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Specific of the Genre and System of Images in the Tragicomedy “Volodymyr” by Theophan Prokopovych

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the genre specific and the system of images in the tragicomedy “Volodymyr” written by Theofan Prokopovych. It is emphasized on the synthesis of European and authentic traditions in this work. The observance of the principle of unity of place, time and space as the main feature of this drama is determined in the analyzed tragicomedy. The research examines the specificity of the writer’s vision and interpretation of the Christianization of the Kyivan Rus’ in 988 and the introduction of Christianity as the state religion. It is also highlighted the researcher’s observance and non-observance of this historical fact. The peculiarities of creating the system of images presented in a high tragic style and in a low comic style are studied. The projecting of the historical figure of Prince Volodymyr on the Hetman Ivan Mazepa, who was the contemporary of Theofan Prokopovych, is noted. The conclusions about the innovative nature of the work in the context of the development of the Ukrainian Baroque school drama are drawn. The specificity of the genre is manifested through the synthesis of the comic and the serious features. The main characteristics of the tragicomedy are realized at the level of the system of images and an ideological and thematic spectrum.

Keywords: Theofan Prokopovych, Baroque, tragicomedy, Volodymyr, comic, tragic, school theater.

The phenomenon of Theofan Prokopovych is significant in the history of the Ukrainian Late Baroque. His artistic heritage is rich in genres, styles, ideologies and themes. The tragicomedy “Volodymyr” plays an important role in it. The work was written in 1705 year during the author’s Kyiv period, and testified to the active development and innovative character of the Baroque school drama. O. Slipushko emphasizes, “Everything was innovative – the plot, the description of images, and the author’s position”¹. (The translation of the quotes is mine. – Huan Meimei). The work by Th. Prokopovych meets the challenges of the new European drama. During his studying in Rome, Theofan Prokopovych formed the European model of thinking that was integrated into Ukrainian literature and education. The text is keeping with the dramatic works by William Shakespeare. Th. Prokopovych does not copy European authors but reflects their heritage creatively, so that it is integrated into the national literature. Based on this integration, there was a synthesis of European and Ukrainian ideas. Due to the efforts by Theofan Prokopovych, Ukrainian drama reached a high level of the development and became a part of the Western European cultural and literary context.

The writer devoted his work to Hetman Ivan Mazepa. The play was exhibited at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy on July 3, 1705. The realization of the principle of the unity of action, time and place, which was a continuation and development of the traditions of ancient theater in Europe, was represented in this work.

Th. Prokopovych defines the genre of the work as “tragicomedy”. The author’s choice of this innovative genre is explained by the fact that it synthesizes high and low, serious and comic. The specificity of the genre is manifested through the synthesis of the comic and the serious, which is realized at the level of the system of images and ideological and thematic range. The author shows his understanding of such important issues as the introduction of Christianity into the

¹ O. Slipushko, «*Volodymyr*» *Feofana Prokopovycha yak ukrainska prosvitnytska klasysystychna drama* [w:] *Literatura. Folklor. Problemy poetyky*, red. H. Semeniuk, Kyivskiy universytet, Kyiv 2012, s. 261.

Kyivan Rus' and the psychological state and inner world by Prince Volodymyr during his decision to Christianize the Kyivan Rus'. The work contains religious and philosophical reflections of the writer, which are revealed in Volodymyr's dialogues with the Greek Philosopher and this Prince's sons. The drama is based on the Christianization of the Kyivan Rus'. This action is projected on the reforms and changes in the society.

Volodymyr's character is complex and multifaceted. The author represents the inner evolution of the hero and significant changes in his psychology at different stages of development of the protagonist. In general, it was formed the image of a ruler-reformer, who was carrying out the civilizational reform, making a historical choice in favor of Christianity as the official religion of the Kyivan Rus' state. Creating this image, the author uses high tragic style. The characters of the pagan priests (hierophants) Kuroiid (in literal translation – Who Eats Hens), Piiar (in literal translation – Drunkard) and Zheryvol or Zheryvil (in literal translation – Who Devours An Ox) have completely different nature. They are totally presented in a low and comic style. M. Sulyma considers Th. Prokopovych's tragicomedy “Volodymyr” a kind of historical and purely religious drama,

We actually have a religious drama, in which there is no place for any other experience than those related to the problem of choosing a faith... However, the value of “Volodymyr” lies elsewhere: a thinking hero appears in Ukrainian drama for the first time².

