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Spiritual Poetry of Ippolit Bogdanovich

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Abstract

Bogdanovich firmly believed in God, an omnipotent God who providentially cares for his creation on an individual and a social level. That was expressed in his spiritual poetry, particularly in his youth. In his view, virtue was a proper disposition of the heart and an active manifestation of this disposition and he associated virtue with the religious foundation on which it should base. Virtue should be *active* and manifest itself in usefulness. However, it is difficult to reconcile with this stance his poem *Dushen'ka* for which Bogdanovich is remembered today, the poem that appears to have only the entertainment value. Bogdanovich's beliefs are also reflected in his historical and historiosophic work. He spoke about humanity's primal happy state which was destroyed by evil and which could be restored only by monarchical autocracy. That is, the cure for the evil hearts of people is a benevolent tsar – a moral problem apparently has a political solution. In his views, Bogdanovich was influenced by masonic teachings that viewed God in a somewhat generic fashion, as the God whose presence can be found, among others, in Christianity.

Key words

Bogdanovich; religious poetry; Orthodoxy; virtue; masonry

Abstrakt

Poezja religijna Ippolita Bogdanowicza

Bogdanowicz głęboko wierzył w Boga, Boga wszechmocnego, który opatrnościowo troszczy się o swoje stworzenie, o poszczególnych ludzi i o całe społeczeństwa. Wyraziło się to w jego poezji religijnej, szczególnie w młodości. Jego zdaniem cnota była właściwym usposobieniem serca i aktywnym przejawem tego usposobienia, a związał ją z religijną podstawą, na której powinna się opierać. Cnota powinna być *aktywna* i przejawiać się w użyteczności. Trudno jednak pogodzić się to z charakterem jego poematu *Duszerika*, za który dziś pamiętany jest Bogdanowicz. Poemat ten ma jedynie wartość rozrywkową. Wierzenia Bogdanowicza znajdują również odzwierciedlenie w jego twórczości historycznej i historiozoficznej. Pisał tam o pierwotnym szczęśliwym stanie ludzkości, skażonym przez zło, który to stan może zostać przywrócony jedynie w monarchicznej autokracji. Znaczyliby to, że lekarstwem na złe serca ludzi jest życzliwy car, czyli problem moralny rozwiązany zostaje politycznie. W swoich poglądach Bogdanowicz najwyraźniej był pod wpływem masońskich nauk mówiących o Boga w dość ogólnych terminach, jako o Bogu, którego obecność można znaleźć między innymi i w chrześcijaństwie.

Słowa kluczowe

Bogdanowicz; poezja religijna; prawosławie; prawość; masoneria

Ippolit Bogdanovich (1743–1803) is one of the literary figures of eighteenth-century Russia known today for his poem *Dushen'ka*. During his university years, he lived in the house of Kheraskov and published his poetry first in Kheraskov's journals. Bogdanovich was in the state service for most of his life, but concurrently he was also a publisher of various journals to which he contributed his work and many translations. He published three volumes of Russian proverbs (1784), the first part of Russian History (1777), and many translations of other works, of which his translation of Voltaire's poem on the 1755 Lisbon earthquake has been most celebrated. It is interesting to see the spiritual aspects of his work and the impact masonry had on it.

Spiritual poetry

His first poetic efforts are marked with a spiritual work that includes versified renderings of six psalms. Bogdanovich's renderings are free, very free, so that the original psalms are barely recognizable. Consider Psalm 23[22]: "The Lord protects me, / The Lord also illuminates me, / And from the earliest years / Puts me on the right path. / He poured with milk His law / Into me when I was young, / So that in the bounty / I'd praise the Lord. / Although fatal limit/fate / Was made for me by [my] enemies, / My shield will remain whole, / I'll trample on [their] anger with [my] feet. / What will the enemy do to me, / Burning with evil fire, / If with the blow of strong powers / The Lord will strike him? / He stretched [His] generous / Right hand to me: / He multiplied beyond measure / My cattle, my wheat. / I sing to you all the time, / The Source of imperishable goods! / Listen to the voice of my praises / From my perishable mouth" (2.118–119).¹ Bogdanovich altogether expunged the powerful imagery of "the Lord is my shepherd," of the paths of righteousness, the valley of the shadow of death, the staff that comforts the psalmist, anointing the head with oil, creating a clearly inferior poem in comparison with the original. Other psalms did not fare any better. Not infrequently, Bogdanovich merged imagery coming from different psalms into one poem. For example, the opening – "O God! You are our refuge and strength / A strong defense and help in our troubles" follows fairly closely Psalm 46[45], but then the imagery includes nets/snares (Ps. 91[90]:2–3), mountains praising God (148:9) and breaking the bow and the shield (46[45]:10, 76[75]:4) (2.120–121). A short paraphrase of Psalm 116[114] is accompanied by an image of God who brought the psalmist from an abyss (Ps. 71[70]:20, particularly in Lomonosov's rendering) and who put the psalmist's weak legs on solid ground (Ps. 40[39]:3).² This paraphrase was later considerably reworked, and for the new ending, Bogdanovich reached beyond the psalter: "Forgive, Creator, this fault / That I curse the day of [my] birth [Job 3:3] / When I get weaker because of suffering. / You see the depth

