

Drozdek, Adam

## Spiritual journey in Maikov's poetry

*Opera Slavica*. 2014, vol. 24, iss. 1, pp. 1-10

ISSN 1211-7676 (print); ISSN 2336-4459 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/130184>

Access Date: 03. 12. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

## SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IN MAIKOV'S POETRY

Adam Drozdek (Pittsburgh)

### Abstract:

In the first period of Maikov's life, spiritual elements are used in his poetry in primarily an ironic, a satiric, and even a burlesque manner, particularly in *The player of ombre* and *Elisei*. Theological references made in odes praising Catherine are more about Catherine as the chosen of God than about the nature of God. After Maikov joined masonry, his poetry became more reflective, meditative, more concerned about spirituality. However, while yearning for spiritual fulfillment, he was satisfied with a somewhat generic religion that included a monotheistic belief in providential God with an unclear role of Christ in personal salvation.

**Key words:** Maikov, masons, theology, eschatology

### Спиритуальный путь в поэзии В. И. Майкова

#### Абстракт:

В первом периоде жизни Майкова, духовные элементы используются в его поэзии в первую очередь ироническим и сатирическим образом, особенно в *Игроке ломбера* и в *Елисее*. Богословские ссылки сделанные в одах восхваляющих Екатерину говорят более о Екатерине как избраннице Божьей чем о природе Бога. После Майков присоединился масонам, его поэзия становилась более задумчивой и медитативной. Однако в то время он был удовлетворен общей религией, которая включала монотеистическую веру в провиденциального Бога, но роль Христа в личном спасении оставалась неясной.

**Ключевые слова:** Майков, масоны, богословие, эсхатология

Vasilii Ivanovich Maikov was one of the most celebrated poets of the eighteenth century. His initial education “was limited to reading devotional books and to moral instruction” (SP xii),<sup>1</sup> which was not unusual for these times. However, the spiritual side of this education was apparently lost on Maikov in his early years as a poet since spiritual elements in his early poetry are used in

---

<sup>1</sup> References are made to: SP – Василий И. Майков, Сочинения и переводы, Санкт-Петербург: И. И. Глазунов 1867. A page number is sometimes followed by a song and a verse numbers.

primarily an ironic, a satiric, and even a burlesque manner. Only in his later poetry were spiritual aspects treated in all seriousness, sometimes in somber, sometimes in joyous tone, but always as something central to his social and particularly personal life.

## 1

Maikov's career as a poet was not long. He started publishing his poetry in 1762 and continued to the end of his life in 1778. In the first period of his literary life, his poetry included primarily odes, fables, and satirical poems. Two such poems brought him to fame, *The player of ombre* (1763) and *Elisei* (1769). They both are categorized as heroi-comic poems in that they use a lofty tone to present rather trivial events. The first is about the game of cards that was a splash at that time in Russia – and not only in Russia – the other is a parody of *Aeneid*, particularly of its then-recent translation of book 1 done by the court-poet Petrov.

*The player of ombre* begins on a rather serious tone: “O truth, you are a direct mother of all that is good, / You should never be neglected. / You are a true mirror of our conscience; / You must not at all be put aside; / You are a shield in a misfortune, beauty in happy time; / It is endurable to await with you even the time of death; / You shine equally in small and in big things, / You save [us] from woe and from perishing” (SP 225/1. 47–54). The author also urges the readers: “Oh, you, all players, hasten to my song, / And listen in silence to the voice of the lyre; / Understand what a game can cause; / A game can often lead us into misfortune” (228/2. 1–4). The hero of the poem, Laender, is led to the Temple of Ombre (230/2. 85): “From three sides it was surrounded by three walls / And three gates made [three] different entries” (231/2. 121–122); these three gates are: golden, through which enter players who play with restraint; silver, for players who frequently misbehave; and copper, for those completely overcome by passions of the game and who often do not even reach the gate since they slip to hell from the steps leading to this gate (231/2. 123–136). Hell is in an abyss from which comes fire, ash, smoke, and stench (234/3. 19–20). In hell, there is a judgment throne of Rhadamanthys, Minos, and Aeacus. One player before them said that there is no greater evil than the schism in the game of ombre, and the heresy is called *poliak*, but the judges scolded him for saying that and considered *poliak* to be the perfection of the game, and sentenced the player to eternal suffering (236/3. 59–75).

