

FaR 2021**International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****AT THE ORIGIN OF NAPOLEON THEME: HERO IN
V.A. ZHUKOVSKY’S EARLY WORKS**

A. G. Sadovnikov (a)*, O. G. Kolarkova (b), A. V. Bogacheva (c), I. S. Ipatova (d),
A. A. Savina (e)

*Corresponding author

- (a) Nizhny Novgorod State Linguistic University named after N.A. Dobrolubov, 31A, Minin Str., Nizhny Novgorod, 603155, Russia, agsad@yandex.ru
(b) Privolzhsky branch of Russian State University of Justice, 17A, Gagarin Ave., Nizhny Novgorod, 603022, Russia, kog0208@inbox.ru
(c) Nizhny Novgorod State Linguistic University named after N.A. Dobrolubov, 31A, Minin Str., Nizhny Novgorod, 603155, Russia, bogachova_a_v@mail.ru
(d) Privolzhsky branch of Russian State University of Justice, 17A, Gagarin Ave., Nizhny Novgorod, 603022, Russia, irina.i@mail.ru
(e) Privolzhsky branch of Russian State University of Justice, 17A, Gagarin Ave., Nizhny Novgorod, 603022, Russia, rapfno@yandex.ru

Abstract

On researching the earliest Zhukovsky’s poems of 1797–1800, fundamental moral-philosophical landmarks for artistic reflection on Napoleon theme are highlighted. Zhukovsky’s early essays allow revealing the nature of his ideas about War, Peace, Glory, Humanitarianism, Heroic virtue. The essay «Peace and war» (1798) within the moral-philosophical aspect represents Peace as the ideal embodiment of Good while War is opposed to it as Evil. The essays «Real hero» (1799) and «Hero» (1800) demonstrate the refusal to glorify those people who achieve glory by means of cruelty, villainy and whose actions are interpreted as fornication renunciation of God and Nature for the sake of ghost glory. This way is undoubtedly regarded as death one. Zhukovsky exposes the myth of Alexander the Great’s heroism and military glory characterizing his motives and ambitions full of vanity and arrogance extremely egotistical. Here Zhukovsky creates a specific religious-philosophical cult of heroic virtue. Ethic-religious-philosophical foundations of Zhukovsky’s ideas about a virtuous Hero were realized in 1798 in his two poems «Virtue». Here the poet supposes that the primary value of a real hero is self-association with the virtue light. This declaration pre-determines the development of Napoleon theme in accordance with disclosure of Napoleon myth on the basis of Russian national and Christian moral ideology in Zhukovsky’s works. And it pre-empted the movement of Anti-Napoleon theme in Russian literature and it is certainly proved by creative works belonging to Alexander S. Pushkin, Mihail Y. Lermontov, Fedor M. Dostoevsky, Leo N. Tolstoy and others.

2357-1330 © 2022 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Zhukovsky V.A., napoleonism, war, peace, hero, virtue



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

Napoleon theme that emerged in Russian literature at the end of the XVIII century has remained topical up to the present time. The cooperative monograph of Faina Z. Kanunova and Irina A. Izikova «Moral and aesthetic quests of both Russian romanticism and religion (1820–1840-s)» highlights the following: «It is extremely lovely that Napoleon theme goes through all Zhukovsky's works. And in this regard the first Russian romantic happened to be «the starting point for everything». Zhukovsky's followers as well as his contemporaries devoted their works to the Napoleon character and to such historical-cultural and moral-philosophical phenomenon as napoleonism. Among them there were all prominent Russian romantics, poets-Decembrists, «Children of 1812», Pushkin, Lermontov, Tutchev, Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy» (Kanunova & Izikova, 2001). Napoleon theme continues to be relevant and topical in the XX century. Bulat Sh. Okudzhava's poetry and prose can be served as the evidence of its relevance.

2. Problem Statement

It is logical and necessary to appeal to Vasily A. Zhukovsky's works in order to research artistic interpretation of Napoleon character and such a phenomenon as napoleonism in Russian literature. To our way of thinking, Zhukovsky formed moral-philosophical foundations of reflecting on Napoleon theme that later on took roots not only in Russian literature but in Russian national mind as well.