1 References are made to BOGDANOVIČ, Ippolit F.: *Sobranije sočinenij i perevodov*. Moskva: Platon Beketov, 1809–1810, vols. 1–6.

2 *Poučitel'noje wveselenije* 1761, no. 6, p. 55; *Stichotvornoje pereloženie psalmov proroka i carja Davida sostavljajuščich Psaltir'*. Sankt-Peterburg: N. A. Šigin, 1869, pp. 217–218.

of [my] heart: / Although I'm sinking in hellish chasm / I hope for Your salvation [Job 19:25]" (2.124).

Versification of psalms became almost obligatory for the eighteenth-century Russian poets, although no one reached the level of Trediakovskii who versified the entire psalter (1753 published in 1989), thereby following the poetic tradition of Simeon Polotskii (1680).³ Versification of psalms became even a sport of sorts which most clearly was manifested in the 1743 competition between Lomonosov, Trediakovskii, and Sumarokov about the versification of psalm 144[143].⁴ In this light, was dabbling with versification of psalms just a poetic exercise for Bogdanovich or was here some personal element here, an expression of his religious emotions? It may have been both. In his Evening prayer (1761), Bogdanovich exclaimed, "I angered God during the day because of my constant sin"; "Look at [my] contrite heart / Bound to You by love / And delay your judgment of the sinner: / Don't kill me this night / And give me by your fortification / [the strength] Not to anger you by my sin / [...] God, of pure hearts / You are always ready to be a protector."⁵ That is arguably the most spiritual poem Bogdanovich wrote, the most personal cry of a contrite heart to the all-merciful God, asking for forgiveness and spiritual fortification. Interestingly, written at the age of 18, it was deemed unworthy of republication by Bogdanovich, who did not include it in his collection of poems, *Lyre* (1773). Perhaps he was dissatisfied with the poetic side of the poem, but he may have also cooled off from the youthful religious passion. He remained to the end steeped in religious thinking, but his thinking became more measured, more sober, more calculated, necessary, and yet on the periphery of his interests. That is well summarized in his *Poems made in three ways* (1763): "That there is the Creator of all – I have no doubt: / My heart tells me about Him; / But I don't know how to love God any other way / Than only in my neighbor" (3.32). The great religious truth is that God exists, but the practical truth is that the acknowledgment of His existence has to be expressed through one's work in the world. Therefore, the problem of morality becomes very important for Bogdanovich, particularly, the problem of virtue and usefulness.

Virtue and usefulness

Already in his early poem, *The law* (1761), Bogdanovich stated that "Since our law is that we should worship God, / And that we should help [our] neighbor as ourselves; / And, in a word, that [we should] love God and [our] neighbor, / Then we can obey the law. / Virtue should be the law (закон) among us / And the laws (права) [should be] only witnesses of its truth. / [...] From this we see that laws for the ungodly / Are all made [1 Tim. 1:9] / [...] There is no law where truth/justice lives. / For whom virtues

3 Polotskii, in turn, followed an example of, and relied upon, *Psalterz Dawidów* (1579) by the Polish poet, Jan Kochanowski.

4 The three versions have been published together in *Tri ody parafrastičeskije psalma 143*. Sankt-Peterburg: pri Imperatorskoj Akademii nauk 1744.