The hell is modeled on the underworld of *Aeneid* 6, which harks back to Hades and Tartarus of the Greek mythology. The tone of the voyage through hell is tongue in cheek, which is aimed at amusing the readers rather than bringing them to the renunciation of or at least to moderation in gambling. The temple is hardly anything that can invoke pious attitude: inside, players discuss their experiences with the game in an atmosphere devoid of any sacredness. The

temple itself appears to be a three-sided pyramid which may be an allusion to the temple as envisioned by masons.<sup>2</sup> The schism may be a mocking allusion to the schism in the Orthodox church and the allusion sides with the schismatics. The reason may be that schismatics were sincerely committed to their cause ready to be imprisoned for their beliefs; some even set themselves of fire.

The *Elisei* is a long poem in which Bacchus uses the coachman Elisei in his battle against limiting the access to alcohol. There are many scenes in the Olympus mocking the council of the gods, scenes of scuffles, and quite a few bedroom scenes. To a large extent it is a raunchy poem and in a rather poor taste,<sup>3</sup> and maybe because of it Maikov is primarily remembered as the author of this particular work. As to religious matters, what is clear from this poem is Maikov's intense dislike of the clergy and hypocrisy in general. When Bacchus makes his case before Zeus for the greatness of wine, he says that the clergy would confirm it (SP 326/3. 120). There is an image of a usurer (tax-farmer) who "Remained all night in prayer / So that the Lord would not consider it to be a sin; / In churches he appeared to be more pious than all [people] / Such are all fakes and hypocrites / At once of Christian and [yet] of no faith" (340/4. 248–252). He also prays to end a storm, but "The thunder does not listen to such a steward / Who amasses [his] riches by untruth / And ruined [his] neighbors by lease for the treasury" (343/4. 380–382). After Elisei destroyed all alcohol in his cellar, the tax-farmer thought it was the devil's work and scared, he called a priest "So that he does not die in his sins / And does not burn eternally in gehenna's fire. / Oh, base soul, what are you doing, / And by this price are you buying heaven, / When orphans harmed by you / Proclaim that you should be in hell? / May your home be hell and your suffering retribution: / First, repay generously to those you harmed, / And then fly to paradise on these wings / That elevate here honest people; / And those harmed by you will plead for you" (347/5. 94–106). According to Orthodoxy, salvation is due to the grace of God who in the person of Christ took upon himself the sins of people. Maikov did not apparently have much use for

---

<sup>2</sup> As suggested by Manfred Schrubba, *Studien zu den burlesken Dichtungen V. I. Majkovs*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1997, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> The *Elisei* was popular in spite of its "scandalous content"; it is an example of literature in which "gayety frequently reaches [the level of] shamelessness" because of its "immodesty" as stated by Leonid N. Maikov (PS xxix). In this poem, "familiar language was deliberately pushed to [the level of] vulgarity" and was "a rude blow to all the constraints that classicism imposed in the name of good taste," André Monnier, *Un publiciste frondeur sous Catherine II: Nicolas Novikov*, Paris: Institut d'études slaves 1981, p. 44. "Majkov uses the burlesque technique of substituting the common and the crude for that which is noble and lofty," James M. Curtis, *Vasilij Majkov, an eighteenth-century Russian poet*, PhD diss., Columbia University 1968, p. 137; Maikov also turned to pornography, pp. 148, 242.

this supernatural side of salvation; he saw redemption in actual work of a sinner in order to at least remove the consequences of the sin. Orthodoxy is not against it, but considers good deeds to be a manifestation of the truly repented person and the sign of forgiveness that flows from God. Maikov, however, placed the emphasis on the human side of the redemption process so that the supernatural side is pushed aside altogether. This means that he was very concerned about the morals of the age and addressed the problem fairly often, particularly in his (or adopted) fables. He recognized there that “the quality of the soul is more valuable than bodily strength” (200), that those “puffed up by pride” should remember that “Fate in the world rules over all, including you” (208). At one point needle bragged that thread always follows it; the thread answered that they both follow the hand of a tailor, which led to the conclusion that “all rule comes from God” (204). In this way, fate appears to be equated with God, although it is unclear whether this makes fate more personal or God more impersonal.

