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The Significance of Single-Syllable Words in E. A. Baratynsky's Poetry of Thought

This article will examine the use of single-syllable words in two important poems on thought by the Russian metaphysical poet E. A. Baratynsky (1800-1844). Following studies done by Jakobson, Shengeli, and Herdan on word length in Russian literature, this paper will discuss Baratynsky's striking use of monosyllables in the poems "Two lots were given by Providence..." («Дало две доли Провидение...»), from 1823, and "More and more thought!.." («Всё мысль да мысль!..»), from 1840. These two poems, which were written near the beginning and end of Baratynsky's literary career, lay out the framework for much of his poetry on thought. An analysis of his use of word length in these poems, along with meter, rhyme, and grammatical features, will show that Baratynsky writes "thought" into their very structure, forcing the reader to join him on his metaphysical quest for meaning while casting doubt on the nature of that "thought."

As noted by Andrea Rolich in her dissertation "The Stanzaic Forms of K. N. Batyuskov and E. A. Baratynskij," Baratynsky's use of form generally followed the poetic norms of the day (149). Rather than creating new forms, Baratynsky as a rule conformed to the standard usages of Russian poetry in the early nineteenth century. His apparent adherence to these standards, however, allowed him to create startling effects that often subverted the surface meaning of his poetry. Although known as the "poet of thought" and as an "incorrigible rationalist" (Sarah Pratt, *Russian Metaphysical Romanticism* 78), the logic, intellectualism, and dualism that seem to underpin Baratynsky's poetry tend to fall apart on closer inspection, much to the consternation of critics such as D. S. Mirsky. Using "Two lots..." and "More and more thought!.." as example poems, this article will demonstrate how formal features, in this specific instance the use of monosyllables, not only require the reader to engage in the "thought" that is the central concern of much of Baratynsky's work, but also support the apparent rationality and actual subversion of logic in his poetry.

Monosyllables possess several interesting aspects that make them suited for undermining straightforward logical constructions and provoking thought in the reader. First of all, while Russian's mobile stress makes it possible to form minimal pairs differentiated only by stress with polysyllabic words (e.g., *múka/muká*, *zámok/zamók*), this is obviously impossible with monosyllables. One could potentially argue that there are minimal pairs such as *pod/pód* ("under/hearth") or *o/ó* ("about/oh"), but, as will be discussed below, Russian poets writing classical verse do not seem to consider the difference in stress between *pod* and *pód* to be as significant as that between *múka* and *muká*.

This leads us to the next significant feature of monosyllables in Russian verse, which is that it is a commonly accepted practice to reverse a foot in a line written in iambs, the most popular meter for Russian poetry, or to insert an extra stress into the line, but only if the hypermetrical stress falls on a single-syllable word. This usage is particularly common at the beginning of the line. In his article "About One-Syllable Words in Russian Verse" ("Ob odnoslozhnykh slovakh v russkom stikhe"), Roman Jakobson gives the examples "S nei ubezhat' mechtal gusar" and "S neiu bezhat' mechtal gusar" («С ней убежать мечтал гусар» and «С нею бежать мечтал гусар»), and points out that the first version is perfectly acceptable in Russian verse, while the use of the second would be a radical exception to the commonly accepted practice (242-3). Jakobson cites Tomashevsky as having found 66 examples in *Eugene Onegin* (referred to in this article as *EO*) of a "trochaic-iambic" opening to a line with a monosyllable as the first word (242), as in the first example given above. Monosyllables thus have a fluid and ambiguous nature in Russian iambic verse, allowing the poet to reverse the expected stress for special effect.

Another aspect of monosyllables in Russian verse is their relative rarity. Barry Scherr, citing studies by Gustav Herdan and Georgii Shengeli, suggests that between 15 and 33 percent of the words in literary Russian are monosyllables (*Russian Poetry* 3-6)—the large difference in the percentages arising from whether or not clitics were considered part of the main word in the different studies. However, even the highest figures are considerably lower than the 75-80% of monosyllabic English words (4-6), giving Russian verse a very different sound from its English counterpart, even when poems are written in the same meter. One could expect to find especially low numbers of one-syllable words

in positions of strong metrical stress, and in fact that is the case. Because the fourth ictus (the eighth syllable) in a line of iambic tetrameter must bear stress and is therefore the strongest, it would be expected to have the fewest number of monosyllabic words. According to Jakobson's analysis of Tatyana's letter from *EO*, for example, the fourth ictus contains a monosyllabic word only 15.3% of the time, while the third ictus, which is the weakest in a line of iambic tetrameter, has the highest number of monosyllables, at 21.1% (247).

