

## The Bible Code in Lesya Ukrainka's Dramatic Poem *In the Wilderness*

*Liudmyla Zhvania (Lutsk)*

The article is an attempt to read Lesya Ukrainka's dramatic poem *In the Wilderness*, using the concept of biblical code, which we understand in the intertextual aspect. It involves the analysis and interpretation of quotations, allusions, and reminiscences to reveal new meanings that such a dialogue with the Book of Books can produce. The dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* deals with the life of the Puritan community, for whom the Scriptures are an exceptional authority, the only source of Christian doctrines and ethical guidelines. Having this in mind, Lesya Ukrainka structures the work in such a way that the Bible appears in a particular position – as a code that allows you to understand the essence of the inner world of the characters, as well as a basis for understanding the philosophical and ideological issues that concern and disturb the author. The main one among them is the eternal question about the meaning of life. Every character of the dramatic poem seeks answers to these questions within their own worldview paradigm, interpreting the texts of the Scriptures in their own way.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian literature, Lesya Ukrainka, dramatic poem, the Bible, code, Christianity, creative work

### Introduction

The dialogue between the Bible and literature has always been an integral part of the European literary process. As early as in the eighteenth century, the English poet William Blake claimed that “the Old and New Testaments are a great code of art” (Fraai 2010, 16). The participants of the cultural process regularly refer to the text of the Holy Scripture and interpret it, thus confirming that it is indisputably a universal cultural code. According to Northrop Frye, no book has had such a specific impact on all European literature as the Bible (Fraai 2010, 15).

Most researchers of Lesya Ukrainka's biography emphasize that she studied the Bible meticulously. Owing to Mykhailo Drahomanov, who induced her to try translating the texts from the Bible, this book had become the object of the writer's scientific and artistic interests. At the request of M. Drahomanov, Lesya Ukrainka translated a part of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Isaiah (Ukrainka 1978, 40, 53), translated the religious works of M. Vern (Ukrainka 1978, 86), and studied the Introduction to the Canonical Books of the Old Testament by G. Cornill (Ukrainka 1978, 51). She admired the sophistication of the poetic language of the Holy Scriptures. “In the Bible, among other things, there is a lot of wild cosmic poetry” (Ukrainka 1978, 46), – she wrote in a letter to M. Drahomanov.

The dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* is a story from the life of the Puritan community, for which the Holy Scriptures were an exceptional authority and the only source of the Christian doctrines and ethical guidelines. Lesya Ukrainka structures the dramatic poem in such a way that the Bible finds itself in a particular, even central position in the drama. It becomes a code that allows understanding the essence of the inner world of the cha-

racters and comprehending the deepest meaning layers of the work, reaching the level of the author's worldview and her philosophical pursuits. This article is an attempt to read Lesya Ukrainka's dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* from the standpoint of the concept of the Biblical code in its inter-textual aspect. It involves the analysis and interpretation of the quotations, allusions, and reminiscences aimed at revealing new meanings that this dialogue with the Book of Books can produce.

### **The Bible in the life of the Puritan community as a source of truth and practical guidance**

The Puritan community mode of life in Lesya Ukrainka's dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* manifests all the features typical of Protestants, whatever the group: religious faith, asceticism, strict observance of Christian moral and ethical norms, diligence, unequivocal recognition of the authority of the Scripture, service to God as the most faithful sense of their being. The image of Edith most vividly embodies these qualities. Those passages from the Bible which she quotes correspond to her worldview guidelines. Thus, persuading her daughter to accept the fate as it is and reconcile, Edith emphasizes the need to perceive their forced stay in the foreign land not as an exile but as liberation, the prototype of which is the story from the Old Testament:

He has let us not into exile, but  
to a promised land, as He once led Israel  
into Canaan from Egypt, their house of labor.  
And in those days too, there were some  
who began to complain about their hard road.  
And what became of them in consequence?  
Remember that and be at peace.  
(Ukrainka 1988, 16)

Numerous documents argue that the Protestants, persecuted in Europe in the seventeenth century, compared their migration to the American continent to the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan (Exodus 1–15).

