

THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATING A PERSON IN THE WORKS OF BELARUSIAN PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

PROBLEMA EDUCAȚIEI ȘI INSTRUIRII OMULUI ÎN CREAȚIA DRAMATURGILOR BELARUȘI DIN SEC. XIX

NATALIA VOLONTSEVICH,

Ph.D. in the History of Arts, Associate Professor,
Belarusian State Academy of Arts, Minsk

The article studies the drama works of Belarus in the nineteenth century to reveal the basic concepts of educating an individual. Having analyzed the plays of Vintsent Dunin-Martsinkevich, Yan Barshchewski, Wladislav Syrokomla, Pavel Shpilewski and Heranim Martsinkevich, the researcher comes to the conclusion that the authors were deeply concerned about the moral values and spiritual guides of their contemporaries, who were increasingly focused on material and pragmatic interests. To prevent the spread of low moral values in society, the playwrights offered to base education on the following principles that were established many centuries ago: the multiplication of Christian virtues, love of the native land and respect for national traditions. The researcher believes that it is no coincidence that the generalized philosophical teachings about the meaning of life, the prevalence of humanity in human souls were often puts into the mouths of mothers and nannies.

Keywords: *Belarusian playwriting, ancient principles of upbringing and education, spiritual and moral values, the image of an ideal hero*

Bazându-ne pe materialele operelor de dramaturgie ale Republicii Belarus din secolul XIX, ne putem forma o închipuire clară despre educația și instruirea omului. Analizând piesele dramaturgilor Vincent Dunin-Martinkevici, Jan Barșcewski, Vladislav Sirocomlea, Pavel Șpilevski și Gheranim Martinkevici, autorul a putut constata îngrijorarea scriitorilor vizavi de valorile morale și orientările spirituale ale contemporanilor, care tot mai mult își concentră atenția asupra intereselor material-pragmatice. Pentru a evita răspândirea în societate a indiferenței, dramaturgii au propus să fie luate ca bază a educației, stabilite cu multe secole în urmă și verificate de-a lungul timpului, următoarele principii: sporirea virtuților creștine, dragostea față de plaiul natal și respectul față de tradițiile naționale. Nu este deloc întâmplător și faptul că principiile general-filosofice despre sensul vieții, despre prevalarea sentimentelor umane în sufletele oamenilor au fost expuse de către autorii pieselor prin gura mamelor și bonelor.

Cuvinte-cheie: *dramaturgia belarusă, principii vechi de educație și instruire, valori moral-spirituale, imaginea eroului perfect*

The problem of forming an individual has always been extremely relevant. It is important to analyze which spiritual and moral foundations of education and upbringing of young generations were laid in the family, and which moral foundations of human personality were supported by the society in the past century. The answers to these questions can be found in the Belarusian plays of the nineteenth century: *Idyll* and *Madman* by V. Dunin-Martsinkevich, *Orphan's Life* by Y. Barshchewski, *Hrabia na Watorach* (*Count Watorski*) and *Kaspar Karlinski* by Wl. Syrokomla, *Dazhynki* by P. Shpilewski and *Evening* by H. Martsinkevich. In these works the playwrights raise the topic of the moral and ethical content of the human soul, speak about the meaning of human life.

It should be noted that the Belarusian writers closely interconnected the subjects of parenting and education with the timeless socio-philosophical theme of equality between people. These plays convey an idea that wealth and entertainment do not automatically endow man with all the virtues. The playwrights harshly criticized those who boasted of their status in society.

For example, in the comic opera *Idyll* the aristocrat Karol keeps dreaming of communion with beautiful women and big money. At the same time, he says that the life of his own bondsmen is «savagery». Thus, the character eliminates the possibility to find any amenities among people who are on the lower level of the social ladder. But in the end the young man is firmly convinced that «the peasants have good hearts, that we do not know them and do not know how to live with them. [...] I

want to love them and I want them to love me; and I hope that, with the blessing of the Almighty, we will live happily together» [1, pp. 145-146]. He got rid of arrogance due to Julia who was in love with him. Despite her aristocratic origin, she easily finds a common language with the peasants, and she understands and has a good command of their language. Through her image Dunin-Martsinkevich reflects on the dignity and humane treatment to every person on earth:

Że Bóg i kmiotków i pany
Zarówno uważa w niebie,
Ten u Niego jest wybrany,
Kto kocha bliźnich jak siebie [1, p. 92].

God in heaven cares equally
About a peasant or the landlord.
And he has the respect for those
Who respect the others. (*Word for word translation*)

In one of the first scenes of the romantic drama *Orphan's Life* Yan Barshchewski also expresses the idea of the equality of people. Helenka's (main character) nanny sings an old song about a simple shepherdess, who became a princess when she got married. The sudden wealth and nobility did not change the good girl's heart. She helped those in need:

The orphan-princess lived a worthy life,
She did not forget her woes,
Generously donated to beggars
And helped the unhappy [2, p. 345].