Following Jakobson's lead, I counted the number of monosyllables in the fourth ictus in Chapter Three of *EO*, and discovered 78 instances of a monosyllable in the fourth ictus. Disregarding the "Girls' song," which is not written in iambic tetrameter, Chapter Three has 647 lines. 78/647 is approximately 12%, giving us the predicted low rate of monosyllables in the final ictus. A discussion of Pushkin's fascinating if infrequent use of monosyllables in *EO* is unfortunately outside the scope of this article; suffice it to say that when they do appear in the fourth ictus, they are often pronouns that are either being used to lighten up the mood, as in the lines «Журналов вняв молящий глас, / К грамматике приучит нас; / стихи введут в употребление; / Но я... какое дело мне? / Я верен буду старине» ("Heeding the pleading voice of the journals, / We are schooled in grammar; / Verses are brought into use; / But I...what is it to me? / I will be faithful to olden times") (*Stikhotvoreniia* 348-9), or for emphasis and foreshadowing, as in the repetition of rhyme «он/сон» ("he/dream"), often in conjunction with «Грандисон» ("Grandison"). In the poems by Baratynsky that are the main focus of this article, we will see how he uses monosyllables for special effect, as Pushkin does, while also taking advantage of their ambiguous nature as bearers of stress to undercut the binary dualism that at first glance appears to form the core of his metaphysics.

The first poem under consideration in this paper, "Two lots were given by fate" («Дало две доли провидение...»), is from 1823, when Baratynsky was just beginning to explore the metaphysical themes that became prevalent in his mature poetry. This early work, while a less concentrated expression of Baratynsky's metaphysics than "More and more thought!..", still gives a clear picture of the dualist worldview of Baratynsky's poetic persona, and the underlying conflict between happiness and intellect with which this poetic persona struggled:

Дало две доли провидение
На выбор мудрости людской:
Или надежду и волнение,
Иль безнадежность и покой.

Верь тот надежде обольщающей,
Кто бодр неопытным умом,
Лишь по молве разновещающей
С судьбой насмешливой знаком.

Надейтесь, юноши кипящие!
Летите, крылья вам даны;
Для вас и замыслы блестящие,
И сердца пламенные сны!

Но вы, судьбину испытавшие,
Тщету утех, печали власть,
Вы, знание бытия приявшие
Себе на тягостную часть!

Гоните прочь их рой прельстительный;
Так! доживайте жизнь в тиши
И берегите хлад спасительный
Своей бездейственной души.

Своим бесчувствием блаженные,
Как трупы мертвых из гробов,
Волхва словами пробужденные,
Встают со скрежетом зубов; —

Так вы, согрев в душе желанья,
Безумно вдавшись в их обман,

Проснетесь только для страдания,
Для боли новой прежних ран.
(Evgenii Baratynskii, *Poeziia, Proza, Publitsistika (Poetry, Prose, Journalism)* 92-3)

Two lots were given by Providence,
For the choice of human wisdom:
Either hope and agitation,
Or hopelessness and peace.

Those emboldened by inexperienced intellect,
Will believe in deceptive hope,
Acquainted with mocking fate
Only through self-contradictory rumor.

Have hope, ebullient youths!
Fly, you have been given wings!
Both brilliant plans,
And fiery dreams of the heart are for you.

But you, who have experienced fate,
The futility of delight, the power of sorrow,
You, who have taken the knowledge of being
Upon yourself as a heavy burden!

Chase away their seductive swarm;
So! Live out your life in quiet,
And preserve the delivering cold
Of your inert soul.

Blessed in your insensibility,
As the corpses of the dead from their graves,
Awakened by the words of a sorcerer,
Rise with grinding teeth; —

So you, cherishing in your soul desires,
Thoughtlessly giving in to their deception,
Awaken only for suffering,
For the new pain of old wounds.

(Translation my own).

“Two lots...” is written in iambic tetrameter with alternating dactylic and masculine endings. The longer first line with its dactylic ending provides an open-ended beginning to each distich within the quatrain, drawing the reader or listener in, while the shorter second line with its masculine ending provides a strong sensation of closure.

