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Introduction

In 1836 France Prešeren published his historic romantic poem The Baptism on the Savica, which has become Slovenia's national epic. The poem, written as the first attempt at a Slovenian epic or Romantic poem of nation-forming scope, deals with Slovenians' 8th century conversion – through violence – to Christianity.¹ The poem is composed of three parts: a dedication to his friend Matija Čop in sonnet form, added by Prešeren later for the collection Poems, and of two main narrative sections. The first part comprises an Introduction describing the desperate encirclement of Črtomir's army, the battle and its consequences, the second and the main part comprises the Baptism describing the baptism of Črtomir at the Savica Falls.

Črtomir is separated from Bogomila when he is moved to defend his people against the Christian Valjahun's attack. After suffering defeat on the battlefield and despairing at the death of all of his comrades, Črtomir wants to take his life, but when he thinks of Bogomila he finds a higher sense of life. Bogomila senses Črtomir's distress and comforts him by promising him a love that nothing cannot extinguish. Bogomila admits to him that she has converted to Christianity and asks that he too convert to the Christian faith. So the poem moves from historical events and external drama to an intimate and subjective level. More than on the national perspective of the Christianization of Slovenians, the focus here is on the realm of the personal, on the intimate experience of love between Črtomir and Bogomila.

This article aims to shed light on matters of love in Prešeren from perspectives that have not yet been given much treatment. It considers love from the viewpoints of the relation between desire and sacrifice, the

¹ Cf. A. Zupan Sosič, *Ljubezen v Krstu pri Savici*, Ljubljana 2002, p. 267.

main heroes' renunciation of love, while also considering sacrifice thematically and in terms of religious anthropology and ethics. It is from these various viewpoints that it examines the love between Bogomila and Črtomir. In the end, the article deals with an example of the opposite direction of interpretation of Prešeren's poem in a more contemporary artistic creation by Dominik Smole (1929–1992).

1. The Way of Love from Battle to Devotion in Prešeren's Poem The Baptism on the Savica

Though Prešeren's Baptism on the Savica is primarily a verse epic, in an artistic and aesthetic sense there is also much moral and ethical drama to be seen. In the national context, drama first appears in the poet's evocation of an historical battle – the violent early Medieval Christianization of the community of Alpine and Pannonian Slavs who were the predecessors of today's Slovenians. The Christian Valjhun and his army violently quell the rebellious Črtomir and his forces. As Prešeren relates in the 26 tercets of the Introduction, Črtomir enters into battle with the stronger Christian army and suffers defeat.² The struggle between opposing passions, however, is not limited to external events. The poem's dramatic nature manifests itself primarily through the dramatic characters and especially through dramatic dialogues between opposites. Such oppositions are depicted most clearly in the second part of the poem, when Prešeren moves from the national and societal level, which deals collectively and objectively with the external historical truth, to a personal, intimate and subjective level.

As mentioned, there are three parts to the poem. At the beginning is an elegiac sonnet dedicated to Prešeren's mentor Matija Čop (1797–1835), a Slovenian linguist, literary historian and critic who died too young. The first part of the poem proper is made up of an Introduction, consisting of 26 three-line stanzas in tercet form, that describes how Črtomir's army is surrounded, as well as the ensuing battle and its conse-

² This conceiving of the dramatic, which derives from the idea of a dramatic act being a willful act that gives rise to discord, disagreements and struggles, along with the existence of some will, some volition, that causes conflict, is in keeping with Aristotle's description of Greek tragedy as well as with classic and classicist European theatre practice: "Antique Greek, Elizabethan, Shakespearean Theatre and French and German theatre of classicism as the struggle between passions." The conversational and conceptual drama that arose in the 19th century was also characterised as "a conflict of ideas, opposing opinions and views." See V. Kralj, *Dramaturški vademekum*, Ljubljana 1964, p. 5.

quences. The second section, the Baptism, describes Črtomir's tragic individual destiny after the battle. This main part is composed in ottava rima and runs to 53 stanzas. The narrative description of the epic events evokes a South Slav folk epic.³ The external drama is replaced by an internal, emotional drama in the emotional meeting of Bogomila and Črtomir.