In its literal interpretation, the Bible appears to Edith and her like-minded people in the community not only as an absolute authority but also as a source of moral, ethical, and practical guidelines in their everyday life. This stern, firm-minded woman, who reminds Richard of the Sorrowful Mother,<sup>1)</sup> builds up relationships in the family with a focus on the strict observance of God's law. Any manifestations of sensitivity are uncharacteristic of her. The mother responds with the words of Christ to the words of Christabel, who suffers from the untimely death of her husband and the inevitability of leaving his grave unattended in homeland: "Let the dead bury their dead!" (Ukrainka 1988, 16).<sup>2)</sup> In a conversation with her son, Edith notes: "Not only bread is needed here, but God's word too" (Ukrainka 1988, 37). The phrase is an allusion to the Gospel account of the temptations of Jesus Christ during His forty-day stay in the wilderness: "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Without losing hope of converting her son to a righteous

1) "This look, / these simple lines, even clothes – / the true Mater Dolorosa" (Ukrainka 1988, 53).

2) Cf. Matthew: "But Jesus said unto him, / Follow me and let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22).

(in her understanding) life, Edith reminds him of one of the parables of the New Testament: “About the talents, Son?” (Ukrainka 1988, 54), and then emphasizes the need for its correct interpretation: “I’m sure that you must have misunderstood” (Ukrainka 1988, 54).

Encouraging the reader to recall a relevant passage from the Scripture, Lesya Ukrainka creates an appropriate context for understanding Edith’s position. One of the options for interpreting this parable in theology argues that if you want to have a positive result in the material world or in the spiritual dimension, you must work hard and persistently. Those who use God’s gifts – health, strength, mental ability to serve God and their neighbors – will be rewarded with eternal bliss in heaven. Lazy and indifferent people will be condemned to eternal suffering. Since Edith is an example of a person who seeks to fulfill the testament of life as subservience, she expects her children to follow the appropriate life guidelines. She is convinced of the correctness of her actions because she relies on the Holy Scriptures authority in everything.

At the climax of the dramatic action, when the community judges Richard, Edith renounces her son, cursing him. The basis for such a difficult decision for the mother were the words of Christ, which she quotes:

Think not that I come to send peace on earth:  
I come not send peace, but sword, for I come  
to set a man at variance against his father,  
and the daughter against her mother, and  
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law  
and a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.  
He that loveth father or mother more than me is not  
worthy of me: he that loveth son or daughter more  
than me is not worthy of me.  
[...]  
“And he that taketh not his cross and followeth  
after me is not worthy of me”.  
(Ukrainka 1988, 52–53)

The woman is sincerely convinced of the righteousness of her decision because she sees the purpose of her life in serving God for the salvation of her soul.

Most other members of the Puritan community are also sincere in their beliefs: Jonathan, Campbell, Caleb Paddington, Abraham Smith, Matthew Fielding. All of them, like Edith, are guided in their own lives by the words of Scripture. Caleb, who does not want to leave Richard’s soul without salvation, asks the community to postpone the sentence and “place him under the supervision of the community”:

And then, if at the end of the year  
He does not become obedient to God  
and to our will, as Jonathan has,  
then it will be as with the publican and the sinner.  
(Ukrainka 1988, 70)

These words refer the reader to the Gospel of Matthew:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then

take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (Matthew 18:15, 16, 17)

This is about discipline as one of the qualities that should characterize the personal relationship sphere of a Christian. Before condemning a person who has made a mistake, you must try to guide him to the path of truth.

