

## **CHARACTER DRAWING IN THE GENRE OF A TRAGEDY-LEGEND IN THE UDMURT LITERATURE OF THE LAST DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

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### **Abstract**

The article deals with the analysis of the peculiarities of character drawing in the genre of a tragedy-legend in the Udmurt literature of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a focus on the plays “Ebga” by P. Zakharov and “Esh-Terek” by Ye. Zagrebin.

The research is carried out within the theory and methodology of the paradigm known as “poetics”. The focus of the research is on the analysis of the poetics of characters in modern tragedy, based on the reconstruction of historic events according to the Udmurt folklore narratives. The historic experience of Udmurts is undoubtedly projected onto the present.

The tragic conflict of the play “Ebga” by P. Zakharov is manifold: tribal rivalry, the conflict between the individual and the communal, religious contradictions. The dramatism of the tragic conflict, reflecting the rivalry and animosity within the nation, is deepened by the contradictory nature of the personages, created by P. Zakharov.

One of the prevalent ideas developed in the play “Esh-Terek” by Ye. Zagrebin is connected with the interpretation of tragic events as a result of historic and ideological aspects of reality: the people are not ready for the Udmurt statehood and consolidation of the neighboring people (Udmurts and Bulgars) due to the fact that the idea of unity is rejected by mean and narrow-minded representatives of both Udmurts and Bulgars as well as some rules imposed by their religious beliefs.

The analysis of the play “Ebga” by P. Zakharov and the play “Esh-Terek” by Ye. Zagrebin demonstrates that the genre of a tragedy-legend in the Udmurt literature of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is oriented at the artistic perception of an individual and history, historic routes of a nation. It is crucial that the Udmurt tragedy is based on folklore narratives (legends) and follows the principles of folklore genres.

The following features representative of the poetics of the characters are revealed and thoroughly described in the article: philosophical interpretation of the formal and content-based components of tragedy, e.g. death of personages; interpreting the historic events and problems (tribalism, lack of unity within the ethnos) from the perspective of the present-day situation; complementing the traditional concept of a personage’s mistakes with the idea of his tragic guilt; complexity of the conflict in which the characters are involved; contradictory nature of the characters, which requires the use of the range of techniques for their individualization; rethinking the tragedy of an individual personage in terms of the tragedy of an ethnos; the

increasing role of mass scenes in revealing the personages, etc.

**Keywords:** Udmurt literature of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dramaturgy, genre, tragedy-legend, personage, personage poetics, P. Zakharov, Ye. Zagrebin.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The plays “Ebga” by P. Zakharov (1992) and “Esh-Terek” (1997) by Ye. Zagrebin, staged by the Udmurt national theatre in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, became the events of noticeable significance. To a large extent, the success of both performances was due to the choice of the type of the main character which was typical for tragedy as a genre as well as modern arts and literature in general. According to some scholars, the major component of tragedy is a conflict between the character’s historically determined demands with the objectivity of real life (Frolov 1979; Introduction to Literature Studies, 2000; Stennik, 1982, etc.).

The plot of the plays written by P. Zakharov and Ye. Zagrebin is based on the interpretation of folklore materials; both authors use folklore narratives with the motives of uniting the Udmurt tribes of Vatka and Kalmes into one nation in the middle ages. The use of folklore motives enables the authors to tackle serious problems in an entertaining way and attract larger audiences.

“Ebga” presents the life of Udmurts in an old hill-fort Idnakar in 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Batyr Dondy, the head of the Vatka Udmurts, understands that Udmurt tribes should unite, and makes his son Zui marry Ebga, a beautiful girl from the tribe of Kalmez. Dondy hopes that, as a result of this marriage, he will have a grandson who will be able to unite the Udmurts of both tribes into a powerful nation. But all his hopes are in vain: Zui is poisoned; Dondy dies; Ebga is killed, pushed down from a steep cliff into a river; her son has no future, he has to grow up without parents; the power is in the hand of Orzi, a miserable and aggressive schemer.