5 BOGDANOVIČ, Ippolit F.: *Stichotvorenija i poëmy*. Leningrad: Sovetskij pisatel', 1957, p. 136.

are the law, / Evil doesn't dare to attack him."⁶ He expressed it also through a story of a Chaldean prince, Dobromysl, who was looking for a wife. After many disappointments, as Homer said, he once encountered Virtue, who ordered him to abandon his fruitless path and follow her (*Dobromysl* (1780s), 2.113–114)⁷ because only virtue gives us in this world the true path (*Ode on the Coronation of Alexander I* (1801), 2.202) where virtue is defined as “a constant love of justice and honor; constant inclination and readiness to do good” (*Discourse about honor of philology in general* 6.93). That is, virtue is a proper disposition of the heart and an active manifestation of this disposition. It has eschatological consequences, as somewhat obliquely expressed by Bogdanovich: “the Most High Father of all creation elevates full freedom and dignity of man solely by the measure of *virtue*” (95). Bogdanovich even authored a *Table for children to learn principal virtues* in which he briefly presented seven virtues (right faith, obedience, love, prudence, justice, firmness, and abstinence), their misuse, their opposites (unbelief, self-will, insensitivity, light-mindedness, injustice, inconstancy, and immoderation), and their rules. Although very briefly, he associated these virtues with the religious foundation on which they apparently should be based. For example, he stated that the true faith (благоверие) best unites morals into one (6.121). The true faith is connected to the perfect purity of the heart that does not allow us to speak or act contrary to God. This virtue is the most durable bond between man and God (125). On the other hand, “unbelief is an unfortunate error and it creates in many dangerous properties of reason. Sacred Scripture calls such ones impure (нечестивые): since people who reject all Faith frequently do not recognize God, the Law, nor virtue, consequently, they destroy the higher levels of honor of rational creation” (124). Nature itself calls us to love, and the Savior considered love to be the principal Christian virtue. With God, love is the highest level of gratitude (133). Irrational love can lead to evil (134). “Love is this virtue in which the law of the Savior is particularly contained.” It directs us to see ourselves in our neighbors (139). Prudence avoids extremes, so it allows us to love without blindness (141). Justice has to be always accompanied by good conscience and supported by prudence (153), where the goodness of conscience appears to be based on a religious foundation. Firmness is supported by secular and spiritual rites to overcome human weakness (154). Good used without measure brings evil (162); evil used sparingly is useful. Nature makes man understand good and evil (163). Abstinence comes primarily from a good upbringing and habits (166). Upbringing in the atmosphere of good morals has to be accompanied by religious education to provide a firm foundation that is based on divine authority to be followed by humans to deserve God's acceptance.

Virtue should be active and manifest itself in usefulness. That was best expressed in the journal Bogdanovich edited: “Were we born for ourselves, / And are we working

6 BOGDANOVIČ, Ippolit F.: *Stichotvorenija i poëmy*. Op. cit., p. 141.

7 The image of Virtue pointing to the right path seems to come not from Homer but from a Sophist Prodicus, Education of Hercules by Virtue (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34). Incidentally, this image was also used by Murav'ev (MURAV'JEV, Michail N.: *Sočinenija*. Vol. 1. Sankt-Peterburg: A. Smirdin, 1856 [1847], p. 168.)

for ourselves? / No, we live to be useful to others.”⁸ As stated by Dobrodumov in one of Bogdanovich’s plays: “All our deeds are based on mutuality, Nature made everywhere silent or aloud contract that people should be useful to one another” (*Theatrical staging* 4.179). As a social consequence, people’s respectability grows with their usefulness (*Perfect happiness*, 2.20). Accordingly, as Bogdanovich expressed it, “I don’t want to be famous in the world, I want to be useful” (2.11). The last statement raises an interesting problem, how severe Bogdanovich was about the usefulness aspect of his life and work.