3. Research Questions

The article deals with the question about Vasily A. Zhukovsky's ideas concerning Napoleon and napoleonism, how they resonate with Russian national and Christian moral values and views. In this context the questions are concerned with Zhukovsky's moral ideas about Hero, War, Peace, Glory, Humanitarianism, Heroic virtue and what not, and how the poet realizes these ideas in his works.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of our work is to substantiate the fundamental significance of Vasily A. Zhukovsky's contribution to both formation and development of Napoleon theme in Russian literature.

5. Research Methods

During our research we have used the following general methods:

a) complex and systemic ones that allow one to review ideological content of Zhukovsky's works in the aspect of religious and philosophical anthropology and to comprehend the continuity of the poet's moral views concerning national culture traditions;

b) comparative analysis helps to compare the texts in terms of different ideas about the terms «Hero» and «Heroic» with the purpose of revealing specific features of Zhukovsky's moral position;

c) problematic-logical approach that allows us to specify the research problematic field and define the main concepts;

d) theoretical reconstruction gives an attempt to restore the transformation process of the ideas about Hero and Heroic in the aspect of both western and Russian culture traditions;

e) functional approach enables us to view Russian moral culture as a self-sufficient system comprised of functionally connected elements.

6. Findings

The relation of Zhukovsky as the pioneer of Napoleon theme towards Napoleon that is expressed in a great number of literary texts (from «Bard's songs over the coffin of Slavs-winners» (1806) to «Night parade» (1836) and «Ahasuerus» (1851), is the object of researchers' constant attention (Dmitrovsky, 2009; Izikova, 2003; Parsamov, 2007; Sadovnikov, 2013; Semenko, 1975; Veselovsky, 2016).

Zhukovsky's views on Napoleon's personality, on his role in Russian and World History, on the phenomenon of napoleonism changed over time but, in general, the poet perceived both the French Revolution and napoleonism as inhuman and anti-Christian phenomena reflecting the idea of evil, oppression of free will and destruction of moral foundations (Kanunova & Izikova, 2001). These Vasily A. Zhukovsky's views were most actively asserted after 1806 during Napoleonic wars and the first years after the war. At this very time he wrote «Bard's songs over the coffin of Slavs-winners», «On the death of Field Marshal, Count Kamensky» (1809), «A singer in the camp of Russian soldiers» (October 1812), «To the leader's winners» (November 1812), «On the first abdication of the Bonaparte throne» (1816). Here Napoleon is characterized as Russian enemy, «bloody tyrant», «autocratic villain», full of mad arrogance. Such poet's categorism is clearly based on patriotic spirit of that time, but one can find historiosophical, anthropological and moral-philosophical plan in Zhukovsky's works.

Napoleonism condemnation as moral-philosophical phenomenon was the most significant for Zhukovsky and remained important throughout his whole career as a poet. The sources of this tendency one can notice in Zhukovsky's works of «pre-Napoleonic» time, the period of his studies at Moscow university honorable boarding school (1797–1800). Then, the most important Zhukovsky's task was to achieve spiritual, moral and aesthetic self-determination, «to make future life plan. To put in order his moral system ...», to specify «Moral system towards God, closest people, himself» (Bichkov, 1903). Most notably, the poet firstly refers to such themes as War, Peace and Hero image which are extremely perspective for further development of Napoleon theme.

In 1798 Zhukovsky published his student essay «Peace and war» in the form of composition with a given theme. In fact, this work is pacifist. Its composition is built in a sharp contrast between images of war and peace. Both composition parts end with the character's pacifist appeal to peace: «Be in a hurry, beneficent peace, hurry to extinguish the enmity between people, ... pour out your balsamic juice into the hearts engulfed in flames of war» and «Run, cherished peace, run between people; their bliss will not be shaken under your quiet cover, and in silence they will enjoy the benefits of life and God's gifts» (Zhukovsky, 2017). The author actualizes the symbol of «quiet cover» that represents both harmony and peace as the God's supreme gift and reflects the poet's desire to realize a single nodal link of being. As a result, Peace in the moral-philosophical aspect is represented as the embodiment of Good that is opposed to War – the embodiment of Evil.

