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INNA TIGOUNTSOVA (HELLEBUST)*

«CHIZHIKI TAK I MRUT»**

BIRDS IN DOSTOEVSKY’S «POOR FOLK»
AND GOETHE’S «THE SUFFERINGS OF YOUNG WERTHER»

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Abstract: My article will investigate the ways in which metaphors for birds, especially birds of song, in the correspondence between the protagonists of Dostoevsky’s novel “Poor Folk” (Ведные люди, 1846) — Makar Devushkin and Varen’ka Dobroselova — refer back to Goethe’s scandalously popular epistolary novel “The Sufferings of Young Werther” (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774). I propose that Dostoevsky involves a metaphoric net as an oblique subtext of references to recent popular European literature to convey the idea of Romantic death (bearing in mind the extent to which “Werther”, though written in the late eighteenth century, retained its cultural relevance for Russian readers in Dostoevsky’s time). As I am investigating the larger picture of Dostoevsky’s treatment of death and suicide in his shorter fiction as well as his dialogue with Goethe on this subject, I also argue that in “Poor Folk” the parody and stylization of Romantic discourse in Rataziaev’s texts (and elsewhere) reveals thematic parallels between the Russian and the German narratives, and demonstrates Dostoevsky’s viewpoint on death, Romanticism and Realism. For the methodological basis of my study, I will apply Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas on parody and stylization from his seminal “Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics” (especially from the chapter “Dostoevsky’s Discourse”).

Keywords: Romanticism, Avian, Epistolary, Parody, Stylization, Narrator’s Narration, Suicide, Death.

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My article will investigate the ways in which the metaphors for birds, especially birds of song, as found in the correspondence between Makar Devushkin and Varen’ka Dobroselova, the protagonists of Dostoevsky’s novel *Poor Folk* (*Bednye ljudi*, 1846), refer back to Goethe’s scandalously popular epistolary novel *The Sufferings of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774). I propose that Dostoevsky involves a metaphoric net as an oblique subtext of references to recent popular European literature to convey the idea of Romantic death (bearing in mind the extent to which *Werther*, though written in the late eighteenth century, retained its cultural (relevance

*Inna Tigountsova (Hellebust), PhD; The Brilliant Club / Researchers in Schools (London, UK), itigount@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-7219-0785.

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for Russian readers in Dostoevsky's time, especially since Goethe's text first became available in Russian in 1781 (Paperno, 1997: 13). As I am investigating the larger picture of Dostoevsky's treatment of death and suicide in his shorter fiction as well as his dialogue with Goethe on this subject, I also argue that, in *Poor Folk*, the parody and stylization of Romantic discourse in Rataziaev's texts (and elsewhere) reveals thematic parallels between the Russian and the German narratives, and demonstrates Dostoevsky's viewpoint on death, Romanticism, and Realism. For the methodological basis of my study, I will apply Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on parody and stylization from his seminal *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, especially from the chapter "Dostoevsky's Discourse" (Bakhtin, 1963: 253–261).

As Irina Paperno writes in her *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia*,

the word chosen by the first Russian translators, *strasti*, obliterated the difference between *die* Leiden, a word used by Goethe, and *das* Leiden, a word applied to Christ, intensifying the Christological connotations of Goethe's title (Paperno, 1997: 13, 213)¹.

The theme of suicide is a significant one for Dostoevsky, appearing in many of his texts. For example, in his *A Writer's Diary*, he famously merges the real-life suicides of Liza Herzen and the seamstress Mar'ia Borisova as prototypes for his *The Meek One* (1876), which reveals the particularly strong influence of Goethe in its Faustian overtones, as does *Brothers Karamazov*, which features Ivan's conversations with a devil. Dostoevsky writes about the whole generation of the 1870s as that of "the suicides". He differentiates between suicides from vanity (*samoliubie*), characteristic of the Khlestakov types of the 1870s, and those from pride (*gordost'*). His tone with regard to the latter is surprisingly sympathetic, considering the emphasis often placed on his religious convictions in Dostoevskian scholarship. Here is what he writes on this account in the *Notebooks* for 1876:

If not religion, then at least that which, for an instant, substitutes for it in a person. Remember Diderot, Voltaire, their age and their faith... Oh, what a passionate faith it was. Ours do not believe anything, ours are a *tabula rasa*. If only they

¹The translations in question: *Strasti mladogo Vertera*, trans. F. Galchenkov, 1781, 2nd edition, 1794; *Strasti mladogo Vertera*, soch. G. Gete, trans. I. Vinogradov, 1796, 2nd edition, 1816 (see also Zhirmunskii, 1932: 514–515).

would believe at least in the Big Dipper — you laugh, but I meant to say in some kind of great idea at least (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: T. 2, 67)².

