

Piotr Głuszkowski, *Barwy polskości, czyli życie burzliwe Tadeusza Bułharyna* [Colours of Polish Character, or Turbulent Life of Tadeusz Bułharyn] Cracow: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2018, 445 pp., Biblioteka Literatury Pogranicza, vol. 26

The reviewed work is a biography of Tadeusz Bułharyn (1789–1859), a publisher and editor of newspapers in St Petersburg, a popular novelist and columnist writing in Russian. This Petersburg Pole is well known in the history of Russian culture of that period, and has often appeared in the works on the leading Russian writers — Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol', Aleksandr Griboedov or Petr Viazemskii. Bułharyn was usually a negative background for them, a person embodying servility toward rulers and literary cynicism. His position in the history of Russian culture was to a large degree defined by the significance of

persons who were in personal or literary dispute with him. Recently this approach has changed; Bułharyn's work and activity have become a subject of numerous studies in Russia. The author of the most important of them is Abram Rejtlat, who published, among other things, a substantive collection of sources on Bułharyn's collaboration with the central police institution — the III Department of the Personal Chancellery of the Emperor. Piotr Głuszkowski's book, although it covers the whole biography of Bułharyn, is in the author's intention an attempt to look at him from a Polish perspective and to expose Polish threads in his life.

Bułharyn's biographers must confront themselves with numerous myths, which Bułharyn created himself and which were created about him. The protagonist of the book had reasons to camouflage certain elements of his life. In childhood he was in the St Petersburg cadet school, next he became a brave officer of the Russian army, but in 1811 he joined the French army in which he participated in the war of 1812. He admitted that he took part in this war, but — Głuszkowski suspects — he did not disclose that he had been in Moscow during its seizure and fire. Other biographical fiction was linked with his literary work of a strongly autobiographical character. On the other hand, the increasing aversion of the Russian intellectual elites toward him fostered the emergence of nasty gossips about him. The author of the book managed to sort out some of these myths and biographical riddles; others (such as Bułharyn's participation in the Spanish war) will wait for future researchers.

The book shows in an interesting way Bułharyn's great Petersburg successes as an editor of several magazines and newspapers (mainly the *Severnaia pchela* [Northern Bee] daily) and as a novelist, the author of a very popular novel *Ivan Vyzhigin*. But this was accompanied by the gradual increase of controversies and aversion towards him. Consequently, he was the subject of numerous epigrams and more or less camouflaged attacks in the press. He was accused of participation in the war of 1812 on the side of the enemy. His unclear attitude to the Decembrists also caused hostility. Bułharyn was a friend of the leading representatives of this movement, he probably had known about the action they prepared, but in the most important moment he remained neutral. The fact that he soon initiated collaboration with the secret police besmirched his earlier attitude. Bułharyn's press successes were controversial, since they were partly the result of the protection of rulers, as well as ruthlessly counteracting the competition. The aversion of the Russian intellectual elites to Bułharyn also resulted from changes in culture, including changes of literary tastes — one should especially mention the mutual antipathy between him and Gogol' and the whole so called 'natural school'. Separate chapters of the book are focused on Bułharyn's relations with Gogol' and Pushkin.

Głuszkowski shows that Bułharyn, as a Pole writing in Russian, was in fact approved by Polish intellectual elites before 1831. He was in good contact with Adam Mickiewicz, who to a large extent owed to him permission to leave Russia. The November Uprising was a radical limit. Bułharyn, as the editor of a St Petersburg

newspaper, could not avoid presenting the official line of Russian rulers toward the uprising, although Głuszkowski mentions that articles of *Severnaia pchela* differed from other Russian papers by their more gentle tone. The milieu in which Bułharyn functioned in Russia did not matter to Polish public opinion (especially in the Congress Kingdom of Poland — Russian partition) before 1831. After the uprising the situation changed. For example, we find characteristic mentions in the book about his warm correspondence with a colleague from cadet school Andrei Storozhenko, that is, the notorious president of the Investigation Committee in Warsaw.

I believe that the issue of Bułharyn's collaboration with the III Department until 1831 requires an analysis. The author is correct when he mentions that Bułharyn was not an ordinary agent, and he agrees with Rejtblat that we should rather speak about the status of a consultant. But it seems to me that more important than determining the nature of Bułharyn's collaboration with the III Department is the problem of the role which this institution, especially its head, General Alexander von Benckendorff, played in the Polish affairs.¹ These issues are not analysed deeply but we may probably state that Benckendorff was the main advisor of Nicholas I regarding the Congress Kingdom of Poland. It mainly related to the limitation of the role of the Grand Duke Constantine in Congress Poland, and in a longer perspective removing him from Warsaw. A secondary issue was ridding Congress Poland of Nikolai Novosil'tsev, who after Alexander's I death was in fact an advisor of the Grand Duke and not a direct representative of the emperor. Bułharyn's memorials filed with the III Department were compatible with these political plans of Nicholas I. Bułharyn wrote both about Congress Poland and the Polish governorates of the Empire (due to the role played there by Constantine and Novosil'tsev). Expectations of recipients, including the emperor, facilitated his very critical opinions on Novosil'tsev's activity in Vilna (Vilnius). In this context, cooperation with the III Department did not have to be very difficult for Bułharyn due to his feeling that his advice would promote observance of the Constitution and the liberalization of the rulers' policy toward Poles. One must mention, though, that he used these contacts to combat the press competition.

The central question of the book is the problem of Bułharyn's national identification — how he himself presented his identity and how he was defined by other people, the Russians and Poles. The Russians perceived him as a Pole. For majority of Poles he was after 1831 a renegade, a man who purposefully denied his Polish identity. But Poles living in St Petersburg evaluated him in a different way and he was still a member of the local Polish milieu. The author shows these different perceptions of 'his' protagonist: the emigration, Warsaw, 'Lithuanian' and St Petersburg.

¹ See: Waclaw Tokarz, *Sprzysiężenie Wysockiego i noc listopadowa*, ed. Andrzej Zahorski, Warsaw, 1980, pp. 71–72.

Bułharyn was of the opinion that Poles, just like the Baltic Germans, should participate in the life of Russia. The case of the Baltic Germans was well known to him as since 1828 he had had a property near Dorpat (Tartu). His views did not leave room for any independence aspirations, but he did not think about the need to renounce Polish culture or history. I believe that it would be interesting to compare Bułharyn with Henryk Rzewuski, who acted at the same time and had similar opinions and views. It seems that Rzewuski to a greater extent assumed Poles' assimilation into Russian culture. Of course they were in different situations — Bułharyn who wrote in Russian and played an important role in Russian literary work could not avoid confronting his ideas with the opinions of Russian elites. Głuszkowski's book shows how Bułharyn's concepts with time became less and less realistic and collided with the ideology of 'official nationality' formulated by Sergei Uvarov (on the orders of Nicholas I). Bułharyn, while fully supporting one element of this ideology (tsarist autocracy), tried to redefine the other two: to change Orthodox religion to Christianity, and to see nationality as not relating exclusively to ethnic Russians.

Summing up, the book is an interesting voice in the discussion on the complex national identities of Poles in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is a part of research on national awareness and norms of conduct in the situations of political choice.

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