This moral-philosophical context is referred to Hero Image as well the interpretation of which one can be found in Zhukovsky's «boarding school» essays «Real hero» (1799), «Hero» (1800) and the poem «Virtue» («From the lights of lights the ray poured out...») (1798).

«Real hero» demonstrates the refusal to glorify those people who achieve glory by means of cruelty and villainy. The lyrical character-narrator exclaims above the tomb with the inscription *«to the winner»*: “Who is this winner? The murderer of thousands? And the murderers are called winners, monuments are constructed for them to make offspring glorify them! No! Let the madman glorify them...” (Zhukovsky, 2017, p. 45).

Such heroes' aspirations are characterized as fornication renunciation of God and Nature for the sake of ghost glory, and this way is undoubtedly regarded as death one: «Heroes! Where are you going with drawn swords? What are you running after? After the glory? After the ghost you will never get? Look around: your footprints are stained with blood; malice is running with you; the bodies you have killed cover your way; the nature is discouraged around you, and there are lots of disasters happening from your hand. (Zhukovsky, 2017, p. 49)

Zhukovsky declares the ideals of a sensitive heart and virtue in the aspects of sentimentalism ideology and religious-philosophical ideas of Russian Freemasonry: “<...>that one who has a heart and loves virtue, will turn away with horror from the proud obelisk and remember how many victims had been killed before it was erected” (Zhukovsky, 2017, p. 51). Following the ideas of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin and Ivan V. Lopuhin, the poet develops the concept of a virtuous personality that enters into his inner world, self-cognizes and seeks light, peace and truth. According to Yury M. Lotman, Vasily A. Zhukovsky could not join the Masonic lodge of Astrea Union earlier than 1818 (as cited in Lotman, 1960). But the poet's views were greatly influenced by the philosophy that took place in Masonic prose, journalism and poetry (Yanushkevich, 2006).

When idealizing the image of «mankind's friend» Zhukovsky creates specific religious-philosophical cult of heroic virtue in his early essays. In the context of this cult, the poet with didactic pathos exposes the myth of Alexander the Great's heroism and military glory in the poem «Hero», opposing him to the utopian ideal of real Hero.

Here Alexander is “<...>conceited, violent, / Strove to apply a yoke / And universe bonds are heavy!». His arrogance «Had no<...> limits; / But this goal was just smoke!». The author blames Alexander here: «You were hungry for glory – and in the madness / You dared to honor yourself with God»; «You wanted to have / The sacred rank of the Hero; / Ah, what is a hero when all his deeds / Are written in blood?» (Zhukovsky, 1999, p. 116).

According to the poet, all Alexander's motives and ambitions are full of vanity, arrogance and have an extremely egotistical character. The Real Hero is represented as a person inspired by virtue and love: “The real Hero is that one / Who honors the virtue, / Who doesn't want to shed the blood<...>; / «Who is in a hurry to wipe the stream of tears / Good deeds are in streams; / Who loves others like himself<...>” (Zhukovsky, 1999, p. 121).

Ethic-religious-philosophical foundations of Zhukovsky's ideas about virtuous Hero were realized in 1798 in the poem «Virtue». («Under the starry shelter of a quiet night...») and «Virtue» («From the light of lights a ray poured out...»). In this lyrical dilogy the author declares rhetorically the immortality of «good deeds» that is opposed to mass destruction: «Only good deeds then / Will remain imperishable. / Nothing can destroy them, / Nothing can cloud them» (Zhukovsky, 1999, p. 133).

«Good deeds» are represented as moral absolute in the value system that is maintained by the lyrical character. When a person performs them he takes the path of truth, overcoming death, being closer to God and introducing to eternal life: «Before the God we will be glorified, / And we will be dressed in Truth's clothes; / Then we'll appear with pleasure / Before the throne of the God» (Zhukovsky, 1999, p. 135).

Ode tone together with melancholic-optimistic dominant of the character's lyrical mind motivate didacticism and moral categorism that can be found in the last stanza of the poem as well: «Oh! How the virtue must be sacred / For all the mortals on the Earth! / And slaves, and Masters of the world, / They must be good for everyone...» (Zhukovsky, 1999, p. 140).

