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*Wzgarda godności y czci pragnienie.*  
A Political Moral Fable  
from the Archive of Simiaon Polacki

Świętej Pamięci dziadka i babci, Stanisław Walczak i  
Katarzyna ze Stefanowskich Walczakowa

That the Polish language and Polish culture exerted influence far beyond the limits of Polish ethnographic territory is a long established truism for which a survey of authors and works published in the *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów* provides abundant evidence. Whether Orthodox or Protestant, Roman or Eastern-rite Catholic, Belarusian and Ukrainian citizens of this very large multinational state often were intimately familiar with Polish religious and secular literature of the Renaissance and Baroque. They made use of Polish literary models and the Polish language in both serious writing directed at the literate public as well as in their intimate private correspondence<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps the most illustrative figure of this phenomenon is Simiaon Polacki (1629-1680). Born Samuel Sitnianowicz-Piotrowski (Samuil Sitianovič-Pjatroŭski) in Polack into a Belarusian burgher family of mixed religious allegiance, the future poet and courtier acquired a thorough knowledge of Polish and Polish religious and secular culture as a result of his education at the feet of Orthodox instructors at the *Collegium Mohyleanum* in Kyjiv and under Jesuit tutelage at the *Academia* in Vilnius or at their *collegium* in his native city<sup>2</sup>. Scholarship long has pointed out the influence of Polish literature in his formation, in his personal library, and in his literary praxis<sup>3</sup>. The writer of these lines has recently published some of Polacki's surviving correspon-

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<sup>1</sup> Martel 1938 remains the classic study of this phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup> The basic biographies are still: Tatarskij 1886 and Majkov 1889. Rolland 1985a (cf. fn. 1); 1985b (fn. 1 list the critical literature to 1980). L.I. Sazonova (1991) gives virtually all the literature on Polacki's life and works to 1991. P. Bushkovitch (1992) provides new and interesting data on the religious situation in Polacki's immediate family (Bushkovitch 1992: 232, n. 24). L. Jankowska and B. Kozak (1998, cf. n. 2) add to the existing literature. In their excellent article the Polish authors situate *Wzgarda godności* in the tradition of paraenetic literature and provide an erudite philological analysis of selected elements of the poem's content and place the text within Polacki's general biography and ideology.

<sup>3</sup> A. Brückner (1888) speaks of the Polish influence and the libraries of the Ukrainian-Belarusian intellectual circles in the later XVII century. While O.I. Bilec'kyj (1965), R. Łuźny (1966: 16-19, 109-128), A.R. Hippisley (1983) discusses the composition of Polacki's library. They are supplemented by S.R. Dolgova (1987) and M.A. Jusim (1993).

dence in Polish to family and colleagues in Belarus and Ukraine<sup>4</sup>. A survey of the early texts published by V.K. Bylinin and L.U. Zvonareva together with others still in manuscript reveals not only Simiaon's interest in Polish literature and culture, but also his ability to blend Polish literary models and sources with his own creative tendencies to produce works of often high quality and lasting interest<sup>5</sup>.

A case in point is the text that is the subject of our study: the moral-political fable *Wzgarda godności y czci pragnienie* recently published by Ludmila Jankowska and Barbara Kozak. This text is notable for its adaptation of a Scriptural source to contemporary problems of political reality in the Commonwealth, for its views on the nature and effects of political power, for its ideas on the qualities of a good ruler, and its opinion of those who openly or avidly seek the glory of this world or high station in life<sup>6</sup>.

The source of the text is Judges 8: 8-15, which is part of longer narrative of a fratricidal struggle for power in the city of Sichem<sup>7</sup>. One brother, Abimelech, has murdered all seventy of his brethren save one, the youngest named Jotham. This brother saved himself by hiding during the slaughter of his siblings. Emerging from his refuge to speak to those Sichemites who have accepted and supported the new victorious fratricide, Jotham delivers a stinging rebuke in the form of the following parable:

An assembly of trees meets to elect their tuler. They approach in turn the olive tree, the fig, and the grapevine requesting each to accept the kingship. Each in turn refuses citing their contentment to serve in a useful but lesser role as producers of good things of benefit to gods and men. In desperation the leafy assembly turns to the bramble bush (*Rhamen burmena* in our text) asking this thorny and otherwise useless plant to reign over them all. The bramble's reply is affirmative, pointed, and nasty. He says: "If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of

<sup>4</sup> Rolland 1985; 1992; 1993; 1995.