Here, Dostoevsky refers to the Ursa Major of Goethe's Werther, the constellation known as *Großer Bär* or *Große Wagen* in German. It is the latter, more colloquial name that appears in the original text³. In Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, the image of this constellation as a chariot (*Wagen*) conveys the notion of traveling, including between the earthly and the heavenly realms, i. e., transformations and transitions to the afterlife. These same metamorphoses at the end of Goethe's *Faust* are also rendered with the aid of celestial imagery representing eternity. Dostoevsky himself emphasizes the transcendental aspect in the already-mentioned allusion to Werther's stars.

Goethe's first novel (which like Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*, made him an overnight literary success) had a significant impact on Russian literature. The story of Werther was so popular in Dostoevsky's Russia that a number of fictional Russian versions were written, and there are records of actual copycat suicides (Paterno, 1997: 13–15, 214). The Russian nobleman Mikhail

²“Esli ne religiia, no khot' to, chto zameniaet ee na mig v cheloveke. Vspomnite Didro, Vol'tera, ikh vek i ikh veru... O, kakaia eto byla strastnaia vera. U nas nichego ne veriat, u nas tabula rasa. Nu khot' v Bol'shuii Medveditsu, vy smeetes”, — *ia khotel skazat', khot' v kakuiu-nibud' velikuiu mysl'* (All translations into English are mine unless otherwise noted — I. T.).

³“Alles ist so still um mich her, und so ruhig meine Seele. Ich danke dir, Gott, der du diesen letzten Augenblicken diese Wärme, diese Kraft schenkest. Ich trete an das Fenster, meine Beste, und sehe, und sehe noch durch die stürmenden, vorüberfliehenden Wolken einzelne Sterne des ewigen Himmels! Nein, ihr werdet nicht fallen! Der Ewige trägt euch an seinem Herzen, und mich. *Ich sehe die Deichselsterne des Wagens, des liebsten unter allen Gestirnen.* Wenn ich nachts von dir ging, wie ich aus deinem Tore trat, stand er gegen mir über. Mit welcher Trunkenheit habe ich ihn oft angesehen, oft mit aufgehobenen Händen ihn zum Zeichen, zum heiligen Merksteine meiner gegenwärtigen Seligkeit gemacht! Und noch — o Lotte, was erinnert mich nicht an dich! Umgibst du mich nicht! Und habe ich nicht, gleich einem Kinde, ungenügsam allerlei Kleinigkeiten zu mir gerissen, die du Heilige berührt hattest!” (Goethe, 1960a: 122. Emphasis mine — I. T.). (“Everything is so quiet around me, and my soul so calm. Thank you, God, for giving my last moments this warmth, this strength. I go to the window, dearest! and see, and still see, a few stars of the eternal heavens through the storm clouds rushing past! No, you will not fall! The Eternal One carries you in his heart and me. *I see the handle of the Big Dipper, the loveliest of all the constellations.* When I used to leave your house in the evening and went out be the gate, it stood up there, facing me. With what ecstasy did I gaze at it so often! So often, with my hands raised, made it into a sign, the sacred landmark of my bliss at that moment! And even now — O Lotte, what is there that does not remind me of you! Do you not surround me! And haven't I, like a child, forever unsatisfied, grabbed at all sorts of trinkets that you, my saint, had touched!” (Goethe, Corngold, 2012: 147. Emphasis mine — I. T.).

Sushkov, for example, produced a novel *The Russian Werther* (*Rossiskii Verter*) based on the suicide novel by the German classic, and shortly after its completion in 1792, committed suicide at the age of sixteen (Paperno, 1997: 12–15). Paperno writes about this Russian version as “Werther cum Cato cum Christ cum Voltaire”. She provides another example of a young Russian suicide, the landowner Ivan Opochinin, “an atheist inspired by Voltaire” who committed suicide in 1793, and who claimed to be translating Voltaire into Russian just before his final act (ibid.: 14–15). According to Iurii Lotman, Aleksandr Radishchev’s suicide in 1802, only a year after he was pardoned and returned from his exile, “was an act affirming his ultimate freedom” inspired by Addison’s Cato, which echoes the motives of other Russian Werthers (ibid.: 15)⁴. The Russian literary giant Dostoevsky (Roman Jakobson’s joke about Nabokov and the Zoo notwithstanding) gives his own reading in *Poor Folk* of the ultra-popular suicide novel by an equally-influential German great.

Dostoevsky’s interest in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* — and later in *Faust* — includes a particular focus on the “eternal moment” (*ewiger Augenblick*) prior to suicide or murder, when tropes of time play a crucial role. That moment of eternity is what Varen’ka experiences when Pokrovsky junior is dying and wants to see the skies. Although not a suicide, young Pokrovsky’s death is connected to Werther via the images of eternal skies and transformations, transitioning into a higher reality. *Poor Folk* is a short novel filled with death: Varen’ka’s parents die; so does her love interest, Pokrovsky junior; a child dies in the poor family of the Gorshkovs; Devushkin’s landlady dies, and we are led to think that, after Varen’ka’s departure with Bykov, the lonely and bibulous Devushkin will likely have the same fate. Varen’ka herself might not survive living with her abuser, who may well be taking her into the provinces so that he can have complete control over this young soul. Pokrovsky senior does not survive long after his darling Peten’ka’s death; and, indeed, the “little finches”, a clear metaphor for the poor folk of the novel, “keep on dying”.