The final moral-philosophical declaration of the lyrical character that is based on both comprehension and criticism of false life values, prepares generalization about the origin and nature of virtue concluded in the second part of the dilogy. Its beginning illustrates the dynamics of the author's views concerning «light» as the source of life and the greatest moral dominant of being.

To compare two Zhukovsky's works «May morning» (1797) and «Virtue» (1798) we can find axiological changes in the poet's mind. For example, according to Sadovnikov (2008), the first one represents light birth in accordance with culture traditions of pagan antiquity, while in the second one the idea of light is expressed in connection with Christian idea: «From the lights of lights a ray poured out / And gave the birth to virtue, / The world that dozed in the dark, has woken up, / The Earth was filled with gaiety; / <...> Golden, blissful century has descended / From the heaven of high bright countries, / Divine delight has taken the possession / In the depths of sacred hearts» (Zhukovsky, 1999, p. 211).

Almost quoting Nicene-Constantinople Creed in the opening verses («God from God, Light from Light»), Zhukovsky relates the virtue birth to Jesus Christ's birth. In both cases the source of Creation is regarded as the God's Light. If one is introduced to this light then it is the gift of divine mercy (Sadovnikov, 2008). The antagonist of virtue in the poem is «the daughter of hell - Malice» which is «the creator of countless fierce troubles» (it gives birth to discords, wars, murders, arrogance, lie, greed and what not).

7. Conclusion

To sum up, to Vasily A. Zhukovsky's mind, the presence of virtue light is the utmost dignity of Real Hero. The poet is convinced that heroes like Alexander the Great are deprived of this great dignity. Reflection on his historical and moral character in Zhukovsky's works anticipates the development of Napoleon theme and greatly determines the poet's attitude towards «heroic» personality of Napoleon. It should be said that Zhukovsky initiated the exposure of Napoleon myth on the basis of Russian national and Christian moral ideology. He became the progenitor of Napoleon or rather anti-Napoleon theme in Russian literature.

References

- Bichkov, I. A. (1903). *Zhukovsky's diaries*. Public Benefit.
- Dmitrovsky, A. Z. (2009). *V.A. Zhukovsky. "A singer in the camp of Russian soldiers"*. Baltic Federal University after Immanuel Kant.
- Izikova, I. A. (2003). Philosophical, historical, religious and moral problems in V.A. Zhukovsky's prose. *Bulletin of Tomsk state pedagogical university*, 1(33), 9–14.
- Kanunova, F. Z., & Izikova, I. A. (2001). *Moral and aesthetic quests of both Russian romanticism and religion (1820–1840-s)*. Siberian chronograph.
- Lotman, Y. M. (1960). Zhukovsky – a mason. *Scientific notes of Tartu University*, (98), 310–314.
- Parsamov, V. S. (2007). V.A. Zhukovsky and Austerlitz ("Bard's songs over the coffin of Slavs-winners" in the historical context). *Bulletin of Saratov University*, 7(2), 53–58.
- Sadovnikov, A. G. (2008). Artistic realization of melancholic character's aesthetic type in V.A. Zhukovsky's poetry of 1797–1800. *Bulletin of Nizhny Novgorod University after N.I. Lobachevsky*, 4, 233–239.
- Sadovnikov, A. G. (2013). About some aspects of mason ideology and melancholic nature philosophy in V.A. Zhukovsky's works of 1797–1800. *Bulletin of Samara scientific centre of Russian Sciences Academy*, 15(2(4)), 1051–1055.
- Semenko, I. M. (1975). *Life and poetry of Zhukovsky*. Imaginative literature.
- Veselovsky, A. N. (2016). *V.A. Zhukovsky. The poetry of feelings and "heart" imagination*. Centre of humanitarian initiatives.
- Yanushkevich, A. S. (2006). In the world of Zhukovsky. In: *Zhukovsky's works as artistic system*. Science.
- Zhukovsky, V. A. (1999). *Poems. 1797–1818. Complete collection of essays and letters in 20 volumes*. (Vol. 1). Languages of Russian culture.
- Zhukovsky, V. A. (2017). *Prose. 1797–1806. Complete collection of essays and letters in 20 volumes*. (Vol. 8). Languages of Slavic cultures.