<sup>5</sup> V.K. Bylinin, L.U. Zvonareva, in *Simeon Polockkij: Virši* (Minsk 1990) Polacki's early verse is to be found in *Pandecta, seu Collecteana albo Zebranie rozmaitych scriptów y notatie*, Russian State Ancient Document Archive (*Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj archiw drevnich aktov*) Fond. 381. Synodal Press Library Collection (*Sinodal'naja tipografskaja biblioteka*), MS. 1800 (Henceforth: RGADA, MS. 1800) a miscellany in folio containing much material on the author and his activities. A second manuscript – State Historical Museum, Synodal Collection, (*Gosudarstvennyj istoričeskij muzej, Sinodal'noe sobranie*) № 731 – entitled by some seventeenth century hand (possibly Polacki's) *Kniga vyrši na gospodskie prazdniki i na nie znamenytie dni*, also contains verse and other texts also from the early period of Polacki's life and activity.

<sup>6</sup> The text as published by Bylinin and Zvonareva (1990: 159-164) contains some misreadings and misprints. These infelicities have been corrected by Jankowska and Kozak who provide an annotated scholarly transcription of the entire text together with a reproduction of the poem as it appears in the ms. I have followed their reading of the text, but have preserved the original orthography, providing modern punctuation where needed, based on my reading of the ms. *in situ*.

<sup>7</sup> I have used the King James version of the Bible for the English version of the text, and the Wujek translation (L'viv 1839-1840) for the Polish version. I have maintained the orthography of this edition for the passages quoted therefrom.

Lebanon.” Passing over from the parable to his own situation Jotham says in Judges 9:19-20:

If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from the house of Millo and devour Abimelech.

After delivering this fiery speech, Jothan escapes to the town of Beer, fleeing his murderous brother and his siblings’ supporters.

*Wzgarda godności* expands upon this slender skeleton of narrative. In the first part of the poem the author transforms the source material from a short and laconic tale that has many of the features of oral narrative into a more decorous and polished literary fable suitable for a cultured audience. In the second and longer portion of the text the narrator spells out the lesson to be learned in a discourse on pride, on power and its nature, on the wisdom of seeking high office, and on the vices to be avoided and the virtues to be cultivated by those who of necessity take part in public life.

Let us consider first the adaptation of passages drawn from the Biblical text as exemplified by the answer of each of the first three plants to which the “sejm” of trees offers kingship. In the Biblical text the Olive answers concisely: “Aza mogę opuścić tłuścność moią, którey używają y bogowie i ludzie, A iść żebych między drzewami wyniesiona była?”

The answer in *Wzgarda godności* differs greatly in pace, tone, and motivation. Rule over others, while not in itself a bad thing, is best left to those who by nature are most capable. Unequal to that task, the Olive prefers to remain useful to society at large in keeping with its natural qualities and talents. The tree says:

Dobra lecz dziwna iest nam wasza mowa,  
Dobra rzecz wprawdzie sprawowac inemi,  
Lecz kto udolny silami swoiemi.  
Dziwna mi przeto iże słabosc moią,  
Wiek moy zielony y wzrost nie po temu.  
A nad to rodzę tłuścność swiatu wszemu.  
Bogu y ludziom dziwnie pożyteczą,  
I mogąc wzdzy ia tak być niestateczną  
Bym, opuscivszy wygody takowe,  
Miała się kasac na honory nowe.  
Proszę łask waszych, mieycie mię wymowną,  
Zgoła ciężarem taki wielki nie równą.

In the biblical text the Fig refuses the proffered kingship with the same conciseness and amazement as the Olive: “Aza mogę opuścić słodkość moię, y owoce przedzięczne a iśdź abych między inszemi drzewy było wyniesione?” The author of *Wzgarda godności* has softened and expanded the fig’s somewhat egotistical reply:

Ia wszystkim drzewom usłużyć bym rada,  
 Krolem byc nie mnie. Dosc się ia kłopoce  
 Bym słodkie mogła swey rodić owoce.  
 Tych ia wdzięczności nigdy nie opuszczę  
 Za rząd krolewski nad lasy y puszcze,  
 A drzewom wszystkim pospolitey rzeczy,  
 Chać tę zawdzięczać będzie mi na pieczy.

