

## Symbols and Paradoxes in Tragicomedy of Mykola Kulish “The National Malahii”

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the problem of essential ideological changes in the consciousness of the protagonist in literary work by Mykola Kulish “The National Malahii”. Attention is paid to studying of artistic means in reflection of deformation in the sphere of ideas. Symbols and paradoxes that author uses to emphasize moral, psychological, cultural distortions are explored. The specific features of the ontological paradigm reflected in literary work are determined.

**Keywords:** *tragicomedy, idea, protagonist, action, person, conflict, Mykola Kulish.*

**Introduction.** Dramaturgy of Mykola Kulish shows the way of intense development that comprised different artistic innovations of modern thinking and expression, namely realistic, romantic, expressionistic, symbolic, surrealist, existential elements, elements of the theater of the absurd etc. It is characterised by artistic experiments, philosophical implication, intellectual saturation. G. Semenyuk emphasizes originality of his talent: “Mykola Kulish is the most tragic person in Ukrainian literature. He was one of the most prominent representatives of the national Renaissance in theatre and dramaturgy of 20<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of 30<sup>th</sup> years in Ukraine” [15, p. 55].

**A brief review of publications on the subject.** Probably the first complete research of Mykola Kulish dramatic works was presented by N. Kuziakina [6]. G. Semeniuk studied dramaturgy of Mykola Kulish [13]. G. Semeniuk also analyzed his literary works in the context of Ukrainian dramaturgy development [14; 15]. T. Sverbilova [12] explored playwright’s literary works as the integral aesthetic system. Yu. Kosach [5], Ya. Goloborodko [2; 3], M. Korenevych [4] analyzed dramas by Mykola Kulish according to principles of modernistic thinking. Ye. Libert [8] paid attention to investigation of biblical symbols in playwright’s texts. V. Panchenko [10], A. Matiushchenko [9] focus on ideological distortions, reflected in dramaturgy of Mykola Kulish. I. Semenchuk [16] and L. Taniuk [17] studied prophetic features in tragicomedy “The National Malahii”.

**Objective:** to define genre characteristics of literary work by Mykola Kulish “The National Malahii”; to analyze the image of protagonist in the tragicomedy as the structural and semantic center of literary work; to determine the ways of heroes interaction in tragicomedy; to research the conflict in the literary work and the ways of ins representation.

**Research results.** One of his brilliant, significant and meaningful work is the tragicomedy “National Malahii”. In this artistic work the playwright examines the problem of spirituality and possible disfiguration in human consciousness. He shows the process of correlation between the high level of spiritual development and inclination to dependence on ideas. In tragicomedy the ideas are presented as such that reflect global processes and also perceived by individual consciousness. Mykola Kulish shows the changes in perception of an ordinary person who becomes addicted to ideas of instant human reformation. Main hero frantic concentration on ideas makes him in-

sensitive to all other important aspects of life. Finally his feverish enthusiasm transmutes into real madness. So, the author present the very actual problem in society influenced greatly by ideological movements that caused horrible distortions in public consciousness. The image of Malahii represents the extreme manifestation.

Mykola Kulish creates multidimensional image of main hero, who claims the role of a prophet in the post-revolutionary time. His name Malahii refers to the Book of prophets from the Old Testament. The playwright shows the formation of false prophet psychology – his consciousness is determined by fear, that’s why he escapes from his fear dedicating life to fanatic serving. In the course of time he completely identifies himself through the idea of human reformation. Malahii’s personality reflects phases of change from the postman who is so afraid of revolution that screwed him up in the closet, to reformer who preaches in madhouse and brothel. Modifications of hero’s behavior are caused by substantial shifts in his perception. Nevertheless, his basic illusions stay unchangeable – only perfunctory changes take place. That’s why suppressed fear converts into bigotry. The playwright has shown that fear that forced Malahii to screw up from revolution was escape from reality.

In such state of reality rejection and his own fear rejection he experiences transformation which continues rejection but in form of bigotry and completely transfers the hero in the illusory world. His own unhealthy thoughts as a result of mixing up religious and communist ideas have formed his phantasmal reality. Malahii is shown as a tragi-comical hero because the image comprises different aspects of depiction but they work together: through comic we see tragic traits and vice versa. His intrusive ideas are very destructive – actions determined by these ideas cause extremely negative changes in his environment. At the same time Malahii precisely observes and analyses social drawbacks. This image combines madness with insight, that’s why Malahii is so ambiguous; and he also reflects the complexity of social and ideological problems; he is the representative of the whole society consciousness with its global contradictions and distortions.

Malahii fancies himself as the sufferer for truth, he disclaims his previous life for realization of his phantasmagoric mission. He seems to be a very suspicious person for almost all strangers he meets, but insane people like him; Malahii causes his daughter death. His deliriums determined by his claim of spiritual and moral improve-

ment of human nature and society finally oppress his mind. These deliriums and their influence on Malahii and other characters in tragicomedy are shown in different aspects.

Malahii's ambiguity is observed through contradictory qualities, actions and deeds: he preaches humanism and shows indifference to his daughter's sufferings; he has the ability to distinguish precisely moral disfigurements in society and to amplify them because of struggle with them. Malahii turns his ideas into complete nonsense, in his imaginary moral improvement he completely destroys spiritual basis. Mykola Kulish represents a hero who wanted to reform people to escape from himself. For this reason he focused completely on idea (not to see the reality), combined it with his own ravings, which developed owing to the lack of connection with the world, so he created closed artificial space.

Malahii's frustrated psychics reflects peculiarly moral decay of society. It seems he opposes himself to declination but he makes it in the frames of self-denial. That's why he doesn't realize dismal difference between motifs and results of his actions. «The madness in a play by M. Kulish is based on belief in something that doesn't exist, and is replicated cyclically as insane revolutionary doctrines, Malahii's mad ideas, and finally as an attempt of their implementation» [1, p. 131].

