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The Bulgakovian Code of Alexander Galich's Pushkiniana

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Abstract. The objective is to describe the ways in which Bulgakov's meanings are transformed, as implied in A. Galich's references to the personality and works of A.S. Pushkin. The Bulgakov code of works, in one way or another correlated with Pushkin in Galich's work, has not yet become the subject of a special research. The study traces forms of actualization of Bulgakovian impressions at different stages of Galich's life as they are reflected in his mature works – the autobiographical novel *Dress Rehearsal* ("General'naya repetitsiya") and the poems *The Fires Have Broken Out* ("Zanyalis' pozhary"), *Experience of Despair* ("Opyt otchayaniya"), and *Experience of Nostalgia* ("Opyt nostal'gii"). Analyzing the conceptual significance of reminiscences from Bulgakov's play about Pushkin and from *The Master and Margarita*, it focuses on the encoding function of a quotation from Anna Akhmatova's epitaph for Bulgakov. Particular attention is paid to Galich's response to the collision embodied in the figure of the Master: Bulgakov endowed his fictional Doppelganger with his own creative maximalism and human frailty, whereas Galich shifted the emphasis from circumstances of irresistible force to personal imperfection. The poet perceives Pushkin's ideal fate as a reproach.The conclusions of the research suggest that: actualization of the Pushkin myth of in Galich's work is based on the conviction of the uniqueness of the poet's ideal path, with the Pushkin invariant functioning as an imperative; by interpreting his own destiny through the Bulgakovian code of the Pushkin myth, Galich was able to transcend empirical experience and, by universalizing his personal trials, repeatedly re-establish a connection with the ideal, embodied in Pushkin; in Galich's reception, Bulgakov's principle of the "indivisible yet unmerged" relationship between the Pushkinian and the Gospel myths emerged as a productively creative contradiction.

Keywords: A. Galich, the myth of Pushkin, the myth of Bulgakov, reception, code, reminiscence, quotation

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Булгаковский код пушкинианы Александра Галича

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Аннотация. Цель – описание способов трансформации булгаковских смыслов, заложенных в отсылках А. Галича к личности и творчеству А.С. Пушкина. Булгаковский код произведений, так или иначе соотнесенных в творчестве А. Галича с А.С. Пушкиным, до сих пор не становился предметом специального литературоведческого исследования. Прослежены способы вхождения разновременных булгаковских впечатлений Галича в произведения зрелого периода (автобиографическую повесть «Генеральная репетиция», стихотворения «Занялись пожары», «Опыт отчаяния», «Опыт ностальгии»). Проанализировано концептуальное значение реминисценций из булгаковской пьесы о Пушкине, романа «Мастер и Маргарита», а также кодирующая функция цитаты из ахматовской эпитафии Булгакову. Особое внимание уделено отклику Галича на коллизию, воплощенную в образе Мастера. Доказано, что если Булгаков наделил романного двойника своим творческим максимализмом и своей человеческой слабостью, то Галич перенес внимание с обстоятельств непреодолимой силы на личное несовершенство; усугублению чувства вины служит апелляция к идеальной судьбе – пушкинской. В результате исследования сделаны следующие выводы: актуализация пушкинского мифа в творчестве Галича определяется убеждением в неповторимости идеального пути поэта, при этом пушкинский инвариант воспринимается как категорический императив; прочитывая собственную судьбу по булгаковскому коду, Галич обретал возможность подняться над эмпирикой и, трактуя пережитое универсальным образом, снова и снова восстанавливать связь с олицетворенным в Пушкине идеалом; в рецепции Галича булгаковская «нераздельность-неслиянность» мифа пушкинского и мифа евангельского оказалась творчески продуктивным противоречием.

Ключевые слова: А. Галич, пушкинский миф, булгаковский миф, рецепция, код, реминисценция, цитата

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Introduction

In the twentieth century, the genuinely creative actualization of the Pushkin myth invariably linked the image of the "poet of poets" with the dramas and tragedies of modernity. Artists for whom the "mythologized 'Pushkin text'" – the texts proper, biographical plots, and topoi – became a "yardstick" for their personal myth found themselves in a particularly distinct position (Shatin, 2000, pp. 235–236). Such a myth-making orientation is daring by definition, even when a sacred distance is scrupulously observed. Fully aware of this, Galich avoided symbolic gestures in the spirit of Blok's "Give us your hand in foul weather," as well as such traditional devices as a "conversation with the monument" or a visionary "meeting" with the living poet. His attention to Bulgakov – whose dialogue with Pushkin was marked by equally strict self-limitations – was therefore entirely natural.