Much like the olive tree, the fig refuses to accept a higher social function that would prove more onerous than that which nature has already assigned it. Furthermore, to leave a presumably well-tended and orderly garden where the tree struggles to bear sweet fruit in order “to reign over forests and wastes” is a prospect that makes this particular kingship even more unattractive. Although not ungrateful for the offer, the Fig, like the Olive sends the delegation away disappointed.

The Vine’s refusal in Judges is as short and to the point as that of the Olive and the Fig: “I azali mogę opuścić wino moje, które uwesela Boga y ludzie, y między inszemi drzewy bydź wyniesiona?” In *Wzgarda godności* the reply is more stately but nonetheless final. The Vine wishes to continue its service to God and man, preferring to continue “blessed productiveness” to kingly regalia. The reply in full reads:

f. 136 v. Rodzę, rzkać, grona słodką krwią płynące,  
 Boga y ludzi mile weselące,  
 Ktore zaś mogę opuscic dla tego,  
 Bym się uięła rządu krolewskiego.  
 Wolę wplodności być błogosławiona  
 Niżli krolewskim wiencem ozdobiona.  
 Niech że mię, proszę, za wymowną maia  
 Szlachetne drzewa, ktore czesc mi daia.  
 Wdzięcznam ich laski, wdzięczyć obiecuię,  
 Rządy siły moi recasuie.

In each of the above examples we see that the author of this piece has made use of the source material adhering to the basic reply of each plant as given in the Biblical text. He has, however, recast the short simple reply of what probably was an originally oral narrative into a measured and graceful poetic discourse that amplifies the motivation for refusal, and underscores the noble nature of the reluctant candidates.

The reply of the bramble is as sharp and acrid as that of its Biblical source, as a comparison of the two passages given below will reveal. First consider the passage from the Holy Writ.

Ieśli mię prawdziwie królem nad sobą stanowicie, przydżciesz a odpoczywajcie pod cieniem moim, a ieśli nie chcecie, nechay wynidzie ogień z rhamny; a nechay poźrze cedry libańskie.

Now the passage from *Wzgarda godności*:

Iesli mię wasza krolem bierze rada,  
Prawdziwie, przydźcie w cienie wdzięczne moie  
Na odpoczynek, chyląc karki swoje.  
Iesli nie chcecie, niech z Rhamna wypadnie  
Ogien a pozrze cedr Liwanski snadnie.

As we can see, the author has incorporated the biblical passage almost unchanged, adding only the demand for a sign of submission (*chyląc karki swoje*) demanded by the haughty bramble as the price of its fulfillment of the anguished and frustration-filled plea “*Kroluy nad nami, Rhamie opuściay!*” This reply sharply contrasts with the courteous and gentle speech of the other candidates and highlights the significant difference between them and their attitudes and that of the bramble. It also allows for the hitherto unobtrusive narrator to enter the text with his commentary and exegesis for the edification of his readers. The narrator exclaims:

O zła hardości drzewa nikczemnego!  
Takes pierzchliwa do sławy srogiego.  
Coś wady uczynił drzewom za pożytek,  
A na zniszczenie ogniem palisz wszytek.

Having vented his anger at the “evil pride of a base tree”, the narrator begins the second major part of the text – the exegesis of the parable and its application to the contemporary political scene. The author establishes a connection between the bramble and those who actively seek rank and honors in society. The poet proclaims that those who most desire power and rank are those least worthy of acquiring it. He says:

Tak iście na tym oplakany m swiecie  
Czci pragnie, ktore iako smiecie  
Godzien od wszelakich biesiad odpędzenia,  
Ba, y czci za złość wszelkiej osądzenia.

Opposed to this type are the characteristics of *ludzie stateczni* which are symbolized by the Olive, the Fig, and Vine. In comparing each of these to the “base tree” the author outlines their particular virtue and expands upon this basic idea with sentiments couched in what often are maxim-like couplets, accompanied by illustrative comparisons, some of which of great vividness. Of those comparable to the Olive the author writes that they understand the transitory nature of honors and therefore flee from them:

125                   Przeciwny sposob ludzi iest statecznych,  
Iako oliwa swiatu użytecznych.  
Iak mogąc tacy honorow biegaia,  
Acz ich godności same upraszaia.