Bogdanovich is remembered today only for his poem *Dushen’ka* (*dushen’ka* is a diminutive of *dusha*, the soul or psyche), which is a retelling of the story of Amor and Psyche presented first by Apuleius and then by La Fontaine (1.29, 103). As rendered by Bogdanovich, it was purely an entertainment story fitting to read to pass the time and break ennui. As such, was it useful, as Bogdanovich’s moral principles would require it to be? Hardly, although he did recognize the possibility of *useful entertainment* – after all, he published in Kheraskov’s journal, which had such a title – but could his *Dushen’ka* be considered not just entertainment, but also useful? Usefulness presumably would require some teaching, making a point that the readers could apply in their lives, like, say, in the plays of Sumarokov and Fonvizin. In that respect, *Dushen’ka* has hardly any salutary value. There are three passing remarks which may be qualified as useful entertainment. At one point, distressed and immortal Dushen’ka wanted to commit suicide; being unsuccessful, she sighed: “immortality is my torment, and I call in vain death to [come to] me” (1.233). The moral being that immortality by itself is not necessarily a blessing; the quality of immortal life is what counts. Toward the end of the story, Dushen’ka opened a box, which she should not have done, and soot from the box blackened her face permanently; she was still considered beautiful by many – “a beautiful African” (266) – but she considered herself ugly. At that point, Amor publicized an old law given by Zeus that stated: “The law of time makes the beautiful appearance ugly, / The external brilliance in the eyes passes like smoke, / But nothing changes the beauty of the soul: / It alone always captivates everyone” (1.273-274). The message is clear, but it is overstated; after all, external beauty does captivate many, notwithstanding the state of the inner beauty. Mercifully for Dushen’ka’s, Venus returned her beauty since she “cleansed herself of sin by her suffering” (274/238). Would the message be that external appearance can be improved by suffering?

God in history

In his long poem, *Perfect happiness* (1765),⁹ dedicated to Catherine II’s son, grand prince Paul, Bogdanovich depicted an original state of the human race, the state of peace, brotherhood, and happiness. He called upon “the holy Truth” to see “mortals in natural state” (2.9, 54) and upon Muses living “where spring constantly reigns, / [...] where

8 [Guyot des Fontaines]: *Oda na sujetnoje upotreblenije žizni*. Nevinnoje upražnenije, 1763, p. 260.

9 Republished in a much shorter version in 1773 as *The happiness of nations*.

eternal day shines and darkness of night is not known” for permission to enter their “sacred groves” (11, 55). Enraptured, he saw “the book of eternity” that includes the past of all nations. He saw in it man coming from the womb of nonbeing (12, 56). Then, man did not use his senses for evil; he was content with his life. The earth was like a garden; lions were like lambs (13, 57–58). “No one then thought about amassing riches / And didn’t thereby cause harm to [his] neighbour (14) / But everyone was rich, although no one thought / That house, land, or the harvest belong to him. / In those happy times, the earth was considered / An indivisible sustainer of all / And people didn’t feel the burden of poverty / Amidst contentment, peace, and joys” (15, 59).

Supremely wise Divinity spread people over the earth so that they could multiply and help one another (2.15, 59) and so they did, working hard (16, 60). Everyone was filled with love to others, seeing them as fathers and brothers and seeing themselves as having their existence from one Creator (17, 61). People only married when they were in love (19, 62). There were no wars (20, 63). “Innocence, truth, love and virtue / Were happily present everywhere on earth” (21, 63).

It appears that this image of the happy primal state was Bogdanovich’s answer to the representation of the original state of man presented by Kheraskov in *The fruits of sciences* (1761) in which very much in line with the depiction of Hobbes he said that “in deep antiquity / [...] Not people lived then, but fiercest animals [...] / In their savagery they were like their environment: / No friendship, no love was known on earth / [...] The Creator turned away His sight from them; / Virtue was not known in these times. / [...] Robbers ruled on earth, not Tsars; / Truth slumbered, evil was exalted. / [...] Not even slightest thought about God, / All [people] lived on earth and died like cattle.”¹⁰ Bogdanovich’s image was closer to the depiction proposed by Rousseau: the original state of man was peaceful; however, in Rousseau’s depiction, people lived in isolation from one another; society was a later development; thus, the virtuous societal harmony of the type envisioned by Bogdanovich was absent from Rousseau’s vision. Importantly, Bogdanovich (and Rousseau) was at variance with the official view of the beginning of man as viewed by the Orthodox Church, according to which the original sin right at the beginning of the existence of man threw humanity into the state of disharmony and the rule of the sin. In this sense, Hobbes’ and Kheraskov’s views were more akin to the Christian view than what Bogdanovich described. In any event, this original idyllic state did not last.

Man discovered “the limitlessly broad mind” of his and his limited knowledge and became ashamed of his ignorance (2.22). He discovered order in nature and used its laws to extend his domain (23). Science brought plenty and proved to be useful to humankind. However, should science be blamed when it causes sorrow? (26) Or, generally, must a good thing be rejected if it also has terrible consequences? Apparently not: “Man is guilty, guilty is [his] mistake / When in good causes we see bad ends, / Wrong thinking and misuse / Always bring evil from the initiated usefulness” (27). Increase of knowledge and development of sciences are not to be blamed for the ills of society. Man is – his ill-conceived plans, imperfection of thought, and misuse of good things.

