DAVID M. BETHEA

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His Life and Art

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Princeton University Press | Princeton, New Jersey

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Guildford, Surrey

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data will be found
on the last printed page of this book

ISBN 0-691-06559-4

Publication of this book has been aided by a grant from the
Publications Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities

This book has been composed in Linotron Trump

Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books are printed
on acid-free paper, and binding materials are chosen for strength
and durability. Paperbacks, although satisfactory for personal
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Printed in the United States of America by Princeton University
Press, Princeton, New Jersey

To my father
and to the memory of my mother

С пожелтевших страниц поднималась ушедшая жизнь,
Уходила во тьму, бормоча и рыдая.
Ты поденщиком был, ты наемником был, и рабом,
И я шла за тобою, доверчивая, молодая.

Раздавили тебя. Раздробили узоры костей.
Надорвали рисунок твоих кружевных сухожилий,
И, собрав, что могли, из почти невесомых частей,
В легкий гроб, в мягкий мох уложили.

Перед тем, как уйти, эти тени ласкают меня,
И кидаются снова, и снова на грудь и на шею,
Обнимают, и молят, и ищут ушедшего дня,
Но ответить я им, и утешить я их не умею.

—Нина Берберова, "Гуверовский архив"

From the yellowed pages there rose a life that was gone;
it left into the darkness, muttering and sobbing.
You were a day-laborer, a hireling, a slave,
and I, young and trusting, followed you.

They crushed you, they shattered the fretwork of your bones.
They ripped to pieces the picture of your lace-like tendons,
and, gathering what we could from your almost weightless remains,
we placed you in a light coffin, in the soft moss of your grave.

Now, before leaving, these shadows begin to caress me,
again and again they cling to my neck and my breast,
embracing, beseeching, looking for the day that's no more,
but to answer them, to console them, I have no way.

—Nina Berberova, "The Hoover Archive"

"My poor boy, take a seat and listen." This is merely showing off with words. The sounds—well, I remove them as easily from my "bag" as the conjurer catches his rouble notes from the thin air. . . . You speak of the significant, of the profound, and it comes out small; I speak of the small, and the profound is revealed. You speak of the beautiful so that it comes out drab; I speak of someone ugly in such a way that—oh my! Why is this? Well, I'm not quite sure. One has to suffer a lot—in the name of a word, under the sign of a word. . . . And still more. . . . And more after that. . . . One has to live not only *here*. . . . In me the main thing is not the citizen, or the worker, or the lover. . . . In me the main thing is the poet.

—*Ars poetica*, from Khodasevich's notebook

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

I suspect my introduction to the name Vladislav Khodasevich was not much different from that of many other American graduate students interested in modern Russian literature. One day our class on Nabokov was to begin discussion of *The Gift*; sifting my way through the "Foreword," looking for hints and disclaimers of what was to follow (with Nabokov I had discovered that the two were often one and the same), I came upon this paragraph:

> The tremendous outflow of intellectuals that formed such a prominent part of the general exodus from Soviet Russia in the first years of the Bolshevist Revolution seems today [in March 1962] like the wanderings of some mythical tribe whose bird-signs and moon-signs I now retrieve from the desert dust. We remained unknown to American intellectuals (who, bewitched by Communist propaganda, saw us merely as villainous generals, oil magnates, and gaunt ladies with lorgnettes). That world is now gone. Gone are Bunin, Aldanov, Remizov. Gone is Vladislav Khodasevich, the greatest Russian poet that the twentieth century has yet produced. The old intellectuals are now dying out and have not found successors in the so-called Displaced Persons of the last two decades who have carried abroad the provincialism and Philistinism of their Soviet homeland.

The paragraph suggests a good deal more to me now than it did then. Nabokov was trying in his opening remarks, as perhaps he was in the text of *The Gift* itself, to jolt the Western reader into the realization that under the ocean of our smugness and too easily received views of Soviet Russian literature an Atlantis of forgotten poetry and prose was waiting to be discovered. What better way than in a first-rate novel to rout the ghost of Western "self-censorship," to lay to rest "the conviction," as Simon Karlinsky put it some years later, "that a Russian writer who resides outside the Soviet Union cannot be of any interest to the Western reader"?

Such ghosts continue to haunt us, however, and the one bright exception of Nabokov, dazzling though it may be, has not been enough to attract more than the eye of the specialist to that "other" Russian literature. The names Bunin (a 1933 Nobel laureate), Aldanov, Remizov, and Khodasevich are not, to state it mildly, household words in the West. Perhaps the most fitting irony in all this, one that Khodasevich, a consummate ironist, would have appreciated, is that I—and presumably other students of Russian literature—was learning of Khodasevich's existence not by reading his verse but by reading Nabokov's novel, especially those passages describing the shadow colloquies between Koncheev, the genuine poet that the young hero wishes to become, and the young hero Fyodor himself. That Koncheev, whose source was Khodasevich, should have a ghostly presence in the novel and that the colloquies should turn out to be will-o'-the-wisps seems to add to the air of unreality and "otherness" that has pursued Khodasevich the artist right up to the present.

But this, the bigger picture, went over my head at the time. I was startled by Nabokov's categorical praise of Khodasevich: "Gone is Vladislav Khodasevich, the greatest Russian poet that the twentieth century has yet produced." Who was this Khodasevich? Blok, Mandelshtam, Mayakovsky, Pasternak—yes; but Khodasevich? Here was Nabokov, a writer nobody could ignore, invoking the name of a writer that everybody, or what seemed like everybody, had managed to ignore. Soon I discovered that Nabokov's declaration was not a case of temporary insanity and that he had repeated himself in the commentaries to his famous translation of *Eugene Onegin*: "This century has not yet produced any Russian poet surpassing Vladislav Hodasevich." The bur, so to speak, was under my saddle, and the chase was on.