- 130 Zamkniono wrota takich przed godnością.  
 Nie uwodzą się żadną wyniosłością,  
 Wiedzą, że iak dym im się wyszey wzbiia  
 Wyniszczon bywa, tak y godnosc miia.  
 Albo iak bąbol im się większy nadmnie,  
 Tym prędzey ginie, tak y godnosc sniadnie.

Of those comparable to the fig (presumably those who pursue an academic or ecclesiastical career) the author stresses their complete disinterest in high office, social prominence, titles stressing their desire for a peaceful refuge, safe from the turbulence and violence of the world. He includes a vivid thumbnail sketch of the negative actions of those who do not measure up to the standard and several striking illustrations of not just the inconstancy of fortune, but the violence with which she may end a careerist's drive to the top. He concludes this section by admonishing those who are truly wise to follow the example of the Fig and refuse when asked to assume high office. The entire passage reads:

- 135 Kto cnot owocem drzewu Figowemu  
 Zrownąć się może, ze wszech naslodszeniu  
 I ten obiega urzedow wysokich.  
 Nie szerzy w uczcie szat skrzydel szerokich  
 Nie trwa o pierszosc mieysc w posiedzeniu.  
 140 Niech że być zwany Doctor w nauczeniu,  
 Za nic ma tytuł, fraszka praelatury,  
 Nie trwa o mitrę, o iuestatury.  
 Spokoiny kącik iemu za ray stoi,  
 W ktorym upadku namniey się nie boi.  
 Na drzewa małe pioruny nie biia,  
 145 Ani teź wiatry szturmem na nie wiia  
 Naywiększe łatwiey lamane bywają,  
 Bo y s korzenia snadnie wywraciaią.  
 Lekkie pioreczka pod niebo wzniesione,  
 W momencie na dol bywaią strącone.  
 150 Tak szczęście kogo pod niebo wyniesie,  
 Prętko o skalę upadku stłucze się  
 Kto tedy mądry, honorow nie goni  
 Owszem, wszelako od owych się stroni,  
 Przykładem Figi, ktora odmowila,  
 155 Gdy na krolewstwo upraszana była.

Like those useful to society (the Olive), like the virtuous (the Fig), those persons whose lips pour forth wisdom like the sweet juices of the Vine also avoid seeking high honors. For them the love for and propagation of wisdom exceeds all things in pleasure and enjoyment: Wisdom is secure and honored by all good things. Life “at the top”, on the other hand, is full of fear, cares, and instability. Those who cannot live in such circumstances best not seek high office, but avoid them at all costs. Of all

this we read in the lines devoted to those who are like the Vine:

Kto też MACICY Winney iest podobny  
 Boskiey mądrości w sercu gronorodnym,  
 Ktorego usta mądrości wylewają,  
 Iako więc grona z siebie moszcz wydaia.  
 160 Nie zechce taki swey niechac słodkosci  
 By dla naywyższych urzędow godnosci,  
 Bo wszelkie skarby z nią próżne równosci  
 Nizsze są nieba od prawdy mądrości.  
 Mądrość bezpieczna, przyjemna wesola,  
 165 Wszelakie. dobra iey holduią zgola.  
 Stolce, zaś, wielkie, przykre, niebezpieczne  
 Pelne boiaźni, trosk, y niestateczne.  
 Mądry Salomon aby to obiawil,  
 Lwami maiestat zewsząd swoy ostawil.  
 170 Iakby też mówiąc: “Kto się lwow nie lęka.  
 Tego do sceptru ledwie zgodna ręka.”  
 Niech rychło przeto na MAIESTAT' siędzie.  
 Kto prawdzizey mądrosci nabędzie.  
 Rad się wymawia, czasem się okupi  
 175 Od wielkich rządow, kto prawie nie głupi.

