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Encyclopaedia of life in plays by Yuliy Kim

Introduction

In the mid-70s Soviet bards went a new way – V. Vysotsky played the lead in *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, Yu. Vizbor played the character of Borman in the film of *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. B. Okudzhava wrote a historical novel about retired lieutenant A. Amilahvary — *A Travel of Dilettanti*. Yu. Kim devoted himself to drama. “A. Halich came to poetry from drama, whereas I began with writing songs, and then they led me to the drama,” said the poet. (Никифорович). Throughout his life, Yu. Kim was engaged at the theatre as well as in writing songs and poems. The writer started creating his own plays quite late. He wrote his first play at the age of thirty. He has been working in this field so far.

The story of Kim’s arrival to the world of theatre and cinema is described in the autobiographical essay of *Shakespeare’s Passion of 1968* from the cycle *Once Mikhailov*. A new stage of creative activities by Yuliy Kim began after he suffered a forced discharge from the school in 1968 because of his participation in a dissident movement and creation of anti-Soviet songs. He lost his job with no opportunity to be the support of the family. That is when the poet began to write plays professionally.

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The objective of the article is to form a comprehensive and objective picture of the plays by Yuliy Kim and to determine the role and importance of his plays in the literature.

1. The plays by Yuliy Kim in literary criticism

Kim’s collaboration with the theatre played a great role in his development as a professional writer, having predetermined particularities of formation of his poetry for the future. For the most “applied” songs, their unavelling of the plot, stylization for different circumstances were just a disguise. A. Horodnitsky mentions, that their importance, sense and underlying theme are often much wider than those of theatre performance for which they were written for. (Городницкий 1992, 8). Yu. Kim shares the position of V. Mayakovsky, who affirmed in 1929 that his role in theatrical work was to make the stage his own tribune. V. Orenov considers that Kim “got involved in pure aesthetics, classical literature and buried himself in eternal themes. But Kim’s theme survived”. (Оренов 1991, 167). In his works the poet expressed contempt to aggression, hatred to totalitarianism, love for children and various monkey tricks by revealing surprising strength of mind of an ironical artist.

In L. Belenky’s opinion, Kim’s favourite dramatic genres are comedy and vaudeville which the author has filled with satirical scenes, monologues, dialogues, narration or marches in the form of songs. The author himself said that his theatrical and creative work in the field of cinema includes “songs, romances, satirical songs, ballads, arias, prayers, chastooshkas, and monologues which are performed by soldiers, students, knights, wolves, wood-cutters, hunters, actors, officers, wanderers, buffoons, pioneers, the Red Army, pirates and other characters of Moliere, Haidar, Swift, Shakespeare, Volodin, Cervantes, Ilf and Petrov, Horin, Coster, Perrault, Ostrovsky, Vonnegut, and Bulgakov”. (ШКОЛЬНИК).

A little sad and slightly mocking author’s lyricism has never gone with too deep seriousness. A. Horodnitsky notices, all Kim’s characters are characterised by “their author’s

unique style and vivid individuality”. (Городницкий 1992, 8). Poet expresses the character’s essence in “songs, arias, monologues, character’s state, group scene, and excursive comments”. (Оренев 1988, 33). In his article, V. Orenov writes about the poet’s love for stylization, imitation and ability to move his characters into distant lands and ancient times. Kim possesses an absolute talent to catch how the words sound in their native environment. He has a gift of a “mocker” with modern naturalness of narration. The author himself considers that he has revived the genre of “remake” in the Soviet cinema. (Ким 1994, 52).

The libretto for the original musical performances and plays of the classical literature take an important place in the works by Yu. Kim. The author uses famous plots and adapts them for modern times. With the help of witty irony, humour, vividness of language Kim changes familiar meaning of originals. By imitating classical literature he shows his own authorship having emphasized the ideas of others and saved the essence of a prototype. The poet is easily recognized in variety of genres such as romances, prison songs, political satire, and folk chastooshka.

“All my life I have been trying to get into Russia, and for more convincingness I involved such excellent masters as Block, Mayakovsky, Voinovich as co-authorship... Work was going well with them!” the author confesses. (Ким 2003, 7). Kim wrote the first Russian musical based on *The Young Ignoramus*— the play by D. Fonvizin, songs for the performance *Dance Akimych!* based on the play *Lucrative Appointment* and *Ah, Balzaminov, Balzaminov!* based on the comedies by A. Ostrovsky. The writer hasn’t passed A. Pushkin over in silence having adopted the plots of his works. New versions have familiar plots changed and new sides of well-known characters revealed.