M. Voznyak notes that the the Jesuit theater influences on the formation of the specifics of the genre, “The influence of this kind of Jesuit dramas on the Ukrainian ones is undoubted”³. I. Franko also emphasizes the influences of Jesuit theater and Polish comedies and interludes on Ukrainian drama⁴.

² M. Sulyma, *Ukrainska dramaturhiia XVII-XVIII st.*, wyd. 3, Stylos, Kyiv 2010, s. 203.

³ M. Vozniak, *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury*, wyd. 2, Svit, Lviv 1992, s. 201.

⁴ I. Franko, *Rusko-ukrainskyi teatr. Istorychni obrysy*. Zibrannia tvoriv u 50 tomakh, tom 29, Naukova dumka, Kyiv 1981, s. 303.

The composition of “Volodymyr” consists of the prologue, five acts, and the epilogue. The author himself is the creator of the theory of drama, according to which each dramatic work must contain five acts, including prologue (the first act is protasis – a summary of the drama), epitasis (the second act is the beginning of the event), the third and fourth acts – catastasis (culmination), the denouement of the work (the fifth act). This principle is used in the tragicomedy “Volodymyr”. The prologue contains an appeal to Ivan Mazepa. The premiere of the drama took place with the participation of the Hetman. Its author solemnly calls him “the noble lord, the patron and the benefactor”, to whom, “the establishment of Volodymyr’s motherland after the Tsar is given by God”⁵. The main emphasis is made on the fact that the hetman is the successor of Prince Volodymyr, a worthy successor to his historical cause. Hence, it is considered that the power of the hetman is given by God. In his address to I. Mazepa, the writer urges the Hetman to see himself in the figure of the prince,

See yourself in Volodymyr, see in this spectacle, as in a mirror, your courage, your glory, your union of love with the monarch’s heart, your true kindness, your sincerity to the Orthodox Apostolic United Church of the Catholic faith our zeal and care⁶.

Th. Prokopovych sees the historical origins of the Hetmanate in the Princely Kyivan Rus’. The Christian faith is interpreted as the basis of state and social development. I. Mazepa is called as not just Volodymyr’s heir, but his son. The positioning of the Prince-father and the Hetman-son creates an important idea about the historical development of Rus’-Ukraine. According to V. Shevchuk, “Volodymyr is an allegory of I. Mazepa. There are no direct analogies in

⁵ F. Prokopovych, *Volodymyr [w:] Slovo mnohotsinne: khrestomatiia ukrainskoi literatury, stvorenoi riznymi movamy v epokhu renesansu (druha polovyna XV – XVI stolittia) ta v epokhu Baroco (kinets XVI – XVIII stolittia)*, wyd. Akonit, Kyiv 2006, s. 40.

⁶ Ibidem, s. 40.

the biographies of both of them, so the author shows the blood and spiritual ties⁷. V. Shevchuk also mentions,

The author's direct instruction is about the use of the type of analogy – Volodymyr is a father, Mazepa is his son in spirit. Therefore, the father and the son are similar to each other, but both of them live their lives and have different conflicts⁸.

The first act of the drama (protasis) is devoted to the description of the experiences of Hell. It is because Volodymyr decided to introduce Christianity into the Kyivan Rus'. By the will of Hell, the ghost of Yaropolk comes to earth to warn pagan priests about the dangers of the new religion. In Yaropolk's monologue, Volodymyr appears as an enemy and fratricide, a negative hero, and his right to rule the Kyivan Rus' is denied,

I am Volodymyr's brother. No! The voice is false, Volodymyr is not a brother, because my godless brother is the Fratricide! ... He is the enemy, the adversary, and the priest of my blood!⁹

(The literal translation of the poetic quotes is mine. – Huan Meimei). Yaropolk's monologue is aimed to contrast with the general positive, often ideal orientation of the image of Volodymyr in the drama. Zheryvil's accusation of Volodymyr's allegiance to pagan gods and his cessation of sacrifices determines the text, because the work describes Grand Prince of Kyiv's decision to accept Christianity and introduce a new religion into the state. Zheryvil appeals to the pagan gods and tries to prevent Volodymyr from carrying out the Christian reform.

⁷ V. Shevchuk, *Teofan Prokopovych. Zhyttia i tvorchist* [w:] *Muza Roksolanska: Ukrainska literatura XVI-XVIII st.: Rozvynene baroko. Piznie Baroko*, wyd. Lybid, Kyiv 2005, s. 316.

