"DAY" AND "NIGHT" OF F.I. TYUTCHEV'S POETRY:
ANTINOMIES OF POETIC WORLDVIEW

A. Valitov¹

DOI: http://doi.org/10.15350/L_27/02

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the study of the poetic space of Tyutchev's lyric poetry, which stands out in the wider context of the Russian poetic traditions of the XIX century for its "otherness". Though based on the ontological foundation upon which the ethical framework of the classical art was built, Tyutchev's lyric poetry clearly manifests the elements of the general perception of being that indicate the existential crisis, decay of former ontological principles, anticipating the emergence of a new cultural space – the poetry of the Silver Age.

Keywords. Tyutchev, "Day and Night", chaos, cosmos, paradoxical, metatext, Silver Age.

In 1883 – ten years after the death of F.I. Tyutchev – his younger contemporary, poet Afanasy Fet, wrote about a book of poems by Tyutchev whom he "adored":

*Here is our patent of nobility –
Graciously granted by the poet,
With reign of powerful spirit
And bloom of sophisticated life.*

So, according to A. Fet, not only the refinement of the poet's lyrical voice but also its ultimate power is amalgamated in his verses. Thus A. Fet in his view of Tyutchev's poetry links two qualities which could seem almost incompatible.

However, the totality of the poetic space of Tyutchev's lyric poetry in its individual manifestations is characterized by even greater

¹Andrei Valitov, Cand. Sci. (Philology), Associate Professor, K.D. Ushinsky State Pedagogical University, Russia.

heterogeneity. Relying on the poetics only, it may be impossible to reconstruct the poet's integral world outlook, taking into account the wide semantic scope of his works – from the ancient heroics ("Cicero (Ciceron)", 1830) and Orthodoxy ("Oh, my prophetic soul! (O veshhha-ja dusha moja...)", 1855) to ontological nihilism ("Of life that blossomed here (Ot zhizni toj, chto bushevala zdes'...)", 1871).

Let us analyse the poem "Day and Night" (Den' i noch'), 1839.

*The spirit world we may not see,
That nameless gulf, is shrouded over
And hidden by a golden cover;
Thus do the gods on high decree.
Day – this most splendid shroud is thee,
Day – for us mortals, animation,
The ailing soul's alleviation,
That men and gods delight to see!*

*But let day fade and night commence;
The blessed veil is torn, revealing
The fateful world it was concealing,
And hurled incontinently hence...
The gulf lies naked to the sight
With its black horrors of perdition,
'Twixt them and us lies no partition:
And that is why we fear the night!*

In his analysis of the poem, contemporary researcher M.M. Dunaev identifies some of the features of the inner world of Tyutchev, "Tyutchev expressed the pagan perception of the world – let us not try to determine now whether it was his actual worldview or just a poetic fantasy, an experience of "other-worldly" mental state. Paganism, usually credited with a harmonious interaction with the natural world, actually perceives it – and the universe as a whole – as something fraught with the horror of an incomprehensible mystery of fate. It is no wonder that the world in the Tyutchev's poem is "fateful". The day (light) is only a deceiving cover hiding the reality: fear and gloom. Gloom, darkness, absence of light – that's true pagan sensation of the surrounding world." [1, pp. 363-365]

In his further analysis of Tyutchev's poetry, M.M. Dunaev notes that the poet was able "to discern sinful conflicting states, concealed

in the deepest depths of the soul and madly gravitating towards shapeless nothingness – chaos", and the researcher considers that the causes of such sensitivity were in instability, duality of the "true nature of Tyutchev himself" [2, p. 365 and 369].

Such characteristics of Tyutchev's lyrical poetry have been marked by many literary critics and scholars at different times. Thus, D.S. Merezhkovsky, for example, generally tended to maximize the importance of the internal sense of distress in the poets' works. N.N. Skatov wrote in this connection: "For Merezhkovsky, Tyutchev was, first of all, a carrier of the elements of individualism with all the related contradictions – from self-idolization to personal self-destruction. Two forces drive the human world, as well as the world of the elements: attraction and repulsion of atoms – personalities. Of these two forces only one – the repulsive force – is affirmed by Tyutchev." '... Buddhism is a religion of inaction. It is primarily a religion of contemplation. This is the essence of Tyutchev's religion.' 'Love of suffering – love – love of evil, of destruction. Chaos.' All these characteristics are taken from different fragments of the book 'Two Secrets of Russian Poetry'. But all of them say the same: Tyutchev is related to the religion of evil, chaos, inaction, destruction and self-destruction. There seems to be a lot of truth in this approach, supported by the poems by Tyutchev and derived from them. Still it is not true because it is not the whole truth about Tyutchev. It was not a mere coincidence that the verses on the basis of which we can speak about Tyutchev as a poet of kindness, space, life and active action just dropped beneath Merezhkovsky's radar." [3, pp. 104-105]