At the same time I was discovering the haunting charm of Khodasevich's poetry, I was discovering that Nabokov had in fact not been speaking into a void. When Khodasevich

emigrated from the Soviet Union in June 1922, he already had quite a reputation as a poet. Andrey Bely helped to make that reputation with important articles on Khodasevich in 1922 and 1923. Thereafter, into the late 1920s, Khodasevich's art was spoken of in glowing terms by some of the most distinguished Soviet and Russian émigré critics and belletrists: Gorky raved that "Khodasevich writes utterly amazing verse," and that "Khodasevich, to my mind, is modern-day Russia's best poet"; Mandelshtam complained that Khodasevich was one of those poets toward whom contemporaries had shown "monstrous ingratitude"; Wladimir Weidlé, in a long article written in 1928 shortly after the appearance of Khodasevich's *Collected Verse,* expressed the view that Khodasevich was now, after the death of Blok, Russia's leading poet. The émigré press was dotted with warm articles and reviews written by, among others, Gleb Struve, Konstantin Mochulsky, Yuly Aikhenvald, Alfred Bem, and Nabokov. To all appearances, Khodasevich the poet had clearly arrived.

Then at some point in the late 1920s, for reasons that were implicitly related to life in exile, Khodasevich began to write less and less poetry. Apparently he had, as the Russian captures it in one neat verb form, "written himself out" (*ispisalsia*). By the early 1930s (if not in fact sooner) Khodasevich had turned exclusively to the tasks of biographer, memoirist, Pushkinist, critic, and shaper of poetic taste. Due to many things, including Khodasevich's ensuing silence as a poet, his prickly personality in and out of print, and literary politics in emigration as well as in the Soviet Union, his artistic reputation was already in sharp decline when he died of cancer in 1939. People seemed to have forgotten that he was, in the first place, a poet.

And it is precisely this cloud of oblivion that Nabokov was trying to disperse when he wrote, in a beautiful necrology that appeared in *Contemporary Annals*: "I find it odd myself that in this article, in this rapid inventory of

thoughts prompted by Khodasevich's death, I seem to imply a vague nonrecognition of his genius and engage in vague polemics with such phantoms as would question the enchantment and importance of his poetry." Unfortunately, Nabokov had good reason to engage in polemics with phantoms that doubted the importance of Khodasevich's poetry. The eloquent efforts of those such as Nabokov, Nina Berberova, and Wladimir Weidlé notwithstanding, Khodasevich has yet to be discovered by many Slavists (not to speak of the generalist Western reader). Rarely has an artist, at one time so highly regarded—and not by the popularizers (Khodasevich was never widely read in this sense), but by those whose authority we respect—been so thoroughly forgotten by later generations. From the late 1920s to the present day there exist only a handful of scholarly articles devoted to Khodasevich's poetry. Finally, in the last decade, as new dissertations are being written about him, as he is being widely reprinted for the first time, as his best works are being collected in an impressive five-volume edition, the situation appears to be changing. The phantoms of which Nabokov spoke may at last be on the run. The present study is an attempt, however imperfect and "introductory," to jar our collective memory into a recognition of what it has lost, to search for *temps perdu* not in a biographical so much as in an aesthetic sense, and—if the attempt is successful—to scatter the phantoms of forgetfulness once and for all. Not a modest undertaking, but then Khodasevich's was no modest poetic accomplishment.

There are, I believe, many good reasons for studying the life and work of Khodasevich. On the plane of biography, he knew many of the writers seminal to the modern period in Russian literature and was on intimate terms with at least two of them—Bely and Gorky. As *littérateur*, he is the author of *Nekropol'* (Necropolis), a superb collection of memoirs devoted to the leading figures of Symbolism; *Derzhavin*, the finest "artistic" biography in the Russian language; two elab-

orate studies of Pushkin; numerous translations—especially of the Polish classics and modern Hebrew poets—into Russian; and hundreds of essays and feuilletons on a multitude of topics. But as Nabokov has pointed out, if Khodasevich is to attract and hold our attention, it is because he is a poet. Thus my intention while researching and writing this study has not been to ignore Khodasevich's numerous other accomplishments (quite the contrary), but to keep the accent where possible on the one accomplishment, his verse, out of which the others grew. When Khodasevich swore in 1903, at the age of seventeen, that he was dedicating himself to "poetry forever," he was not speaking idly. There is a sense in which he saw everything he did through the eyes of a poet. Even in the 1930s, when he had begun to speak more retrospectively, to study the past glories of Russian poetry (Pushkin, Derzhavin, Symbolist colleagues), to admonish, sometimes peevishly, the younger generation of émigré poets for losing sight of tradition, the creative personality was never far below the surface.

What sort of poetry did Khodasevich write? What, in a few words, is its secret? The uniqueness of Khodasevich's poetic manner resides in his startling fusion of Symbolism and post-Symbolism, "idealism" and "realism," Pushkinian lapidary form and ever-questioning irony. Indeed, in Khodasevich's finest work an improbable balance—a sort of "moving stasis"—is struck between a private, ulterior sense of beauty and the process of "living down" that beauty. Though Khodasevich may have some distinguished relatives in the Western poetic tradition (the names of Laforgue, Hardy, and Auden come first to mind), there is virtually no one, particularly if we consider his application of the principles of modern "unstable" (the term is Wayne Booth's) irony in lyric form, with whom he might be compared in Russia. In a study such as this it is essential to demonstrate both how Khodasevich's mature aesthetic operates in isolation, how his ironic speaker, for instance, produces a remarkable interplay of voices and

rhetorical tension in a certain poem, *and* how that aesthetic was "programmed" to operate in a larger context, how Khodasevich arrived at it through internal necessity, via personal experience and the history of his time. I found, in trying to arrive at a balanced reading of Khodasevich's mature verse, that the one point of view does not exclude the other, which brings me to a question that gave me some pause, that is, the question of biography.