Although some literary critics view The Baptism at the Savica as a "national epic," Prešeren employed a Romance poetic form in order to infuse the material with the spirit of "high" art.⁴ As agonizing as this Christianization through force was, it was in fact necessary for the continued existence of the Slovenians and for their inclusion into the European faith. Moreover, it took some thousand years for the Slovenians to adopt high European culture and the eminent literary forms that would rank them as equals of other European nations.⁵

For the Introduction, Prešeren imported into Slovenian the rhymes and rhythms of the Dantesque tercet, one of the most important Italian stanza forms.⁶ In this he was influenced by the Brothers Schlegel, who promoted the use of Romance verse forms, arguing that such non-Germanic forms were most conducive to expressing Romantic emotions. Dante's realisation of this form in The Divine Comedy resulted in a canonical work of world literature.⁷ Prešeren also transplanted the ottava rima stanza that was mostly likely created by Boccaccio and was the primary stanza form of the Renaissance epic, as exemplified in Ariosto's epic Orlando furioso. The form was welcomed during Romanticism, as evidenced by such works as Byron's satirical epic Don Juan and the main section of Prešeren's The Baptism on the Savica.⁸

Throughout the poem oppositions and contradictions provide for dramatic impetus, and this is reflected at the levels of form and content.

³ Cf. V. Osolnik, *Nacionalne junaške pesnitve južnih Slovanov v obdobju romantike*, Ljubljana 2002, p. 113.

⁴ Cf. B. A. Novak, *Romantična pesnitev v kontekstu zgodovinskega razvoja pesniških oblik*, Ljubljana 2002, p. 55.

⁵ By introducing the most recognised and noble European poetic forms into Slovenian lands, along with complex literary themes, Prešeren showed that Slovenian is no less adequate a language than any other language is, and that the "Slovenian nation had a right to an independent existence." Cf. M. Hladnik, *Dve povesti v verzih iz prve polovice 19. stoletja*, Ljubljana 2002, pp. 196–197.

⁶ "Terza rima" is Italian for "third rhyme."

⁷ B. A. Novak, *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸ Originally used for long poems that were heroic in subject matter, "ottava rima" was later used in many mock-heroic poems. Giovanni Boccaccio is believed to be the first to have used this form.

Prešeren is more interested in existential discord and dissonance than in peace and harmony. The poem, however, is not limited to dramatic elements, as there are also epic and lyrical elements. Though most of the poem is in fact devoted to the epic narrative so vibrantly transmitted to the reader, this epic tale is dramatically discordant, unsettled, and agitated. A similar drama also resides in the lyrical elements, as can be seen in the subjective and emotional meeting of the heroes Bogomila and Črtomir and in the subjective confessions to which their emotional states lead them.

In their studies of Prešeren's *The Baptism on the Savica*, Janko Kos, Boris Paternu, Taras Kermauner, Janez Vrečko, Alojzija Zupan Sosič, and others have written about the theme of love. All of them have inevitably touched on the issue of love in general. Alojzija Zupan Sosič sees an "important convergence of two concepts of love, romantic and Christian" in the harmonious image of patriotic and erotic love, though this is followed by "Romantic love resignation."⁹ In her view Prešeren successfully and "harmonically united all three types of Romantic love: romantic love (as a medieval heritage), love for the nation (the homeland) and love of art (literature)." Added to these in *The Baptism on the Savica* is the Christian idea of spiritual love.

Stanzas 8 and 9 of the poem indicate how Črtomir and Bogomila are smitten with each other from their first meeting and how, over the course of a year, this attraction grows into a pure love that is as powerful as death. Already the next two stanzas reveal how Črtomir, due to the Christian Valjhun's attack, had to separate himself from Bogomila in the service of defending the pagan faith of his ancestors. Črtomir decides to enter into battle against Valjhun's mighty army, even if this is "without a hope" (stanza 14). The rest of the poem is dedicated to the theme of love.¹⁰

Stanzas 7-10 read:

To famous Hero of the ancient tale
The daughter, Bogomila, is the peer;
Her beauty to herself she'll ne'er unveil,
Her face and eyes with innocence are clear.
The adulations of her suitors fail
To move her heart or to endear her to them.
Her sev'nteenth year has she begun to chart;
A fire for no-one burns within her heart.

⁹ Cf. A. Zupan Sosič, *ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁰ Since pages in the book are not numbered, stanzas are indicated here by numbers.