Yu.M. Lotman in one of his last articles about Tyutchev's works also mentioned some oppositions inherent to his lyric poetry, though, as well known, the scholar treated the entire Tyutchev's poetic legacy as the integrated whole, "The interpretation of Tyutchev's body of work as a unified text has become well established. This approach, however, should be agreed with another well-known fact: regular occurrences of contradictory solutions to the same problems in Tyutchev's poetic legacy. Thus, for example, while considering the opposition of 'being' and 'non-being', which is fundamental for the entire system, a researcher looks in bewilderment at a passionately expressed thirst for being. And, on the other side, – at an equally powerful urge to 'taste destruction'. The same can be stated regarding other most significant oppositions, including the 'Russia – West' one." [4, p. 86]

The complicated worldview contradictions were intertwined in Tyutchev's lyric poetry and, maybe, even determined the paradoxical nature of other aspects of his poems, providing them with that degree of originality and uniqueness which constitute the phenomenon of Tyutchev's poetic legacy. For example, L.V. Pumpyansky, in his study of Tyutchev's style, drew attention to the paradoxical combination of its components: "alloy of Schelling with Derzhavin", "a combination of incompatible styles Romanticism and Baroque". [5, p. 15] "His lyric poetry accustoms us to a monumental style in small forms," said Y.N. Tynyanov about the genre originality of Tyutchev's poetry. [6, p. 51] He assumed that Tyutchev, moving away from the ponderous, "monumental" forms of the XVIII century poetry, turned to the latest "literary form of fragment" developed by the German Romantics. Short poems – fragments – were incorporated into a whole, unified text, being at the same time inclined towards restoration of "the great epic tradition of the XVIII century". [7, p. 52]

Tyutchev's poetry concentrates ontological dimensions of metatext of the new European culture, and a person of his poems is withdrawn beyond any sustainable space and is doomed to rootlessness and metaphysical anguish. The fundamental state of Tyutchev's lyric hero is that of a person facing an elusive space, a human at the abyss. The image of the world is not described – it just flickers in the unfathomable depths. In the poetic world of Tyutchev it is realised in the description of colours (mostly gold, azure, green, smoky, etc.) as lights, and the depiction of light as a glimpse, a flash in the unfathomable darkness ("The Alps (Al'py)", 1830; "Just how it happens during summer (Kak letnej inogda poroju...)", 1863; "How beautiful is the sea at night (Kak horosho ty, o more nochnoe...)", 1865; "The East is doubtful and silent (Molchit somnitel'no vostok...)", 1865). A person – facing a "sphinx of nature" ("Nature is a Sphinx. And all the more destructive (Priroda – sfinks. I tem ona vernej...)") and encountering its incomprehensible mystery – dies, tempted to fathom the unfathomable. It faces the person as a destructive temptation.

We can speak of an unresolved crisis of the space inherent to the poetic worldview of Tyutchev. In this context most of the semantic load of Tyutchev's poetry was taken over by the literature of the Silver Age. In the space of culture, the world of Tyutchev's poetry with its "glimpses" and "abysses" proved to be close to the poetic cosmos of Russian Symbolism, with its internal tension and anxiety, submission of reason and will to feelings and mood. The literary work

by practically all Russian Symbolists, both of the "older" and "younger" generations, was influenced by Tyutchev's poetry. Moreover, many of them considered that his influence almost entirely determined the ontology of the Symbolist aesthetics. So, the major load of the semantic meanings developed by Tyutchev was taken over by the XX century culture anticipated in his poetry.

References

- [1] Dunaev M.M. Pravoslavie i russkaja literatura (Orthodoxy and Russian Literature). Moscow: Hristianskaja literatura, 1996, 320 p.
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] Skatov N.N. Nekrasov: sovremenniki i prodolzhateli. Oчерki. (Nekrasov: Contemporaries and successors. Sketches). Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1986, 336 p.
- [4] Lotman Yu.M. Poeticheskiy mir Tjutcheva (The Poetic World of Tyutchev). Tjutchevskij sbornik. Stat'i o zhizni i tvorchestve Fjodora Ivanovicha Tjutcheva (Tyutchev Collection. Articles about F.I. Tyutchev's Life and Literary Works). Tallin, 1990, 458 p.
- [5] Pumpyansky L.V. Pojezija F.I. Tjutcheva (Poetry by F.I. Tyutchev). Urani-ja. Tjutchevskij al'manah (Urania: Tyutchev Almanac). 1803-1928. Lenin-grad, 1928, 623 p.
- [6] Tynyanov Yu.N. Pojetika. Istorija literatury. Kino (Poetics. History of Literature. Cinema). Moscow: Kniga, 1977. 327 p.
- [7] Ibid.