Critical biographies of writers often imply a certain causal approach to the material, a "first this, then that" attitude that can be seen to surface even in the titles of such studies: *Khodasevich: His Life* and *Art*. Does the conjunction insert a synchronic link or a diachronic wedge between the concepts it straddles? If it were not so clumsy, I would prefer another title in this case: *Khodasevich: His Life in his Art and his Art in his Life*. Rather than write a separate, self-enclosed biography followed by a separate, self-enclosed analysis of the poetry, I have tried to demonstrate to the reader that there exists between the biography and the poetry of each period a genuine symbiotic relationship. There are, to be sure, impressive examples of the-life-then-the-art approach (Karlinsky's fine study of Tsvetaeva), but I am convinced that the reasons for taking an "integrated" approach to the study of Khodasevich are valid and compelling ones.

One of the great Pushkinists of his generation, Khodasevich liked to search for the biographical facts of Pushkin's life that shed light on the poet's art. And to Khodasevich's mind there was no detail too small or insignificant to pass by. Typical, for instance, might be Khodasevich's attempt to show how the various details surrounding Pushkin's affair with Baroness Ficquelmont are transformed into the scene of the old woman's boudoir in "The Queen of Spades." It would be a mistake to think that Khodasevich was interested in simple identification; he was interested in the way Pushkin objectified or "masked" (to use Yeats's term) all that was crudely autobiographical, how the "real" became the

"artistic" through a process that was organic, unsponsored, internally motivated. Khodasevich wanted to capture the psychic metabolism of the artist in the act of creation. Thus those approaches that ignored either the poet's life (the Formalists) or the poet's art (the pure biographer Veresaev) could never do justice to Pushkin's dimensionality. If one were to give a name to Khodasevich's approach to Pushkin, it would be "stereoscopic," simultaneously aware of the life and the art and the mysterious link that binds them. I do not purport to read Khodasevich as well as Khodasevich reads Pushkin. But I do believe that a similar relation exists between the life and the art of Khodasevich, and I have tried to focus on those aspects of his biography that best show his becoming an artist and his transformation of life into art.

This study is the first critical biography of Khodasevich to appear in any language. Although its format suggests a certain comprehensiveness, it would be foolish to claim that what I say exhausts the subject. Obviously, with the focus on Khodasevich the poet, Khodasevich the critic and publicist gets short shrift. But works such as this can never be all things to all people; if I had devoted equal space to each aspect of Khodasevich's career as professional man of letters, the text would have soon become unwieldy. So my assumption (and sincere hope) has been that interest in Khodasevich is only just beginning and that what I have not managed to say others will.

There are seven chapters in all, the first being purely biographical and the last six combining the biography and the work of a given period. Chapters 2 through 6 have alternating sections of biography and analysis of poetry; chapters 2 and 3 begin with discussions of the two phenomena, Symbolism (or more precisely "Bryusovism") and Pushkin, that were seminal to Khodasevich's early development as a poet; chapter 4 opens with a discussion of Khodasevich's "poetics of irony" and introduces the poetry of the major period; chapters 4 through 6 (those dealing with the major period) con-

clude with a final section giving a detailed exegesis of a major text (or texts) in that collection. The largely "literal" translations of Khodasevich's poetry appearing throughout the text are my own.

Any work such as this is in a real sense a joint undertaking. To begin with, had the Graduate School at the University of Kansas not supported my initial project ("Irony in the Poetry of Vladislav Khodasevich") with a Dissertation Fellowship in 1976 and had the National Endowment for the Humanities not underwritten the expanded version with a Fellowship in Category B in 1979, it is difficult to imagine what still unborn state the present study would be in. I might sum up my debt of gratitude to former teachers, who so carefully wrote in the margins of my schoolboy consciousness, with lines from the verse letter that Keats once sent to his favorite teacher Cowden Clarke: "Ah! had I never seen, / Or known your kindness, what might I have been?" Here I should like to mention Mr. Thomas Donovan, who guided my first struggling steps in the art of self-expression; Professor James Boatwright and Mr. Henry Sloss, who did so much to bring English and American literature alive for me; Professors J. Theodore Johnson and Harold Orel, both amazingly perceptive and generous experts on modern European literature; and the Department of Slavic Languages at the University of Kansas, especially Professors Joseph Conrad, Gerald Mikkelson, Stephen Parker, and Heinrich Stammler. The Russian language, which I have so grown to admire and marvel at, first became known to me through the efforts of my teachers at the Defense Language Institute (none, as I recall, were gaunt ladies with lorgnettes, but tended to be full of body, with full-bodied voices) and thereafter became an intimate ally through the efforts of Professor Robert Lager, Mrs. Eugenia Felton, and others.

Those colleagues, some Khodasevich aficionados and other experts on the period, who have shared insights or material, or both, with me include: Mr. Alexandre Bacherac, Profes-

sors Sergei Davydov, Roger Hagglund, Robert Hughes, Lev Loseff, Jane Miller, Gleb Struve, Richard Sylvester, and Mr. Martin Sixsmith. I would like to thank especially Miss N. B. Nidermiller, Khodasevich's niece, for providing needed information on the poet's background, as well as the families of the late Professor M. M. Karpovich and the late I. I. Bernshtein for granting me access to Khodasevich's papers in their possession. Research at Watson Library (University of Kansas), Widener Library (Harvard), Sterling Library (Yale), and New York Public Library and archival work at the Hoover Institute (Stanford), Beinecke Library (Yale), the Central State Literary Archive (TsGALI) (Moscow), and the Gorky Institute of World Literature (IMLI) (Moscow) were made simpler by the pleasant staffs at each. Typing of the text was ably handled by Ms. Mary Longey. And warm thanks are due to Ms. Tam Curry, my copyeditor, who did her difficult job superbly and who taught me much about language, especially my own.

Finally (or almost), my debt to Nina Berberova, who read the manuscript, offered valuable suggestions, and generally encouraged me along the way, is incalculable: just as it would have been impossible to retrieve much of Mandelshtam's literary estate without the constant vigilance of his widow, Nadezhda Yakovlevna, so would it have been impossible to keep Khodasevich's memory alive without the ongoing efforts of this woman, his wife of ten years and his closest companion in the hard years of exile; it was she alone, an important émigré writer in her own right, who took pains to preserve Khodasevich's papers in her archives and who published what were until recently the only editions of his poetry and prose to appear either in the Soviet Union or in the West since the 1930s.