10 CHERASKOV, Michail M.: *Tvorenija*. Moskva: V Universitetskoj Tipografii, 1796–1803. Vol. 3, pp. 2–3.

Is eradication of evil just a matter of the brain: improve your thinking and you will be a better person? Apparently not – the love of knowledge, philosophy, that is, is what is divine in man: “Reward of pure souls, joy of gentle mores / Mentor of minds, the path and the key of peace [...] / O philosophy! A supreme heavenly gift” (27). Mortals are like the Divinity only through philosophy. Learning not only increased the standard of life, but also “corrected hearts and crude morals” (28), although it is unclear how such crude morals could have existed in the state of universal goodness and happiness. However, “imperceptibly, evil sneaked into our hearts” (28, 64). To account for the existence of evil, Bogdanovich called upon an image of the Fury that left hell to deceive people (29, 31–33, 64). We do not learn how the hell and Fury came into being. In this state of the downfall of humanity, passions prevailed and “the one was happiest of all who was more powerful of all” (33, 65). In that state, “The Heaven turned away from their evil-doing / Preparing just blow for their punishment” (30, 65). By this blow Bogdanovich probably meant the existing state of affairs in the world, universal enmity and the fact that “evil and sin was the fate of people” (34). However, “Innocence, truth, sciences, virtue / Gathered by love shouted to Heaven / That the Source and Creator of such goods / Gave them shelter and gave hearts meekness” (34, 67). That may mean that after God inflicted punishment on people by leaving them to their own – and Fury’s – evil devices, He took pity on them and wanted to instil back in their hearts virtue and truth as ruling principles of life. How? Monarchical autocracy appears to be Bogdanovich’s answer.

“How pleasant are these sacred bonds / That strengthen general unity / By them unions are created and consolidated / And through them mortals see perfectly happiness” (2.38). To counter evil and thereby ensure social unity, “a man was elected to give laws to all / The fate of people was given into his hands, / People, in humility, called him a Tsar” (39, 68). He was supposed to be a model of meekness, a protector of all. How this monarch was elected is unclear. Evil-doers hardly would opt for such a choice. However, people were tired of rampant evils, and there were still some remnants of the love of man in them and “sparks of truth still were burning in them” (38). It is hard to imagine that a choice of such a leader would not meet with opposition; thus, at first, this monarch would have to be anything but meek to become a real ruler, not only in name.

The first tsar was “a universal father and God on earth” (2.45). Virtue ruled with him and justice was the norm (46). That is, the cure for the evil hearts of people is a benevolent tsar – a moral problem has a political solution. It is unclear, how the tsar can maintain his moral rectitude amidst corrupted morals. Bogdanovich could always say that the tsar, although elected by people, was chosen by God and supported by God during the tsar’s reign to be a steadfast moral model for his subjects. Claims to that effect have been frequently made in countless odes of various authors in the eighteenth century. Bogdanovich himself depicted Catherine II as the one through whom virtue shines, and truth opens its path to her (*Ode to Catherine II*, 2.133), as supremely wise, who allowed people to see the golden age (2.129; *Song to Catherine II*, 2.175). In this way, the ending of the *Perfect happiness* is rather disappointingly anticlimactic: all this historiosophic presentation was just a prelude to the usual praise of the tsarist rule and extolment of the Russian autocracy as the dream of nations about the restoration of the original paradisiac state.

The issue of the desirable social order returns in the play *The Slavs* (1787) which casts the simplicity of the life of the Slavs against the high culture represented by puffed-up Pansofii and the Macedonian king Alexander in whom the Slavic social order inspires admiration. Athenians are always anxious about possible misfortune. The Slavs live happy in their simplicity (4.24/1:3)¹¹; simplicity and good morals are better than Athenian wisdom (25). Alexander wanted to decide whether he should conquer the Slavs, but he did not want “to subjugate those who are themselves fit to subjugate people with their virtues” (82/3:2). Moreover, virtuous people the Slavs appear to be. The Slavs that do not do useful work are ashamed since they are brought up that way. Those who do not want to be happy are unhappy, but they are corrected through gentle ways (87/3:3) “without taking their foolishness against them as a crime.” The Slavs do not waste time to write about virtues. Virtues are preserved in “continual human actions”; a few books are about what can feed the heart and reason (88). People are brought up “to have correct ideas about things and sound understanding” (89). Such good rules were introduced by an empress who took good rules from Greek sages. It is celebrated every 25 years by renewing all her salvific institutions (90). On the one hand, this empress may be Olga, later Saint Olga, wife of Prince Igor. On the other hand, it may be a reference to Catherine II who celebrated the 25th anniversary of her coronation in 1787.¹²