The distiches are joined into quatrains by the alternating rhyme scheme, which links the first and second half of each stanza. The dactylic rhymes in each stanza are all from the same parts of speech, while the masculine rhymes are not necessarily so. Except for the first and last stanzas, all the dactylic rhymes in each stanza are made up not only of the same word type, but of words in the same case (in the first stanza «провидение» is nominative singular and «волнение» is accusative singular, while in the final stanza «желания» is accusative plural and «страдания» is genitive singular), while except in the fourth and sixth stanzas, the masculine rhymes are either different parts of speech, or in different cases. There is therefore a contrast between the more stable and uniform dactylic rhymes, and the less predictable and less uniform masculine rhymes.

The dactylic rhymes in the first and last stanzas are made up of neuter abstract verbal nouns, giving them a particularly undefined quality, and also emphasizing the trapped circularity of the lyrical “I,” who cannot seem to escape from this long-drawn-out abstraction implied by the form and meaning of this type of word. The open-ended and undefined quality of the neuter abstract verbal nouns is in contrast to the masculine rhymes of the final stanza (обман/ран). The concluding word of the poem, «ран», is in

fact a grammatically feminine noun (рана) that has been “masculinized” by being put into the genitive plural, causing it to lose its –а ending and allowing it to be used to create a masculine ending to the line. This “masculinization” of a grammatically feminine word places a strong emphasis on the final masculine rhyme.

The ending of the poem in a single-syllable word is even more marked, given the tendency in Russian verse to avoid using monosyllabic words in strong ictuses, as discussed above. In “Two lots...” there are only four monosyllabic words in the fourth ictus («сны», «власть», «часть», and «ран»). Fewer than a sixth (14%, or a very similar figure to what is found in *EO*), therefore, of all the lines end in a monosyllabic word. The scarcity of monosyllabic words in the final ictus, both in the poem and in Russian verse in general, makes «ран» stand out particularly clearly as a choice for the final word of the poem.

The truncation of its “natural” grammatical and metrical feminine ending gives it, and the line as a whole, a strong sense of completion. The contrast between the open-ended abstract verbal nouns and the final, single-syllable concrete noun with its abbreviated ending “cuts off” the poem at that point, leaving the reader with no hope of appeal against Baratynsky’s seemingly inescapable binary construction. The form of this poem, therefore, emphasizes its apparent theme of inexorable logic and hopeless, irreconcilable opposition between two unattractive options.

The opening line of the poem—«Дало две доли провидение»—indicates that we will be dealing with a binary system here (две доли). The fact that it is given by Providence (Провидение) suggests that it is immutable and inevitable. We therefore begin the poem already trapped in dualism.

The first stanza begins by setting up a dualist world view in general, and ends by setting up a specific binary opposition that would haunt Baratynsky in one form or another throughout his career: надежда и волнение (hope and agitation) versus безнадежность и покой (hopelessness and peace). There is, then, no unequivocally positive choice for the poet here: hope brings with it a life of trouble and care, while peace is purchased at the price of hopelessness. Knowledge and ignorance are contrasted, with neither presented as an attractive option: those who are still ignorant of the world live in a state of deception and are sure to be disillusioned and disappointed as they become acquainted with life, while those who have already taken on “the knowledge

of being” gain nothing but the possibility of fresh misery from it. Those who possess knowledge are shown as having fallen into a post-Edenic state not by engaging willfully in sin, but simply by being exposed to the truth, which, in this as in other Baratynsky poems, has a corrosive effect on happiness. Furthermore, by presenting these as the only two choices available to “human wisdom,” while linking the word «ум» (intellect) with the adjective «неопытный» (inexperienced) in the second stanza and the prefix «без» in the word «Безумно» (crazily or thoughtlessly) in the final stanza, the intellect is devalued throughout the poem as an instrument for making decisions. The overall depiction of truth, knowledge, and the intellect is profoundly negative in this poem, and, while they are contrasted with feelings and desires, this binary contrast is more apparent than actual, as the choice between intellect and feeling is a false one: fate, not free will, will force knowledge on the unsuspecting “ebullient youths,” without suppressing their hopes and desires entirely, so that they will live a half-life between the “agitation” and “peace” that are set up as the two possible options for “human wisdom” in the first stanza.