See, Črtomir his little boat now rows
To offer Živa gifts from his own hand,
From flocks and fruits, all he owes to nature,
As is his wont, the bounty from his land.
He brings them close; his pace before them slows
And all at once a force he'll ne'er withstand,
A burning flame, is kindled in his breast:
Love's arrows from her eyes, his heart their quest.

O happy, happy Črtomir! your gaze
Alone sufficed the maiden to entrance:
Quite overcome, her feelings in a daze,
Her voice a-tremble and downcast her glance:
Her once pale face with colour is ablaze,
As rosy dawns the days ahead enhance.
The while she leaves enclosed in yours her hand,
Maintained therein by pow'rs she'll ne'er command.

Let other poets of the ardour write
Which blossomed in their hearts all summer through,
How Črtomir came by whene'er he might,
How, watching them, her father younger grew;
For him, though not for me, a known delight,
His breast their happy love did long imbue,
Their passion fated far too swift to fade,
Fast driv'n out by separation's blade.

After suffering defeat on the battlefield and despairing at the death of all of his comrades, Črtomir wants to take his life, but when he thinks of Bogomila, "his wish for living is restored" (stanza 15). The subsequent seven stanzas are dedicated to his search for Bogomila. Helped by a "fisherman" (stanza 18) his burning desire is fulfilled in stanzas 16 through 22. Črtomir's meeting with Bogomila plays itself out in a long dialogue between the two:

O, Bogomila, hither to my heart!
The end of worry, woe and grief is here.
With sudden joy my veins are like a fast pulsing star
As I behold your radiant face's cheer.
Let now fierce whirlwinds tear the skies apart,
The heavens be o'ercast with clouds severe;
I'll care no longer for the world's alarms
As long as you are in my happy arms. (Stanza 23)

Immense happiness and passion befall Črtomir, but Bogomila admits to him she converted to Christianity: "Know now that I accept the

Christian law...” (stanza 25), and tells him that separation is again inevitable for them. She is convinced that it was a Christian God that kept Črtomir alive in the battle that killed all of his comrades. In stanzas 29-30 she says to Črtomir:

That God the God of love they truly call,
Who loves all creatures, us who are His own,
That earth, beset with angry storm and squall
Is but a place of testing, for our home
Is really heav’n; that suff’ring, pain withal
With joy, are gifts His hands have shown;
That His dear children He to heaven will lead,
That none should perish, thus has He decreed.

For us His creatures He has heav’n preferred
Wherein His glory dazzles cloudless, clear;
No eye has yet beheld, nor ear has heard
The joy which there awaits His chosen dear.
Those happy ones, their every wish conferred,
will see their bodily burdens disappear,
For God’s own dear commands will there unite
Those who below in mutual love delight.

At the conclusion of her speech, Bogomila asks that he too convert to the Christian faith:

O Črtomir, from out your sleep awake,
To long-held grievous faults now bid farewell;
Choose not the night-time’s sombre paths to take,
No longer strive God’s mercy to repel.
Delay no more its kindness’ bright daybreak,
When dawning love may fears of parting quell,
When both our paths together join again
After our deaths, aloft in heav’n’s domain. (Stanza 35)

Although the Christian God, whom Bogomila calls “the God of Love” (stanza 29), initially seems to Črtomir to be a “God of wrath” (stanza 37) – after all, so much blood has been spilled in the fight for the Christian faith – Črtomir, out of love for Bogomila, states he is ready to cede and that she may “command its faith, its thoughts, its ev’ry deed” (stanza 36). He thanks her for her love and decides to let himself be baptised as proof of his devotion to his loved one; afterwards, he plans to marry her as soon as possible. In stanza 39 he declares:

The faith of Bogomila I accept,
In love and peace and concord the belief,

I know that idols and their slaves adept
Imagined are by those within their fief;
'Twas for my fathers' sake those laws I kept,
Which now by force of arms have come to grief.
But if my being baptised unites us now,
When will we be conjoined by marriage vow?