In this period of his life, Maikov made many theological references; however, they were made primarily in odes praising Catherine on various occasions and these theological references are mainly about how Catherine is the chosen of God and what a great blessing she is to Russia and to all the world, Catherine, “blessed among women” (SP 30; cf. Luke 1:42): “God, the Creator of the universe / Alleviated your sadness and our fate / The Ruler of war and peace / Gave you bloodlessly the throne” (SP 31); she was elevated to the throne by “the almighty hand” “For happiness of all and for peace” (40); “God reveals His image in her / Through her He astonishes us / How wise and majestic He is” (42). “If anyone would like [to have] a happy fate / And to live peaceful life all the time, / He should humble himself to Catherine / And bring to her his heart as an offering” (62); therefore, “Shouldn’t the entire universe / Be subdued only to her?” (497); “Under Catherine’s scepter / Happy is life of all; / Her nations are paradisiacal lilies, / Her rule is Eden” (498). There is thus the recognition of the providential God who cares for the world, particularly, for Russia, but this recognition is a distant second to the overwrought praises of the tsarina, the praises which put Maikov next to the many sycophants of the age.<sup>4</sup>

However, there is one early poem devoted to theology or rather to eschatology, the ode *On the last judgment* (1763 amplified in 1773). After conflagration of the earth, hell opens up, stars fall down, the last judgment begins; on the sound of the last trumpet, people are resurrected in the same bodies as they were on earth, all with fear awaiting the judgment. “Heavens shine with fire, / And at that very moment / The gates of the east open, / The true Judge of all comes. / The earth shows its horror, / Trembling, it shows fire from its womb; /

---

<sup>4</sup> With some restraint, Leonid Maikov stated that in Vasilii Maikov’s odes to many known personages “there is a lot of exaggeration” (SP xxiv).

Then, they get quiet before God: / The earth and sea, fire and wind. / Fearsome is God in His glory, / His throne – expanses of the world, / The crown – the light, dawn – the purple / And scepter – obedience of all creations” (SP 14). Angry God sentences sinners to eternal “sulfur, smoke, and stench” (cf. the hell from *The player of ombre*) and not to hear their moaning of the condemned, God closes (puts a seal on) hell. The just are let in to paradise to live with angels in eternal joy and God’s mysteries are also revealed to them: “Know your makeup / Know the makeup of the world / And in unending years / You’ll be content with yourselves. / This is a reward for your deeds, / This is a reward for hard work” (15). This solemn tone in an ode written at the beginning of Maikov’s poetic career was abandoned for the next 10 years until his spiritual side was reawakened.

## 2

In the early 1770s, Maikov joined masonry. It is known that in 1772, Elagin’s lodge, the Lodge of the Muses, was founded and the document concerning its opening was also signed by Maikov as a secretary.<sup>5</sup> From this point onward, Maikov’s poetry becomes more reflective, meditative, more concerned about spirituality than anything else. His satirical tone disappears, irony is abandoned, and concern about life here and in the hereafter becomes much more pronounced. This tone is set by the *Ode on the vanity of the world* (1775), which, as the title proclaims, opens with a summary statement saying that “All is wrong in this world, / All is vanity in the world; / Perishes without return / Beauty of all things”; everything ends, good times, joyous thoughts, pleasant things (SP 150). The theme appears often in other poems: “Each of our steps is a step toward death” (*Ode* from 1774, SP 152). “Just as rapid waters flow into the stormy ocean / And vanish in it, / Similarly, years run into eternity, / Day rushes after day. / In nature, all that is born withers away; / Last year passed and will be no more, / Another has come, but it’ll pass like the last, / And the multitude of ages after it will also pass. / Having flown to eternity, each one will sink in eternity: / ... Both shepherd and a ruler will equally perish, / Only virtue will remain behind them” (*Verses on the year 1777*, SP 519).

Virtue, one of the main aspects of masonic ideology, has a lasting value which makes the life worth living, after all, since this is the footprint left behind on earth. By following virtue, one’s life is not in vain; vanity of life is conquered through virtue. Virtue is not only something left for others, but also something which makes life fulfilling here and now, without waiting for a reward after death (which does come, too): “Happiness should serve / Those protecting virtue. / If

---

<sup>5</sup> ПЕКАРСКИЙ, П[ётр П.]: Дополнения к истории масонства в России XVIII столетия, Санкт-Петербург: Типография Императорской Академии Наук 1869, pp. 34–35.

someone is satisfied with little, / [If] someone is not proud, is quiet, willing, / He is a happy man. / Who strives for happiness, / He will get tired in this path / And will never be happy” (*Ode to Happiness* (1778), SP 525–526). Happiness is thus a side-effect of a virtuous life, working on one’s own happiness seems to guarantee that one will never be happy. To some extent, this is also reflected in Maikov’s versification of Psalm 1: whereas verse 2 is about constant meditation on the law, in Maikov’s rendition it is about following the law to reach happiness (SP 3); that is, following the law, presumably – the law of God – makes a person virtuous and thus becomes also a means to reach happiness.