This ambiguous status is echoed by the gender of the monosyllabic rhyme words in the poem. Three out of the four of the single-syllable words used in masculine rhymes are grammatically feminine, which suggests both dualism and the undermining of this dualism, as these words are simultaneously feminine and masculine. In the final line of the poem, «Для боли новой прежних ран», the apparent dualism is given particularly strong emphasis through the direct juxtaposition of the adjectives *новый* and *прежний*, while the grammatical forms of the two nouns in the line, *боли* and *ран*, highlight the reversal that has taken place in the final stanza as the formerly hopeless addressees have reawakened to their painful hopes. While *боль* and *рана* are both feminine, by being put in the genitive *боль* gains a syllable, while *рана* loses a syllable, so that they “switch places,” with a grammatically feminine monosyllable becoming a disyllabic word and a grammatically feminine disyllable becoming monosyllabic while also completing a masculine line of verse. The way in which the key words in the final line of the poem are transformed and change places echoes the ability of the poem’s addressees to transform from hopeful to hopeless and back again.

The transformation that is implied throughout the poem and that is made explicit in the final stanza undercuts the dualist structure set up in the first stanza, and its apparent balance is undermined by the emphasis (even if frequently negative) given to hope

throughout the poem, and the preference given to it in the poem's conclusion. Ultimately, "Two lots..." seems to be less an exercise in pure dualism than an attempt to set up a dualist system that leads the poet into such despair that the only choice in the end is pain—a sort of monoism, instead of the intended binary system. Just as the structure of this poem appears to follow the general guidelines for verse of its era while in fact subverting them by making the most strongly emphasized word in the poem a monosyllable, the content appears to set up an argument in binary logic that in fact negates the possibility of such logic.

Thought and logic would continue to be important themes and intractable sticking points in Baratynsky's poetry for the next two decades. Baratynsky's thoughts on thought are perhaps most clearly expressed in the following poem, written in 1840:

Всё мысль да мысль! Художник бедный слова!
 О жрец ее! тебе забвенья нет;
 Всё тут, да тут и человек, и свет,
 И смерть, и жизнь, и правда без покрова.
 Резец, орган, кисть! счастлив, кто влеком
 К ним чувственным, за грань их не ступая!
 Есть хмель ему на празднике мирском!
 Но пред тобой, как пред нагим мечом,
 Мысль, острый луч! бледнеет жизнь земная.
 (Boratynskii 249)

More and more thought! Poor artist of the word!
 O thought's priest! No oblivion for you;
 All is here, why here is man, and world,
 And death, and life, and unveiled truth.
 Chisel, organ, brush! Happy is he drawn
 To those sensual arts, not crossing their boundary!
 There is intoxication for him at this carnal feast!
 But before you, as if before a naked blade,
 Thought, sharp ray! Earthly life grows pale.
 (Translation my own)

The structure of the poem demands the thought that the poem implies is the fate of the “poor artist of the word.” The poem is written in iambic pentameter with a fixed caesura after the second foot. The caesura after the fourth syllable was obligatory in the beginning of the 19th century, but by the time this poem written it had already begun to fall out of favor (Scherr 55). The exact structure of the meter, therefore, was in a state of flux when «Всё мысль да мысль!..» was written and published, and so the more erudite reader might have felt compelled to pause and search for the caesura in every line, slowing down the reading and requiring a great deal of “thought.”

The rhythm is further confused, further requiring thought from the reader, by the heavy use of monosyllabic words in the poem. Discounting the preposition «к», the poem contains 61 words, of which 37, or approximately 60%, are monosyllabic. There are 15, or approximately 25%, bisyllabic words, and only 9, or 15%, trisyllabic words. Referring back to the studies cited by Scherr and mentioned at the beginning of this article, on average, works by Russian authors tend to contain 15-30% monosyllabic words, over 30% bisyllabic words, and over 30% of words with three or more syllables (Scherr 3-6). «Всё мысль да мысль!..», therefore, contains a much higher percentage of monosyllabic words, and a much lower percentage of trisyllabic words, than the average for works by Russian authors.

This heavy use of monosyllabic words not only breaks the norm for usage in Russian poetry, it also helps create more confusion about the exact nature of the meter and its precise rhythmical structure. This confusion is exacerbated by the frequent hypermetrical stressing and the use of pronouns and prepositions, which normally do not bear stress, in positions of stress. In the reproduction of the poem below I have highlighted words with potential or definite hypermetrical stress in red, and words that would not normally bear stress but here are in positions of metric stress, in blue.