If those who are useful, modest, and truly wise do not seek honors and offices, who then pursues such goals? The author is quick and cutting in his answer: the base, the morally corrupt, those repugnant to God and those useless to both God and men. As the poem says:

Ten tylko karze się godności  
 fol. 137 r. Kto iest podobny RHAMNU nikczemności.  
 Podly rodzaiem, podlejszy złościami  
 Mierziony Bogu niecnot swych owocami,  
 180 Nie użyteczny Bogu y swiatowi  
 Na rządy wielkie kasać się gotowy,

When such persons do attain power they become insufferable tyrants, impious debauchers, full of pride and useless to their subjects. Fearing neither heaven nor hell, they institute a reign of terror, abrogating the rights of their subjects and ignoring the laws of the realm. They value neither the obedience of their subjects nor any sound advice offered them. They shout down anyone who would remind them of their mortality and Divine retribution for their misdeeds. In the end not only do such tyrants perish, but they also cause ruin and misfortune to their entire kingdom. After death their name is expunged from human memory and their soul, like the “lousy bramble bush” (*Rhamnisko*), is consigned to everlasting fire. As the author tells us in a passage full of righteous indignation:

Na rządy wielkie kasać się gotowy,  
 Których nabywszy, ach, iak niestateczny,  
 Tyran, wydzierca, niebożnik wszeteczny.  
 Trudno przystąpić dla pychy srogości,  
 185 Iako do Rhamnu dla kołających ości.  
 A co poddanych za pożytek z niego?  
 Strach, boiaźń, rany od tyrana zlego,  
 Na niebo pluie, piekła się nie boi,  
 Niższy poddane prawa oddeymuie  
 190 Lamie wolności, co chce to sprawuie.  
 Za nic mu słusność, zdrowych rad nie słucha.  
 Śmierć, sąd kto wspomni, ten trąbi na głucha  
 Wszystkich zagubi y sam ginie własnie,  
 Iako skra, miasto spaliwszy, zagaśnie.  
 195 Wiele narobi przez małe pożycie,  
 Bo iak dym w krotce straci swoi bycie,  
 Albo iak ogień przed wodą zaginie.  
 Zagrzebią pamięć złoźnika w popiele,  
 Który na swiecie bied narobił wiele.  
 200 A nędzna dusza pewnie się ostanie  
 W ciemney przepasci, w ognia oceanie,  
 Bo iako Rhamnisko ni nacz się nie godzi  
 Tylko ogniovi pokarm się przygodzi,  
 Tak y nikczemnik chciwy sławy świata  
 205 Strawą iest ognia w nieskonczone lata.

Turning from the world of the text to that of his reader, the author/narrator concludes this parable with advice that applies not only to those “greedy for the glory of this world”, but to all those who are mindful of their end – “take stock of your situation lest you suffer the same fate and, if you have sinned, repent, and by your good deeds wipe out past offenses.” He writes:

Mierze się kaźday przedsię stanu swego  
 Iesli chcesz ubiec tak upadku zlego,  
 A kto się zawiodł, obacz się przynaymniej;  
 Nagrozd dobrocią przeszle twoie złości,  
 210 Tak uydziesz kary, nabędziesz radości.

A close reading of this text reveals that the author skillfully adapted the unadorned Biblical narrative to his own purpose.

The typologically similar *fabula* of the search for a monarch was ideally suited to the contemporary Polish political model with its elective monarchy. The use of the



term “*seym*” in the text is therefore both natural and suggestive<sup>8</sup>. It connects the world of the text to that of the reader and directs his or her attention to the *sjuzhet* of the piece as suggested by the title-disdain for honors and the dangers inherent in the desire for glory and those who actively seek it. The transformation of the originally simple statements by the unwilling candidates into decorous speeches reflecting their character with the simultaneous preservation of the harsh reply of the bramble highlights the contrast between the virtuous and vicious upon which the plot of this parable is constructed. The bramble’s haughty and acrimonious declamation also motivates the author-narrator’s intrusion into the text. Such a transition paves the way for the moralizing exegesis that follows.

While treating the dilemma posed by the lure of honors and rank in general terms, the narrator yet includes two details in the discussion of those whom he likens to the fig tree that are striking. In the first instance the narrator gives a brief sketch of those who attract attention by their dress and who seek primacy of place at feasts as he writes: “Nie szerzy w uczcie szat skrzydel szerokich / Nie trwa o pierszosc mieysc w posiedzeniu”. The image of a figure dressed in the ample robes of church or state which fly about as he rushes hurriedly to take the best place at the table is suggested by the “wide sleeves of their garments”. The highly effective instrumentation of this line with its emphasis on the sounds *sz*, *rz*, *cz*, *ć* implants this image of rustling fabric and hustling courtier firmly in the subconscious of the reader. In the second instance the author takes to task those who seek titles and especially high church offices saying: “Za nic ma tytuł, fraszka-praelatury, / Nie trwa o mitrę, o iuestatury.”