2. The plays by Yuliy Kim

2.1. The Fairy Tale of Ardennes Forest

In 1968, Kim was invited to write songs for the play of *The Fairy Tale of Ardennes Forest* by Shakespeare. The poet created an original interpretation of the classic, having written 17 songs among which there were monologues of Buffoon, Jack-melancholiac, Wanderer, Rosalinda and others were presented. The play is full of lyricism and love for life. The former plot in a new version was presented with jokes, disguise, merry-andrew’s play and masquerade as a modern work of current importance in which pastoral genre receded into the background. The main idea of Kim’s play was to glorify freedom and human dignity.

The Kim’s play is characterized by exactness of evaluation of social events, sincerity, insight, refined irony, which helps to show the essence of phenomena and events. Due to that deep notional and artistic effects are achieved. Philosophical deepness is concealed in ease, light irony and wittiness of Kim’s poetry. Naturally, Aesopian language is found here: stinging phrases are performed by simple-minded Buffoon who is a wise man and a philosopher – a strict, apt and vivid analyst: “Бездарные гримеры, / Коварные суфлеры — / Мы сами! Мы с вами!”. (Ким 1990, 74).

The theme of “retraction” of a familiar life style, motives of wind of change, a continuous voyage, a journey which can be interrupted neither by affection for relatives, nor by love – it was a kind of a life style. So, through Jack-melancholiac’s monologues Kim is arguing on philosophical topics about person’s destiny and place in this world (“небо — вот твой отчий кров, а этот мир — твой дом!”), his thoughts, nature, God, the sense of life, solitude and friendship: “Жить меж людей – но не с людьми”; “иметь везде знакомый круг, и никогда друзей”. (Ким 1990, 79).

Paraphrasing Shakespeare's famous statement, the author mentions how close the theatre is connected with man's real life: "К чему играть спектакли, / Когда весь мир — театр / И все мы в нем — актеры?" (Ким 1990, 74). But while Shakespeare speaks about the roles which are performed by a person all his life long, beginning with childhood and finishing with a helpless old man, Kim means social and public roles. In ironical lines of the comedy the author describes an ideal society where "корона венчает того, кто в самом деле лев", and if the ruler's ears start to grow, he must be "locked in a cattle-shed". (Ким 1990, 75). Kim is against lies and hypocrisy when "kopeck wants to become a ruble", "a brunet plays the role of a blond", "a jackal plays the role of a sheep", and "butcher" plays the role of a doctor who "чуть запор — он хватя за топор, / И нет живота, хоть плачь!". (Ким 1990, 75).

Kim shows himself as a perfect satirist when presenting the character of guileful ruler Frederick, a parricide and intriguer, whose speech is full of demagogic stock phrases. So, in the song of Prime Minister the author continues exposing social problems when the innocent are "guilty of true speech and honest eyes", and the only help and favour by an executioner is "to give poison before execution". (Ким 2002, 168).

2.2. The Young Ignoramus

In a new version of *The Young Ignoramus* Fonvizin's cold and ceremonious comedy characters and circumstances have started to live their new cheerful, wise, playful dramatic life. Despite his love for imitation Kim tends to make his characters more humane: Prostakov, Skotinin and main intriguer Mrs. Prostakova gains an ability to love and suffer. Heartless Mrs. Prostakova appeared to become a bit sentimental and lyrical in spite of her cruelty. Her love for the son is criminal, but motherly usual: "Как у мово детушки Митрофанушки / Кудри выются чистый шелк, очи ясные..." (Ким 2003, 293).

Original character of Skotinin is a "man-mask" whose name speaks for itself and is a description of his bearer. Whereas an original character does not have any humanity and ability to love ("Люблю свиной, сестрица, а у нас в околотке такие крупные свиньи, что нет из них ни одной, котора, став на задни ноги, не была бы выше каждого из нас целой головою") (Фонвизин 1989, 90), Kim's Skotinin loves pigs sincerely, and he expresses his feelings to the cattle sensitively and touchingly: "Кому свинья — свинина, / Щетина да сальцо. / А мне свинья — скотина, / У коей есть лицо" (Ким 1990, 37). In this character's monologue the poet compares people to pigs which are sometimes more human and kinder than the first ones. Kim shows that even such a foolish and rude man can suffer from solitude or have feelings and affection: "Ни злобы, ни попрека, / Ни хитрости какой... / Мне в людях одиноко, / А с ними я — как свой" (Ким 1990, 37).