On Alexander’s request, a celebration was performed for him. In a big room, there was a big pyramid with an inscription “twenty five years.” From the pyramid the Genius/Spirit of Time (103/3:7) came out. A council circled the pyramid and hung wreaths on it (104/3:8). A choir of the Slavs sang, “Glory to the Most High on heaven, glory. / Glory to the good Empress on earth, glory [...] / Glory and goodness to the good [person], glory” (105). Time flew from the sky in a cloud, was delighted with the pyramid and threw its scythe to its base (106/3:9). A group of Geniuses/Spirits of Time danced with garlands around the pyramid and then stood still along with Time (106). It is a very peculiar rite that has very little to do with the historical Slavs. The pyramid? This betrays more Bogdanovich’s enchantment with masonry rather than with the Slavic past. Maikov, a mason, has in his *Elisei* a Temple of Ombre, which is a three-sided pyramid (pt. 2, ll. 85, 121–122). Kheraskov’s Cadmus experienced visions in a pyramid, repented there of his misdeeds, was forgiven, after which it was “as if he was born again.”¹³ Bogdanovich’s Slavs did recognize the Most High, just as masons did, and presumably, they owed their purity of life to the divine providential influence, just as masons believed they did.

In his *Historical description of Russia* (1777), theological allusions are not as outlandish as in the *Slavs*, but it is mainly up to the reader to guess that the Christian religion could be meant by the author. About princess Olga, Bogdanovich said that she was troubled by idolatry. “The Holy *Faith* that descended from heaven touched her heart and inflamed it with a passionate desire to know the True God” (5.56). So she went to Constantinople, where she accepted the Christian faith and was baptized (57). Upon return, “Saint Olga

11 1:3 – act 1, scene 3.

12 Cf. KARAMZIN, Nikolaj M.: *O Bogdanoviče i jeho sočinenijach* [1803]. Sočinenija. Sankt-Peterburg: Karl Kraj, 1848, vol. 1.

13 CHERASKOV, Michail M.: *Kadm i Garmonija* [1789]. Tvorenija. Vol. 9, pp. 127, 146.

began to enlighten people with the knowledge of the True God, but the light of the Gospel did not yet illuminate the entire *Russia*”, and many remained unaffected, including her son Sviatoslav (58). It was prince Vladimir who “illuminated deep darkness of unbelief with the light of *Christ* and transformed the land covered with the thorn of coarseness into blossoming Eden of salvific teaching” (87). “*Vladimir*, having accepted the law, *put on a new man*, as the Sacred Scripture says [Eph. 4:24]” (89). He indeed erected many idols in Kiev: Perun and others (95); nevertheless, “there is no doubt that *Vladimir* was inwardly distant from idolatry [...] he was looking for the source of true teaching and reason.” No doubt, in Bogdanovich’s mind, since foreigners saw it; otherwise, they would not dare to propose to him to change his faith, in which Bogdanovich referred to Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish envoys who came to Vladimir trying to persuade him to accept their faith. However, it was through his envoys that he was persuaded to accept the Greek faith, that is, the Orthodoxy of Byzantium. He was baptized in Kherson (Korsun) (119). Vladimir took from Kherson remains of St. Clement and Phoebus, church books, church implements, and some priests. Back in Kiev, he destroyed temples and idols (120), released his wives and lovers, built churches (123), established civil laws (124), and sent priests to other parts of Russia to convert people to “the only Orthodox Faith” (125). In his account, Bogdanovich most followed the *Russian primary chronicle* (*The tale of bygone years*). Very similar chain of events would be soon retold on a much larger scale by Kheraskov in his epic poem *Vladimir* (1785, 1787).