But Bogomila has to disappoint his hopes once again. In stanzas 40-45 she explains the reason for her rejecting his marriage proposal: she has promised God that she will remain eternally chaste in exchange for His having saved Črtomir in the battle:

My virtue have I pledged to God alone,
To Jesus, Mary have my promise giv'n;
However many years to live I own,
Enduring vain desires, in hope of heav'n,
My will shall vanquish any pow'r that's shown,
By none shall I be to betrayal driv'n
Of the Messiah, my only Groom on high;
I'll never be your bride, until I die! (Stanza 42)

Črtomir's valour and courage, seen from the start of the poem, fades as he realizes that he will remain alone also in love. Bogomila senses Črtomir's distress and comforts him by promising him a love that nothing can extinguish and that will be revealed "after we die and pass to our reward." Bogomila will wait in Heaven as a "virgin bride." In stanzas 47-48 she assures him:

He does not know true love who thinks its flame
By dire misfortune can extinguished be;
For it will flicker pure, for e'er the same
As now, when from my body I'll be free;
I am denied by th' stronger heav'nly claim
From tasting of its sweetness nuptially.
But when we come to bid this world adieu
Then you will see how pure my love, how true.

So that God's promises be testified
Go preach them now to all the lands Slovene;
To God and you my faith will fast abide
For all the days on earth for me foreseen.
Then with the Father I, your virgin bride
Shall wait for you on high in heav'n serene
Until your flocks their pastor's death lament,
Till you up to the realms of light are sent.

Bogomila senses the Christian God as personified love: “That God the God of love they truly call” (stanza 29). It is the fundamental message of the Bible, as in the description of God’s love in 1 John 4:7-21 we find the definition: “God is Love” (vv. 8 in 16). In a state of distress, Črtomir has a vision of eternal union with Bogomila. The nature surrounding him begins to shiver with light – a rainbow appears and pours its pure gleaming beauty over Bogomila’s pale, gentle face. The unusual scene of unimaginable and inexpressible beauty moves Črtomir and unsettles him. Črtomir is struck dumb by the sudden appearance of the rainbow pouring its pure gleaming beauty over Bogomila’s pale, gentle face. The unusual scene of unimaginable and inexpressible beauty seizes Črtomir:

Now out between the clouds appears sunlight,
Whose rays the pureness of their beauty shed;
On Bogomila pale a rainbow bright,
A heav’nly glow o’er dear face is spread.
He cannot hide the tears which dim his sight;
He thinks the heav’ns have opened overhead,
And that he stands no more in this world’s realm,
So does this vision him quite overwhelm. (Stanza 49)

Material wealth is no longer of any importance to him, and he renounces his gold, asking Bogomila to give it to the poor.

The poet does not reveal what is going on inside the hero; he only describes that Črtomir, moved, decides to carry out Bogomila’s wish in the service of his love for her. He promises her a loyalty based solely on love rather than on the legality of marriage. Before taking leave of her, he consents to baptism in the waters of the Savica Falls:

Up to Savica’s fall they make their way,
For Črtomir complies with her request;
The holy priest and he pray together,
In Father, Son and Spirit he’s baptised.
Those near fall down upon their knees straightway
And joy illuminates the maiden’s eyes,
The eyes of one who heathendom observed,
Who formerly the goddess Živa served. (Stanza 52)

Črtomir and Bogomila’s pain is most intense when they say farewell, when love shows itself to be “the most violent” of passions.¹¹ In this context the motif of sacrifice as a “specific kind of gift” moves into the

¹¹ Cf. W. B. Irvine, *On Desire*, New York 2006, p. 14.

foreground as they renounce their will in exchange for eternal love beyond earthly existence.¹² Whereas at the beginning of the poem, Bogomila and Črtomir make offerings to the pagan goddess Živa on the Island of Bled, and Črtomir and his soldiers sacrifice themselves for their country. After the battles and conversion to Christianity, the sacrifice of the young couple is linked to love and to the practices of atonement and expiation. The two also renounce each other.

When Črtomir was absent, Bogomila traded her reverence for the pagan goddess Živa, the goddess of love, in favour of the Virgin Mary and the new “God of love” (stanza 29). Bogomila is described in the poem as beautiful, innocent, modest, ethereal, and gentle by nature, but at the same time steadfast and consistent in her decisions. It appears that her character is the very opposite of the lovely but bold Julija Primic who inspired Prešeren’s poetic oeuvre for so long – for unlike the beautiful but essentially hollow Julija, Bogomila is possessed of an inner beauty and a rich inner world.

In the story of Bogomila and Črtomir, we are witness to transformation of sacrifice: it is first seen as the more elemental and basic form of ritual, as a harvest offering to the goddess Živa on Bled Island, while with the arrival of Christianity self-sacrifice replaces such sacrifice. Bogomila especially appears to be following the example of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, for she informs Črtomir that only suffering can cleanse man of his sins, and she repeats the priest’s words: “How all of Eve’s and Adam’s sins of old / By Christ’s blood on the Cross were purified” (Stanza 32).