Guided by a similar desire, Caleb addresses the community, alluding to the story of God's punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah from the Book of Genesis (Genesis 18–26):

Brethren,  
I think that we shall still give him  
a second opportunity. God gave even Sodom  
a second chance. Perhaps he will come to his senses...  
(Ukrainka 1988, 68)

I plead as Abraham did for the unholy city.  
(Ukrainka 1988, 70)

His position is supported by other members of the community, who express their hope for the possibility of correcting Richard, confirming it in words from the Scripture: "God is all-powerful. For God, everything is possible" (Ukrainka 1988, 70). This expression is a reference to the Gospel of Matthew: "But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, / With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Lesya Ukrainka emphasizes the sincerity of the primary desire of the Puritan community to adopt a just decision based on the principles of Christian charity. However, the human community is far from ideal – it can easily give up its principles and yield under a strong targeted influence. The suchlike situation has become possible owing to the actions of Godwinson, who skillfully manipulates public opinion.

### **The Bible as a manipulation tool in the hands of the Pharisee**

A hint of Godwinson's hypocrisy is heard at the beginning of the work, when Richard, in response to his threats, notes: "In that kind of community it certainly would mean freedom for all Pharisees" (Ukrainka 1988, 29). Indeed, love of neighbor, kindness, forgiveness – all that reflects the main content of Christianity – are of no importance for Godwinson. His life standards are determined by quite different principles. Godwinson has unlimited power and authority in the community and tries to make the most of his position for his own benefits. He, naturally, does not want to lose his supremacy over the members of the community. Thus, in the person of Richard, who is an independent person by nature and does not fall under his influence, he sees a threat: "For me this man has become a stone that causes men to trip and stumble on a road" (Ukrainka 1988, 61).<sup>3)</sup>

The confrontation between Godwinson and Richard begins with the latter's refusal to participate in the construction of a stone house that the community decided to build for their preacher. Instead, Richard Iron defiantly goes to build a fireplace for River's wife, who suffers from severe poverty, hunger, and cold with her children. He, unlike most fellow

---

3) The source of this expression is the Old Testament: "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Isaiah 8:14).

citizens, is not indifferent to other people's mischiefs. A woman with her children is punished by the community for her husband's behavior, who tried to "mislead the community [...] and left for Rhode Island after the last election" (Ukrainka 1988, 30).

Godwinson compares her to Sapphira, referred to in the Acts of the Apostles: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 5:1–2): "God'll punish her as He punished Sapphira /Annaia's sinful wife, who tried to hide / her husband's sin from the community" (Ukrainka 1988, 65).

Following the preacher, Edith curses the unfortunate woman: "My son, you speak like Rhode Islander. / River's wife must be the cause of this. / My God strike her head!" (Ukrainka 1988, 37). Among the Puritans, as the author of the play emphasizes, there is a spirit of conformism, callousness, hatred, and intolerance for all those who are the other and inconvenient.

The community, led by Godwinson, unfairly accuses Richard of the things he has not done. His creation of idols (sculptures) and immorality in relations with an Indian girl, who was just a model for a sculptor, is the main accusation. In his accusation, Godwinson traditionally relies on the Bible: "I think that we should read /what was done in Israel / when someone sinned with a pagan woman" (Ukrainka 1988, 65).

The preacher, a minister of religion in the community, uses quotations from the Scriptures, taking them out of context, to influence public opinion and manipulate the sentiments of the community members for his own benefit. His goal is to punish, morally destroy, and expel the disobedient from the community:

To make  
an idol of a pagan woman is a much a greater sin!  
With this, he has disobeyed God's great and terrible  
commandment; and for that God will punish us  
to the furthest generation with his worst wrath,  
if we don't punish Richard ourselves.  
(Ukrainka 1988, 66)

These words allude to one of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses:

I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. (Exodus 20: 2–17)

This commandment is a requirement to adhere to the faith in the one God, not to create idols for yourself, and not to worship them. All the allegations against Richard are overtly ill-founded since the sculpture that he has created is the work of art, not an object of worship.

But Godwinson was most annoyed by the figure that Davy sculpted in his likeness because it was very similar to the original and emphasized its funny features. The preacher also finds grounds for his appeals in the Bible:

In the Bible it says:  
"Who so shall offend one of these little ones  
Who believe in me, it were better for him

that a millstone were hanged about his neck,  
and that he drawn in the depth of the sea".  
(Ukrainka 1988, 66)

Quoting these verses from the Gospel of Matthew, Godwinson continues to manipulate fellow citizens. He purposely forms in their minds the image of Richard – a sinner, an immoral person, and an enemy who must be punished. The preacher adds more and more negative traits to this character, multiplying the number of his imaginary sins: "He has disobeyed still another commandment. He does not honor his mother" (Ukrainka 1988, 69).