Galich's reception of Bulgakov's Pushkiniana found expression in an entire system of reminiscences and – what is especially important – in the encoding of his lyrical persona's stance through allusions to the figure of the Master: a deliberately unheroic character who, by virtue of his vocation to speak the truth, is correlated with both Yeshua and Pushkin. In this way, Galich's statements about the fundamental principles of his creative conduct come into focus.

Bulgakov's Pushkin vs. "Our Pushkin" in the Context of Galich's Early Impressions

On 10 February 1937, an editorial in *Pravda* reproduced the theses of V. Kirpotin's book *Pushkin's Legacy and Communism* (1936), thereby "finally determining Pushkin's place in the Soviet hierarchy" (Druzhinin, 2012, p. 233): "Pushkin is wholly ours, a Soviet poet, for Soviet power has inherited all that is best in our people, and it is itself the realization of the people's noblest aspirations." The Soviet appropriation of the classic demanded a struggle against his "falsifiers": *Attempt on Pushkin* and *In Defense of Pushkin* are typical titles of pogrom-style articles. "From Pushkin, that poor lover of freedom," O. Freidenberg observed in 1949, "they have made a state-police bogeyman" (Druzhinin, 2012, p. 118).

The reverse side of state Pushkinism was revealed in the semi-official genre of the "confidential conversation." On the eve of yet another jubilee (April 1949), a senior literary functionary imposed on his charges "from whom a contemporary poet should draw his inspiration, whom he should take as a model": "Pushkin is very many-sided, and it remains to consider what suits us and what does not" (Shaporina, 2011, p. 124). Galich – admitted to the Union of Soviet Writers much later but present at writers' meetings – could well have heard similar instructions in the 1940s. Finally, everyone knew the grim jokes on the theme "if Pushkin lived in our time".

The lavishly funded "death jubilee" did not fulfill expectations of producing a great Soviet Pushkiniana congenial to the classic (Platt, 2017, p. 210). The creative

insolvency of the servants of the official cult was confirmed again by the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Pushkin's birth. Against this background, Bulgakov's unpublished play *Alexander Pushkin* – legalized by the Moscow Art Theatre under the title *The Last Days* (1943) – stood out in bold relief. Galich almost certainly saw the production both in its premiere season (in the spring of 1943 he returned to Moscow with a front-line theatre troupe) and later, when the authorities' restrictive measures only intensified the audience's interest in the country's sole staging. As E. Bulgakova lamented in 1946, the theatre was forbidden to perform *The Last Days* more than two or three times a month.

To reconstruct Galich's early impressions it is worth recalling Bulgakov's ability to put to work the "commonplaces" of earlier and contemporary literature in the service of his own design (Petrovsky, 2008, p. 194). Such is the collision "Pushkin and the Autocrat", outwardly corresponding to the Soviet model yet articulating a universal conflict: "The story of the poet's last days in Bulgakov's play is continually illuminated by the legend of Christ's last days" (Petrovsky, 2008, p. 157), achieved through a whole series of parallels with the Gospel narrative and the citation of the poem "Secular Power", which organizes the plot's "dramatic center" (Petrovsky, 2008, p. 157). The breadth of generalization intensified the work's topical nature.

Naturally, the semantic scope of Bulgakov's conception could be accessible to the young theatrical audience – including Galich, yet not fully: the first Soviet generation's estrangement from the Bible made itself felt (he would later write, "We keep confusing the Old and New Testaments…")[1], as did the deliberate schooling of the public in historical allegories that eliminated free associations. Nevertheless, the work's heretical polysemy became a cultural fact. Staged amid temporary censorship relaxations, the play about Pushkin's death inevitably resonated with the memory of the victims of the 1930s and with the tragedies of the somber seven years after the war.