The capacity to sacrifice oneself for another that Črtomir and Bogomila embody is present in Kant’s moral philosophy, as well as in other moral philosophies — namely, as a key to an ethical life. Črtomir passes a moral test when, given the choice between love of the self and self-transcendence, he renounces his will and opts for the latter. However, it seems that saying farewell is more difficult for him than it is for Bogomila, as the following words apply only to Črtomir: “(...) to his breast / He warmly clasps her, wordless bids farewell / With his right hand; his eyes with teardrops swell.” (stanza 50) Bogomila remains resolute, as if she were no longer connected to the sensual world.

¹² Cf. M. Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, Princeton 2012, p. 3.

2. The Motif of Vows and Devotion in Prešeren's Baptism on the Savica

To understand Bogomila's and Črtomir's sacrifice, one must distinguish between the term "sacrifice", which derives from the Latin *sacrificium* (from: *caser* 'sacred'; *facere* 'to do') and the term "devotion," which derives from the Latin word *devotio*. As German anthropologist Joseph Henninger (1906–1991) explains, the term *sacrificium* connotes "the religious act in the highest, or fullest senses; it can also be understood as the act of sanctifying or consecrating an object" and the word is most often used in the sense of ritual sacrifice of animals, or even humans, as a gift to a deity.¹³ "Devotion," meanwhile, is explained by religious studies scholar David Kinsley (1939–2000) as indicating self-sacrifice, and understood as a burning, passionate affection, devotion, and loyalty.¹⁴ It is considered as reverence and fidelity, as a deep respect, care, loyalty or love for a person, soul or deity, or for God.

Kinsley notes that "devotion" is often linked to asceticism and devoting oneself to a spiritual or monastic calling.¹⁵ It is in this sense that we understand the significance of Črtomir and Bogomila's sacrifice in Prešeren's poem, where sacrificial love is described in terms of the protagonists' renunciation of physical love or in opting for asceticism and a monastic life. Bogomila's opting for sacrifice, especially, thus, must be understood in the context of the religious sphere of offering or dedication, of giving up the self to God in exchange for Črtomir's being saved from a certain death. While there are many ways of accounting for asceticism or monasticism, according to Kinsley such decisions are often linked to devotion and self-sacrifice — especially in the theistic traditions of believing in God or in gods as well as in the Buddhist traditions of East Asia.

The eternal covenant that Bogomila has made with God is firmer and more binding than the relative fleetingness of marital union would be. After agreeing to be baptised, Črtomir falls silent. It appears that his future life will be dedicated to Bogomila and to carrying out the mission to which he has committed himself. By all appearances, Črtomir opts for asceticism primarily out of devotion and love for Bogomila. The transition from sensual excitement at Bogomila to his decision for asceticism is indeed sudden and rapid, and he feels the emotional transformation in a

¹³ Cf. J. Henninger, *Sacrifice*, New York 1987, pp. 544–557.

¹⁴ Cf. D. Kinsley, *Devotion*, New York – London 1987, pp. 321–326.

¹⁵ Cf. D. Kinsley, *ibid.*, p. 325.

very painful manner. Also speaking for Črtomir's renunciation of a worldly life is his gesture of giving all of his possessions to the poor. The poet's taciturnity when describing Črtomir's baptism and his life after separating forever from Bogomila is telling; indeed, it provides a hint of tragedy. The future fates of both protagonists is related in the poem by means of a report. The silent baptismal scene and the sparse narration of Črtomir and Bogomila's future destinies are in effect very dramatic precisely because the poet passes over them in silence.

In Prešeren's poem the themes of devotion, piety, and dedication are most prominently linked with the figure of Bogomila, who wholeheartedly accepts the new Christian faith. Bogomila experiences longing for God as a natural longing for peace, as a longing for death in the sense of a longing for home; it is in stark contrast to the turmoil of the world as a place of trials. In the poem she calls God a father, telling Črtomir that she will wait for him in heaven "with the Father" (stanza 48), while calling heaven her home and establishing it as a positive contrast to the turbulent earthly life of suffering and sickness.