The recognition of the futility of life makes it easier to direct one’s eyes toward the hereafter. Is it, however, possible that my life ends with the death of the body in spite of the strong desire for immortality? “Did the Creator of innumerable worlds, / The Creator, my God and Father / Put in me [the realization of] their end / So that in futile desires / I’d live my short life / And in narrow limits of this life / More unhappy than dumb creatures / I’d be because of my desires? / Or, punishing me, the Creator / Didn’t put an end to my desires?” (*Ode to metropolitan Platon on the immortality of the soul* (1778) SP 160).<sup>6</sup> No, “Our God rules in eternity, / We are His children, He – the Father; / He loves, cherishes, calms down, / He’ll prepare eternal life for me” (161/274). Man’s soul is immortal, since perfectly benevolent God could not instill in this soul the desire of immortality if it had not been the case since that would have indicated that God created humans imperfectly. The argument ultimately relies on God’s perfection and was used in Maikov’s times by other authors.<sup>7</sup>

What life can man expect after death? In his very free rendering of Psalm 42[41] (1773), Maikov added a strophe that is not in the psalm: the holy inhabitants live in the house of God on whom the divine light shines. In this holy habitation there is joy and peace and heavenly sweetness; songs are sung there unto God and “solemn sound sounds [there]” (SP 5–6). When Maikov wrote in the *Sorrowful song* (1776) about the dead princess Natalia that she “flew away to heavens” (513), he surely had this holy inhabitation in his mind. This is the

---

<sup>6</sup> This ode “filled one of the first pages in the developing cultural tradition of creative union of a poet and a priest,” КУКУШКИНА, Е[лена] Д.: Тема бессмертия души у В. И. Майкова, XVIII век 21 (1999), p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> КОНИССКИЙ, Г.: Філософські твори, Київ: Наукова думка 1990 [1749], vol. 1, p. 414; АНИЧКОВ, Д. С.: Слово о невещественности души человеческой и из оной происходящем ее бессмертии [1777], in Т. В. Артемьева (ed.), Мысли о душе. Русская метафизика XVIII века, Санкт-Петербург: Наука 1996, p. 107; ЗОЛОТНИЦКИЙ, В. Т.: Доказательство безсмертия души человеческой [1780], in Артемьева, op. cit., pp. 149–158; ЩЕРБАТОВ, М. М.: Разговор о бессмертии души [1788], in his Сочинения, Санкт-Петербург: Типография М. Акинфиева и И. Леонтьева 1896–1898, vol. 2, p. 345.

paradise mentioned in the ode *On the last judgment* quoted above. Interestingly, in the 1773 version he added the part (also quoted above) about revealing mysteries concerning the makeup of oneself and the world, the mysteries veiled before the eyes of mortal while they lived on earth.

Probably the best expression of Maikov's theological sentiments is found in his *Ode to the seekers of truth* (1778). The opening verses give an image of a meeting of a masonic lodge with the words: "You, who've been illumined / By triune ray of supreme wisdom / Whose reason despises / The terror of the dark cloud of ignorance! / Oh, children of the morning light, / In meetings of our council / Presides this daughter of heaven / And pronounces to us saying this" (SP 161). A long speech of the daughter of heaven follows in which she encourages masons to seek knowledge and promises protection in this endeavor from evil and malice of the world and of hell: "I'll defeat their powers through you, / Through you I'll show them light; / Their mores will mellow through you, / When by turning to the light / They take through you my rays" (162). Thus, the masons will not only perfect themselves in the process but also the world by becoming the window through which the light of wisdom will shine onto the world. However, some may be immune to this benevolent influence. "The morning light will not touch them / Who are embraced by eternal slumber. / But even if they wake up, / A throng of crude ignoramuses – / Hearts full of chastity / Will not be created instead; / They can only be pitied / That by deep darkness of night / Their eyes will remain covered. / Can anyone be ordered to be wise?" And the daughter of heavens continues: "I am called the light of the truth; / I am a daughter of generous heaven; / I appear to all who seek me; / I open the door to those who knock; / Opening the divine teaching, / I stretch my hand to those who ask, / And lead [them] to my luminous temple. / This entire path is strewn with thorns; / But my temple is clothed with laurels / In which [temple] they receive a reward. / It is so pleasant to the wise / And their spirit is joyous / And can't be understood only by those / Whose mind is covered by fog. / Hold on to me, children / I'll reveal my mysteries to you, / I'll raise you higher than thunder" (163). Some phrases are borrowed from the gospels thereby identifying the daughter of heaven with Christ.