Galich's encounter with Bulgakov's Pushkin coincided with his emergence from the artificial isolation from reality that had been, first, study at K. Stanislavsky's Opera-Dramatic Studio ("The crushing events of those terrible years, it seemed, had not the slightest relation to us, studio members"[2]), and then work at the experimental studio of A. Arbuzov and V. Pluchek ("…we only thought that we were living the contemporary moment; <…> we were constructing it", 1974, p. 79). The civil execution of Anna Akhmatova in the first postwar year could no longer be

[1] Galich's poems are quoted in author prose translation; the source of the texts is the most authoritative posthumous edition: Galich, A. (1999). *The Clouds Drift, the Clouds…: Songs, Poems* (A. Kostromin, Comp., p. 459). Moscow: Lokid Publ.; EKSMO-Press. (In Russ.) Further we indicate only the year of publication of the book and the page number.

[2] Galich's autobiographical novella is then quoted in author prose translation from the first edition: Galich, A. (1974). *Dress Rehearsal*. Frankfurt/Main: Possev-Verlag. (In Russ.) Further we indicate only the year of publication of the book and the page number.

perceived abstractly; only recently (in 1942) Sasha Ginzburg had been presented to the great contemporary, read to her his poems – received graciously – and elicited a reciprocal gesture of trust: "Having listened to the boy, she <…> began to read to him" the *Poem Without a Hero*" (Chukovskaya, 1997, pp. 422–423). Galich met the actor and theatre director S. Mikhoels and the poet P. Markish on the eve of the repressions against them, feeling for the first time a personal implication in the tragedy (1974, pp. 173–174). These experiences awakened historical "rhymes," which would later, in the 1960s, contribute to the formation of the tragic myth of the artist.

Galich could quite easily have joined the list of victims of the campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans"; it is telling that one of his comedies was denounced for lack of ideas and for "aestheticism" by that very mentor of writers (see Aronov, 2012, pp. 71–72) to whom Pushkin himself was suspect. It was precisely then that Galich took his first responsible creative step – "he wrote his best play, *Matrosskaya Tishina*, and, unable to stage it, began to read it in private homes", which in those days was "more dangerous than the liberty-loving guitar of the Thaw and stagnation era" (Nagibin, 1996, p. 593). While subsequently acknowledging the ideological naiveté of this piece, Galich regarded it as an important stage in his life: an experience of readiness to vindicate the word with one's fate. The essence of this early trial is captured in the title of his autobiographical novella, completed on the eve of emigration: *Dress Rehearsal*.

The Image of Pushkin in *Dress Rehearsal*: A "Bulgakovian" Perspective

The life path that elevated Galich to a major poet and a Soviet outcast is marked in the novella primarily by Pushkinian milestones, whereas the impressions related to Bulgakov more often appear dissolved in cultural experience. Alongside direct references to *The Theatrical Novel* accompanying recollections of Stanislavsky, there arise semantic and stylistic echoes of *The Master and Margarita* that were likely unreflected. Thus Liya Kantorovich, the beauty from Patriarch's Ponds – a mysteriously mature peer of the infantile first-person narrator – is an image that functionally unites Margarita in the role of exacting muse and the Master as a judge of stillborn words[3]. "Implausibly beautiful and sad," alone amid the rapt audience of the theatre performance *The City at Dawn*, Liya sobers Sasha Ginzburg with a genuinely Bulgakovian gesture: "I did not like the way you acted! <…> How can you play such a thing?!" (1974, p. 181).

As he constructs the Pushkinian layer of *Dress Rehearsal*, Galich quietly advances the thought of a guiding hand of fate. Reporting that he had "for some reason been extraordinarily proud all his life of the accidental coincidence" of his birth date with the day the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum opened (1974, p. 83), he, by that

[3] We thank our colleague L. Bolshukhin, who shared his ideas with us.

very gesture of perplexity, renders the accident meaningful. The same intention emerges in the account of his childhood home – the Venevitinov mansion in Moscow, where on 12 October 1826 Pushkin read *Boris Godunov*. The memory held by the historic place came alive on 24 October (New Style) 1926, when, to mark the centenary of Pushkin's reading, his father's brother L. Ginzburg and colleagues-Pushkinists arranged a literary-theatrical celebration: "The house was expecting a miracle – and everyone understood this, while I, it seemed to me, grasped it with special, passionate distinctness" (1974, p. 65). The image of memory carries such emotional energy that it inevitably becomes a foreshadowing not only of childhood but also of later life's revelations; in fact, it is a retrospective prophecy – an act of acknowledging fate, harmonizing with the climactic monologue: "My Russia has turned-out Negro lips, blue fingernails, and curly hair – and I cannot be excommunicated from that Russia; no force can make me part with it" (1974, p. 194).