These two passages stand out simply because of their vividness and because these details are the only ones so highlighted in the text with the exception of those that characterize the “tyrant” who gains power. From this one may infer that the two images relate to one another and that they represent a particular auctorial agenda in a piece devoted to pride – that deadly sin which is the source of the striving for power, honor, and rank. Their presence also raises questions concerning the authorship of this text about which we shall speak in due course.

The similes and metaphors by which the author illustrates the dangers attendant to striving for rank and power constitute a second group of artistic features that characterize this second portion of the text. They display the typically Baroque themes of *vanitas*, of the inconstancy of fortune, of dynamism, of violence and terror. They are

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<sup>8</sup> Jankowska and Kozak (1998: 204) suggest that the poem might be Polacki’s reaction to the proposed election of Aleksej Michajlovič: such a subtext is indeed tantalizingly possible, given Polacki’s known interest in contemporary political events (see *Three Early Satires by Simeon Polotsky...*), the scattered comments in the published correspondence (n. 4, *supra*) and the poem *Tron (Fron) istinny* (in Bylinin, Zvonareva 1990: 22-25). The Olive’s refusal to leave a well tended garden to reign over “forests and wastes” (*lasy y puszczy*) heightens this suspicion, calling to mind as it does the very brief reign of Henry Valois, and perhaps reflects rather the attitude of a Western European candidate to the Polish throne rather than one from the East. The matter bears further investigation in as much as in the 1660’s Polacki expressed interest in the election of Michal Korybutowicz Wiśniowiecki to the Polish throne.

intended to buttress the narrator's moralizing in an aesthetically effective manner. Thus, in speaking of the ephemeral nature of honor the author says:

Wiedzą, że iak dym im się wyszey wzbiią  
Wyniszczon bywa, tak y godnosc miia.  
Albo iak bąbol im się większy nadmnie,  
Tym prędzey ginie, tak y godnosc sniadnie.

The author also cautions us to beware of Fortune, a goddess whose fickleness is well known. While able to raise us to great heights, she can dash our hopes with alacrity and destructive effect.

Lekkie pioreczka pod niebo wzniesione,  
W momencie na dol bywaią strącone.  
Tak szczęście kogo pod niebo wyniesie,  
Prętko o skałę upadku stłucze się  
Kto tedy mądry, honorow nie goni  
Owszem, wszelako od owych się stroni...

Speaking of those who seek humble tranquility rather than tempestuous prominence the narrator says:

145                   Spokoiny kącik iemu za ray stoi,  
                          W ktorym upadku namniey się nie boi.  
                          Na drzewa male pioruny nie biia,  
                          Ani też wiatry szturmem na nie wiia  
                          Naywiększe łatwiey lamane bywaią,  
                          Bo y s korzenia snadnie wywracaią.

And finally, in contrasting the pleasures and security of wisdom with life in the *haut monde* the author states:

165                   Mądrość bezpieczna, przyjemna wesola,  
                          W szelakie dobra iey holduią zgola.  
                          Stolce, zas, wielkie, przykre, niebezpieczne,  
                          Pelne boiaźni, trosk, y niestateczne.

Each of the above passages adds emotional weight to the otherwise cerebral argument of the whole piece that the search for honor and prominence in society is not the path of the *vir doctus et virtuosus* but one which should be avoided at all costs. To do otherwise is to put one's life and one's soul at risk.