Similar sentiment can be found in the *Paris' judgment* in which Juno (Hera), Pallas (Athena), and Venus (Aphrodite) give Paris their pitches to sway their way his decision about who is most beautiful, but Pallas appears to be Maikov's *porte-parole* (an thereby she resembles the daughter of heaven).<sup>8</sup> She asks Paris: "cleanse your thought from all worldly vanity / And then approach me to see the light / ... Only I can illuminate mortals / And subjugate weaknesses of the heart to the mind. / Tear apart the veil of darkness, / Tear apart and know glistening

---

<sup>8</sup> Curtis, op. cit., p. 214.



vanity; / Look with the sight of your sound reason / And see that your mind is filled with the sweetest of poisons! / Come here, Paris, to supreme wisdom” (358). Her gift is “Pure fervency of sound mind and heart. / My joys do not include vices, / But having delighted the soul, elevate to the immortals; / Their sweetness is known only to me / And to those whom I let see my light; / I open to you the darkness of unknown things; / I open to you heavenly realms, / The courses of all stars, of the sun, of the moon, / With this revelation your reason will be delighted, / You’ll know how and where rain, snow, and hail are born; / Through my illumination you’ll know / The birth of lightening and the nature of thunder, / Whence fierce winds breathe onto us, / Why they become more fierce and then calm down.” Only those who follow Pallas can be truly happy (360), “But there are only few [such people] in the world of mortals, / And this small number brings them honor” (361), which appears to be a fairly elitist vision of those truly wise. In this, rhetorical questions that God asked Job about, say, the source of snow, hail (38:22), and rain (38:26), the courses of thunder (38:25) and of wind (38:24) can be answered by Pallas/wisdom to true seekers of truth, i. e., to masons, who will know what remains unanswered in the Scriptures.

By itself, the desire of wisdom is not alien to Christianity, in particular, to the Orthodox religion, the official religion of Russia. Augustine described his path to conversion when he started with Cicero’s *Hortensius*, the book which encouraged Augustine to love wisdom itself, whatever it is, to seek it, follow its footsteps, to grasp it, to cling to it with all his strength. However, Augustine’s enthusiasm was tempered by the fact that the name of Christ was missing (*Confessions* 3.4). In that respect, there are at least two streams in masonry. Both require the mason to be a believer. However, one requires that only those should be admitted as masons who are proved to have enough fear of God, honesty, love of man, and desire of knowledge. The candidate swears to always worship in spirit and truth almighty Jehovah and to learn about His power through nature. Each theoretical brother has to be associated with some religion and ardently follow it; he can also accept most rational views that are pious and useful; usually it is enough if he is a Christian.<sup>9</sup> The mason has to believe in a God, master of the universe, but a belief in Christ is not required; it is at best a nice extra. Another stream of masonry requires masons to be Christians: Jesus is God, the only teacher of mankind; He is of the same essence as the father, and masons want to obey His word.<sup>10</sup> This Christian version of masonry was very strong in Russia. As

---

<sup>9</sup> [Graf von Löhrbach], *Die theoretischen Brüder oder zweite Stufe der Rosenkreutzer und ihrer Instruktion*, Athen 1785, pp. 59, 63, 71

<sup>10</sup> [VON HAUGWITZ, Ch. A. H.]: *Hirten-Brief an die wahren, ächten Freymäurer alten Systems*, 1785, pp. 2, 5. Lopukhin recommended *Die theoretischen Brüder and Hirten-Brief* as part of a masonic library, ЛОПУХИН, И. В.: *Духовный рыцарь или Ищущий премудрости*, Русская старина 15 (1884), no. 11, p. 279.

Lopukhin expressed it in his *Zelosophos*, only a Christian can be admitted in “the Society of Knights Seeking Wisdom,”<sup>11</sup> and in his catechism for free masons he wrote that the goal of the order of masonry is the same as the goal of true Christianity.<sup>12</sup> A statue of the lodges of the Eighth Province stated: “A candidate who has been accused either publicly or legally of having opinions contrary to the pure Christian teaching ... shall be excluded from the Order.”<sup>13</sup> Moscow Rosicrucians required that “each theoretical Brother must adhere to one well-known Christian religion.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the oath taken by the candidate of the Theoretical Degree required one “to worship the Great Omnipotent Jehovah with spirit and truth throughout my whole life.”<sup>15</sup> No mention of Christ.