⁸ *Ibidem*, s. 316.

⁹ Th. Prokopovych, *Volodymyr* [w:] *Slovo mnohotsinne: khrestomatiia ukrain-skoi literatury, stvorenoi riznymi movamy v epokhu renesansu (druha polovyna XV – XVI stolittia) ta v epokhu baroko (kinets XVI – XVIII stolittia)*, Akonit, Kyiv 2006, s. 40.

The second act of the drama (epitasis) represents the conversation between the pagan priests Kuroiid, Piiar and Zheryvil during the feast of the god Perun. Zheryvil informs about Volodymyr's decision to introduce Christianity. Zheryvil seeks to summon the devils of the World, Blame and the Body (Flesh) to fight against Volodymyr and the Christian faith. The devil of the World considers Volodymyr's decision to adopt Christianity from the Greeks, as quick and reckless. The devil of the Blame recollects the past Volodymyr's sins, believing that in this way the Prince wants to atone for his sins. The demon also promises to instill "crucified" thoughts and thoughts in the Prince to prevent the introduction of Christianity. The Devil of the Body says of the Prince's three hundred wives in the past.

The catastrophe covers the third and fourth acts. It is told about the culmination of the drama, in particular, Volodymyr's decision to baptize the Kyivan Rus'. The full disclosure of the psychological state of the Prince, his inner motives and impulses in favor of the introduction of a new religion are noted here. The events are unfolding in the Prince's palace. At the beginning of the third act, the author brings Volodymyr and his sons Borys and Hlib to the stage. We can observe Volodymyr's inner confrontation over the choice between paganism and Christianity. The process of making the final decision is depicted in the numerous conversations of the Prince with the Greek philosopher and sons Borys and Hlib, who advise him to accept the new Christian faith. Zheryvil tries to persuade the Prince to return to the pagan gods, and Volodymyr's illness is explained by the cessation of sacrifices. However, Volodymyr shows resilience of character and demonstrates the decision to change the religion of the Kyivan Rus'. In addition to this, he tries to enlighten pagan priests with a new faith, so the Prince offers Zheryvil to stay and listen to the Christian Philosopher. Thus, the author forms such a defining feature of Volodymyr's image as his missionary work and apostolate. Theofan Prokopovych represents the discussion between Zheryvil and the Philosopher, contrasting two worldview systems, Zheryvil represents the opposition to any changes. Volodymyr defends the position of progress, the necessity of

the educational reform. Zheryvil's opposition to reforms is explained by the lack of proper education, which was a problem for the clergy and the state of that time, "It is not necessary neither the law, nor a condemnation of our State; our kind is cruel, wordless, he hates Writing – this is his guilt"¹⁰. The writer focuses on the important problem of education. Knowledge and education are the key and condition for the successful development of the state and society for him. Hetman Ivan Mazepa also pursued such a policy. The conversation between the Philosopher and Zheryvil has a deep allegorical connotation. It is the embodiment of the struggle of the Enlightenment, the progress with ignorance and regress. V. Lytvynov notes,

In a dispute with the Greek 'Philosopher', the ignorant priest Zheryvol (Zheryvil), unable to deny something in essence, responds only with swearing, shouting and threats. Prince Volodymyr and others understand that this is due to ignorance. The struggle ends with the victory of the 'philosopher'¹¹.

The drama "Volodymyr" is based on the conflict between old and new. In addition to this, in the sense of this confrontation, the author also puts the understanding of Christianity as an innovative worldview and progress, "The conflict between two groups of drama characters is a reflection of the original confrontation between conservatism and innovation, pragmatism and sacrifice, ignorance and education"¹².

The fourth act presents Volodymyr's conversations with Borys and Hlib about the essence of Christianity. The sons support the Prince with the decision to introduce Christianity. Borys proclaims the important idea that faith is a factor in the unity of the people, "Our agreement is, father, indispensable: we are united not so much

¹⁰ Ibidem, s. 67.

¹¹ V. Lytvynov, *Chy buv Feofan Prokopovych rannim prosvitnykom?* [w:] *Kyivska akademiia*, wyd. Kyivska akademiia, Kyiv 2006, s. 66.