The idea that man has a natural propensity for devotion is advocated in many religions and religious movements, including Hinduism and Sufism. In those religions' teachings, all human beings long for a loving God and for as long as they do not surrender to this love they remain frustrated, incomplete, lonely, and lost. Such religions explain dedication or devotion to be nurturing of this natural human instinct — to serve and to love the Creator, who filled man with a longing for reunification with his source. Many Sufi concepts argue that he who is not devoted to God is like a fish out of water, a camel that is far away from a watering hole, or a bird that is isolated from its partner. In the mystical sense, to seek God means a return home. It entails seeking the known and the comforting, while heeding man's natural longing. A similar idea is expressed in Augustine (354–430), who at the beginning of his *Confessions* says: "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."¹⁶ J. W. Curran very precisely defines the essence of devotion:

Devotion is the first act of the virtue of religion and is defined as: promptness or readiness of will in the service of God. Concretely, this means the perfect offering of the will itself to God, for readiness of the will in the service of God is the will offered to God in worship. Just as by adoration the body of man is offered to God, so by devotion the will of man is offered to God. Devotion, besides being the first, is also the prin-

¹⁶ See the translation by H. Chadwick, Oxford 2008, p. 3.

cipal act of the virtue of religion. Religion is a virtue of the will, so its first and principal act is the offering of the will itself. Since devotion is the first and principal act of the virtue of religion, it must appear in every other act of religion. Devotion is in this respect like the first and principal act of the virtue of charity, which is love. Almsgiving, a secondary act of charity, must flow from love or it is not an act of charity at all. So also every other act of religion must flow from devotion, or it fails to be an act of religion. It is in this sense that prayer, sacrifice, adoration, and all the rest must be devout to be truly acts of religion.¹⁷

In Prešeren's *The Baptism on the Savica*, Črtomir's greatest sacrifice is connected to the renunciation of sexual love – though it is also Bogomila's sacrifice, for Bogomila also has chosen virginity according to the model of the Virgin Mary. The lovers' renouncing of sexuality in favour of abstinence, celibacy, and life-long virginity reflects the practice of renouncing sexuality that developed between men and women in Christian circles already in a period pre-dating St Paul's missionary journeys — that is, some 40–50 years after Christ.

Christianity adopted from its Jewish origins a particular understanding of the human individual who endeavours to see past the body – that restless reminder of man's lasting kinship with the animal world – and into the heart. Also in connection to sexuality Christianity emphasised the concept of the weakness of human will, which distances man from the sacred and on account of which human flesh appears as a “quivering thing” vulnerable “to temptation, to death, even to delight.”¹⁸

Images of love unto death have been disturbing yet beautiful in works ranging from those in the Tristan and Isolde tradition to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The prototypical text on love, however, remains the biblical *Songs of Songs*. The dynamic approaching and withdrawing in *Song of Songs* evokes a number of poetic discourses on love, such as Prešeren's *The Baptism on the Savica*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Joseph Bédier's *Roman de Tristan et Iseut*, among others.

The dialogue between the two lovers in the *Song of Songs* occurs in the spirit of a dialogue with the world, which is represented by natural metaphors in the literary form of a poem. Love is shown in all the dimensions of its reality, from longing to seeking, from fulfilment to alienation, and renewed seeking. The literary form of a poem expresses the existential possibilities in a manner surpassing those of any other potential form of presentation. Rabbi Akiva calls the *Song of Songs* the “the Holy of

¹⁷ See *Devotion*, [in:] *New Catholic Encyclopedia* IV, Detroit et al. 2003, p. 708–709.

¹⁸ Cf. P. R. L. Brown, *The Body and Society*, New York 1988, p. 434.

Holies,” and Goethe notes in his *West-östlicher Diwan* that the Song of Songs is “the most gentle and inimitable account of passionate and comely love we have been provided with.”¹⁹ The longing for fulfilment, which is in the forefront of the poem, is accompanied by the change of mood and a love that is in motion, so to speak. It is seen in the lovers’ distancing, approaching and renewed distancing. In the fifth chapter, it is intensified to the extent that the woman is made sick when her beloved departs. The oscillation between proximity and distance, as well as the metaphors of the two marvelling lovers, is escalated in the moments of mutual commitment that are merely suggested in the Song of Songs. Although the longing is never fulfilled, because the irrational lovers alternately approach and then move away from one another, the denouement of the Song of Songs expresses the female beloved’s profound faith in the power of love: “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame” (Song of Sol. 8:6).

