

Title: Death Staged in Baroque Lyrics: Comparing C. Achillini, E. Chudovskii and S. Polotskii
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Abstract:

Three poems: “La morte” (Death) by Claudio Achillini (1574-1640), “Ili sitse” (Or so) by Evfimii Chudovskii (1620-1705), and “Smerti pamiat” (Memento Mori) by Simeon Polotskii (1629-1680). All deal with a theme central to the Baroque – death. What similarities and what differences exist between a poem stemming from the Western secular tradition and two poems resulting from a Russian culture still dominated by Orthodoxy?

Since they deal with the same theme, these poems share certain features that may be associated with it, such as a feeling of instability, the theme of *vanitas vanitatum*, and the problematic nature of the lyrical “I.” In developing these features, these poets use similar sources, and in fact both the biblical and the classical traditions resonate in the poems. Notwithstanding these similarities, the Italian poem reveals a cultural background that clearly distinguishes it from the Russian ones. For instance, the earthly, theatrical vision of the world typical of the Italian Baroque is absent in the Russian poems, whereas the didactic focus of the Russian poems is alien to the Italian.

Similarities exist also at the stylistic level, reflecting a conspicuous attention to style and an attempt to express the poet’s own poetic voice. These characteristics suggest that the models provided by Western Baroque poetry were assimilated in the Russian literature of the time in an original way. However, in the West, Baroque poetry responded to the Renaissance tradition; how was the Baroque received in a Russia, with no prior (high) poetic practice? Russian literary Baroque manifests an eclectic nature, selecting those elements from Western culture that could be synthesized with traditional culture more easily and rejecting those that contradicted key principles of Russian culture. Eclecticism thus emerges as a distinguishing characteristic of Russian Baroque that contributed to a new concept of literariness in early modern Russia.