The appreciation that goes with my last acknowledgment is as precise as any dead reckoning of this sort: thank you, Kim, in what must have at times seemed our "star-crossed" years, for steering a straight course.

Parts of chapters 4, 5, and 6 have appeared, respectively, in *Topic* (Fall 1979), *Slavic and East European Journal* (Fall 1981), and *Slavic Review* (May 1980). The passage from Nina Berberova's *The Italics Are Mine* that is quoted on pp. 342-345 of this book is reprinted courtesy of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. Mrs. Vera Nabokov has kindly granted me permission to cite in full Nabokov's translation of "Ballada."

Madison, Wisconsin, August 1982 DMB

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration I have used is that recommended by Professor J. Thomas Shaw in his *The Transliteration of Modern Russian for English-Language Publications* (Madison, 1967). In the text itself and in the expository sections of the notes, I have used Shaw's "System I," which is a modified version of the Library of Congress system for the purpose of "normalizing" (making more pronounceable) personal and place names for the generalist Western reader. In all citations of bibliographical material and in transliterations of words as words I have used "System II," which is the unmodified Library of Congress system, with the diacritical marks omitted. It is hoped that any confusion that might arise from the combination of these two systems (e.g., the reader will find "Valery Bryusov" in the text but "Valerii Briusov" in a citation) will be compensated for by the increased readability afforded the nonspecialist and the greater precision afforded the specialist.

ABBREVIATIONS

Italics	Nina Berberova, *The Italics Are Mine*, trans. Philippe Radley (New York, 1969).
Kursiv	Nina Berberova, *Kursiv moi* (The Italics Are Mine). Munich, 1972.
Nekropol'	V. Khodasevich, *Nekropol'* (Necropolis). Brussels, 1939; rpt. Paris, 1976.
PN	*Poslednie novosti* (The Latest News).
Stat'i	V. Khodasevich, *Literaturnye stat'i i vospominaniia* (Literary Articles and Memoirs). New York, 1954.
SS	V. Khodasevich, *Sobranie stikhov* (Collected Verse). Ed. Nina Berberova. Munich, 1961.
SZ	*Sovremennye zapiski* (Contemporary Annals).
Voz	*Vozrozhdenie* (The Renaissance).

KHODASEVICH

1

ORIGINS: 1886-1896

> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.
> —Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West"

> In a hundred years or so some young scholar, or poet, or maybe just a snob, some long-nosed chatterbox . . . will turn up a book of my verse and create (for a month or two) a literary fad of Khodasevich.
> —from Khodasevich's notebook

Other than what is given in "Mladenchestvo" (Infancy), Khodasevich's short autobiographical fragment, and in retrospective asides that dot his later memoirs and critical prose, we know relatively little about the early life of the poet. To proceed with the modest inventory of these beginnings is to proceed as well with the following assumption: Khodasevich saw the past somewhat differently than did many contemporaries; his relation to personal history was neither so "lyrical" as that of Irina Odoevtseva, nor so "metaphysical" as that of Fyodor Stepun, nor so resiliently forward-looking as that of Nina Berberova, nor so capriciously revisionist as that of Andrey Bely. Nor were his memories from childhood on like Nabokov's, suspended in a sort of amniotic fluid, "a radiant and mobile medium that was none other than the pure element of time."[1] Khodasevich might have remarked instead, not unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake";[2] and thus he

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York, 1970), p. 21.
[2] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York, 1961), p. 34.

never had the internal equilibrium, never was "awake" from personal history long enough to write a volume about himself. Unfortunately, all we have is the first installment; but if a little under twenty pages of economical prose, wrought from what seems a prehensile memory by the blade of self-analysis, is any indication of promise, then such a volume would have been remarkable indeed.

Vladislav Felitsianovich Khodasevich was born in Moscow on 28 May 1886 (16 May, old style) into a family of modest means whose ties with Russia were more geographical than genealogical. His father, Felitsian Ivanovich (1834?-1911[3]), was the son of a disenfranchised Polish nobleman who had fled with his family into Russia (from his native Lithuania) during the Polish rebellion of 1833. What we can say further about Felitsian Ivanovich is quite sketchy, his son giving us little in his autobiographical prose to flesh out the paternal portrait. He decided as a young man on a career in painting and studied under the famous F. A. Bruni at the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg; he had at one point painted frescoes in the churches of Vilnius. But then with time he abandoned this first love, either because he doubted his talent or his ability to support a family (he had married Vladislav's mother while still a fledgling painter). At the time of Vladislav's birth, he was Moscow's first Kodak dealer, the proprietor of a photographic supply shop centrally located on Bolshaya Dmitrovka Street. Felitsian Ivanovich, then, seems to hover somewhere slightly beyond the threshold of impressions that Khodasevich recalls in his autobiographical fragment: perhaps he was too old (he was going on fifty-two when Vladislav was born); more likely he was simply too busy making ends meet to be a chief attraction in the fanciful

[3] We know the precise dates of few members of Khodasevich's immediate family. The year of F. I. Khodasevich's birth can be reconstructed from "Infancy": "When I was born my father was going on fifty-two, my mother forty-two." (Khodasevich, "Mladenchestvo" [Infancy], *Vozdushnye puti* [Aerial Ways], 4 [1965], 100.)

world of his youngest child. Still, as Khodasevich suggests elsewhere, his father appears to have been quiet and kindly, happy during the evening to play an occasional game of *soroka-vorovka* (something like "This Little Piggy") with his son.[4] It would be wrong, I think, to interpret Khodasevich's relative silence as resentment of his father's absence, while much closer to the truth to take it at face value: as the lack of strong influence, either positive or negative. Generally speaking, a father's domestic role during this late Victorian period was not nearly so intimate as it is today. Like Blok, Khodasevich would be growing up mainly in the presence of women, or as he puts it, in a "gynaeceum."[5] What in fact the poet finally does have to say about his father, the artist *manqué*, comes not in prose but in the *sub specie aeternitatis* of poetry, as Blok used to call the artistic transformations of his affair with Volokhova: over forty years later Khodasevich would, with some fine dactylic strokes, provide the image of an artist-become-father whose gift to his son-become-artist was, ironically, the will and talent he did not have. The sixth child of a six-fingered father, Khodasevich would find a use for the extra little finger that, like the unfulfilled aspirations of a young painter, his father had kept hidden in his left hand:

Был мой отец шестипалым. А сын? Ни смиренного
сердца,
Ни многодетной семьи, ни шестипалой руки
Не унаследовал он. Как игрок на неверную карту
Ставит на слово, на звук—душу свою и судьбу . . .
Ныне, в январьскую ночь, во хмелю, шестипалым
размером
И шестипалой строфой сын поминает отца.[6]

My father was six-fingered. And his son? Neither a
humble heart,
nor a family of many children, nor a six-fingered hand

[4] See *SS*, p. 196.
[5] Khodasevich, "Infancy," p. 109.
[6] *SS*, p. 197.

did he inherit. As does a gambler on a risky card,
so does he on a word, on a sound, bet his soul and fate . . .
Now, this January night, a little in his cups, with a six-fingered meter
and a six-fingered strophe the son remembers the father.

Vladislav's mother, Sophia Yakovlevna (née Brafman) (1844?-1911), assumes a greater, though by no means dominant, presence in the writings of her son. Her father was Ya. A. Brafman (c. 1825-1879), the Jewish author of the notorious *Book of the Kahal* (1869) and *Jewish Communes: Local and International* (1888).[7] The *Book of the Kahal*, which discusses the oppression in southwest Russia of poor Jews by rich Jews, was interpreted as a justification for pogroms. As his daughter after him, Ya. A. Brafman was converted from Judaism to Christianity—first Protestantism, then Catholicism—and under Alexandr II became something rare for his time, a nobleman of Jewish origin. The maternal grandparents of the poet must have separated at an early date, since Sophia Yakovlevna was soon left an "orphan," having "lost" her mother; through her father's connections, she was taken in by the Radziwi*ll*s, one of the most prominent families in Polish Lithuania.[8] The orphaning of the girl was real if not literal: her mother, whose name is found nowhere, apparently did not die, but according to family legend, ran off with another man and thereafter became a black sheep.[9] She later returned to her daughter's household,

[7] See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971-1972), pp. 1,287-1,288; and Louis Bernhardt, "V. F. Khodasevich i sovremennaia evreiskaia poeziia" (V. F. Khodasevich and Contemporary Hebrew Poetry), *Russian Literature* 6 (1974), 24n.

[8] See V. Lednitskii, "Literaturnye zametki i vospominaniia" (Literary Notes and Recollections), *Opyty* (Experiments), 2 (1953), 166: "My [Khodasevich's] mother was an orphan, having lost her mother early, and was taken in . . . by the family of Prince Radziwi*ll*."

[9] My thanks to Miss N. B. Nidermiller (Khodasevich's niece) for providing me with this information.

however, and was to be one of the fixtures in the distaff world surrounding young Vladislav.

It was in the aristocratic Radziwiłł household that the Jewish girl Sophia seems to have found not only material shelter but cultural and spiritual largesse as well, for when she and her new husband, Felitsian Ivanovich, left Vilnius for St. Petersburg and his renewed course of study at the Imperial Academy, she had been converted to Roman Catholicism and had conceived a lasting passion for Polish literature. In an article about Mickiewicz that her son wrote much later the completely ingenuous nature of Sophia Yakovlevna's feeling for her acquired, yet nonetheless real, homeland is poignantly evident:

> Several impressions, which even now I recall very clearly, relate to the earliest period of my life, to the time when I had not yet begun to go to kindergarten, after which there set in my irrevocable russification.
>
> During the mornings, after tea, my mother would take me into her room. A picture of the Ostrobram Holy Virgin hung there in a golden frame over the bed. A little rug lay on the floor. I would kneel and read first "Our Father," then "Hail Mary," then the "Credo." After that mama would tell me about Poland and sometimes read me poetry. The poetry would be from the beginning of *Pan Tadeusz*. I learned what sort of work that was only much later, and only then understood that her reading went no further than the seventy-second verse of the first book. Every time the hero (as yet unnamed), after having just climbed out of the carriage, ran alongside of the house, caught sight of the familiar furniture and chiming clock, and with childish joy
>
> Once again tugged the cord that let forth
> the familiar surge of an old mazurka by Dąbrowski,
>
> mother would begin to cry and let me go.[10]

Here in the child's view the traditions of Roman Catholicism and Polish national identity are magically woven into the poem's "acoustic fabric" (*zvukovaia tkan'*),[11] the result being

[10] Khodasevich, "K stoletiiu 'Pana Tadeusha' " (For the Hundredth Anniversary of *Pan Tadeusz*), *Stat'i*, p. 73.

[11] Ibid., p. 75.

a sort of nostalgic tinnitus, what thereafter would be a benignly recurring autosuggestion of who he was and where he had come from:

> I knew these verses almost by heart, not understanding much in them, and not trying to. I knew that they were written by Mickiewicz, a poet in the same way that Pushkin, Lermontov, Maykov, and Fet were poets. But to understand Pushkin, Lermontov, Maykov, and Fet was both necessary and possible, but Mickiewicz was something else altogether: his was not just poetry, it was something inextricably bound to prayer and to Poland, that is, to the church, to that Catholic church [*kostel*] on Milyutinsky Lane where mama took us on Sundays. I never saw Mickiewicz or Poland, for they were as impossible to see as God, but they were there in the same place as God: behind the low railing covered in red velvet, in the organ's thunder, in the smoke of the incense and in the golden radiance of the slanting rays of the sun, falling sideways out of somewhere onto the altar. For me the altar was the threshold or even the beginning of "that other world" where I was before I was in this one and where I will be when I am in this one no longer.
>
> God—Poland—Mickiewicz: invisible and incomprehensible, but my own [*rodnoe*]. And—inseparable from one another.[12]