Malahii didn't have the possibility for his self-realization in philistine environment, so he strives to start moral improvement of others. His delusions as to himself (Malahii fancies his transformations to national commissar with an appropriate name Narmahnar); as to the reform which he wants to perform with the help of coverlet and magic passes, separate him from reality: «Malahii's admiration for projects provides him incommunicable position, which is conflict to a greater or lesser extent in relation to other characters as his projects cause inconveniences (for commandants, whom he annoys, for strangers, whom he wants to reform) and even grief (for close people whom he has left, for his daughter Liybunya, for nurse Olya)» [1, p. 132].

The playwright has shown the stages of Malahii's fantasies formation. These fantasies became completely autonomous substitute of reality. Frightened inhabitant of a provincial town in his visional dreams turns into reformer. His fancies substitute reality which he rejects and tries to change it with the help of these excogitations. His ravings can't resist reality, for sustaining them he gradually plunges into madness, creating negative space around himself. Spiritual improvement which is the object of his strivings changes into absurd and chimeric aim, embodied in the notion "blue nothingness". Malahii's utopian conceptions causes self-denial that is confirmed by P. Rieker's statement: "some utopias can be typically anti-utopian only because each utopia has the element of counter-utopia" [11, p. 334].

Diverse depiction of Malahii creates multidimensional image, every aspect of which is specified through the comparison with others. Malahii arises in the image of the reformer (he imagines himself), madman (significant part of surrounding people perceives him in this way), fanatic (objective description). All three aspects of Malahii's depiction are correlated with certain sphere of artistic expression – Malahii's reality, other character's reality,

objective reality. I. Semenchuk affirms duality: «The character is shown in two plans: whom Stakanchyk pretends to be and whom he is really» [16, p. 132]. Combination of real fact with unhealthy fantasies, their fusion in hero's imagination produces preconditions for usage of grotesque forms. These grotesque forms acutely detect discrepancies but at the same time bizarre inter-correlation of imagination and outer world is displayed. Malahii's consciousness in a distorted form reflects the most important moral, ethical, spiritual and social problems of the time.

Paradoxical depiction of Malahii exposes his ambiguity – he is able to analyze social and moral imperfections but his observations induce him to ludicrous actions. The main hero transmits social consciousness crisis, when the previous structure has been ruined, but none world-view transformation hasn't been realized. N.Kuziakina affirmed: "Malahii fanatically worries about socialist ideas and he observes that people who live in new society in their outlooks and preferences are tightly connected to the old ones" [6, p. 155]. Although Malahii discerned inconsistencies, he wasn't able to handle with mental overloading in post-revolutionary times. That's why his consciousness creates weird visions, with the help of which he escapes from reality he doesn't like and at the same time he becomes a hostage of his own fantasies. G. Semenyuk claims: "The author shows surrounding reality so that the logic of a normal person seems to be inverted, and the socially distorted personality perceives the realm of an absurd as a standard" [13, p. 32].

Malahii claims: "you won't destroy evil by protocols" [7, p. 59]. This statement in connection with his acute observation on manifestations of human decay shows him as a person who deeply understands the drawbacks that must be improved. But he completely ignores his own madness. The character of Malahii has an ambiguous depiction. He arouses different intense reaction in people he communicate. Malahii has left his family for implementation of his bizarre reforms. The scene organized by his wife for Malahii stayed at home had tragi-comical implication. It seemed, the protagonist resisted restricted worldview of his town residents but in fact he started to show dangerous signs of fanatic belief in his mission.

In Council of People's Commissars Malahii is depicted in many different roles that emphasizes tragi-comical basis of the character. Commandants convinced in his insanity. But Malahii then appears and perform the role of a reformer who tried to reform people whom he led to the Council. The emergence of his intimate friend reveals one more role of Malahii – he is shown as fugitive from his own home. Nevertheless Malahii proclaims himself as a national delegate who finally is sent to psychiatric hospital.

The development of dramatic action and deployment of the conflict proves to amplify these shown aspects of Malahii's personality. All these roles symbolize different contradictory aspects of protagonist's character.

The end of the play proves the final collapse of Malahii's personality, he became the reason of his daughter Lyubunya's death but even couldn't understand the fact having lost the adequacy.

Fundamental problems of the time are concentrated in tragicomedy: degeneration of human nature and fanati-

cism. The image of Malahii becomes the peculiar symbolic point of these problems intersection. His sagacity reveals the essence of the society and individual personality moral decline, but also makes him a fanatic, focused to the level of self-forgetting on a unreal idea of reformation.

**Conclusions.** Ideas and caused misleads construct the personality of Malahii. That's why he has no doubts about the possibility of external transformations of human consciousness. The concept of "blue nothing" becomes the apotheosis of passionately dreamed images of world welfare. The playwright showed the mechanism of Malahii's consciousness fragmentation, the process of total identification with the idea of reformation and the cutting off of all other fragments. The hero looks at the "blue distance", he is interested in the abstractions he has invented, and is not interested in people, such as his daughter Lyubunya,

nurse Olja. He pays attention to them only in context of his reformation projects.

The heroines suffer and they are defenseless. That's why the Malahii's unhealthy fantasy oppresses them and the further illusion destruction causes the demolition of their personalities. The spiritual universe oversets in the process of faked reformation. The final absorption in a terrible reality becomes complete. This reflects the madness of the protagonist. Symbolically Malahii preaches his projects in the madhouse and in the brothel. But if his delusions cause resonance among the madmen, then he is condemned in brothel. Malahii is completely transposed into a falsified reality, and his unhealthy imagination turns any external impulses into elements of this insane reality.

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