# Artistic Forms of Consciousness Representation in the Dramatic Works by Oleksandr Oles Zemlya *Obitovana* and *Nich na Polonyni*

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#### Abstract

This article attempts to examine the genre features of the dramatic works of Oleksandr Oles. The specific features of the reflected world outlook, and ideological contradictions that determine the deployment of the dramatic action and the development of a dramatic conflict will be determined. Attention is paid to the study of various forms of artistic conditionality which the writer uses in order to display the characteristic features of internal processes that influence the ways of perception and interpretation of external reality. Internal vicissitudes that occur in the minds of the heroes become the source of the formation of illusions that separate the heroes from the outside world. The playwright depicts paradoxical phenomena occurring due to the existence of parallel planes: the realities of objective reality and the illusions of the heroes. The writer shows the mechanism of the formation of illusions and their self-reproduction, which ultimately leads to devastating consequences.

Key words: hero, dramatic action, dramatic conflict, consciousness, artistic convention

#### Abstrakt

W artykule badane są cechy gatunkowe dzieł dramatycznych Ołeksandra Olesyi, jak również specyficzne cechy przedstawionego światopoglądu i ideologiczne sprzeczności, które determinują rozmieszczenie działań dramatycznych i rozwój konfliktu dramatycznego. Zwrócono uwagę na badanie różnych form uwarunkowań artystycznych, których autor używa do ukazania charakterystycznych cech procesów wewnętrznych wpływających na sposób percepcji i interpretacji rzeczywistości zewnętrznej. Wewnętrzne perypetie, które pojawiają się w umysłach aktorów, stają się źródłem powstawania iluzji, oddzielając bohaterów od świata zewnętrznego. Dramat opisuje zjawiska paradoksalne ze względu na istnienie równoległych płaszczyzn obiektywnej rzeczywistości i złudzeń aktorów. Pisarz ukazuje mechanizmy powstawania złudzeń i ich samoodtwarzania, co ostatecznie prowadzi do druzgocących konsekwencji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** aktor, akcja dramatyczna, konflikt dramatyczny, świadomość, konwencja artystyczna

Many scientists (Kudryavtsev 1997; 1999; Nevrly 1994) have studied the dramatic works of Oleksandr Oles in the context of ideological paradigms studies and genre systems research. Mykhailo Kudryavtsev analyses the author's plays as the dramas of ideas (1997). The researcher also examines the aesthetical and artistic signs of the plays (Kudryavtsev 1999). Mikylash Nevrly explores the semantic, stylistic, and genre aspects of Oles' dramaturgy (1994).

Stepan Khorob pays attention to the analysis of symbolism in its typological peculiarities (2007). The scientist compares the dramatic works of Oles and Maurice Maeterlinck in order to address definite symbolic characteristics in the dramaturgy of the Ukrainian writer and a Belgian playwright as well as to determine the specific traits of their dramatic works. One more comparative study is represented in the article of Olga Blashkiv, who observes typological similarities in the dramatic works of Oles and WilliamButler Yeats at the level of mythological and symbolical structures (2008).

Halyna Sapozhnykova studies symbolic implications in the dramatic works of the playwright (2011). She analyses different symbolic projections in Oles' plays which correlate with ontological models defining the whole world structure (Sapozhnykova 2011).

Therefore, the literary critic observes the corresponding symbolic codes in the writer's dramaturgy and designates their artistic and structural functions.

Philosophical and artistical aspects of the dramaturgy of Oles' works are analysed in Irvna Chernova's study (2016). The researcher examines the aesthetical peculiarities corresponding to the expression of pantheistic world perception. The linguistic approach to the analysis of the playwright's dramatic work is used in the article of Halyna Vyshnevska (2010), who explores conceptual frames. Different aspects of scientific studies applied to the analysis of the dramaturgy of Oles' works prove its multidimensionality in literary, aesthetical, philosophical etc. planes. The dramatic work of Oles Zemlya obitovana (The *Promised Land*; 1935) has aspects of a tragedy, although the author himself defines it as a drama. The playwright addresses the problem of fanatical blindness, which leads to the complete destruction of the family, as depicted in the literary work on the physical and moral level. The writer analyses ideological distortions that create an illusory dimensionality, which is alternative to reality, to which the heroes' consciousness is subjected. The conflict of the composition has a marked tragic orientation, as it touches upon the ideological crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, which led to the domination of destructive phenomena in public life. The moral and physical destruction and self-destruction of the members of the Shumitsky family are projected onto the entire Soviet society. The conflict is based on the principle of tragic irony, and the title of the literary work is focused on it. The heroes make decisions based on their own fantasies about the promised land, which leads to their destruction.