So without getting too far ahead of ourselves, we can see in these passages, the details of which are as emotionally shaped as any in Khodasevich's autobiographical prose, the character of the maternal legacy. On the other hand, the fact that the poet was by blood half-Jewish seems to have had little significance for his childhood development. Only much later, perhaps through his close friendship during the Symbolist years with the Jewish poet Muni (Samuil Viktorovich Kissin) (who wrote in Russian), and certainly through his editing and translating of the texts of the great modern Hebrew poets (including Bialik and Tschernichowski), did the fact of his Jewish heritage begin to take on an added weight. Strangely enough, it was Khodasevich's Jewish mother who so religiously emphasized the Polish legacy that by blood issued from Felitsian Ivanovich. And stranger still, like one

[12] Ibid., p. 74.

of those infinite vagaries that pattern our lives if only there is an ironist there to see them, it would be another Jewish member of Khodasevich's family, this time the wife and ministering angel of his final years in emigration, Olga Borisovna Margolina-Khodasevich, who converted not to Roman Catholicism but to Russian Orthodoxy shortly before disappearing into a Nazi heart of darkness.

Khodasevich's "irrevocable russification," which he dates from his entrance into kindergarten and, presumably, into a world full of Russian youngsters, might have begun even earlier with the appearance of a third very important adult influence on his childhood life. Like many children of foreign-born parents committed to preserving native traditions in an alien environment, the young Vladislav grew to chafe at his mother's reminders that other Polish children living in Moscow still managed to speak their language and go to church regularly. Wacław Lednicki, the Polish scholar, who met Khodasevich only many years later as a result of a mutual love of Pushkin, was apparently just such a model child, and without even knowing him, Vladislav came to hate him like the taste of bad medicine.[13] But alongside Mickiewicz, Roman Catholicism, and maternal coaxing there was a Russian presence from the very beginning: as Khodasevich tells us in verses whose odic splendor recalls Derzhavin, the child "sucked the agonizing right . . . to love and curse"[14] Russia with the milk of his nurse, Elena Alexandrovna Kuzina (by marriage, Stepanova). More than to his mother or father, it was to this simple peasant woman, born in a village of the Tula Province, that Khodasevich traced his adopted birthright as a Russian poet. There was no need to embellish the fact of her importance. When as a newborn infant Khodasevich appeared too weak to suckle and all other wet nurses refused the task, Elena Alexandrovna managed the impos-

[13] Lednitskii, "Literary Notes and Recollections," pp. 166-167.

[14] Khodasevich, "Ne mater'iu, no tul'skoiu krest'iankoi" (Not by my mother, but by a peasant woman from Tula), *SS*, p. 66.

sible. And in suckling the little Vladya, she not only saved his life, she gave up the life of her unweaned son, Vladya's coeval: to have milk enough for one, she had to give the other to a foundling hospital, where he was bound to die, and did shortly thereafter. The debt that the future poet owed his nurse, therefore, was incalculable, and it is not curious that her example, which reads like fiction become life, should provide an important clue to the portrait of an artist *in statu nascendi*.

Yet the Russian legacy goes deeper, I think, than these perhaps too easily romanticized facts. It is not enough (though much, to be sure) that Elena Alexandrovna was Russian and the baby owed his life to her, since this does not account for her connection with the *chudotvornyi genii* (wonder-working genius)[15] of the Russian language, as Khodasevich calls it in the same poem. Unlike another famous nurse, she did not, as the poet tells us, ply her young listener with the language-rich marvels of Russian fairy tales. The answer lies in what Elena Alexandrovna came to represent, what Khodasevich made her, in his poetry. Of the three parental figures, she alone occupies a central position in the *Collected Verse*. In a sense that returns to this heavily patinated metaphor some of its original vitality, Elena Alexandrovna was Khodasevich's Muse; it is her image that will be tightly linked with that of the poet's *dusha*, his Psyche and Beautiful Lady;[16] it is for this reason that the poem invoking the old nurse comes very close to the beginning of *Tiazhelaia lira* (The Heavy Lyre), Khodasevich's finest, most "musical" collection.[17] Like Pushkin before him, whose Muse undergoes

[15] Ibid., p. 67.

[16] Khodasevich connects the notions of Psyche and *Prekrasnaia Dama* (Beautiful Lady) in "Iridion," *Stat'i*, p. 102.

[17] It is perhaps significant that Khodasevich moved the poem about Elena Alexandrovna close to the beginning of *The Heavy Lyre* in the 1927 (Paris) edition of *Collected Verse*, whereas the same poem was located in the middle of the 1922 (Moscow-Petrograd) edition of *The Heavy Lyre* published separately.

gradual mythopoesis from old nurse, Arina Rodionovna, to winsome young goddess, Khodasevich will trace his "psychic" milk to the real breasts of Elena Alexandrovna.[18]

F. I. KHODASEVICH and his bride had arrived in St. Petersburg in the early 1860s. It was not long thereafter that Felitsian Ivanovich changed his profession and the family moved to the ancient city of Tula, eighty miles south of Moscow. Tolstoy had been born on Yasnaya Polyana, his family estate nearby Tula, and one anecdote has Khodasevich's father photographing the great author.[19] Although Vladislav, born some twenty years later, does not appear at first to have been much interested in his father's (for that time) innovative profession, it is curious that the central image in *Sorrentinskie fotografii* (Sorrento Photographs), perhaps Khodasevich's greatest work, is a double-exposed snapshot.[20] Why Khodasevich, in many ways a traditionalist, would use what Susan Sontag calls an "optical-chemical process"[21] to develop the image of Russian culture in eclipse might be explained by a conviction that the photograph is an ersatz art form, catching by chance what a painting would catch by design—Felitsian Ivanovich had traded genuine art for photography, a mechanical substitute.[22]

In Tula the Khodasevich family began to grow. After the first child, a son, died within a few months of birth, there

[18] See V. Khodasevich: "Arina Rodionovna," *Voz*, no. 1314 (6 January 1929); and "Iavlenie Muzy" (The Appearance of the Muse), *O Pushkine* (On Pushkin) (Berlin, 1937), pp. 8-38.