A nameless countenance is the only portrait of Pushkin in Galich's oeuvre. Even in the cycle "Alexandrian Songs," dedicated to three Alexanders – Polezhayev, Blok, and Vertinsky – their great namesake is only implied. What determined this indirect mode of recreating the central figure of Galich's personal pantheon?

In his Pushkiniana Galich is close to the author of a "hero-less" play about Pushkin: "Bulgakov professed Pushkin religiously" (Petrovsky, 2008, p. 64), and therefore considered his physical presence on stage impossible. It has been observed that such a "'chaste' approach to Pushkin's image is akin to the poetic, lyrical approach", which traditionally avoids "concreteness that could <…> appear debasing" (Kormilov, 2004, p. 25). This thesis is only partly accurate. In Bulgakov's play the status of a sacred figure is grounded by way of the negative – through material, bodily details of a grotesque kind; it was precisely their anti-canonical charge that stimulated Galich's creative imagination.

The dramatist granted Pushkin's detractors – the enemies of the "moor" – the right to participate in the portraiture of the off-stage hero: "…who is that black fellow standing by the column?"; "…he's standing by the column in some rascal's tailcoat, his hair disheveled, and his eyes burning like a wolf's"; "I still have in my memory a face with bared teeth"[4]. This "deformation" of the image unfolds in the heated atmosphere of the poet's last days. Galich's exaggeration of Pushkin's Negroid features is closer to Bulgakov's vision than, for example, to Tsvetaeva's delight before the "Black Deity" (the essay "My Pushkin"). The portrait of Pushkin made by Galich implies the final tragedy.

The continuation of the monologue about "my Russia", on the one hand, makes explicit the theme of the poet's death, and on the other shifts the stylistic register, thereby further shading the tragic-grotesque outline of Pushkin's image: "My Russia

[4] Bulgakov translated by the author. Bulgakov, M. (1965). *Dramas and Comedies* (pp. 365, 369, 386). Moscow: Iskusstvo Publ. (In Russ.)

has turned-out Negro lips, blue fingernails, and curly hair – and I cannot be excommunicated from that Russia; no force can make me part with it… <…> Nor can I be excommunicated from the Russia whose sullen boyish face and beautiful – sad and gentle – eyes say that this boy's ancestors were natives of Scotland, and now he lies – killed – and covered with a greatcoat – at the foot of Mount Mashuk, and a frenzied thunderstorm is rolling over him, and until the very end of my days I shall hear his sudden, already deathly – already from there – sigh" (1974, p. 194). Lermontov's death (to quote Pushkin's epitaph to Griboedov) had nothing terrible or languorous about it. Pushkin, by contrast, endured torments that are all but impossible to capture "artistically." Perhaps only Bulgakov succeeded in doing so.

The most unexpected element of the portrait – the blue fingernails – makes it possible to specify the link between Bulgakov's Pushkin and the image of Pushkin in *Dress Rehearsal*. The mythologeme "Pushkin the African" is actualized by an artist endowed with Acmeist keenness of sight, who in "Salon Romance" mentioned the *Lilac Negro* from a song by Vertinsky. The epithet *lilac* is transformed into *blue*, which – thanks to the focus on the hands – enters into the theme of a martyr's death. The inner logic of the image is clarified by the last act of Bulgakov's play.

Bulgakov was inclined to depict writer-heroes through a single detail extracted from the mass of particulars preserved by memoirists (Belobrovtseva, Kuljus, 2000). Pushkin's hands are frequently mentioned by the witnesses of his last days: V. Dal' held the sufferer's hand for hours; A. Turgenev saw Pushkin with convulsively clenched fists; the doctors felt his pulse, and so on. Transforming this recurring detail, Bulgakov proceeds from an episode in Dal's reminiscences in which Pushkin responds to the advice not to be ashamed of his pain, to moan: "No, I mustn't moan; my wife will hear; and it would be ridiculous for this trifle to overcome me; that is not my desire"[5]. The dramatist conveys the effort of will through a physically palpable gesture – terrible even as reported by an outsider: "Yes, he died hard. <…> Yes, he bit into his hands so as not to cry out, so that his wife would not hear, and then he grew still"[6]. Galich – whose monologue about dying poets resembles a prose poem – renders Pushkin's portrait even more sparingly than Bulgakov, yet the martyr's hands – the hands with blue fingernails – remain an integral part of the image.