Grygory Luzhnytsky expresses his thoughts about the playwright's literary work as follows:

Meanwhile, *Zemlya Obitovana* by Oles is the most powerful and the most penetrating contemporary play [...] Maybe Oles as a lyric poet felt the tragedy of the Krushelnytsky family (the Shumitsky family in the play) very deeply. This pain (and it is evident in the play) could not be performed in the lyrical form (one that is too modest and narrow). It had to be presented in the form of a drama (2004, 262; my translation)

Anton Krushelnytsky, a Ukrainian writer, publisher, a minister of Ukrainian National Republic, emigrated to Vienna with his family after defeating the national liberation struggle. He returned to Soviet Kharkiv in 1934. Krushelnytsky was accused of attempts to destroy the Soviet state and was executed. Almost the whole family of Krushelnytsky (his daughter and four sons), who represented the Ukrainian intelligentsia, was

destroyed by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. These biographical facts, which emphasize the tragedy of a literary work, were addressed by Oles in his play.

The playwright reveals the nature of illusions that cover mass consciousness and rigorously determines the limits of its functioning. Shumitsky's inflectional tendency to change the world reflects contemporary social trends that did not foresee a particular internal development. The writer examines the process of forming Shumitsky's fanaticism as an irreversible process. This is because illusions become a kind of substitute for the inner essence of the hero, the meaning of his being. Obsessive ideas that torture him determine the way of his own being and the being of his family are the result of Shumitsky's self-deception. The hero concentrates on artificial mental structures, which seem to him better than reality. But in no way can he withstand its pressure.

Of great importance in deploying a conflict there is the image of the magnitude of the hero's self-deception. Shumitsky's self-assertion becomes the main factor in his world-view, which closes in the limited frameworks and causes their further narrowing to the point of complete unconsciousness in the final scene. The conflict becomes peculiar, as it develops due to the moral self-destruction of Shumitsky. His illusions are constantly being destroyed and he is constantly faced with a terrible reality. However, with the help of absurd rationalization, he justifies the suffering and death of his relatives in order to maintain his own destroyed illusions.

In the image of Shumitsky Oles focuses on the exaltation of the hero, which is multiplied by his literary talent and education and gives him the opportunity for a large-scale simulation of the future. However, the playwright shows the lack of control of this process, because excessive emotions that overwhelm Shumitsky blunt his ability to think critically. From the very beginning, the hero focuses on his own feelings, which are formed under the influence of propaganda ideas, as a result of which he loses the grasp of reality. His perception of ideas is characterized by fanaticism, because the hero absolutizes them, thus getting stuck only on the external form of ideas, which reflect the speculative desire of the masses to change. The excessive elevation of the hero is determined by his naive belief in the possibility of exercising controlled social changes based on his own fantasies.

Supported by stern feelings, the fantasies about the new social order acquire a special status in Shumitsky's worldview. He exaggerates the achievements of the new ideology, thereby completely ignoring its negative impact. Instead, the hero rejects the real facts that deny the heroes' claims to change the outside world. The excitement of the exalted feelings of Shumitsky prevents his objective assessment of events. The ideological confrontation of Shumitsky with his son Boris becomes a peculiar indicator of the starting positions in Shumitsky's image of the world, which in the future deployment of events will have tragic consequences. The beliefs of the hero in the building of the promised land in Ukraine are completely irrational, as they are based on his passionate aspirations, for which the manifestations of a true reality are distorted or ignored. The real evidence of discrediting the Soviet system makes the hero irrationally turning into a confirmation of his own illusions. The hero has created his own myth about a new arrangement, a constant focus on which becomes a trap for him, and he deprives himself of the possibility of getting out. In the future, the chosen way of self-deception will lead him to a complete immersion in his own illusions.

In the discussion of Shumitsky with his son Boris, the playwright outlines some of the characteristic phenomena that collectively lead to the total crisis of humanism in the twentieth century. On the one hand, these are destructive ideas and actions that seem to be right. Their attractiveness and popularity are determined by the propagated ephemeral possibilities of changing the social structure, which illusorily increases the value of the adherents of these ideas without the need for personal development. On the other hand, it is a deliberately detached position of those who are aware of the illusory nature of totalitarian reforms, but ultimately succumbed to the ideological pressure.

The image of Boris reveals the principle of tragic irony. The observer who saw the devastating results of totalitarian ideology dies as a result of repression. The writer strengthens the inner conflict of the hero, which he tries to solve at the expense of a significant decrease in the level of awareness, which leads to the deployment of destructive processes. Boris cannot escape the internal conflict by refusing his own views. The hero morally destroys himself for the sake of adapting to a devastating ideology, but the result of his actions is a physical death.