Intelligent and strong irony is typical for Kim's works. In spite of that, imitating the original in a Vralman's monologue the author intentionally uses some words incorrectly by changing endings: "В матушка Россия, излишна, крепки лоп, особый слушай, ушитель, кутшер". (Ким 2003, 287). The character created by Kim differs from the original by his intelligence, irony, deepness of assessment. Fonvizin's satire is "more simple-minded" because it is two centuries younger than the modern interpretation. Kim's satire is burdened with historical experience of the cruel twentieth century. In Vralman's speech Kim shows his disrespectful attitude to the Russian land and people, although in his heart he agrees with these words and sneers at stupidity and lack of education of the Russian people: "В матушка Россия голова излишна, / Был бы только крепки лоп! / Ваш страна — особый слушай, / Разобраться мудрено... / Кто у вас ушитель, кто обычный кутшер, / Или это все одно?". (Ким 2003, 287).

2.3. The Flemish Legend

In 1977, the poet begins work on his own dramatic play – rock-opera *The Flemish Legend* based on the novel of *The Thiel Eulenspiegel* by Sh. De Coster. The action takes place during people's liberation war of Flanders against tyranny of Spain in the XVI century. The main idea of a new version of a story about Thiel is a moral victory of humour and love for life of people in the fight against tyranny of the King, meanness of Oransky and heartlessness of Rybnik.

Thus, the theme of the mean ruler who believes that “the cattle should be kept by the throat tightly to teach them how to breathe» stands out through the whole play. (Бек 1990, 275). The author's position is expressed in the words of generous and freedom-loving Thiel: “Вперед, вперед, свобода стоит жизни! А жизнь без свободы не стоит и гроша!” (Ким). The song is run through with the poet's pain about his killed father (“Пепел отца жжет мое сердце!!!”). The poet is taking hard the pain for the country, where despotism and outrages are queening it and “orphans and widows are burned alive like firewood”. (Ким 1990, 36). The ironic bitter lines reflect the horror realistic pictures, where people hand over their friends and relatives to the authorities: “Волоки на костер хоть родимую мать – / Ты получишь законную треть!” (Ким 1990, 36).

The terrifying reality is opposed to the life-asserting position of Thiel. The poet shows his thirst for life and freedom in the guise of the main character (“Живи, дыши, не бойся / И чувствуй каждый миг”), love for people, outward things and nature: “Как щедро это солнце, / Как ясны эти звезды, / Как этот мир велик!”. (Бек 1990, 275).

2.4. Noah and His Sons

After a number of years the theme of war and peace appeared in the Kim's works: “О, если бы мы умели всего-навсего женщин слушать, разучились бы мы, расхотели убивать, разорять, рушить” (see *Two Arrows*) (Ким 56, 206), “Давайте поля сражений объединим в один манеж для представлений!”, “Как много напутано в жизни – то нежность, то злость. Что сдвинуть в ее механизме, чтоб лучше жилось?”. (Беленький 1990, 84). The writer felt hunger for creating his own plots, not only to supply other's stories with his texts. Kim's play *Noah and His Sons* was an example of this kind of works.

The play consists of two parts, each of which is further subdivided into scenes and interludes with the prologue. The main characters are Noah Tammer, the Secretary-general of United Nations Organization, and his sons Frederick, Erich, and Jackie. The main idea of the antiwar play *Noah...* is salvation of the world and humanity from a nuclear explosion. Noah's mission is to save the world from total destruction. The author calls upon heads of states to come to an agreement amicably in order to avoid the deaths of millions of people taking the field: “Как докричаться до глав правительств? / Договоритесь – еще не поздно! / Пока не поздно – договоритесь!”. (Ким 1990, 93).

The author introduces the aliens (Singers) into the plot who are looking at people from the outside, calling them “самоистребляющими индивидуумами” who have “слишком малая доля разума относительно общей массы” and hesitating about their “гуманоподобности”. (Ким 1990, 92). Kim sneers that it is easier for the authorities carrying the war “легче сдохнуть обоюдно, / Чем хоть бы раз довериться взаимно”. The author blames them for absurd deaths of great number of people: “ради высших идеалов / Необходима гибель низших миллионов”. (Ким 1990, 93). Every line of the Final song is full of hope and the

author's pain about people who kill each other senselessly: (“За что же дети – обречены? / Нет ничего на белом свете, / Что может стоить такой цены”). (Ким 1990, 93).