In the very position of the author of *Dress Rehearsal* one inevitably recognizes a Bulgakovian "prototype": the tragic image of Pushkin is created by an artist handed over to the tender mercies of a new privileged rabble. In a new historical turn there recurred the Soviet authorities' prejudice against the "chief classic": "… by an unerring secret instinct it sensed an enemy in him"[7] , and it no longer hesitated

[5] Veresaev, V. (1927). *The Duel and Death of Pushkin* (p. 36). Moscow: Joint-Stock Publishing Society "Ogonyok". (In Russ.)

[6] Bulgakov, M. (1965). *Dramas and Comedies* (p. 411). Moscow: Iskusstvo Publ. (In Russ.)

[7] Zorin, L. (1997). *Forestage: A Memoir Novel* (p. 311). Moscow: Slovo Publ. (In Russ.)

to declare as much ("What? A play about Pushkin? They will compare him to Solzhenitsyn"[8]).

L. Zorin's reminiscences tellingly bring together Galich and Bulgakov over Pushkin. Having read his colleague's new play, Galich could not conceal his agitation: "I suspected – with good reason – that the loneliness of my hero elicited from him a response. For all the greatness of Pushkin's name, it is unlikely he could refrain – if only for a moment's encouragement – from drawing bitter and flattering parallels with his own burdensome everyday life"[9]. And further: "I had known Galich for many years and had seen him in his merry period – handsome, vivid, loving life in all its everyday manifestations (a purely Bulgakovian trait!)"; "but he vigorously broke his fate. Perhaps that is not quite accurate – fate broke him. Talent proved stronger than inclinations, stronger than metropolitan hedonism; talent subdued its master (again I recall Bulgakov)"[10]. It is not impossible that this memoiristic essay absorbed the echoes of conversations with Galich about Bulgakov, whose biographical legend had long circulated in the theatrical world and by the early 1970s had grown into a fully fledged literary myth.

Galich's Lyric Persona in the Light of the Pushkin Absolute: The "Bulgakovian" Collision

If a legend – which belongs to the realm of the singular – "is deprived of the legislative authority of myth" (Virolainen, 1995, pp. 332–333), the Bulgakov myth, at an early stage of its circulation, already displayed its normativity, encoding self-interpretations. One of the earliest examples of this is Galich's lyric poetry.

An immediate impulse for the poet was Anna Akhmatova's poem *In Memory of M. B-v* (1940), first published in the same year that *The Master and Margarita* was resurrected: "You lived unflinchingly and up to the end / With magnificent disdain"[11]. Taking up the theme of dignity preserved to the end, Galich twice underlined the link with Akhmatova's epitaph to Bulgakov, which makes the coding function of the quotation particularly evident. In "Experience of Despair" (1972) and in "Experience of Nostalgia" (1973?) he retains the rhyme position of the word 'disdain' ('prezren'e') and its connection with the theme of death: "There is neither darkness nor enlightenment, / And you are neither living nor slain. / And the one relief is – disdain – / Sure healer of every pain" (1999, p. 392); "Disdain, disdain, disdain – / Given to us like a new kind of seeing, / And a pass to the repose to come!" (1999, pp. 423–424).

The poem *The Fires Have Broken Out* links the natural disasters of the summer of 1972 with the end of the earthly life of the Master and Margarita, who leave an

[8] Zorin, L. (1997). *Forestage: A Memoir Novel* (p. 310). Moscow: Slovo Publ. (In Russ.)

[9] Ibid., p. 304.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Akhmatova translated by the author: Akhmatova, A. (1966). In Memory of M. B-v. In *Day of Poetry* (p. 50). Leningrad: Sovetskii Pisatel' Publ. (In Russ.)

apocalyptic fire behind them: "The poisoned wind hums and deranges / For days on end without a break. / And we console our own Margaritas / That manuscripts do not burn! / And we console our own Margaritas / That – simply – the ground beneath us is burning…" (1999, p. 379).