Finally, Godwinson subjects to negation all masters and artists as such:

The rest were Cain's tribe. They were all descendants  
of Sidon and Tyre. They should be punished with an  
iron yoke! Who were the first artists? Jubal and  
Tubal-Cain. And who was their father?  
(Ukrainka 1988, 69)

These lines refer to the part of the Book of Genesis that deals with the genealogy of Cain. In particular, about those of his descendants who became the ancestors of all artisans and artists: "And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah" (Genesis 4: 21–22).

Jonathan, who dared to stand up for a friend, also refers to the Bible: "And thus, Our Lord Jesus said to forgive not only..." (Ukrainka 1988, 67) These lines are an allusion to Christ's words about the need to forgive neighbor: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18: 21–22).

For Godwinson, the Bible is only a source of quotations, which he uses in the needed context, in accordance with his purpose to support his claims. Lesya Ukrainka emphasizes this with the help of remarks: "During the scene with JENNY, GODWINSON looks through the Bible, making some texts" (Ukrainka 1988, 64), "Godwinson (painstakingly searches in the Bible and makes a sudden gesture) silencing JONATHAN. [...] He pushes the book to CALEB and reads, omitting some phrases and stressing others" (Ukrainka 1988, 67). He finds a passage in the Scripture (Sirach 38: 27–33) that silences Jonathan:

The Carver and work master [...] give themselves to counterfeit imagery and watch to finish a work. The smith and [...] the potter set their minds to finish their work. [...] All their desire is in the work of their craft, without these cannot a city be inhabited but they shall not sit on the judge's seat [...] they cannot declare justice and judgment. (Ukrainka 1988, 67–68)

Since Jonathan is a craftsman, he is deprived of the right to speak at public gatherings. And so that he would not even have the desire to defend Richard, Godwinson adds another biblical quote: "He that saith unto the wicked, that art is righteous; him shall the people curse, nations abhor him" (Ukrainka 1988, 68; Parables 24:24).

Godwinson's hypocrisy culminates in the climax of the drama when he mimics a trance and prophecy: "[...] he begins to shake, sets his vision straight ahead, stretches his hands as if to some apparition, and yells out in an unnatural ecstatic voice, cutting Richard short!" (Ukrainka 1988, 71).

The pseudo-prophecies uttered by Godwinson are a parody reminiscence of the prophetic texts of the Old Testament. To emphasize her ironic attitude to this character, Lesya Ukrainka constructs Godwinson's monologue in accordance with the Old Testament prophet's style and uses a lot of biblical images, motifs, and allusions:

Woe unto us! My Zion! Oh, new Jerusalem!  
 Whither are they leading thee? Oh, what do I see?  
 What do I hear? Oh, sorrow! Oh, woe! Cymbals, drums,  
 zithers and reed pipes... a youth dances frantically  
 before the figure of Moloch. A virgin is brought  
 into the service of Astoret. Oh, shed tears ye people!...  
 God is great in his anger! Listen, Daughter of Zion!  
 Robbers with copper faces approach thee...  
 There is no hope for thee... Thy God hath forsaken  
 thee for thine idolatrous betrayal...  
 (Ukrainka 1988, 71)

The New Jerusalem is an allegorical expression used in Revelation to depict the kingdom of heaven (Rev. 21:2; Rev. 3:12) as well as a symbol of God's Church. For example, the prophet Isaiah declares: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:1).