Considering the other echoes of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* in *Poor Folk*, such as that of Tatiana in Onegin’s study (Varen’ka in Pokrovsky junior’s room when the bookshelf crashes to the floor), as well as the further significance of Pushkin’s collected works in the story of the Varen’ka-Pokrovsky relationship, Varen’ka’s choice of marrying her abuser, Bykov,

⁴For a more detailed discussion of Radishchev’s suicide, see Lotman, 2001: 258–269, as well as Lotman, 1985: 87–94.

may be an extreme illustration of Pushkin's "all choices were equal to her" ("vse byli zhibii ravny"). Rebecca Matveyev's suggestion that Varen'ka seeks comfort and respectability in this marriage provides a possible line of investigation; however, considering the trauma and tragedy that Varen'ka is describing in her notebook, it is more likely that marriage to Bykov is in itself a form of suicide, or of a typical Dostoevskian connection between abuser and abused, or between slave and master (Matveyev, 1995: 539). At that point Varen'ka clearly sees, as does Devushkin, that his attempts to sustain the dream of making her life better cannot continue. He does not have the means to be sending her potted plants, sweets, or theatre tickets, and neither can he propose to her. Their relationship develops with a tendency toward Varen'ka looking after the drinking Devushkin as if she were, indeed, a mother. Note, for example, her seeking to buy him clothes, as he appears to be virtually naked as an infant, having drunk away all of his vestements. It is not mentioned in the text why all these clothes are sold together, as Varen'ka puts it; that deliberate omission and the turns of phrase that Dostoevsky gives to Varen'ka implies that the clothes became available after a person had lost all his money or died penniless, distinctly possible future prospects for Devushkin, who is likely to die of bitter poverty, alcohol, and sheer loneliness after Varen'ka leaves with Bykov.

In his book *Za i protiv*, Shklovsky quotes Dostoevsky, who himself cites Goethe in this excerpt from the *Writer's Diary*:

The suicide Werther, ending his life, in the last lines he leaves behind regrets that he will not see "the beautiful constellation of Ursa Major" any more, and says his farewells to it. Oh, how Goethe, here at the very beginning of his career, reveals himself in this detail... (Shklovskiy, 1974: 145)⁵.

The name of the constellation in question is apropos since Shklovsky's Russian edition of Goethe's epistolary novel (for which he does not provide bibliographic information) translates it as *Voznichii* ("charioteer"). However, he may have possibly read it in the original and his knowledge of astronomy did not prove to be perfect. In Russian, this name (*Voznichii*) is given to a different constellation — Auriga (*Lat.* "charioteer") — and not Ursa Major,

⁵"Samoubitsa Verter, konchaia s zhizn'iu, v poslednikh strokakh, im ostavlennykh, zhaleet, chto ne uvidit bolee 'prekrasnogo sozvezdiia Bol'shoi Medveditsy', i proshchaetsia s nim. O, kak skazalsia v etoi chertochke tol'ko chto nachinavshiisia togda Gete...".

or the *Wagen* (“chariot”) specified by Goethe⁶. This leads Shklovsky to accuse Dostoevsky of mis-remembering the German classic (Shklovskiy, 1974: 145)⁷.

He is on firmer ground when he observes that, for Dostoevsky, literature “comes before thoughts of religion” (“stoit vpered i myslei o religii”) (ibid.: 149). In the *Notebooks* for 1876 (“If only they would believe at least in the Big Dipper”), Dostoevsky’s allusion to Goethe suggests literature as a source of faith to replace (however inadequately) conventional religion. One could, perhaps, go even farther than Shklovsky and suggest that for the young Dostoevsky in particular, literature *was* a religion, with Goethe as one its great prophets, capable of creating an art fulfilling a redemptive function. In “Mr. -bov and the Question of Art”, Dostoevsky himself expresses a similar opinion when writing on the nature of art and impressionable young people (Dostoevsky, Magarshack, 1997: 97).

The image of a fleeting cloud in Dostoevsky, too, brings up the image of the sky, which, in the context of this novel concerning death, recalls the eternal skies of Goethe⁸. In *Poor Folk*, the imagery of clouds and the eternal skies is intensified by the presence of birds. In this epistolary novel, the first letter has nine bird-related metaphors (and more, if metaphors of other winged creatures like from “little angel” to “fly” are included). They reappear throughout the novel, where we encounter doves, a sparrow, roosters, swallows, a hybrid of a little “lifeling” / chicken / child (*zhiznenochek*) (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: Т. 1, 70), little finches, and a nightingale, in addition to general metaphors of little birds of song, heavenly little birds, birds of prey, and “a weak, yet unfeathered fledgling” (*ptenchnik vy moi slaben'kii, neoperivshiiisia*) (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: Т. 1, 59). Here is one example of

⁶I am most grateful to Rolf Hellebust for the information on Auriga.