Prešeren’s Bogomila expresses a similar faith in love’s power to transcend death. In *The Baptism on the Savica*, Črtomir, and Bogomila must each travel a solitary path through life, but this path, as Bogomila senses, will last only a short time. Each initially deifies loving desire and seeks to find sustenance in that desire. Not until the point of trial brought about by the battle and with it acceptance of a different religion does the authenticity, or rather inauthenticity, of such emotions become evident. When Bogomila first recognizes Christian agápe, she wishes to guide Črtomir towards an eternal love by speaking to him about the nature of religion; the reader senses that their love is, in spite of the suffering that it causes, stronger than death.

3. Dominik Smole’s *The Baptism on the Savica* as a Contrary Literary Interpretation

The more the reader follows the thought and poetics of France Prešeren, the more he/she must be attentive to a modern interpretation of Prešeren’s poem, which is offered by the Slovenian dramatist Dominik Smole (1929–1992) in his play *The Baptism on the Savica*. Smole’s work is a “religious drama that transforms into a political one in Act II.”²⁰ It begins where Prešeren’s poem ends – between the walls of the monastery

¹⁹ Cf. J. W. von Goethe, *Goethes Werke* II, Munich 1998, pp. 128–29.

²⁰ Cf. S. Borovnik, *Slovenska dramatika v drugi polovici 20. stoletja*, Ljubljana 2005, p. 70.

at Aquileia. Črtomir does not feel fulfilment in his new faith; he feels betrayed and deceived. Whereas Prešeren's Črtomir remains silent, Smole's drama articulates Črtomir's internal religious experience and relates that Črtomir allowed himself to be baptised even though he felt no faith in his heart.

Among Slovenian literary critics, Prešeren's poem is seen as an open work, because it allows each reader to unlock the text in his own manner. As Janez Vrečko notes, individual interpretations as well as the text itself have experienced offences and "attacks," primarily because the main protagonist Črtomir "did not seem appropriately Slovenian in character, in his inner essence."²¹ The poet Oton Župančič even dubbed him a "werewolf," and at one point France Kidrič. Similarly, he understood the poem not as an expression of Prešeren's world view, "but as a compromise in his world view through which Prešeren betrayed his own free-thinking" – though he later distanced himself from this argument.²² The poem "remains one of the most controversial texts of Slovenian literature."²³

A particularly striking manner of interpreting Prešeren's poem is offered by Dominik Smole's play *The Baptism at the Savica*. Unlike Prešeren's Bogomila, Smole's Bogomila is stamped by a false piety, by empty splendour. The nun Anunciata points out the inner emptiness concealed by a respectable appearance when she says, "Your face, sister Bogomila, is as thin and vast as a cathedral, dazzling, luxurious, prepared and horrifyingly empty."²⁴ When Črtomir recognises her hypocrisy, he begins to hate the woman on whose account he was baptised and for whom he took on a faith he cannot feel. In a conversation he accuses her of false faith, of betrayal, though Bogomila defends herself against allegations of infidelity, asking how she could not remain faithful to him "among a handful of defeated pagans [...] and in constant flight, like a beast?" She admits that she is inclined "neither to the gods, nor to God" and states, "it would be twice foolish if I were to strive for that which is not in me."²⁵

Not strong enough to renounce love, Smole's Bogomila takes refuge in a lie. She is therefore the complete opposite of Prešeren's Bogomila, whose love is as strong as death. Črtomir is struck by her words,

²¹ Cf. J. Vrečko, *Bogomilina vera in Črtomirova mistika*, Ljubljana 2002, p. 281.

²² Cf. J. Vrečko, *ibid.*

²³ Cf. J. Vrečko, *ibid.*

²⁴ Cf. D. Smole, *Krst pri Savici*, [in:] *Zbrano delo* III, Ljubljana 2009, pp. 12–13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

and in a tortuous silence he remains “with his hands over his face.”²⁶ From that moment anarchy and authoritarianism become stronger and stronger in him, and his desire for love is driven out. His passion seeks a new realm of activity and he finds it in a controlling morality and in the masses of downtrodden people. In the dialogue with the Patriarch he states plainly that the Patriarch does not believe in God and that he let himself be baptised because he was afraid of death. Črtomir feels spiritually crippled and wishes to seek true faith, to experience a true baptism; under the name of Christianity he heeds his own, resolute and merciless truth, one which, in the name of Divine justice, destroys everything that is hypocritical, insincere, or false.