Moloch and Astaroth are pagan deities worshiped by the Jews in different periods of their history. The Bible repeatedly mentions them (Leviticus 18:21; 3 Kings 11:7,15; Jeremiah 32:35; Acts 7:43; 3 Kings 11:5–33; Judges 2:13; Judges 10:6; 1 Kings 7, 1 Kings 12:10; 1 Kings 31:10; 4 Kings 23:12–13). Children were sacrificed to Moloch and burned on the fire. The sacrificial rituals were accompanied by music, songs, and dances. Astaroth or Astarte was the goddess of love and fertility. Cult prostitution was associated with worshiping her. The prophets accused the Jews of worshiping idols and foretold them terrible punishments for it.

The daughter of Zion is the allegorical name of Jerusalem in the Old Testament Prophets. For example, Jeremiah states: "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins" (Lamentations 4:22). The cry "Oh, weep, weep" is perceived as an allusion to the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the book of the Old Testament, and also an allusion to Rachel crying for her children (Matthew 2: 16–18).

The reminiscent-parodic style of Godwinson's monologue emphasizes the features of the inner world of the character portrayed by the author in an ironic way. Godwinson is the embodiment of a hypocrite who demonstrates ostentatious piety. He skillfully manipulates the community, using the text of Scripture. Picking quotes out of context, searching for the appropriate to the situation biblical expressions, he interprets them in his own way, obsessed with his selfish purposes. In this way, Godwinson asserts his power and authority among the believers. To realize this, he purposefully excludes all those who are not ready to obey his will, using low and insidious methods. Godwinson is a type of all the scribes and Pharisees in religion. Under the guise of a priest, his true nature is hidden – complacency, contempt for people, selfishness, insincerity.



### **The Bible as a worldview model of the individual search for faith and the sense of life**

Richard's worldview search develops in the paradigm of Christianity. He quite often refers to the Holy Scriptures to substantiate his thoughts. However, unlike his fellow citizens, for whom the main thing is the formal observance of the religious dogmas, just literal interpretation of the texts of the Bible, Richard tries to understand the true essence of Christianity as a religion of love and freedom. Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdiaev noted, "Christianity is a religion of love, but it is judged by the malice and hatred of Christians. Christianity is a religion of freedom, but it is judged by the acts of violence perpetrated by Christians in history" (Berdyayev 1928).<sup>4)</sup>

Richard is guided by the commandment to love his neighbor when helping the community-rejected River's wife. He is struck by the hypocrisy and cruelty of his fellow citizens:

Think, Mother, about those people who  
call themselves "saints" and "God's children",  
but who offer their brothers no bread, but only stone!  
It is they who should be cursed!  
(Ukrainka 1988, 37)

These lines are an allusion to the words of Christ: "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" (Matthew 7:9). This reference to the Gospel illustrates a contrast between the actions of Christians of the community and the main postulates of religion. The Puritans depicted in the drama are religious fanatics that are afraid to "ruin their souls" by violating religious precepts. Like the Old Testament scribes, they follow the letter but not the spirit of the law. Postulating the supremacy of Christian moral and ethical values, in life, they are ready to expel, curse, and condemn to death from starvation and cold those who do not obey the will of the community and its spiritual leader. Nikolay Berdyayev spoke about the imperfection of Christians and their inability to fulfill Christ's testaments: "The intolerance, bigotry, and cruelty that Christians have often shown in history is the result of the human nature inability to comprehend all completeness of the Christian truth about love and freedom" (Berdyayev 1928).

Life guidelines based on the fear of the death penalty for sins are alien for Richard. In the teachings of Christ, the idea of living in joy is more important to him, as opposed to perceiving it as suffering: "Enough of weeping and wailing, / and gnashing of teeth. The earth isn't hell, / and joy is not a sin; it is God's gift to man!" (Ukrainka 1988, 46).

In these lines, Lesya Ukrainka resorts directly to the Bible: "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth..." (Matthew 8:12).

The poetess also uses allusion – we come across the mention of "joy" in other books of the Gospel: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15:11); "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10). "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

The antithesis of suffering and joy, death and life is used by the author to clarify and make more expressive the worldview of the main character of the dramatic poem. It is

---

4) Here and subsequently, unless indicated otherwise, translations from the Russian are by Liudmyla Zhvania.



optimistic and life-affirming, in contrast to the position of the Puritan community. The fear of the Last Judgment forced its members to be in a continuous process of serving God through selfless work, discipline, and austerity, and which comprehend the enjoyment of life as a sin.