⁷“Dostoevskii tak davno i stol'ko raz prochel Vertera, chto otdel'nye stroke romana perestavilis' i slilis' v ego soznanii. Bol'shaia Medveditsa zamenila ‘privetlivoe sozvezdie Voznichego’”.

⁸According to Goethe’s studies of metamorphoses, clouds, a pivotal symbol of *Faust*, convey the idea of transformations, including those to the other life (Gete, Kasatkina, 2009: 652). Compare Mephistopheles’ “Ich liebte mir dafür das Ewig-Leere” (Goethe, 1960b: 349) (“Net, vechnoe Nichto odno mne milo”) (ibid.: 566), and “The Ever-empty is what I prefer” (Goethe, Arndt, 1976: 294). Liza Knapp suggests that the sound of the pendulum and the dead sun in Dostoevsky’s *The Meek One* signify the laws of nature, which, considering the Faustian context of the novella, which confirms my point about the eternal moment linked to the Higher Being since Goethe links the sun, nature, and God in his *Weltanschauung* (Knapp, 1996: 40–41). Cf.: “Nezadolgo do smerti Gete skazal Ekkermanu: ‘Esli sprosiat, sposoben li ia, po svoei prirode, pokloniat'sia solntsu, ia tozhe otvechu: nesomnenno! Ibo i ono otkrovenie naivysshhego... Ia pokloniaius' v nem svetu i tvoriashchei sile Gospoda, kotoraiia odna darit nas zhizn'iu, i zaodno s nami vsekh zverei i vse rasteniia’” (Gete, Kasatkina, 2009: 656).

Varen'ka as a “heavenly little bird” in the introductory letter of the novel: “Srvnil ia vas s ptichkoi nebesnoi, na utekhu liudiam i dlia ukrasheniia prirody sozdannoi”, translated as “I compared you to a heavenly little bird, created for people’s enjoyment as well as nature’s adornment” (ibid.: 14).

Ptichki pevchie (Little Birds of Song) is how the title of the operetta / opera-bouffe *La Perichole* by Jacques Offenbach was translated into Russian. Among the better-known parts of *La Perichole* is the title character’s letter song, *O mon cher amant*. The work premiered in 1868, so could not have influenced *Poor Folk* directly, but it was based on Prosper Mérimée’s 1829 one-act play *Le carrosse du Saint-Sacrement*. Offenbach’s opera has a Romantic storyline. It is about two Peruvian street singers who are in love but too poor to obtain a marriage license. Its title is mentioned in the text of *The Meek One*, a novella by the mature Dostoevsky influenced by the ideas and literary technique of Goethe, as was *Poor Folk* (in the case of the former, by *Faust*, and in that of the latter, by *Werther*). The narrative style of *The Meek One* showcases the internal letter-like monologue of a pawnbroker to his wife who has committed suicide, after the fact of her death. As I analyze tropes of transformations related to death in Dostoevsky and Goethe for my larger research project, I ultimately argue that Dostoevsky remains a Romantic throughout his life, and that Goethe plays a part in it. *The Meek One* and *Poor Folk* both support my argument, if in different ways. In *Poor Folk*, the dying little finches of this article’s title (especially where the theme of death is concerned) refer to Goethe’s famous suicide novel which was also an inspiration for *Poor Folk*’s genre of the epistolary novel. *Werther* also engages with the themes of literary ambition and the cult of genius, both intertwined with a love story, as does *Poor Folk*. There are various additional parallels between the two texts; for example, the protagonists are on the margins of society, especially its bourgeois segment (upper bourgeois for Werther, and lower for Devushkin), or the profession of the fathers of Lotte and Varen’ka (Lotte’s father is an “Amtmann”, an estate keeper, as is Varen’ka’s), and so on.

Devushkin thinks about Varen’ka as a little heavenly bird — “Srvnil ia vas s ptichkoi nebesnoi” (ibid.), alluding to the Romantic image of the Heavens in both Lermontov and Goethe, the former famous for his poem *The Clouds* (1840): “tuchki nebesnye, vechnye stranniki” (“heavenly little clouds, eternal wanderers”) and the latter for his idea of ever-changing yet eternal nature as the divine, and the changing clouds in the skies as symbolic of metamorphosis, of transformations (see Tigountsova, 2017). These include the transformations between life and death; additionally,

the cloudy skies in the window occur in the text of the *Poor Folk* at the time of Peter Pokrovsky's death. His dying wish is to look outside the window, but the sun — as in *The Meek One* — is dead; it is too cloudy to see it (“solntsa ne bylo”), and he only catches a glimpse of grey skies before he dies (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: 45). The Goethean absent or “dead sun” is associated with time and seasons; time is changing from the profane to the divine when the protagonist looks at the pale daytime skies, as well as alluding to the Pale Horseman of the Apocalypse. Dim daylight accompanies Pokrovsky Jr. on his transition to the otherworld where time itself is different, on his journey to meet Death. References to tears, poetry, and to scenery similar to that in the description of Pokrovsky's death (for example, the pale skies) also occur elsewhere in the narrative of *Poor Folk*; the fact that Dostoevsky returns to this imagery in a novel which he declared “had not a single superfluous word” (“Roman nakhodiat rastianutym, a v nem slova lishnego net”, he writes in a letter to his brother Mikhail on the 1st of February, 1846 (ibid.: 46–47)); ibid.: Т. 28, 117–118) is significant in itself. *Poor Folk* had several draft versions; the first one underwent major changes in November 1844, and a variety of minor changes followed the second variant in February–March of 1845 (ibid.: Т. 1, 464–465).