The plot of Ye. Zagrebin’s tragedy “Esh-Terek” unfolds around a bargain between the young Udmurt chief Esh-Terek and Peri (the Evil Spirit, the Sprite of the Water and Underworld), according to which Esh-Terek receives a magic horse, which cannot be defeated by anybody, and gives Peri a beautiful Bulgar girl, kept by Udmurts in captivity. But when the Udmurt warrior sees beautiful Ailsu, he falls in love with her and decides to marry her. Their mutual love was a good opportunity to stop the war between Udmurts and Bulgars, but these hopes for peace “are broken by the ice of conflicts between the tribal leaders” (Ar-Sergi, 1997); it all results in the death of the young couple.

“Ebga” by P. Zakharov and “Esh-Terek” by Ye. Zagrebin are notable examples of modern Udmurt drama’s experiments of depicting personages as well as discoveries in the sphere of theatrical aesthetics. The objective of the article is to outline the peculiarities of character drawing in the genre of a tragedy-legend in the Udmurt literature of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. OPINIONS AND DISCUSSION

The research is carried out within the theory and methodology of the paradigm known as “poetics”. The focus of the research is on the analysis of the poetics of characters in modern tragedy, based on the reconstruction of historic events according to the Udmurt folklore narratives. It is considered that one of the requisites of tragedy as a genre is “the idea of the characters’ inevitable death” (Fedorova, 2002, p. 90). In “Ebga” by P. Zakharov there are many tragedies (deaths) which are determined by the plot development as well as the characters’ psychology. Not only the central personages (Dondy, Zui) die, but also the characters, that appear in the play episodically, perish; for instance, Puzhei, a person close to the elite of the Vatka people, is murdered by his own son. The scenes of death and peril emphasize the philosophic component of the play, making readers concentrate on the author’s reflections on instability of the society based on hatred, discord and rivalry. The historic experience of Udmurts is undoubtedly projected onto the present.

“There is another important trait of tragedy, distinguishing it from the genre of drama: it is a fatal mistake or misconception <...>, in tragedies personages’ mistake receive a global historic meaning” (Frolov, 1979, p. 285). Udmurt critics write that one of the messages of “Ebga” by P. Zakharov is “the extension of human capacities, the destruction of boundaries which were important at some historic moments in the past, but became too narrow for the bravest and most active members of the society” (Fedorova, 2002, p. 90). The examples of “the destruction of the boundaries” (violating the centuries-old rules) include Dondy’s pressure on his son to marry Ebga, his attempts to co-habit with his daughter-in-law and resigning from his son. All the

rules are violated for the sake of the greater good for the Udmurts in the future, in the hope that the Udmurt tribes will be united, but all these efforts result in the destruction of his son's family and a nationwide disaster. Dondy's behavior is interpreted by the author as a negative consequence of his errors; at the same time the author points to the character's tragic guilt and responsibility for the events. This interpretation raised debates among the Udmurt intelligentsia (Razin, 1992; Vinogradov, 1992; Vladykina, 1993, etc.).

The tragic conflict of the play is manifold: tribal rivalry, the conflict between the individual and the communal, religious contradictions. The conflict is strengthened by the idea of "одиг инмарен улоно" ("we need one God"). In the author's view, the conflict between the tribes is supported by the fact that the two tribes have two different religious cults: the Kalmez people worship Mustor, and the Vatka people pray to Kyldysin. The Vatka priest Ozhmeg has no doubts that the traditions inherited from the ancestors are inviolable and venerating one God by all tribes is impossible. He addresses Ebga with anger and indignation: you live with the Vatka people, so you have to worship their God. Ebga, on the other hand, is unwilling to give up the God of her tribe, she wears a medallion with the sign of the God of the Kalmez tribe.

The dramatism of the tragic conflict, reflecting the rivalry and animosity within the nation, is deepened by the contradictory nature of the personages, created by P. Zakharov. For example, Zui is a romantic by nature, he is brave and strong, but too meek and mild; he lacks the toughness, necessary for the existing political situation. The personage's traits are revealed both directly, through his monologues and deeds, and indirectly, through other characters' (Dondy, Ebga, Ozhmeg, etc.) attitudes to him. Ebga's persona is also characterized with complexity and profoundness. Being the only daughter of her father, the only heiress of the Kalmez Udmurts, she has complete awareness of the importance of uniting the tribes into one nation; her tragedy is that she has no strength and experience to resist to the intrigues around her, gradually she turns out to be a toy in the hands of the Vatka political elite, and as a result she violates the rules and goes against the traditions of both tribes. Ebga is shown as a victim of the socio-political battle between the tribes; she is torn between the sympathy to her husband and social and historic necessities, which contributes to the intense psychological atmosphere of the tragedy.