Richard's creative nature rebels against the alien idea of finding meaning in life in the routine hard work. He criticizes the need for such work in the new living conditions and complains: "I became an ox, and like the Babylonian king, I don't know why I am being punished" (Ukrainka 1988, 18). This comparison is also a biblical allusion.<sup>5)</sup> However, in this case, the author uses it only as a stylistic trope.

His calling is art: "I believe that on this earth here, everyone has his own duty and his own cross to bear" (Ukrainka 1988, 54). The key to understanding his spiritual quest is the Gospel parable of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:41, 42), to which he refers in a conversation with his mother: "It's very simple: while Martha cared about the things of the world, Mary craved for things eternal" (Ukrainka 1988, 54). For Richard, the meaning of life is in achieving the ideal, the truth that one can comprehend only in the act of creativity:

During the sacred and triumphant time  
When we create – we disregard the sinful world;  
We are surrounded by a world of dreams.  
It then becomes "God's Kingdom" here on earth;  
which people seek quite fruitlessly so often.  
(Ukrainka 1988, 46)

It is about the uniqueness of the emotion that creativity can give an artist. It is the ability to go beyond the ordinary, into other dimensions of life. Thus, artists are much closer to grasping the truth than other humans. The philosophy of Martin Heidegger substantiates concordant ideas. He speaks of the superiority of aesthetic knowledge over the rational. Only the work of art can fully manifest the truth, which means "the unconcealment of being" (Heidegger 2002, 16). "Art is a becoming and happening of truth" (Heidegger 2002, 44). Heidegger illustrates his opinion with the example of Van Gogh's painting "Shoes": "Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, in truth *is*. This being steps forward into the unconcealment of its being. [...] In the work, when there is a disclosure of the being as what and how it is, there is a happening of truth at work" (Heidegger 2002, 16).

It is worth mentioning that Heidegger assigns a special role to sculpture which "an embodying bringing-into-the-work of places, and with them a disclosing of regions of possible dwellings for man" (Heidegger 1973, 8). The philosopher identifies the work of art with the truth itself: "Sculpture: the embodiment of the truth of Being in its work of instituting places" (Heidegger 1973, 8).

For Richard, the art of sculpture acquires a sense-creative significance, without which life loses its value. He compares renunciation of gift with Judas' betrayal of Christ:

Oh, now I know!  
You want me to renounce

---

5) The story of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who was punished by God for his pride and lived as an animal for 7 years: "The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws" (Daniel 4:30).

My sculpture? I can't do that, because  
 I wasn't born to be a traitor. Even if I  
 were to betray it, as Judas did, I'd also  
 surely hang myself as he did.  
 (Ukrainka 1988, 56)

According to Lesya Ukrainka, art provides an inner liberation of man, his escape from the routine of everyday life. This opinion is related to Berdyaev's thesis that the creative act is "transcendence, going beyond the immanent reality limits, the breakthrough of freedom through the necessity" (Berdyaev 1991, 219). According to the philosopher, a creative act "takes place out of time. Only the products of creativity, only the objectification exist in time. The products of creativity cannot satisfy the creator. But the experienced creative ecstasy, the elevation that overcomes the differences between subject and object, passes into eternity" (Berdyaev 1991, 223).

In Lesya Ukrainka's dramatic poem, the main character's soul confesses the commandments of Christ and accepts such ethical norms as love of neighbor and mercy. But the demands of humility and submission to the will of authority are unacceptable for him. The desire to realize his ideal of beauty and comprehend the truth through the act of creativity is what distinguishes Richard from his pragmatic, down-to-earth environment. However, having found himself in exile, unable to realize himself as an artist, Richard quickly despairs, loses the meaning of life. As a result, his life turns into just an existence, which, in the eyes of the hero of the drama, acquires the signs of the hellish existence: "These are threatening sounds [...] that predict / eternal torment in hell. But I'm in hell already..." (Ukrainka 1988, 101). Creativity not only brought about meaning in the life of the sculptor, but it made him a free man, gave him the strength to defend his own beliefs, to resist the masses, and granted him joy. With the loss of creative inspiration, Richard loses interest in life:

While once I wanted no peace at all,  
 now I hear my strength deserting me,  
 just like that chord. I shall not be able to live  
 by bread alone...  
 (Ukrainka 1988, 56)

Only in a creative act, the author of the dramatic poem states, a person's inner liberation is possible. Owing to creativity, a person has the opportunity to enter the realm of the eternal.