Всё мысль да мысль! Художник бедный слова!

О жрец **ее!** тебе забвенья нет;

Всё **тут**, да **тут** и человек, и свет,

И смерть, и жизнь, и правда **без** покрова.

Резец, орган, **кисть!** счастлив, **кто** влеком

К ним чувственным, за грань их **не** ступая!

Есть хмель ему на празднике мирском!

Но **пред** тобой, как **пред** нагим мечом,
Мысль, острый луч! бледнеет жизнь земная.

As can be seen, the first three lines all contain either definite or possible hypermetrical stress on the first syllable («Всё» must be stressed, even if lightly, and «О», as an exclamation, could also carry emphasis). Furthermore, all the words before the caesura in the first four lines are either monosyllabic or pronouns, making the exact nature of the meter difficult to determine at the beginning of each line. This creates an expectation in the reader/listener of an uncertain rhythm made up of monosyllabic or lightly stressed words in the first part of the line—an expectation that is broken in line five with its two bisyllabic words in the first two ictuses, and then in line six with the only trisyllabic word before the caesura in the poem. In the reproduction of the poem below I have marked the caesura with a slash, and also highlighted the bisyllabic words in green and the trisyllabic words in purple, in order to show their positions in the lines:

Всё мысль да мысль! / **Художник бедный слова!**
 О жрец **ее!** / **тебе забвенья нет;**
 Всё тут, да тут / и **человек**, и свет,
 И смерть, и жизнь, / и **правда без покрова.**
Резец, орган, / кисть! **счастлив**, кто **влеком**
 К ним **чувственным**, / за грань их не **ступая!**
 Есть хмель **ему** / на **празднике мирском!**
 Но **пред тобой**, / как **пред нагим мечом**,
Мысль, острый луч! / **бледнеет жизнь земная.**

As this shows, of the nine trisyllabic words in the poem, only «чувственным» is positioned before the caesura, while «Резец, орган» are the first fully-stressed bisyllabic words to appear before the caesura in the poem. This places the “sensual arts” and the tools used to create them under special emphasis, but also putting them outside of the system of the poem’s structure. Line five is also the only line in the poem to have four bisyllabic words, and line six is the first to have two trisyllabic words (the final line also contains two trisyllabic words, but after the caesura). This sets line five and six off rhythmically from the first half of the poem, so that, while these lines are written in the

same meter as the first four lines, the use of longer words gives them a very different sound, setting off the lines that describe the work of the “sensual artist” from those that describe that of the “poor artist of the word.”

Line seven, which describes the intoxication available to the “sensual artist” at the “carnal feast,” returns to the rhythmic pattern established in the first four lines of the poem, in which all the words before the caesura are either monosyllabic or pronouns, but it is nonetheless set off from the rest of the poem by being the only line which contains no syntactical break. As in lines five and six, the reader/listener is drawn along with the sensations of the “sensual artist,” so that we are also given a taste of the “intoxication” of a flowing, unchecked artistic experience.

In the final two lines of the poem “Thought” is addressed directly. Line eight is striking for its use of potentially unstressed words («пред», «тобой», «пред») in the first three ictuses, thereby giving heavy emphasis to the final two words in the line, «нагим мечом». «Мечом» receives particularly strong emphasis not only by being in the strongest ictus of the line, but by being the last rhyme-word in a triple rhyme («влеком», «мирском», and «мечом»), and by being placed directly before a syntactic and line break.

The transition between lines eight and nine, with a masculine ending in line eight followed by a hypermetrical stress at the beginning of line nine, creates a cluster of stressed syllables that slows the reader/listener down and forces them to pay close attention to the meter—to engage in thought, that is. There is a similar transition between lines two and three («забвенья нет; / Всѣ тут») and at the caesura in line five. However, the effect is even stronger at the transition between lines eight and nine, as the collection of stresses at the transition between lines two and three is made up entirely of monosyllabic words, while the collection of stresses at the caesura in line five is not further emphasized by the presence of a rhyme word. The overall effect of lines eight and nine is one of rising emphasis throughout line eight, with the most intense emphasis at the beginning of line nine due to the hypermetrical stress on the word «МЫСЛЬ» (the subject and addressee of the poem), followed immediately by a fully-stressed ictus («острый»), and then another stress and strong syntactic break at the caesura («луч!»). The phrase «МЫСЛЬ, острый луч!» is therefore the emotional and emphatic zenith of the poem.