Galich's pre-departure lyric, a lyric of self-accounting, naturally brings together the Bulgakovian and Pushkinian "lines." In the Pushkinian context the question is posed anew of an artist who served the truth but "did not deserve the light" ("ne zasluzhil sveta").

Emigration – saving one from arrest and promising the happiness of seeing one's words in print – appears in poetic reflection not as a new life, but as an otherworldly mode of being; the metaphor of *the repose to come* speaks to this clearly. In the lyric reception the collision embodied by the Master is sharpened to the utmost: having preserved the artist's dignity to his last breath, Bulgakov endowed his fictional Doppelganger with his own creative maximalism and human frailty. Measuring his own lot against the tragedy of Bulgakov-Master, Galich shifted attention from circumstances of irresistible force to personal imperfection. The sense of guilt was exacerbated by an appeal to the ideal destiny, manifested by the epigraph prefixed to "Experience of Nostalgia":

> "…As they were driving across the Neva, Pushkin asked jokingly:
> – You're not taking me to the fortress, are you?
> – No, Danzas answered, it's just that the shortest way to the Black River is through the fortress!" (1999, p. 421)

A second epigraph (a modified quotation from Pasternak's "Winter Night") brought the event of Pushkin's duel closer to the present: "…It was last February" (1999, p. 421); a third – the incantatory distich from Akhmatova's poem "In the Nursery" – is a helpless gesture redirected to a poet hurrying toward his goal. The connection of this triad with the personal theme becomes clear as the lyric plot unfolds.

Reining in the ache of parting, the poet reminds himself of the primary loss that threatens every bearer of a creative gift under the rule of the state's "wolves": "Like a stone forest, struck dumb, / We stand upon that fateful verge, / Where the body seems no longer body, / Where the word is – not only not deed – / But not even word any more" (1999, p. 423). To remain faithful to Pushkin's precept that "the poet's words are already his deeds", one must choose the "otherworldly" freedom of exile.

Yielding to nostalgia increases the cost of the sacrifice. Petersburg's "winged horses," the "toy jingle of sleigh-bells", Christmastide, the Russian image of the Eternal Feminine, Pasternak's "February candle" (1999, p. 424) – these are images of memory that evoke the sweet pain by which the exile possesses an inalienable wealth. Yet at the close there is an abrupt break in intonation: "But there is still the Black River, / But there is still the Black River, / But – there – is – still – the Black River! / Do not speak of this. Be silent!" (1999, p. 424).

The ring composition, which heightens the sorrowful semantics of the toponym, recalls the shortest road to the goal, Pushkin's Via Dolorosa. In a value system where the response to the tragic apotheosis of poets is "secret envy – fatal" (1999, p. 129), the only impeccable personal choice could be death at the Black River – on Russia's Golgotha. In the light of the Pushkin absolute even exile turns out to be a compromise. Evasion of the highest fate is the bitter secret of the lyric persona, who falls silent at the instant he recognizes his weakness.

Conclusion

The actualization of the Pushkin myth in Galich's work – closely interwoven with his personal myth-image – is determined by the conviction that the poet's ideal path is unrepeatable. As such, this orientation is not new to twentieth-century Pushkiniana; its uniqueness in Galich's case was conferred by the myth-maker's maximalism: the height of the Pushkin invariant became a categorical imperative.

Reading his own fate through the Bulgakovian code enabled Galich to rise above the empirical and, by interpreting what he had lived through in universal terms, to restore again and again his connection with the ideal. It is precisely in the Pushkin context that the question of the artist who *served truth but did not deserve the light* is posed with utmost urgency.

Bulgakov's principle of the "indivisible yet unmerged" relationship between the Pushkinian and the Gospel myths, as interpreted by Galich, proved to be a truly creative contradiction. Pushkin's 'Christ-likeness' remains implicit, but the implied status of the poet-martyr exerts a decisive influence on the lyrical hero's position: in the presence of the personified ideal, it is impossible to choose any other reference point, and the awareness of one's own imperfection leads beyond the limits of what is accessible in earthly life. This semantic potential determines the emergence of a new level of Pushkinian reflection in Galich's song-poem *When I Return...*, which should be the subject of further research.

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