2.5. The Bug

Kim's play *The Bug* fundamentally differs from the comedy by Mayakovsky. In a new variant the author has reconsidered and revalued 1920s, having looked “at the world from the point of view of a blamed person, absolutely destroyed by merciless satire of Mayakovsky,” considers D. Hoder. (Годер 1988, 54).

The satire of Mayakovskiy, which is very close in its style to that of Zoschenko or Ilf and Petrov, is shared by Kim. Passion to stylization also makes two poets similar. When working on *The Bug* Kim mostly took into consideration the characters and circumstances, depicted in the comedy by Mayakovsky rather than the style and language of the original. In Kim's play the main character is presented as the citizen, who is nostalgic for his rustic past but is not going to leave his Moscow life style for patriarchal life, in spite of the fact that “больно много было грому... Сердце просит тишины”. (Ким 2003, 94). *The Bug* by Kim is a story about how the main character was seduced, deceived and ruined by his close people, and strangers took occasion, enticed and led him astray: “Ходил Ваня темным лесом, попал Ваня в лапы к бесам. Заморочили Ванюшу – реквизируют душу”. (Ким 2003, 107). Mayakovsky's Prisytkin is a “bug”, nasty insect, whereas in a new version of the comedy vulgarity and self-confidence are not typical for Ivan. Here, he is just a little guy driven into a tight corner: “Ничего-то мне не надо – лишь бы милую вернуть!” (Ким 2003, 107).

The performance has a turning-point from satire to drama, where in contrast to the original, Zoya shot herself. In her lyrical monologue she expresses all her love and pity for Ivan by blaming the society for everything that has happened: “Вы чего наделали? Чем мы вам мешали?”, “Ой, вы зачем порвали ниточку – Ведь это жизнь моя!”. (Ким 2003, 102-103). Mayakovsky's Zoyatook it easier when she learnt about Ivan's wedding: “We wanted to live, we wanted to work ... so, that's the end...». (Маяковский 1988, 554).

Secretary Lassalchenko represents a generalised image of the ruler, whose traits are easily recognized. A theme of a merciless cynical ruler is continued in a romance of a main character, where speech particularities of one of the Soviet leaders of that time are being mocked. (Ким 2003, 101-102). Like in the original in Kim's songs (“In our Red Family ...” (Маяковский 1988, 552), “I demand a Red Wedding!” (Маяковский 1988, 553)) the main character's love for the “red” is ironically emphasized (“red heart, red soul, red hand”) and his stupidity: “С победой трудящихся масс/ Я понял красоту и симпатию, / А тем более глядя на вас”. (Ким 2003, 101-102).

Although the plot differs greatly from the original the texts of the two authors are intertwined so that sometimes it isn't possible to tell one from another. Kim is trying to reconsider, interpret the classic. A new variant of the play is not all-sufficient. It is opened towards the original. In Kim's work the author's attitude to Mayakovsky is obvious, the argument with predecessors about those times which have become clearer many years later.

2.6. Moscow Kitchens

During Perestroika Yu. Kim continues to work actively, energetically, and analytically. In his works he responds to the social events in the country. In late 1980s, the poet wrote a unique dramatic poem *Moscow Kitchens*, devoted to the fighters perished in their fight against with totalitarian authorities. At this time it represents a combination of everyday and political satire,

synthesis of song poetry and spoken poems. In the poem, having been finished already in “new times”, a reflection of the author’s life and soul searching, creative achievements are found. A tragic and heroic story about dissident movement is described in the ironical manner which is so typical for the poet. Dissidents appeared in early 60s. By the end of the 70s they had been already put down cruelly by totalitarianism. A. Horodnitskiy mentions that this is the first essential work devoted to Moscow dissidents. (Городницкий 1992, 9).