Devushkin contrasts the little birds to birds of prey in the same letter to Varen'ka, where he mentions that some unnamed poet (“sochinitel'”) writes: “Zachem ia ne ptitsa, ne khishchnaia ptitsa” (“Why am I not a bird, a bird of prey.”) (ibid.: 14). This line of verse serves as an exposition, as we later learn of how Varen'ka twice falls prey to Bykov, with Devushkin left to either read or write about her fate.

The window as a frame to an opening into a different world or to the skies (or, indeed, to the Heavens, not only in *Poor Folk* but in *The Meek One*, (whose title character commits suicide by jumping out of a window), and also appears in Varen'ka's letters to Devushkin. They are both watching one another's windows: for example, she says: “vchera ia do polnochi u vas ogon' videla”. (“Yesterday I saw your light on until midnight.”) (ibid.: 19). Windows in Dostoevsky appear to exist to enable his characters to look at the heavenly skies in the Goethean sense, with its *ewige Augenblick* (eternal moment) when the human is confluent with the divine, if only for a brief moment, and only in the present. Dostoevsky's windows are openings into the skies where heavenly little birds (*ptichki nebesnye*) are flying; Varen'ka watching Devushkin's window through hers is a symbol of the transition of the human into the divine, and a transgression from her own soul and life into his, as she reprimands him, in a maternal fashion, for

staying up late. In other words, it seems to me that Dostoevsky remains true to himself, and always manages to sneak the heavenly and / or Romantic component into his Realist narratives, as he does here in *Poor Folk*. Windows as metaphors for human eyes in Dostoevsky (and he personifies at least one “little yellow building” in his essays) are looking at the heavenly skies, little birds, and at the divine.

The trope of the rooster appears in *Poor Folk* several times in connection with both Pokrovskys. For example, Pokrovsky Sr. is proud “as a rooster” of his son (“gord, kak petukh”) (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: 35). The son’s name appears in the diminutive Peten’ka just before the word for “rooster”, alluding to Peten’ka-petushok, the rooster of East Slavic folklore from songs and fairy tales (“Ja Petia-petushok!” “Chto ty rano vstaesh, detiam spat’ ne daesh”, “Masliana goluvushka, shelkova borodushka”, and so on). Pokrovsky Sr. also brings “prianichnykh petushkov” (gingerbread roosters), and talks about Peten’ka (“tolkuet o Peten’ke”) (ibid.).

Metaphors for birds in the first letter of *Poor Folk* appear in the context of spring and of nature awakening, which parallels the beginning of *The Sufferings of the Young Werther* in this respect. Lotte, the female protagonist of Goethe’s novel, rejects and criticizes books that were sent to her by Werther’s dance partner’s cousin, as does Varen’ka with regard to the texts of Rataziaev, sent to her by Devushkin. Makar Devushkin’s name combines echoes of a pastoral idyll—the name Makar comes from the Greek word for “blessed”—with the Russian saying “Kuda Makar teliat ne gonial” (“to hell and gone”, *lit.* “where Makar did not send the calves”), thus invoking both innocent calves and the shepherd. The surname “Devushkin” means “maidenly / girly” (“Mr Maidenly”); the patronymic Alekseevich, although admittedly a common one, alludes to the Vita of Alexis, Man of God, which was well known to Dostoevsky. The religious allusion hints at the humility of Devushkin. Finally, the archaic word for poet, which Devushkin uses to refer to himself on one occasion (*piita*) is put in the feminine gender, adding to the feminizing effect of Devushkin’s surname (ibid.: 53). The theme of poetry and literary glory that is introduced here echoes Werther’s letters about art and poetry in the letters from the 4th of May to the 19th of June.

In *Poor Folk*, the theme of literature is introduced with Devushkin’s “kogda by vsiakii skazal [about his poetry] ...stikhotvoreniia Makara Devushkina” (“when everyone would say... poems by Makar Devushkin”) (ibid.). Poems are also contrasted with boots, an idea we find again in the later Dostoevsky. Interestingly, the term for friendship—“druzhba”—is used to mean love in Varen’ka’s relationships with both Pokrovsky and Devushkin, which

follows in the wake of the traditions of Wertheriana (*cf.* the letter from the 4th of May where Werther laments the early death of his “friend” in a clearly amorous context). The literary ambition of Devushkin is a turn away from him being a humble copyist; it speaks for his individualism, is connected to the Romantic cult of genius, and presents Devushkin as a would-be Romantic hero.