The second part of line nine contains two trisyllabic words, making it only one of two lines in the poem to have two trisyllabic words, and the only line in the poem to have both trisyllabic words after the caesura. After the rough, uncertain rhythm created by the extensive use of monosyllabic words earlier in the poem, followed by cluster of stresses in the phrase «пред нагим мечом, / Мысль, острый луч!» (further emphasized by two consecutive «м» clusters—«нагим мечом, Мысль»), the appearance of two trisyllabic words at the very end of the poem smoothes out the rhythm, allowing the final line of the poem, especially with its feminine rhyme, to “fade away” just as earthly life does before the “naked blade” or the “sharp ray” of thought.

This fading away at the end of “More and more thought!..” contrasts with the end of “Two lots...,” which comes to a full halt with its masculine rhyme, but both poems conclude in a way that appears to support the logical conclusions of the author. The abrupt ending of “Two lots...” seems to give no hope of appeal, forcing the reader to accept its bitter conclusion that experience brings suffering and peace can only be achieved through hopelessness, while the final line of “More and more thought!..”, with its “softer” and more deliberate feminine ending, finishes on a stately note that lends the author gravitas without distracting the reader’s attention from the «Мысль, острый луч!» phrase, which, as mentioned above, serves as the poem’s focal point.

However, in both poems the author’s logical conclusions and binary constructions are put under threat by his use of monosyllables. The final word of “Two lots...”, «ран», is slippery and prone to transformation. Its status as a monosyllable means that it can bear metrical stress or not, as the author chooses, while it is transformed from its two-syllable base form into a monosyllable by being put into the genitive plural. Furthermore, it is a grammatically feminine word that is being used to create a masculine rhyme ending. To the reader who engages in “thought,” all these things suggest that the categories the author is using are not nearly so cut-and-dried as he seems to be saying, and cause the reader to question the dualist system of the “two lots” for which the author is ostensibly arguing.

In “More and more thought!..” the prevalence of monosyllables in the poem means that the reader can not immediately be certain of the meter or the position of the caesura, and while those uncertainties are eventually resolved in favor of iambic pentameter with a caesura after the second ictus, the doubt that this casts on the author’s

formal and logical constructions lingers throughout the rest of this short poem. The structure of the poem requires the reader to engage in “thought,” but the thinking reader will be forced to notice that the poem’s formal and logical structure do not hold water as examples of pure form or logic. The meter is broken up by the use of monosyllables and pronouns, while the statements of which the poem is composed do not follow each other in a logical chain of thought, but are scattered in an impressionistic fashion that leaves the reader in no doubt of the lyrical hero’s distaste for being ruled by thought, while jumping from topic to topic and addressee to addressee with little attempt to connect them or even clarify who is who. The uncertainty of the meter and the uncertainty of the subject matter plunge the reader into an equal state of uncertainty and undermine the conclusions that the author is trying to make.

Baratynsky has been hailed by everyone from Pushkin onwards as a poet who thinks, and his poems unquestionably grapple with thought and cause their reader to think about both their form and the content. However, they are less straightforward and more difficult to grasp than may appear at first blush, full of contradictions and insoluble conundrums that undermine the logic of the arguments he appears to be presenting. Their form, in which Baratynsky gives the rules of classical Russian verse his own particular twist, highlights and supports their content, in which tropes common to Russian Romantic poetry are subtly reworked in a distinctly Baratynskyan fashion. This article has focused on his use of monosyllables in two poems about the inescapability of knowledge and the concomitant suffering it brings. While the conclusions drawn in the poems are of the inevitability of pain, the emphasis placed on monosyllabic words in them suggests that at a certain level the author is undermining his own argument, or at least pointing to a way out of the dilemma in which his lyrical hero is trapped. Just as the poems’ forms are filled with words that occupy a “twilight zone” between stressed and unstressed, metrical and hypermetrical, or—in the case of «паH»—masculine and feminine, so too are the poems’ contents filled with thoughts that could just as easily go the other way, so that the reader can ultimately come to the conclusion that human wisdom has been given many more choices than two.

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