin*. If Derzhavin remained whole and creative even in extreme old age, then Travnikov, of whose final years essentially “nothing is known,” was burdened by life; he “waited for and desired death.” In this painful life the temptation of suicide presented itself, but it went against Travnikov’s “entire philosophy of life and poetics”: “out of pride alone one must bear it all to the end.”⁸⁰ Khodasevich’s own features emerge in this image. In the second half of the 1930s he became disillusioned by the emigration and by émigré literature, lived a solitary life, and considered himself to be a lost man (see his letter to Tumarkin). We know from Berberova’s memoirs that in the 1920s Khodasevich thought about suicide, and it is likely that the memory of these ideations were integrated into the biography of Travnikov.⁸¹

Travnikov’s relationships with other poets also reveal points of similarity to Khodasevich’s. The silent and withdrawn Travnikov fell into the company of writers at the end of the eighteenth century, but he did not get on with the older poets and held himself aloof from the younger ones.⁸² In shaping a symbolic character who was simultaneously present in and absent from the literary sphere, Khodasevich reprised his own disillusionment with literature in the emigration. Khodasevich also transferred his rejection of the Pushkin myth to Travnikov.⁸³ The fictitious poet’s attitude toward Pushkin is almost arrogant: a copy of *Ruslan and Liudmila* was purportedly preserved in Travnikov’s library, with the notation, “The young author is wasting his gifts on cheap mockery. This is the result of an education at the beginning of which one is supposed to write compositions like *The Dangerous Neighbor*.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:102.

⁷⁹Ibid., 110.

⁸⁰Ibid., 114–15.

⁸¹Berberova, *Kursiv moi*, 245, 250.

⁸²Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:104–5.

⁸³At the same time, we may read into the structure of “Zhizn’ Vasiliia Travnikova” an unconscious identification with Pushkin: the role of the narrator and publisher who has allegedly found the papers of a deceased author hints at *Povesti Belkina* (Pushkin, *SS* 5:45–49).

⁸⁴Khodasevich, *SS4* 3:114. Translator’s note: *Opasnyi sosed* was a “frivolous,” heroic-comic narrative poem written in 1811 by Pushkin’s uncle, Vasilii Pushkin.

Travnikov lived during a period of the flowering of Russian poetry, although it seems that he did not participate in it and intentionally distanced himself from its rising star, Aleksandr Pushkin. The more observant gaze of the literary specialist (that is, of Khodasevich himself) reveals in Travnikov a poet who stood at the sources of both a new literary language and philosophical verse:

Of course, his work is formally associated with the eighteenth century. But it was not Karamzin, or Zhukovskii, or Batiushkov, but namely Travnikov who began the conscious struggle against the conventions of pedantic affectation, one of the last legacies of the eighteenth century. More than any other poet, only Boratynskii and those Russian poets whose works are associated with Boratynskii, were able even to approximate Travnikov.⁸⁵

Travnikov demolishes the conventional and affected poetic language of the eighteenth century. Khodasevich had characterized Derzhavin's poetic innovation in a similar fashion, emphasizing above all his shattering of the poetics of the ode. Evidently, Khodasevich, as the author of the mystification, correlated Travnikov's invented poetics with his own, describing the triumph over symbolism and the return to classical Russian verse in this manner.

In "The Life of Vasilii Travnikov" Khodasevich reproduced his émigré identity: an invalid, a misanthrope, a poet forgotten yet great, whose pride prevents him from committing suicide. Notably, Khodasevich fits this identity into the framework of the culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although nothing prevented him from writing a fictional biography of a contemporary poet (as Vladimir Nabokov, bearing Khodasevich's mystification in mind, did in his 1939 story "Vasilii Shishkov"). It was precisely the classical period of Russian literature that always remained the zone of magical attraction for Khodasevich; it was "his" space.

The "Life of Vasilii Travnikov" is a narrative that diagnoses trauma. In his mystification Khodasevich did not overcome the trauma of emigration; as before, he felt himself to be an invalid; he was unable to write poetry. Nevertheless, in this text Khodasevich's contradictory literary self-awareness, which previously he had symbolically connected with *unlike* poets (Pushkin/ the third-rate writers of the nineteenth century, Derzhavin/ Captain Ledbiadkin), was now expressed in a *single* persona: in a fictitious poet of the nineteenth century, great but completely forgotten. This poet was ostensibly the "resurrected" Khodasevich, and here the author reveals his hope that his own literary legacy would be resurrected in a similar way. "The Life of Vasilii Travnikov" turned out to be more encompassing than the earlier model of "genius/caricature of a genius." In this manner Khodasevich admitted the futility of his attempt to change his self-perception in emigration, but he then proposed a view of his life and literary work from the point of view of the reader and literary historian of "the year 2035."

The emigrant environment thus became a trial for Khodasevich, as it did for many other Russian writers. In the first years of his life abroad he hoped to remain a poet, whose poetic inspiration would compensate for the adversities of life. But the experience of

⁸⁵Ibid., 115.

emigration turned out to be far too traumatic a circumstance, and this resulted in the formation of a defective identity. Inasmuch as the trauma of emigration affected his poetic creativity in a destructive manner, Khodasevich the poet became mute. This forced him to turn to the biographies of Derzhavin and Pushkin, which allowed him to find a matrix in which he might describe his own life. Khodasevich attempted to find resonances between his own fate and the fate of the poets of the past in order to find the poet within himself once again. These attempts were not crowned with success: every recourse to the image of a great poet led to identification not with him but with his “double.” In the case of Derzhavin, this was the parodic character Captain Lebiadkin from *The Possessed*. In Pushkin’s case, the “double” was supposed to be Travnikov, endowed with a traumatic identity. Yet Travnikov turned out to be great and defective to an *equal* degree, which reconciled Khodasevich to his ambiguous place in literature. Having found a literary form for his tragic self-image, Khodasevich stopped feeling a need for the Pushkin myth, which he now (after 1936) perceived as negative and a source of unhappiness.