Literature and reading are also significant where Varen’ka’s education and her growing feelings for Pokrovsky Jr. are concerned. She enters Pokrovsky’s room, sees his books, and attempting to take a look at one, makes the bookshelf crash when she tries to put it back in place. This is a parallel with Pushkin’s Tatiana in *Onegin*’s study as mentioned above, as well as the moment when Pokrovsky realizes that Varen’ka is of age; thus, this scene is the beginning of both their book exchanges and their romance; incidentally, *Eugene Onegin* has a “*Pesnia devushek*” (maidens’ song) as a stylized insert text after Tatiana sends her letter to Onegin, bringing us to Devushkin of *Poor Folk*.

Images of the canary and nightingale feature in *Poor Folk* in Devushkin’s story about his amorous encounter with an actress and a singer:

A potom i zasnut’ ne dadut; vsiu noch’ naprolet ob nei tolkuiut, vsiakii ee svoei Glashei zovet, vse v odnu v nee *vliubleny*, u vsekh odna *kanareika na serdtse*... U aktrisochki tochno gosok byl xoroshen’kii, –zvonkii, *solov’inyi*, medovyil’ (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: 61)⁹.

Romantic love for an actress is associated with the canary, the epithet for the actress’s voice — nightingale-like — notwithstanding. In this passage, it becomes evident that Devushkin’s ideas about Romantic love require the use of a particular language; it has to do with avians, and that by using this language in conversations with Varen’ka, he unwittingly opens up the nature of his feelings for her. Note yet another link to honey in connection with entertainment (singing this time) and a female romantic interest. The dying little finches of which Devushkin laments “*chizhiki tak i mrut*” foreshadow Varen’ka’s Romantic death, as she becomes increasingly ill with a cough (implied consumption, a favourite ailment of Romantic texts).

One of the most difficult methodological questions of this study is to decide whether Rataziaev’s purple prose, quoted by Makar Devushkin

⁹“And later they wouldn’t let me get to sleep; all night long they were talking about her, everyone calling her their Glasha, everyone *in love* with her alone, the sole *canary* of their hearts... The actress had a fine voice indeed — resounding, like honey, like a *nightingale!*” (Emphasis mine — I. T.).

to Varen'ka is, in Bakhtin's terms, a parody, or rather a stylization of Romantic discourse. Mikhail Bakhtin discusses both stylization and parody as belonging to the type of *dvugolosoie slovo* ("double-voiced discourse") (Bakhtin, 1963: 253). It would seem that the elements of stylization of Romantic discourse are so intensified in these texts that it makes "Ermak and Zuleika" and "Italian Passions" a parody. The difficulty arises from these stories being retold to us by a narrator — Devushkin — who takes them at face value, in their "priamoe i bezuslovnoe znachenie" ("direct and unconditional sense"); so to him they are within a "single-voiced" discourse (*odnogolosoie slovo*) (ibid.: 254). To Varen'ka, who reads them as we do, they are yet another type of Bakhtinian discourse: the imitation (*podrazhanie*), the position of which is ambiguous: it exists between single-voiced and double-voiced discourse (ibid.). To Rataziaev, it is possibly a stylization (ibid.), but to Dostoevsky it is a parody:

...v parodii... avtor, kak i v stilizatsii, govorit chuzhim slovom, no v otlichie ot stilizatsii, on vvodit v eto slovo smyslovuiu napravlennost', kotoraiia priamo protivopozhna chuzhoi napravlennosti. ("...in a parody... the author, as in a stylization, speaks through another's discourse, but, as opposed to stylization, he introduces a vector of meaning, which points in the opposite direction to that of another's, into this discourse"). (ibid.: 258–259).

The complexity of the genre of *Poor Folk* plays a role here, though, as Bakhtin additionally posits that stylization is always close to the "narrator's narration" (*rasskaz rasskazchika*):

Analogichen stilizatsii rasskaz rasskazchika, kak kompozitsionnoe zameshchenie avtorskogo slova... i zdes' chuzhaia slovesnaia manera ispol'zuetsia avtorom kak tochka zreniia, kak pozitsiia, neobkhodimaia emu dlia vedeniia rasskaza. ("As a compositional replacement of the author's discourse, the narrator's narration is analogous to the stylization... and here [in the narrator's narration] another's speech style is used by the author as a point of view, as a position, necessary for him in his story-telling"). (ibid.: 254).

This means that, within the fabric of *Poor Folk*, the inserted narratives of "Ermak and Zuleika" and "Italian Passions" are close to both parody and stylization, and, in the purely functional sense, constitute a "narrator's narration"; however, I suggest that the degree of closeness depends on whose viewpoint is taken into account, as I have already mentioned.