The poem consists of twenty two various parts which include poetic and prosaic monologues, dialogues, polylogues, scenes in the court, songs, duets, and choral parts. *Moscow Kitchens* includes “wicked parody, satire, folk chastooshka, dissident’s conversation, bitterness and sweetness of recollections”, — writes A. Hershkovich (Гершкович 1992, 4). In the poem there are heroes, betrayers, executioners and criminals. The characters of the poem are young people who started the way of dissidents in late 60s. They cannot see how Stalinism is recommenced in the state, how the authorities are killing people, treading down their honour and dignity. A great number of autobiographical moments are reflected in the poem. For instance, the main characters sign a protest proclamation and incur anger of the authorities, shadowing, interrogations and chase. Various destiny is waiting for heroes: some of them were arrested, some were sent to Siberia, someone broke on pain of death having repented. T. Beck calls *Moscow Kitchens* “the encyclopedia” of Soviet people’s life, because the plot of the poem in details is based on real documental events of life at times of stagnation, including the scenes of search. (Бек 1992, 276). In the poem the author also reflected a great number of gatherings in a kitchen, which were spent together with friends and “brothers-in-arms”. The life of Nicolay, the complicated tragic and outstanding character of the poem, is associated with P. Yakir’s life who suffered from being persecuted by the Soviet authorities.

Kim remains true to his ironic tone in the poem when depicting incorrigibility of the Soviet leaders’ views from Stalin to Brezhnev in a bright grotesque of a skomorokh scene. A satirical song mentions L. Trotsky and I. Brodsky who was blamed for parasitism and was arrested “for doing nothing”.

In the songs real pictures of poor way of life is opposed to intellectual wealth of those who gather in Moscow kitchens – “10 square meters for 100 people”. (Гершкович 1992, 4). There is a “Russian night conversation”, which marginally influenced people’s lives and future of the arts. (Ким 2003, 199). In those kitchens the poems were declaimed, the guitars played, food for thought was prepared for disappointed people, who had lost the hope, who had gathered together from different places for the “only theme, like a candle burning in the night”. (Ким 2003, 199).

Conclusions

To sum it up, having studied and analysed in our opinion some of the brightest typical dramatic plays by Yu. Kim, we can conclude that in spite of the fact that the author started to write plays much later than songs, he reached a high level in this field as well. The poet equalized his glory of Kim-song-writer and Kim-playwright. Kim equally professionally writes original plays and poems, provides performances with his song texts. The theme range of his drama pieces is quite wide: the author touches upon eternal and vital topics, presenting social, political and psychological problems. The poet moves these problems of the society into different times and countries. However under disguise of various stylizations it is easy to notice playful look of the lyric character, who hates bellicosity, self-confidence, official vulgarity, and in spite of all obstacles, insists on his point of view.

Stylization and interchanges with classics occupy a significant place in the plays by Yu. Kim. However, the poet not only imitates classical works by Shakespeare, Fonvizin,

Mayakovsky, etc. but also completely processes materials to create independent stagings. The author not only changes the genre, text, plot and collisions, but also changes the accent in characters and values, modifies the theme and general pathetic elements to create new problems and conflicts for consideration. Kim's songs-monologues present vivid images of the characters, whose words convey the author's inmost thoughts, ideas and ideals. Kim continues deriding human vices and weaknesses, struggles with lawlessness, illegality, injustice and oppression of people.

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Summary

The object of the article is a variety of plays by Yuliy Kim. The objective of the article is to form a comprehensive and objective picture of the plays by Yuliy Kim and to determine the role and importance of his plays in the literature. In the article some of the brightest typical dramatic plays by Yu. Kim have been studied and analysed. We can conclude that the theme range of his drama pieces is quite wide: the author touches upon eternal and vital topics, presenting social, political and psychological problems. The poet moves these problems of the

society into different times and countries. Under disguise of various stylizations it is easy to notice playful look of the lyric character, who hates bellicosity, self-confidence, official vulgarity, and in spite of all obstacles, insists on his point of view.

Stylization and interchanges with classics occupy a significant place in the plays by Yu. Kim. However, the poet not only imitates classical works by Shakespeare, Fonvizin, Mayakovsky, etc. but also completely processes materials to create independent stagings. The author not only changes the genre, text, plot and collisions, but also changes the accent in characters and values, modifies the theme and general pathetic elements to create new problems and conflicts for consideration. Kim's songs-monologues present vivid images of the characters, whose words convey the author's inmost thoughts, ideas and ideals. Kim continues deriding human vices and weaknesses, struggles with lawlessness, illegality, injustice and oppression of people.

Key words: stylization, staging, plot, character, dramatic plays, song poetry, spoken poems, irony, humour, vividness of language, romance, prison song, political satire, folk chastooshka.