Christianity

There is no doubt that Bogdanovich firmly believed in God, an omnipotent God who providentially cares for his creation on an individual and a social level. However, most of the time, Bogdanovich referred to God in somewhat generic term as the Most High, as Creator, the Divinity, as simply God. Was it God of the Christianity? Since frequently, God was discussed in the social and historical context of Russian life, the reader could assume that it was a God of Christians, but Bogdanovich was somewhat evasive on the subject. He never mentioned the Trinity. Only once did he mention the Holy Spirit in a noncommittal fashion.¹⁴ Christ is hardly mentioned and if He was mentioned, that was on the margin of some nonreligious topic: once in an inconsequential phrase (when speaking about some events having taken place after the birth of Christ, 5.21); when discussing the problem of virtues, Bogdanovich referred twice to the Savior who considered love to be the principal virtue (6.133, 139), and in the discussion of the importance of language, in particular, of words, he said that our language “we consecrate to the glory of the Source of all generosity as the best part of our being” (6.74). The dignity of word can be seen in the creation of the world with which the world was created. The

14 In his 1772 letter to Shtelin, Bogdanovich wrote that some books of Simeon Polotskii were forbidden in 1689 since “superstitious people” accepted only books of their ancestors, “who only, as they said, have been dictated/inspired by the Holy Spirit.” (MAKOGONENKO, G. P. (ed.): *Pis'ma russkich pisatelej XVIII veka*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1980.)

Supreme Creator is called in the Sacred Scripture *God-Word* (79–80). Orthodoxy is directly mentioned only twice, as “the only Orthodox Faith” (5.125) and inconsequentially as an Orthodox Church that adopted some Greek words (6.99). He frequently mentioned the Faith, with the capital F, and the reader presumably should understand it as Orthodoxy, but it is unclear whether Bogdanovich himself so understood this Faith; so there is a mention of “beneficent Faith” (2.205); in last times, a judgment takes place according to Faith (3.61); suicide is considered a sin by Faith (3.66); as already mentioned, “the Holy Faith” touched the heart of Olga (5.56) and she was eventually baptized (57). For Bogdanovich, however, Faith had a broader meaning; he did understand by it Greek Faith (5.113, 128), that is, the Orthodoxy (although he also mentioned Greek faith, with the lower-case f (5.110, 111)), but he also spoke about any Faith (5.124), about disagreements of various Faiths (5.180, 195, 203), about Lutheran Faith (5.191, 193, 199) and even about Catholic Faith (5.196), which is significant since along with most Russian intellectuals and ecclesiastics of the time, he made disparaging remarks about Catholicism (e.g., 5.189, 213).

In six volumes of his writings, there is very little presence of Christianity. Most of it is in his early history of Russia. He always spoke with reverence about Christianity, but in his spiritual poetry, Christianity is altogether absent. The reason may be that from early years he lived in the house of Kheraskov, who was a prominent mason and it would be difficult to assume that he was not exposed to masonic ideology. Bogdanovich himself became a mason, and one of his letters about delivering papers to a lodge can be interpreted as an indication that he even switched from one masonic system to another.¹⁵ Masonic symbolism is reflected in his poetry rather faintly.¹⁶ The faction of masonry to which Bogdanovich belonged was religious in the sense that belief in God was prevalent, even required, but it was a tendency to believe in a somewhat generic God whose presence can be found, among others, in Christianity. The emphasis was placed on the omnipotent providential God, not on Christ. Christ was, in a way, marginalized. Salvation was still received from God, but a sure avenue to it was one’s work, one’s good deeds, one’s life of virtue rather than the salvific work of Christ, His crucifixion and resurrection – and so was Bogdanovich addressing God when asking for forgiveness of his sins. That may also explain almost a fixation with psalms among Russian masons rather than with the Gospels: psalms become a favourite versification subject, not Gospels. A similar tendency of marginalizing the Christian aspects of religious faith is evident in Maikov and also in Murav’ev even to the extent that it reaches in him the level of unitarianism.

15 A 1779 letter to Kurakin, a mason – DRUŽININ, P. A. (ed.): *Neizvestnyje pis'ma russkich pisatelej knjazju Aleksandru Borisoviču Kurakimu (1752–1818)*. Moskva: Truten', 2002, pp. 117–119.

16 Sakhrarov’s suggestion that *Dushen'ka* can be read as “a masonic allegory about wanderings and adventures of the human soul,” (SACHAROV, Vsevolod: *Ijerglify vol'nyh kamenščikov: masonstvo i russkaja literatura XVIII–načala XIX v.* Moskva: Žiraf, 2000, p. 68) overinterprets the poem too much.

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