Devushkin writes that he got up in the morning feeling like a fair falcon — "iasnym sokolom" —, an epithet and trope from folklore, frequent in epic songs (such as *The Lay of Igor*, for example, which makes Devushkin's

statement read as high-flown, archaic speech) (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: 14). Since Homer (note that Greece is troped as exotic, and that the past is an important theme in Romanticism) and Ossian (pseudo-Ancient literature) are both mentioned in *Werther*; it is possible to make a parallel with these real and fake epics, too, since the true nature of *The Lay* is disputed. Normally, this form of address (or in this case, self-address) is applied to a young warring medieval prince, or a battling hero in an old Slavic text, but this is what Devushkin thinks of himself, or at least this is how he presents himself to Varen'ka. Is it ironic? Probably not, but it is clearly purposefully done by Dostoevsky so that we might see the extent of the gap between Devushkin's hopes and dreams and his status in life. Hence, the incongruous phrase. Goethe's *Werther* is a dreamer in his own right with his artistic aspirations which (in the manner of my recent theory interest, Pierre Bayard) can be traced forward to Devushkin's literary inspirations.

In addition to “angel”, a fairly standard Romantic literary form of address to a female (to the extent that *Werther* remarks in his letter from the 16th of June how overly-common it has become (Gete, Kasatkina, 2009: 31), Devushkin calls Varen'ka “matochka” (a variant of “Mummy”, usually translated into English as “little mother”), appearing to be phonetically linked to “lastochka” (swallow), a common term of endearment. Why does he write “My sweet mummy?” to her? Is this what one writes to a young girl? Is it then not also an extension of his amorous fantasy? He denies any such fantasy vehemently, but he may well be one of those untrustworthy narrators (in his letters) whom Sarah Hudspith focuses on in her research. Or, does he see something maternal in Varen'ka because she is ultimately more mature than he is, in which case the relationship is unbalanced, and Devushkin is to be trusted even less since he claims he only has fatherly feelings for Varen'ka? Or is this, perhaps, a connection to *Werther*'s ideas about children as part of nature? Or, is it an attempt to show that Devushkin is being sincere? See, for example, *Werther*'s letter from the 26th of May where he writes about his drawing of the two peasant boys, a four-year old holding his baby sibling in his lap, which allows *Werther* to not deviate from nature and to depict it truly (ibid.: 28). The youngest of these boys, Hans, dies later in the text, and this is one of the deaths that foreshadows *Werther*'s suicide. It is noteworthy for our comparison of the two texts that the German *Mütterchen* (“little mother”) is standard German (though it does not occur in *Werther*), as opposed to Dostoevsky's occasionalism “matochka” (there is a standard Russian diminutive “matushka” which Dostoevsky decides not to use here), and “matochka” does sound intentionally awkward. The doubling technique

typical of Dostoevsky appears in Werther both in relation to the eponymous protagonist and to Lotte, who is depicted as a mother to her siblings and as her mother's double in a somewhat disturbing fashion:

Vot etot rozovyi bant byl na tvoei grudi, kogda ia vperve uvidel tebia sredi tvoikh detei, rastselui ikh za menia i rasskazhi ob uchasti neschastnogo ikh druga. Milye moi! Oni i seichas okruzhaiut menia! (Letter from the 20th of December) (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: 115).

The fact that Lotte is made to promise on her mother's deathbed that she would marry socially-approved Albert and become her mother's replacement to her children notwithstanding, a doubling of her character, has a tragic bearing on Werther's fate. Lotte's mother is dead, but Lotte now *is* her mother (to her siblings), so she is made unattainable to Werther by the fact of being a ghost-like echo of her mother in this life. He thus takes his own life to be united with his other-worldly love in divine eternity:

...Na poroge smerti mne vse stanovitsia iasnee. My ne ischezнем! My svidimsia! Uvidim tvoiu mat'! Ia uvizhu, uznaiu ee i pered nei, pered tvoei mater'iu, tvoim dvoinikom, otkroiui svoiu dushu. (Letter from the 20th of December) (ibid.: 110).

Lotte's purity is emphasized, especially in the novel's opening when she distributes bread amongst her siblings (one of two allusions to the Eucharist in the novel); by virtue of her being a semi-divine maternal substitute, she is compared to the Mother of God¹⁰. Similarly, Dostoevsky's '*matochka-lastochka*' phonic parallel combines allusions to the otherworldly other, the Romantic little bird, and the eternal skies of Goethe. Goethe's female protagonist is firmly linked to the idea of eternity in Werther's letter from the 20th of December in which he is contemplating life after death, and remembering the stars he saw above the gate of Lotte's house. The eternal skies and the clouds symbolizing transformations, including the one that is awaiting Werther, are present in this written soliloquy, as are the stars of the Big Dipper, the *Große Wagen*, with which Shklovsky makes his point. The *Große Wagen*, a speaking name in itself, promotes the notion of travel, like that of the beyond-the-grave metamorphosis in Werther's case. The lode star (*Leitstern*, *Polarstern*) that can be located in the skies with the aid of the *Große Wagen* provides guidance; it serves as a compass to Werther who has decided on committing suicide, and at the time of writing this letter

¹⁰Letter from the 16th of June (32–33). Note also that she is wearing a virginal white dress in this scene, and that the preceding passage has Werther refer to her as his "angel" and as an image of perfection.