### **Conclusion**

The case study of the Bible code, which is actualized in the dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* with the help of numerous quotations, allusions, and reminiscences, contributes to a better understanding of the foundations of the philosophical issues and worldviews on which the author of this drama reflects. The main one among them is the eternal question of the meaning of life. Every character of the dramatic poem seeks answers to these questions within their own worldview paradigm, interpreting the texts of Scripture in their own way.

Namely, Edith, Jonathan, and most members of the Puritan community perceive the sense of their life in strict observance of biblical laws, purity of moral values, deliverance from sin, service to God and the community for soul salvation and living in the future Kingdom of Heaven. For them, the Bible is the only authoritative source of truth and

practical guidance in life. The sense of Godwinson's life is the unbridled desire for power. For him, the Bible is a tool for manipulating public opinion and a source of quotations that he uses in the needed context, aiming at achieving his own selfish goal. His sanctity, hypocrisy, ostentatious observance of the letter of the law are those qualities that manifest signs of rebirth or degradation of any religious teaching. For Richard, the Bible is a source and the basis of his worldview. The sculptor sees the meaning of life in creativity, which is an opportunity to comprehend the truth, to break through time and space into the world of eternity, his ideal.

The analysis of the Bible code in the dramatic poem *In the Wilderness* gives grounds to conclude that Lesya Ukrainka embodied not only her views on the role of creativity in human life in the image of Richard, but it also offers insights into the poet's attitude to Christianity on the whole. She, like Richard, recognizes the moral and ethical principles of Christ's teaching but rejects all the religious precepts associated with humility, obedience, and the recognition of the spiritual authority of the church and its ministers.

#### Sources:

- Ukrainka 1978: УКРАЇНКА, Л.: *Зібрання творів у 12 томах. 10*. Київ 1978.  
 Ukrainka 1988: *LESIA UKRAÏNKA in Translations: English, German, Spanish, French, Croatian, Portuguese, Italian*. Pasuniak, N. [ed.]. Philadelphia 1988.  
 OFKJB: *Official King James Bible* [on-line]. <<https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>> [cit. 01-12-2020].

#### Literature:

- Berdyayev 1928: БЕРДЯЕВ, Н. А.: *О достоинстве христианства и недостоинстве христиан*. Варшава – Париж 1928 [on-line]. <[https://librebook.me/o\\_dostoinstve\\_hristianstva\\_i\\_nedostoinstve\\_hristian/vol1/1](https://librebook.me/o_dostoinstve_hristianstva_i_nedostoinstve_hristian/vol1/1)> [cit. 10-12-2020].  
 Berdyayev 1991: БЕРДЯЕВ, Н. А.: *Самопознание. Опыт философской автобиографии*. Москва 1991.  
 Frye 2010: ФРАЙ, Н.: *Великий код. Біблія і література*. Львів 2010.  
 Heidegger 1973: HEIDEGGER, M.: *Art and space*. Seibert, Ch. H. Loras College 1973 [on-line]. <<https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/art-and-space.pdf>> [cit. 12-01-2021].  
 Heidegger 2002: HEIDEGGER, M.: *Off the Beaten Track*. Young, J. – Haynes, K. [trad.]. Cambridge 2002 [on-line]. <<http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/filmphilology/heideggerworkofart.pdf>> [cit. 10-12-2020].

*Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University  
 Lutsk*

*Liudmyla Zhvania  
 zhvania@ukr.net  
 ORCID: 0000-0003-1864-2119*