[19] Lednitskii, "Literary Notes and Recollections," p. 166.

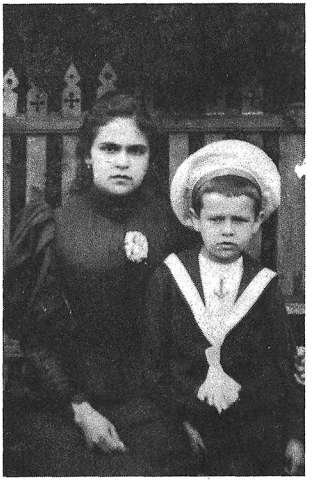
[20] A provocative "photography" shows up as an entry in Khodasevich's "calendar" for the year 1897. The calendar was a list of brief, diaristic entries for the years 1886-1921; it was given to Nina Berberova at the time she and Khodasevich left the Soviet Union in June 1922. See *Kursiv*, pp. 168-170.

[21] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), p. 158.

[22] Although Khodasevich never criticized photography as an art form, he did have negative things to say about the cinema. See V. Khodasevich, "O kinematografe" (On the Cinematograph), *PN*, no. 2045 (28 October 1926).

followed over the next eleven years (1864-1875) Mikhail, Maria, Viktor, Konstantin, and Evgenia.[23] Except for Evgenia

[23] Of Khodasevich's brothers and sisters we know very little, and there is not much likelihood of discovering more. Mikhail (Misha) (1865-1925) was a Moscow lawyer known for his Ciceronian eloquence and sartorial flair. He followed the arts enthusiastically (along with Vladislav's, his name shows up on the list of subscribers to *Vesy* [The Scales], the Symbolist journal *par excellence*). His daughter was Valentina Khodasevich (1894-1970), the portrait painter and set designer. For brief portraits of Mikhail Khodasevich, see Lednitskii,"Literary Notes and Recollections," pp. 156-159; and Richard D. Sylvester, ed., *Valentina Khodasevich and Olga Margolina-Khodasevich: Unpublished Letters to Nina Berberova* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 13-14. An excellent portrait of Valentina Khodasevich is also found in Sylvester, pp. 13-49. The other children, with the exception of Evgenia, went their separate, sketchy ways: Maria (Manya) married Mikhail Antonovich Voyshitsky, a tax collector with musical inclinations, and moved to Petersburg; Viktor chose to work in his father's store, but apparently he died early; Konstantin (Stasya) was the black sheep—unlucky in school and in marriage, he was shot by the Bolsheviks. Evgenia (Zhenya) (1876-1960) is portrayed in "Infancy" as an attractive older sister: "well-dressed, slender, and graceful, . . . [with] pretty hands and legs, [so that] even a brown gymnasium dress with black apron look[ed] very good on her" (p. 109). (Mikhail, Evgenia, and Vladislav all shared a penchant for elegant clothes.) Like her younger brother, Evgenia eventually took up permanent residence in Paris following the Revolution. It is to her daughter, Miss N. B. Nidermiller, that I owe thanks for much of this information.



Vladislav Khodasevich as a little boy with his sister Evgenia (Zhenya), c. 1890.

(Zhenya), we know almost nothing about the others as children, for by the time the family had moved to Moscow (sometime after Evgenia's birth in 1875) and Vladislav was born and had his first childhood impressions, the older children had already begun to leave the household: Mikhail to become a lawyer, Maria to get married, Viktor to work in his father's store, and Konstantin to enter medical school. From little Vladya's point of view they appear as adults who drop in to visit.

The birth of the last child, the future poet, was premature by two weeks. Impatience, in some ways characteristic of the modern period for which Khodasevich was to write,[24] was even in this initial setting forth a salient quality:

> An important trait in me is impatience, which has furnished me in life with many an unpleasantness and has tormented me constantly. Perhaps it comes from the fact that I was, as it were, born too late and ever since it seems as though I have been trying unconsciously to make up the loss. . . . In our family I came to be a Benjamin, a "leftover" [*poskrebysh*], a favorite. I was watched over, pampered, and everything taken together had a rather bad effect on my health, my character, even on several of my habits.[25]

In later feuilleton-length sallies against Vladimir Mayakovsky, Maxim Gorky, Ilya Ehrenburg, A. I. Kuprin, Modest Gofman, Zinaida Gippius, Georgy Adamovich, and many

[24] In May 1885, just a year before Khodasevich's birth, Victor Hugo, a literary colossus spanning most of the century, was buried in a massive state funeral unlike any Paris had ever seen. "The twentieth century," as Roger Shattuck formulates it, "could not wait fifteen years for a round number; it was born, yelling, in 1885. . . . By this orgiastic ceremony [Hugo's wake and funeral] France unburdened itself of a man, a literary movement, and a century." (Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years* [New York, 1968], pp. 4-5.) Though it would be difficult to find such a watershed year in the Russian context, the deaths of the great Realists—Dostoevsky and Pisemsky in 1881, Turgenev in 1883—along with Tolstoy's radical renunciation of the self that authored *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* suggest that by the mid-1880s Realism (at least in literature) had spent itself and the transition (perhaps most easily identifiable with the onset of Chekhov's mature period in 1886-1888) to Symbolism and "Modernism" had begun.