An important aspect of the dispute between Shumitsky and Boris is the assessment of the situation in Galicia. Boris considers an adaptation to ideological destruction in Galicia as acceptable but refuses to accept that the Bolshevik ideology is more devastating. On the contrary, Shumitsky completely condemns fascist ideas and exalts the Bolshevik ones. Each of them sees deficiencies only in the opposite ideologies.

In the play, the heroes are contrasted with each other, which emphasizes their onedimensionality. The playwright emphasizes the illusions of Shumitsky with the help of expressive symbols, which, with the development of the action, are alarming. The hero is aware of the irreversibility of their actions, but the expected consequences are associated with their own unrealizable fantasies: "Yes, but a ship with blue sails flows and takes us all from a deserted island to the promised land, where all wounds are healed" (Oles 1990, 148). Shumitsky's euphoria caused by his expected trip to Kharkov, overwhelmed by revolutionary transformations, is contrasted with the disturbing prejudices of his wife, which are expressed in the excessive idealization of life in Western Ukraine.

In Shumitsky's dialogues and monologues, Oles explains the deep mechanisms of the Soviet ideology, which were based on the distorted substitutions. Shumitsky reflects the need to change the communal mode of existence, which, with the help of the communist doctrine, unobtrusively aims at the idealization of totalitarianism. As the demonstration of the key principles of Bolshevik worldview, the conversation between Shumitsky and Fanya is indicative as she illustrates and confirms the views and convictions captured by Shumitsky himself.

The playwright emphasizes the sacralization of processes associated with revolutionary changes. The perception of the revolutionary cult figure in the play is conditioned by the promoted external enhancement of personal aspirations towards large-scale, but illusory, goals. Shumitsky's fantasies about revolutionary restructuring, which are the signs of self-reproduction, are based on hypertrophied exaggerations and idealisations: "You imagine this crazy overclocking! [...] To overcome centuries of history, cultural development, civilization of other peoples for these decisively couple of years! A miracle on earth, I repeat, creates only the revolution and its brilliant leaders" (Oles 1990, 153; my translation).

The writer comprehensively depicts the consciousness of Shumitsky, which operates in a sealed space, built up by fanatical ideas, which prevents the perception of any revealing information. The euphoric statements of Shumitsky are contrasted to dangerous perspectives that the hero ignores. Kozenko's sarcastic remarks about the forthcoming journey of Shumitsky, due to his bitter experience, turns into a forecast: "And write, comrade, whether the frosts are great in Siberia... and don't you want to go back backwards, to warm up at this old crust" (Oles 1990, 155; my translation). Kozenko demonstrates to Shumitsky an alternative version of the Soviet reality: "For some reason, the commissars themselves, and the sodkoms, and the GPU – in boots, and the rest – are barefoot, or even naked" (Oles 1990, 155; my translation). Kozenko's sarcasm testifies to his detached position, conditioned by the inability to change the catastrophic situation in society.

Oles shows the atmosphere of danger, reinforcing the reaction of various characters to the situation in Soviet Ukraine. In particular, Kozenko confirms the information of the nurse, although the tone of their messages is completely different. The nanny gives an emotional description of the scale of the socio-political catastrophe that takes on the form of tragedy, which serves as an unobstructed warning from the dangerous intentions of Shumitsky. It reproduces apocalyptic pictures of Soviet existence, focusing on details that trace the tragedy as much as possible, and emphasizing the authenticity of information.

Characteristically, the nanny tried to convince Shumitsky to refuse the travel to Soviet Ukraine twice, and her caution, through spontaneity and sincerity, has a special force and emphasizes the absurdity of his intentions. The repeated warnings to Shumitsky, which were different in tone, but shown the threats to existence in Soviet Ukraine, create an idea of the reality that the hero perceives through his own projections. The colossal difference between the illusions of Shumitsky and the reality becomes the basis for the deployment of a tragic conflict, which causes the personal self-destruction of the hero.

Kulchytsky reflects Shumitsky's position in a way that reflects excessive self-confidence in the assessment of political phenomena. If Shumitsky perceives the warning as jokes or ignores them, believing them to be false, then Kulchytsky justifies the devastating effects of Soviet authority. In a conversation with Kulchytsky, Shumitsky formulates the principles of the domination of speculative theories over manifestations of human nature, which, with the development of action, will receive maximum exacerbation and distorted forms. Shumitsky declares: "A woman, unfortunately, still remains a woman and, above all, a mother. The children are for her a common blood, not a common idea... But a couple of years will pass, and the social upbringing of children will fill this gap between a woman and a man" (Oles 1990, 158; my translation).