Russians, who were sincere about their masonic allegiance, joined masonry to fulfill their spiritual needs. They found the official Orthodox church to be unable to satisfy these needs – because of its overemphasis placed on rites, because of its aridity, because of the low level of education of the clergy, and the like – and yet they did not want to abandon Christianity, so masonry became to them a way of revival of the Christian faith, the way of experiencing it spiritually. This was a desire of Lopukhin, Novikov, Gamaleia, Schwarz, and others. Other masons, while still yearning for spiritual fulfillment, were seemingly satisfied in a more generic religion that included a monotheistic belief in God, but the person of Christ was at best in the shadows. This type of masonry can be detected in Elagin, Kheraskov, and apparently Maikov also belonged to this category. It is interesting that except for the oblique allusion to Christ under the disguise of the daughter of heaven, Christ is mentioned only twice in his poetry. Once it is in an inconsequential exclamation (“I don’t know, by Christ,” SP 324/3.49). Not once is Christ mentioned as a savior – although repeatedly Catherine is praised as a savior (31, 33, 34, 38, 55, 62). Only once is Christ mentioned in an ode to Catherine (1770) as a Son of God who says: “I created air, the sea, drought, / I elevate kingdoms and bring [them] down, / And I end quarrels among winds; / All flesh breathes and lives through Me / Through Me my wise judgment manifests itself in the world / And through Me kings rule.” However, this is not about theology, since the speech quickly deteriorates into a praise of Catherine; “I give Catherine thunder / To rule with it on the earth; / Haughty and suborn hearts / Will be subjected to her; / She’ll elevate the horn of the faithful, / She’ll punish

---

<sup>11</sup> ЛОПУХИН, И. В.: Масонские труды, Москва: Товарищество типографии А. И. Майонтова 1913, pt. 1, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pt. 1, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Raffaella Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian utopia in eighteenth-century Russia: the Masonic circle of N. I. Novikov*, Dordrecht: Springer 2005, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Faggionato, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Faggionato, op. cit., p. 61.

those who don't worship Me / And she'll show to the entire world / That I am the only God there" (SP 98). Christ is only used here as a stamp on legitimacy of any political ambitions of Catherine. The language did not change in the masonic period of Maikov's life. "Catherine, an angel of the world / She gives peace to the universe," as expressed in an 1775 ode (140) had such a universal reach by the will of God: "Having His throne above the stars / And the sun and moon as [His] footstools / The Creator inaccessible to us / Looked toward the North / And said: 'Listen, mortal people, / Listen the earth, listen waters / Listen fire, air, and aether: / I'll glorify Russia forever / And give this testament with her: / May the entire world be her throne'" (*Ode* from 1774, SP 133).

Being a mason meant to be a good citizen, which meant maintaining or at least not opposing the current political system. Maikov may have believed that with his numerous odes to Catherine he fulfilled his masonic duties even if by extolling her to the sky, quite literally, although not uncommon at this age, he went an extra mile. This is clear from an idyllic picture of the harmony of the country life as he saw it. In his opera, *A village holiday* (1777), a choir of peasants sings: "We live a happy life (fate), / Working all the time, / We spend our life in the field / We spend [it] rejoicing / Village pleasures / Make our hearts rejoice; / Our morals are not wicked, / There is no flatterer among us / No cunning men are here, / No malicious nets of theirs, / No rich or poor are here, / No clerical tricks" (SP 467). No mention of the serfdom problem. This, presumably, would be as close as possible to the lost golden age – as described in the ode *War* (1773) – when there was peace, when a lion was lying next to a lamb, as expressed with imagery borrowed from Isaiah, when spouses were faithful to one another, there was no fear, no jealousy, "Freedom, brotherhood, equality, / The happy life" (SP 110–111).

Maikov found solace in the masonic spirituality that believed in God, the Creator of the universe, a providential God who cares for His creation, who created an immortal soul and wants this soul to be joined with Him after death, the soul which is, as it were, a part of Him; after all, "The soul is a spark of the divine" (SP 159). The life on earth should be filled with the search for wisdom, which will only partially be revealed here and fully after death. Part of this wisdom is living a virtuous life which includes being a good neighbor, a good citizen, a good worker. This was reflected in Maikov's poetry.