Act II of Smole’s drama takes place in Slovenian lands, at Gospa Sveta, whence Črtomir has been forced and where he travels together with nuns, Bogomila, Pia, and Vincencija. There he fanatically, maniacally slaughters people who in his view do not carry God in the heart – who gave false oath and who remain pagans. He believes he is the “hand of God,”²⁷ and in his view God knows no mercy and strikes with a firm hand. He fanatically claims to Bogomila that the “God of revenge” is the only and true God. “There is no other.”²⁸ Bogomila flees from him as if from a madman, and the Patriarch elevates her to Mother Superior. This promotion is incomprehensible for Črtomir. His God, he says, “who is not afraid of dog’s blood, has decided differently.”²⁹ He murders Bogomila with a knife. Each becomes a victim of a time in history that curtails and then kills their freedom, as well as them. It seems that they find redemption in death.

Conclusion

Love is a central theme of Prešeren’s *The Baptism on the Savica*, because the entire lives of the main heroes, Bogomila and Črtomir, play themselves out in the service of love as the highest value. It is love for the homeland that moves Črtomir to fight, and still more significant are the internal struggles that are ignited by his love for Bogomila and that culminate in his self-sacrifice. At the heart of Prešeren’s poem are the lyrical dialogues about the emerging love between Črtomir and Bogomila that grew into an experience of love marked by immortality. Prešeren

²⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

describes “fruitful” suffering – the self-sacrifice agreed to by Bogomila and Črtomir in return for the promise of eternal love in the hereafter. When Prešeren’s Bogomila first recognises Christian agápe, she also convinces Črtomir to let her lead him from natural religion to longing for eternal love. It is on the same basis that other timeless literary depictions of love rest: the biblical Song of Songs, Dante’s Divine Comedy, the tradition of Tristan and Isolde, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, and so on.

As seen, there is, however, another and more radical and contrary explanation. In Dominik Smole’s more contemporary Slovenian play *The Baptism at the Savica*, Črtomir and Bogomila do not know how to love. Their love is “wild,” depersonalized, violent, devoid of pure desire and too weak for self-sacrifice. They deny and finally destroy each other through egotistical behaviour. Smole paints Bogomila in mocking tones, deriding her not only as an opportunist but also as a woman. His play presents a world in which men dominate, and women cannot fight that world any differently than Bogomila does, for otherwise she would “buckle as if shot at.”³⁰

The title in English: *Poetics of Love and Devotion in Prešeren’s Poem The Baptism on the Savica*

Abstract (Summary)

This article examines the presentation of love between Bogomila and Črtomir, the main characters in the historic romantic poem *Krst pri Savici* (*The Baptism on the Savica*) by France Prešeren (1800–1849). The main protagonists are the pagan leader Črtomir – who enters into battle with an army led by the Christian Valjhun, Duke of Carinthia – and the young maiden Bogomila, Črtomir’s love. The main part of the poem describes Črtomir’s search for Bogomila after the battle, and his baptism at the source of the Savica River, a baptism he accepts out of love for her. At the heart of Prešeren’s poem are the lyrical dialogues about the emerging love between Črtomir and Bogomila that grew into an experience of love marked by immortality, as they renounce their will in exchange for eternal love beyond earthly existence. Bogomila is described as beautiful, innocent, modest, ethereal and gentle by nature, but at the same time steadfast and consistent in her decisions. The main point of the article is Bogomila’s opting for sacrifice, understood in the context of the religious

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 32–33.

sphere of offering or dedication, of giving up the self to God. Among Slovenian literary critics, Prešeren's poem is seen as an open work, because it allows each reader to unlock the text in her or his own manner. The most radical and contrary explanation of Prešeren's poem is Dominik Smole's more contemporary Slovenian play *The Baptism on the Savica*. According to Smole, Črtomir and Bogomila do not know how to love; their love is "wild," depersonalized, violent, devoid of pure desire and too weak for self-sacrifice; they deny and ultimately destroy each other through egotistical behaviour.

Key words: France Prešeren (1800–1849), *The Baptism on the Savica*, love, metaphors of marvelling lovers, devotion and sacrifice, longing for fulfilment, offering of the will, Dominik Smole (1929–1992), contrary interpretation

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