The playwright depicts the process of Shumitsky's final immersion in his own illusions, which leads him to Soviet Ukraine. The writer manifests the paradox of the image due to the sharp contradictions between Shumitsky's misconceptions and the conditions of existence in the Soviet state, since the hero resorted to absurd self-deception for denying the obvious facts that heavily destroyed his imagination. Shumitsky's self-assassination leads to fatal consequences, because in the final scene the hero loses his mind by justifying the extermination of his entire family. The playwright strengthens the tragedy of the literary work, showing members of Shumitsky's family who were aware of the devastating effects of the Soviet ideology as victims of his fanaticism.

Oles recreates the breakdown of the Shumitsky's soul as a result of a passionate fascination with the Bolshevik ideas that replaced those aspects of reality which he sought to deny, and at the same time caused the personal degradation of the hero due to his belief in ephemeral convictions. The writer emphasizes Shumitsky's sense of inferiority, which deepened the hero's fanaticism, as he tried in any way to obtain the approval of the orthodox Bolsheviks. The image of Shumitska gains special traits of tragedy, because she was frightened by her own premonitions. She did not only watch the brutal Bolshevik reality, but also experienced terrible metamorphoses of her relatives, first of all, with Shumitsky. The personal collapse of the hero acquires a visible manifestation because of the betrayal of his old friend in order to assert, according to Shumitsky, the ideals of the revolution.

By changing the angle of the depiction, the writer reveals the absurd cruelty of the totalitarian system. The author changes the way of focalisation after the arrest of Shumitsky and his relatives. The further development of the action is shown from the standpoint of the Bolsheviks. They consider the family of Shumitsky to be spies, whom they want to destroy, baselessly accusing them of crimes, and to Shumitsky they are treated as objects of mockery.

Shumitsky's reactions to the extermination of his family reproduce the destruction of his consciousness. The hero cannot endure the loss of his sons and his wife and finally immerses in his crazy delusions, in which he presents himself as a commissioner of education, performing punitive functions. The dismissive attitude of the guard emphasizes the absurdity of Shumitsky' monologues. The symbolist elements of the literary work are manifested through the voice of the deceased wife of Shumitsky, who reproaches him for the death of their children. The voice of Shumitska becomes the embodiment of the cruel truth from which Shumitsky was removed, to his own insanity. The writer reproduces the all-encompassing fanaticism of the hero, which makes him design his own insanity to the image of his wife. The playwright shows Shumitsky's fragmented consciousness, since the conversation with the wife's voice takes place in the imagination of the hero and symbolizes his irreconcilable inner struggle between the subconscious understanding of truth and the illusions that destroyed his own life and the lives of his relatives.

The final scene of the literary work has a symbolic meaning. Shumitsky does not give up his erroneous illusions but strives to join his dead wife and sons. At the same time, the final episode is characterized by ambiguity, since the author does not reveal the consequences of the fall of Shumitsky on the path to an imaginary reunification with his family and continues the conflict of the prisoner existence of the hero.

The tragedy of Oles Zemlya obitovana (The Promised Land) reflects the phenomena of distortion and destruction of personal consciousness as a result of interaction with destructive ideas. The writer reveals the mechanism of masking ideological destructiveness by focusing on those aspects which are proclaimed positive and evolve within the limits of the dominant ideology. The playwright reveals the essence and tragic

consequences of the artificial introduction of ideas that are characterized by exceptional unilateralism, schematics and contradict the natural development of personality and society. At the same time, the writer analyses the problems of radical transformation in the mass consciousness, comparing different positions due to different cultural-historical and political experiences, which leads to the erosion and loss of moral values in the process of violent confrontation.

The title of Zemlya obitovana (The Promised Land) represents a sarcastic allusion to a fake image of Soviet reality. In the title, the playwright concentrates on the meaning, which is expressed as a tragedy in the opposition between mental constructions and reality. Oles depicts the self-development of illusions of the protagonist in the tragedy about the Soviet way of life and the creation of the Soviet totalitarian regime, which to a certain moment develop in parallel planes. Shumitsky's move to Soviet Ukraine means for the hero a devastating collision of illusions and reality, but the playwright emphasizes the fatalism and irreversibility of the hero's fanaticism, which overcomes the impulses of mental and physical self-preservation, which, in turn, leads to catastrophic losses that the hero cannot fully comprehend.

The dramatic poem by Oles *Nich na polonyni* (*The Night on the Montain Valley;* 1941) combines dramatic (internal and external confrontation, which manifests itself in the collision of contradictory aspirations of heroes), lyrical (reflection of inner states and feelings of the heroes) and epic (external descriptions) components based on a fantastic reinterpretation, which mixes images in the sphere of artistic convention.