[25] Khodasevich, "Infancy," p. 100.

others it is not difficult to see the markings of this impatience. Khodasevich could not brook, particularly in discussions of Pushkin, an opponent whose theories were founded on less than precise knowledge. And more than once, he plunged headlong into an attack before considering the consequences.[26] One of the most impressive aspects of Khodasevich's biography is his record in matters of literary conscience; an aspect much more controversial is his record in matters of literary tact and forbearance. While it would be far too simple to see in the polemical essays that Khodasevich launched from *Vozrozhdenie* (The Renaissance) and targeted to Adamovich at *Poslednie novosti* (The Latest News) the behavior of a spoiled child (what was at stake was infinitely more important than one's personal feelings), there remains a sense in which his fierce individualism, his rejection of any compromise, his isolation from all the "isms" of modern Russian poetry can be traced to his role as the last, or in a way only, child, the Benjamin of a doting Rachel and Jacob.[27] Indeed, as Khodasevich explains almost in the same breath, the fact that he was as if an only child, with few playmates his own age and primarily his own fancy and the world of adults with which to occupy himself, led naturally, though no less profoundly, to his personality as a poet:

[26] See, for example, as described in M. Vishniak, *Sovremennye zapiski: Vospominaniia redaktora* (*Contemporary Annals*: Memoirs of the Editor) (Bloomington, IN, 1957), pp. 140-149, 205-206, Khodasevich's virulent criticism of the pro-Soviet *Versty* (Versts) group (Svyatopolk-Mirsky, Sergey Efron, P. Suvchinsky, Artur Lourié) and his charge that the Pushkinist Modest Gofman committed plagiarism. The editorial board position at *Versts* is found in Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Cvetaeva: Her Life and Art* (Berkeley, 1966), pp. 68-69. The articles on *Versts* and Gofman are V. Khodasevich: "O 'Verstakh' " (On *Versts*), *SZ* 29 (1926), 433-441; and "Konets odnoi polemiki" (The End of One Polemic), *Voz*, no. 1318 (10 January 1929).

[27] "Khodasevich could be capricious and stubborn like a child. He would establish his truth on irrational bases, and in order to defend it, once having taken the bit, and ignoring everyone and everything, he would charge ahead—usually at a loss to himself and to his truth." (Vishniak, *"Contemporary Annals": Memoirs of the Editor*, p. 206.)

My late arrival hindered me even in literature. Had I been born ten years earlier, I would have been a contemporary of the Decadents and Symbolists: three years younger than Bryusov, four years older than Blok. But I made my appearance in poetry precisely when the most significant of all modern trends [i.e., Symbolism] had begun to exhaust itself, yet the time for something new to appear had still not set in. Gorodetsky and Gumilyov, my coevals, felt this just as I did. They attempted to create Acmeism, from which, in essence, nothing came and of which nothing, save a name, has remained. But Tsvetaeva (who is, however, younger than I) and I, having emerged from Symbolism, attached ourselves to nothing and to no one, and remained forever solitary, "wild." Literary classifiers and compilers of anthologies don't know where to stick us.[28]

There is something very touching about Khodasevich looking to his origins and linking his independent spirit and his loneliness to the same qualities in Marina Tsvetaeva. Though their poetry could not be more different, they were united, as Simon Karlinsky describes the mood of Tsvetaeva's last letter to Khodasevich, by "the closeness of two great poets who had no place in Soviet literature and who by the mid-thirties remained alone in émigré literature as well."[29] Perhaps no one understood the tragedy of emigration better than these two; perhaps no one's art bore the scars of that tragedy with greater force.

Khodasevich's role as coddled child had, as he suggests, a rather significant effect on his physical development as well. Not only would the *mal du siècle* provide a historical mood for growth into later childhood and adolescence; there would also be real illnesses, with threats more immediate and physical, to punctuate the flow of early impressions. Khodasevich would have bad health his entire life; he would be thin, prone to illness, his complexion sallow; he would smoke with a passion, surrounding himself (and, if present, his interlocutor) in billows of smoke, "his long fingers," in Nabokov's

[28] Khodasevich, "Infancy," pp. 200-201.

[29] S. Karlinskii, ed., "Pis'ma M. Tsvetaevoi k V. Khodasevichu" (Letters of M. Tsvetaeva to V. Khodasevich), *Novyi zhurnal* (New Review), 89 (1967), 107-108.

words, "screwing into a holder the half of a *Corporal Vert* cigarette";[30] and he would complain, with a similarity to Tolstoy's famous cancer victim, Ivan Ilyich, that seems prophetic, of an ashen taste in his mouth. Because his health from birth was perilous, his family fed him only the blandest diet, which so took hold that Vladislav developed a sort of "gustatory infantilism" (*vkusovoi infantalizm*)[31]—till the end of his life he would avoid fish, fruit, and greens, preferring instead pap and chicken fricassee. The delights of Gogolian and Chekhovian gastronomical *poshlost'* (a uniquely Russian "philistinism") would be lost on him: "Fish makes me sick, I don't know the taste of caviar, oysters, lobster—I've never tried them."[32]

A host of later major and minor illnesses—measles, bronchitis, smallpox, bad teeth, tuberculosis of the spine, furunculosis, eczema, catarrh, cancer—were probably caused by a combination of factors, including bad luck (Khodasevich's back problems began in 1915 when he fell and injured his spine at a friend's name-day party) and exceedingly poor living conditions ("hunger" appears often in the "calendar" of his early manhood).[33] But there is little doubt that a major factor was the dietary habits that threatened to shatter the child's health from the beginning. The abdominal discomfort that the solicitous parents feared would result from a normal diet was not avoided. Indeed, it returned with a vengeance in the last years of Khodasevich's life and culminated in the gallstones and hepatic cancer that killed him, prematurely, at fifty-three. The theories of Hippocrates and Galen would have found a prime example in Khodasevich, for the "bil-

[30] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, p. 285. See the portraits of Khodasevich by his niece Valentina Khodasevich and by Yury Annenkov in Sylvester, *Valentina Khodasevich and Olga Margolina-Khodasevich: Unpublished Letters to Nina Berberova*, pp. 34-35 (insert no. 2); and Iurii Annenkov, *Dnevnik moikh vstrech* (Diary of My Encounters) (New York, 1966), I, 29.

[31] Khodasevich, "Infancy," p. 100.

[32] Ibid.

[33] *Kursiv*, p. 169.