to Lotte is on his path to the eternal stars, the skies, and life after death, where he hopes to meet her again. Lotte is thus intrinsically linked to the tropes of skies, stars, transformations, and divine eternity:

Ia podkhozhu k oknu, dorogaia, smotriu i vizhu skvoz' groznye, stremitel'no nesushchiesia oblaka odinochnye svetila vechnykh nebes! Vy ne upadete! O net! Predvechnyi khranit v svoem lone i vas i menia. Ia uvidel zvezdy Bol'shoi Medveditsy, samogo milogo iz vsekhn sozvezdii. Kogda ia po vecheram ukhodil ot tebia, ono sialo priamo nad tvoimi vorotami. V kakom upoenii smotrel ia byvalo na nego! Chasto ia prostiral k nemu ruki, vidia v nem znamenie i sviashchennyi simvol svoego blazhenstva! I eshche... Akh, Lotta, vse, vse napominaet zdes' o tebe! Ty povsiudu vokrug menia! Ia, kak nenasytnoe ditia, sobiral vse melochi, kotorykh kasalas' ty, moia sviatynia! ("After eleven' section, letter from December the 20th") (Dostoevskiy, 1972–1990: 114).

The divine skies of eternity and metamorphizing clouds appear in the passage in *Poor Folk* that sets the background for the aforementioned death of Petya Pokrovsky. These tropes are also used with the aim of creating a context for Dostoevsky's bird-related metaphors, as well as those images of other winged creatures such as the angel and the "lifeling" (*zhiznenochek*). The poor finches of Dostoevsky's first novel are dying in the stuffy rented corners of thick-walled St. Petersburg buildings, and, as in his other texts, he connects the lack of air to the lack of "living life" (*zhivoi zhizni*). Varen'ka, as one of those little songbirds of *Poor Folk*, performs the same function in this novel for Makar as does Lotte for Werther. As a little bird, or as an angel, Varen'ka is associated with the eternal skies.

In *Poor Folk*, Dostoevsky reveals an ambiguous attitude to Romanticism. We can find elements of parody of a Romantic text as well as (Dostoevsky's) self-parody of Romantic features in *Poor Folk*, but we can also find them used in the most straightforward way, complying with the conventions of the Romantic narrative. All of this, however, only testifies to Dostoevsky's deep engagement with the Romantic text, and the echoes of this engagement are clear in his later fiction, as I hope to address in my larger project. Goethe seems an unavoidable inspiration in the context of nineteenth-century Russian literature, even more so since the two greats can both be classed as pre- and post-Romantics at different stages in their creative careers, while still actively engaging with the Romantic discourse, combining the tropes of divine eternity (the skies and stars), of poor folk (the little birds), and the clouds that stand for transformations and death.

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Tigountsova (Hellebust) I. [Тигунцова (Хеллебаст) И.] "Chizhiki tak i mrut" ["Чижики так и мрут"] : Birds in Dostoevsky's "Poor Folk" and Goethe's "The Sufferings of Young Werther" [птицы в романе Достоевского «Бедные люди» и «Страдания юного Вертера» Гёте] // Философия. Журнал Высшей школы экономики. — 2021. — Т. 5, № 3. — С. 172–187.

ИННА ТИГУНЦОВА (ХЕЛЛЕБАСТ)

PhD, Блвстящий клув / Учёные в школах (Лондон, Великобритания);

ORCID: 0000-0002-7219-0785

«ЧИЖИКИ ТАК И МРУТ»

ПТИЦЫ В РОМАНЕ ДОСТОЕВСКОГО «БЕДНЫЕ ЛЮДИ» И «СТРАДАНИЯ ЮНОГО ВЕРТЕРА» ГЁТЕ

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Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается, каким образом метафоры, основанные на образах птиц, в особенности певчих птиц, в переписке героев романа Достоевского «Бедные люди» (1846) Макара Девушкина и Вареньки Добросёловой соотносятся со скандально известным романом в письмах Гёте «Страдания юного Вертера» (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774). В статье выдвигается идея о том, что Достоевский задействует сеть метафор в качестве косвенного подтекста отсылки к недавней популярной европейской литературе. Данная мысль учитывает степень влияния и культурной значимости, которой обладал при жизни Достоевского роман «Страдания юного Вертера», написанный в конце восемнадцатого века. Статья является частью большего проекта-монографии, в котором исследуются тексты короткой прозы Достоевского о смерти и самоубийстве и его диалог с Гёте на эту тему; в статье также постулируется, что пародия и стилизация романтического дискурса в текстах Ратазаява (и не только) выявляют тематическое соответствие русского и немецкого повествований, а также демонстрируют точку зрения Достоевского о смерти, романтизме и реализме. Методологической основой моего исследования являются идеи Михаила Бахтина о пародии и стилизации из его основополагающей книги «Проблемы поэтики Достоевского» (в частности, из главы «Слово у Достоевского»).

Ключевые слова: романтизм, птичий, эпистолярный, пародия, рассказ рассказчика, самоубийство, смерть.

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