There is one final question to be addressed in relation to this well crafted and highly literate text – the question of authorship. In spite of the fact that Bylinin and Zvonareva include it in their published collection of Polacki's verse, and Jankowska and Kozak ascribe the text to that author, the matter is not so clear-cut and easily

settled. The text found in the Russian State Archive for Ancient Document RGADA MS. No. 1800 is part of a larger convoy of Polish verse that consists of working drafts of several poems that are undoubtedly original. To judge from the watermarks the ms. itself dates from the late 1640's and early to mid 1650's<sup>9</sup>. There is no evident order in the overall organization of the texts. Thus, verses from the mid-1650's are found on the first folia of the ms. while one of the few dated and signed texts, Polacki's translated *Akathistos to the Most Radiant Mother of God* (1648) is found much later in the ms. *Wzgarda godności* is found in a group of Polish texts on fols. 135/157-139/161. It follows immediately after the working draft of the poem *Czystosci Strożów 6*, a work that is undoubtedly Polacki's and therefore *Wzgarda godności* is arguably his as well. The fact that it does not appear among the clean copies of several of the Polish texts in the State Historical Museum, Sinodal Collection ms. 731 could be seen as a counter argument to this attribution. A second possible argument against Polacki's authorship are the references to *mitry*, *praelatury* and *inuestatury* (lines 139-140), all of which are more appropriate, to the Western rather than the Eastern Church. But once again, given Simiaon's background and the culture or the area in which he was raised, educated, and initially active, it is not out of the question that he was familiar with these terms and could employ them when circumstances demanded.

Could Polacki have written such a poem on such a theme? We know from his verse, his later sermons, and from his personal correspondence that he was both interested in politics and the attributes of a good ruler, and was particularly concerned about problems of pride and ambition. We know that, at least in theory, he wrote that he valued safety and security over attaining rank and honors<sup>10</sup>. We know that as a writer Polacki could be both smooth and consoling as well as mocking and sarcastic as the occasion demanded it. We know that as a religious writer he constantly adapted scriptural and liturgical texts for his creative efforts. All this argues convincingly for attributing *Wzgarda godności* to his pen. And here we will let the matter rest at least for the time being.

*Wzgarda godności* is a highly polished discourse that draws upon an ancient text to draw a lesson on the sin of pride – a flaw of human nature which lies at the core of much human behavior and misfortune. Transformed by the author, the tale of the olive, fig, vine and bramble, the Biblical core of the work, enabled him to address contemporary problems in light of transcendent values as illustrated by the authority of The Book. The Biblical text was familiar to Polacki in both Polish and Latin, as was the subject of the text. Polish was, to all intents and purposes, a second mother tongue

<sup>9</sup> The watermarks of ms. 1800 which I have been able to observe *in situ* – a mounted figure in a double circle containing the name “Marcian Giedroyc” most closely resembles Laucevičius 1967, nos. 1089 and 1090 (I, p. 171), identified (I, p. 189) as Vilnius 1646, Raseinai 1648 (No. 1089) and Vilnius 1647, Raseinai 1648 (no. 1090). T.N. Protas'eva (1973: 110) provides three watermarks for this ms., the earliest dating to 1652, and the others dating to 1676-1681.

<sup>10</sup> Bushkovitch 1992: 168-169; Bylinin, Zvonareva 1990: 22-25. Rolland 1985b: 175; Rolland 1995: 395, 397, 406, 408.

to him and his training in rhetoric and poetics in the schools of the Commonwealth enabled him to write verse that at times was quite respectable. If it is the work of his pen *Wzgarda godności* gives further proof of that ability. If not, the fact that he chose to include it in his poetic storehouse testifies to his literary discernment. In either case, it is a testament to the influence of Polish language and culture in the formation of the sensibilities of one of the Commonwealth's many non-Polish citizens.

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### Abstract

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*Wzgarda godności y czci pragnienie*

*Wzgarda godności y czci pragnienie* is a notable text for its adaptation of a Scriptural source to contemporary problems of political reality in the Polish Commonwealth. The Author considers first the adaptation of passages drawn from the Biblical text and analyses how the poet recasts the short narrative, which was probably of oral origin, into a graceful poetic discourse. In the second part the Author shows how the parable of the Olive, the Fig and the Vine has been adapted to the political situation of the Polish Commonwealth, a Republican system where the King was elected by the nobles. It is better to renounce seeking rank and honors in society – the poet concludes – for the sake of a virtuous life and the good of men.

In the last part of the paper the problem of authorship of the poem is discussed. In Rolland's opinion it is possible to ascribe the poem to Simiaon Polacki: both style and ideas expressed in the verses easily find analogies with the other well known literary works of the Bielorussian poet.