It is noteworthy that the playwright is oriented at considering the personality of the leader of a small ethnic minority in the context of the global history. The folklore intertextuality enables the writer to create an artistic form, embracing folklore conventionality as well as in-depth analysis of an individual's life, his/her character, the role of errors and guilt in human life.

One of the prevalent ideas developed in the play "Esh-Terek" by Ye. Zagrebin is connected with the interpretation of tragic events as a result of historic and ideological aspects of reality: the people are not ready for the Udmurt statehood and consolidation of the neighboring people (Udmurts and Bulgars) due to the fact that the idea of unity is rejected by mean and narrow-minded representatives of both Udmurts and Bulgars as well as some rules imposed by their religious beliefs.

The question of a tragic error and tragic guilt has always been important for the Udmurt dramaturgy, with "Esh-Terek" (1912) by Kedra Mitrei and "Kamit Usmanov" (1939) by I. Gavrilov as the prime example of this trend. In this context the motive of a tragic error is of high significance. In Ye. Zagrebin's version of this legend Esh-Terek leads Udmurts in their fight against Bulgars, but, on meeting the Bulgar Khan's daughter Ailsu, he falls in love with her and leaves the battlefield. By that time, following the laws of his tribe, he had already been engaged to an Udmurt girl Indzy and, refusing to marry her, betrays both his betrothed and his tribesmen. But is Esh-Terek's decision a betrayal? This question is among the most debated issues raised in the play. The People's writer of Udmurtia V. Ar-Sergi writes that the young Udmurt leader is not a traitor: "Not the wars, but peaceful relationships with neighbours will enable Udmurts to survive and raise their national self-consciousness. This is the main message of the performance" (Ar-Sergi, 1997). An acclaimed Udmurt poet L. Aituganova is also of the opinion that "the author tries to inspire the audience with humane ideas <...>. Even the protagonist's name convey the idea of friendship, it emerged from the Udmurt word 'esh' (udm. friend)" (Aituganova, 1997). But the mutual love of the sweethearts, representing two clans, does not bring the long-awaited peace, the characters' personal tragedy is entwined with the national tragedy. In his work the playwright follows the folklore tradition of depicting conflicts and strengthens its tragic elements.

In the process of the artistic perception of individual's tragedy as a national tragedy Ye. Zagrebin demonstrates an ample use of mass scenes. As it is stated by V. Ar-Sergi, both the playwright and the director of the performance "employ static *mise-en-scènes* for mass scenes. All the characters behave as if they were one person. Isn't frightening? And here rebellious Esh-Terek comes. He brings new reasonable ideas which make it possible for everyone to survive. But his ideas are rejected, and this is his personal tragedy as well as the tragedy of the whole nation" (Ar-Sergi, 1997).

### 3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the play “Ebga” by P. Zakharov and the play “Esh-Terek” by Ye. Zagrebin demonstrates that the genre of a tragedy-legend in the Udmurt literature of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is oriented at the artistic perception of an individual and history, historic routes of a nation. It is crucial that the Udmurt tragedy is based on folklore narratives (legends) and follows the principles of folklore genres.

Tragedy-legends by M. Zakharov and Ye. Zagrebin reveal the following characteristics of the Udmurt tragedy in terms of the personage poetics: philosophical interpretation of the formal and content-based components of tragedy, e.g. death of personages; interpreting the historic events and problems (tribalism, lack of unity within the ethnos) from the perspective of the present-day situation; complementing the traditional concept of a personage's mistakes with the idea of his tragic guilt; complexity of the conflict in which the characters are involved; contradictory nature of the characters, which requires the use of the range of techniques for their individualization; rethinking the tragedy of an individual personage in terms of the tragedy of an ethnos; the increasing role of mass scenes in revealing the personages, etc.

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