A notable feature of the literary work of Oles is the clear concentration of the writer on the images that embody meaningful symbolist significance. In the area of the valley, which appears in the title of the dramatic poem and determines the place where the dramatic action is deployed, the phenomena of unusualness and danger are concentrated, and the night-time of their actions intensifies the atmosphere of anxiety.

The playwright is programming the development of the action by outlining the greatest dramatic tension from the outset. In the dialogue between the heroes of the dramatic poem, Ivan and Stepan, there are indications of important content components that will determine the artistic structure of the literary work, which are revealed in the story of Stepan in the valley and in the description of the love conflict between Ivan and Mariika. In the work, the author differentiates the dream from a fantastic reality, but at the same time he points to the relativity of such differences, because of the decisive role of the consciousness of the hero, since different projections of reality reveal various aspects of his worldview.

The image of the mavka, which embodies the expression of the natural element, becomes a peculiar reflection of the hero's duality. Ivan, who lives an earthly life and is in love with the earthly girl, contemplates the possibility of love with mavka, which, however, is regarded as sinful. The fantastic picture of the world that unfolds before Ivan on the mountain valley captivates the hero as an alternative version of his usual reality. Ivan's acquaintance with the amazing mavka and mysterious world of the mountain valley destroys his formative ideas about the future life.

The confrontation between Mariika and mavka in a dramatic poem symbolizes the uncertainty of Ivan's position, who stands before the choice voiced by mavka in a conversation with her rival: "He is as mine as yours. / Whom of us he will choose – it is not known" (Oles 1990, 219; translation mine). Love conflicts become tragic in the sense of the consequences of non-reciprocal feelings, which deepen through the inharmonious interaction of the two worlds. Ivan does not understand his feelings, but he shows his interest in mavka, who decides to influence the situation using a devil in love with her, who, in the face of his own terrible calculations, pushes Mariika to the abyss. The playwright peculiarly builds a dialogue between Ivan and mavka in parallel planes. Mavka tells him about the death of Mariika, while Ivan tells her about his love. The writer also emphasises some discrepancies, thus showing two parallel scenes: a woodman is trying to save Mariika; Ivan with mavka are discussing their poetic plans about their future.

The further deployment of the dramatic action reflects the gradual extinction of Ivan and the mavka who suffer because the death of Mariika. The internal conflicts experienced by the heroes are aggravated by their alienation from their own nature through contradictory and painful feelings and the confusion of their existence between the two worlds. Ivan and mavka feel their own responsibility for the death of Mariika, which changes the characters themselves and their feelings. The playwright shows the insensibility of the heroes when they begin to build hypothetical versions of their probable life by blaming each other. Ivan showed his indifference to Mariika, but after the death of the girl he creates a concept of love for both Mariika and mavka. Mavka explains her desire to eliminate the rival, which lead to the tragic consequences, by expressing her hopes which Ivan had provoked. Mavka and Ivan clarified the causes of their actions by their desire for the unknown, represented by love between a human and a forest creature. Such aspirations are turning to the heroes with their lost lives and sufferings. Mariika's voice causes different reactions: Ivan proclaims the desire to join her; instead, mavka resists the offer of Ivan.

In the final scene of a dramatic poem Oles maintains a certain ambiguity. The experience of Ivan's twilight is projected into reality after the hero's awakening. The playwright focuses on ambiguity: after awakening, Ivan denies Mariika's death, but the hero denies not the fact, but his own reaction to this fact; he calls mavka, which testifies to her existence as a real person; his negative state is maintained after awakening.

The playwright uses fantastical elements that reflect the symbols of the ancient Ukrainian mythology and contain information about certain stereotypical situations, actions, feelings. The consciousness of the heroes becomes the background of the development of dramatic collisions and their projections, the various combinations which lead to the erosion of the facets between reality and the various forms of its display. The reflection of the sphere of consciousness of Ivan plays the role of the primary form, which covers all other types and levels of artistic image, since all the vicissitudes of the literary work are determined by Ivan's dream. The writer preserves the impartiality of the image, which causes the disclosure of the main intrigue, an important feature of which is the duality of perception, in the final episode of the literary work.

In the dramatic poem *Nich na polonyni (The Night on the Montain Valley)* Oles depicts the movement of the hero in the fantastical space and time that leads to his internal transformations, the starting point of which is the activation of the unconscious aspirations of the hero in new conditions that are unusual for him, thus causing the conflict to unfold through intricate interactions with other actors.

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