¹² I. Isichenko, *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury: epokha Baroko (XVII-XVIII st.)*, wyd. Sviatohorets, Lviv 2011.

by bloodline, but by the divine belief”¹³. It was the unity of faith that became the basis for the unification and consolidation of the Kyivan Rus’. After all the conversations, Volodymyr comprehends the essence of what he heard. These inner reflections represent the Prince’s psychological state condition, who is in doubt when making this important decision. Focusing on changing Volodymyr’s psychological state, while he is making decisions, is innovative. The writer reveals the inner psychological changes of the Prince’s spiritual growth, which led him to a cardinal decision. We can notice a tense struggle in the soul of the protagonist; the tension is growing until the Prince makes a final decision. Volodymyr’s monologue with the announcement of his decision is represented as the ending of the work. The personal choice of the Prince becomes the choice of the state and forms the future ways of its development. This historical monologue of Volodymyr is built in the form of questions to himself, “Where are you going, poor Prince! Three hundred of your wives, where are they? Don’t you care? Or are you a wild beast, not a man? Will you be proud, though you can be humble?”¹⁴. The inner monologue evolves into a struggle against the temptations of the Devil of Temptation, which recalls the Prince’s past and urges to change to return. However, the Prince showed resilience and moved to a firm belief in the need to baptize himself and the Kyivan Rus’.

The outcome of the drama is represented in the fifth act. Pagan priests say that the Philosopher is to blame for the Volodymyr’s decision. Pagan idols are being destroyed in the state and a new faith is spreading. Mechyslav Horobryi brings news of the Prince’s final decision to convert to Christianity. Then the Herald appears and informs that the Christian name of Volodymyr is Vasyl. The Prince’s message to the Brave is read, where it is mentioned that the

¹³ F. Prokopovych, *Volodymyr [w:] Slovo mnohotsinne: khrestomatiia ukrainskoi literatur, stvorenoi riznyimi movamy v epokhu renesansu (druha polovyna XV – XVI stolittia) ta v epokhu baroko (kinets XVI – XVIII stolittia)*, wyd. Akonit, Kyiv 2006, s. 75.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 77.

Grand Prince converted to the christening, “By the grace of God I came to light from darkness”¹⁵.

The final part of the work is the performance of the choir led by the Apostle Andrew and the angels. The Apostle of Jesus Christ Andrii glorifies the very fact of the Christianization of the Kyivan Rus’, as well as predicts future historical events. He announces the murder of Borys and Hlib, the tragedy of Kyiv from the invasion of Batu Khan. The Apostle also mentions the figures of Metropolitan Varlaam Yasinsky and Ivan Mazepa, whom he glorifies for state activity, military affairs and cultural development of the state. According to M. Sulyma, Th. Prokopovych focuses on the religious glorification of Prince Volodymyr, especially his historical merit to baptize the Kyivan Rus’.

Theofan Prokopovych wrote a religious panegyric play... The playwright glorified the introduction of Christianity and its initiator... Prokopovych wrote a play about a canonized holy man¹⁶.

To conclude, the Prince Volodymyr’s character is shown through the representation of the internal evolution, which lasted from the doubts to the belief in the choice of Christianity as the state religion. Th. Prokopovych emphasizes that Volodymyr’s decision was made primarily as influenced by his sons Borys and Hlib. The author does not adhere to historical authenticity, but creates an artistic context of making the decision and its implementation. The Prince’s view is presented as his personal choice. The ruler of the Kyivan Rus’ and his state gradually came to realize the need to be christened. The author praises the Prince for his great apostolic feat – the christening of an entire great state. He follows the European tradition, in which the motives of the christening by the rulers of their states were widespread, Th. Prokopovych explains and confirms the correctness of the canonization of Prince Volodymyr, his introduction to the

¹⁵ Ibidem, s. 88.

¹⁶ M. Sulyma, *Ukrainska dramaturhiia XVII-XVIII st.*, wyd. 3, Stylos, Kyiv 2010, s. 204.

pantheon of the Kyivan Rus' saints, which testified to the self-sufficiency of the state and its church. In addition to this, the official introduction of Christianity in Kyivan Rus' is interpreted as the result of Volodymyr's internal spiritual quest. The Prince Volodymyr's image is historical, but this historicity is successfully projected on the author's contemporarity. The opposition of old and new, progress and regress, reforms and backwardness, education and ignorance are the basis of the plot and the basis for creating a system of images of the work. This tendency was creatively conceived by a Ukrainian author of the Baroque period.

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