Wł. Syrakomla's comedy *Hrabia na Wątorach* (*Count Wątorski*) also warned arrogant people against constant opposing to the «simple plebs». It was the idea of maintaining true humanity in the soul that sounds in the monologue of the main character:

Mnie od pieluch wmawiali, żem dostojne dziecię,
Że bez pracy, bez nauk, znajdę cześć na świecie.
Dzisiaj, gdym niedołężny, gdy mię hańba czeka . . .
Przeklęctwo, kto magnata odróżnił od człeka ! . . . [3, p. 174].

I was convinced from the cradle that I'm a worthy child,
That I can find honor in the world with no job and no science.
Today, when I'm helpless, when I'm about to be disgraced...
Cursed be the one who separated aristocrats from men!...
(*Word-by-word translation*)

The idea of equality among people is vividly reflected in the text of the dramatic poem *Evening* by H. Martsinkevich. The whole play is riddled with brotherhood motifs. This is manifested through the words «brother» and «brothers» that are used about 40 times. About 50 times the characters use words that are directly related to the high status or low origin of people (the word «gentleman» is used about 35 times, «man», «savage», «slave» — about 15 times) [4].

Back in the early 1840s, Dunin-Martsinkevich was one of the first to express concern about the moral values and spiritual guides of the youth. In particular, in *Idyll* Karol, after a stay abroad, began to despise the common people, the people's language and culture. Julia is convinced that this is due to his age and inexperience, «He was so young and irresponsible when he left us... But once in a society of tainted youth, he began to neglect the customs of the people and forgot my good father's advice» [1, p. 104]. The francomaniac gentleman later regretted the years of learning:

Ja w szkole mody ćwiczony
Mylnemi zasady żyłem [1, c. 92].

I used to go to a fashionable school,
I lived a life not worth living. (*Word for word translation*)

In contrast to Karol, the young lady received education in a boarding school: «We learn to glorify God and perform the duties that our position imposes on us» [1, p. 113]. Julia contrasts with the European education of many young ladies, «who from a young age to old age are constantly taught salon manners» [1, p. 113].

Barshchewski in *Orphan's Life* spoke bitterly about young landlords who «grow like poor cripples». Other people do everything for them, and they «think about nothing and grow like careless trees». The playwright put these ideas into the mouth of a peasant philosopher Bonka. At the conclusion of his speech, the character asserts that «then inactivity and laziness, lack of habit to face obstacles... force them to be arrogant, despise people, and finally... forget God, and then their descendants are crippled in body and soul» [2, p. 358]. These nobles are often brought up by foreign teachers. Meanwhile, the main female character was nursed by a local woman who knew the Belarusian folklore. It can be assumed that the nurse was not at odds with the girl's mother in approaches to education, as it was Hanna who was entrusted to grow the little Helenka. Mother's advice has a generalized philosophical nature, and it sounds in the song of Mother's Spirit:

My son, love without measure
God, your land, your faith, and brother.
Endure the world, because life is not a holiday,
After all, it is like a dream that disappears [2, p. 352].

Dunin-Martsinkevich said in the mid-1850s that education should be based on the «multiplication of Christian virtues». In *Madman*, the playwright several times focused on the ideal of the educational principles of the past. In particular, the 16th century, when both the common people and the children of prominent persons, such as the Hetman's daughter, highly appreciated their traditions and culture, in contrast to the women of the 19th century, who:

Z nowomodnego dumne ukształcenia, [...]

Że przebiegły Suego, Balzaka, Dumasa,

Myśl ich tęskna w dziedzinie Montechrystów hasa!

Wstydzą się przodków mowy – z obyczajów szydzą,

W prostocie ich serdecznej barbarzyństwo widzą [1, c. 207].

They are proud of their modern knowledge [...]

For they have read all of Sue, Balzac and Dumas

And their thoughts flew with Monte Cristo.

They laugh at traditions and the native language,

And see barbarism in the simplicity of their hearts.

(*Word for word translation*)

The playwright claimed that it was a change in the principles of education that caused the new perspective on life for young people, which was more aimed at the material and pragmatic than the spiritual. It may be noted that similar processes in the sphere of culture were then highlighted by Syrokomla, who in his opening remarks to the comedy *Hrabia na Wątorach* noted that «being captured by the effects of French literature, our writers regret that our customs and traditions do not provide a basis for creating such a rich composition as in *The Wandering Jew* or *Monte Cristo*» [3, p. 127].

In *Kaspar Karlinski*, a boy named Sigizmund dreams, like his father, of feat of arms for the good of the Fatherland. And he is ready to sacrifice his life to defend his country. From the words of his nurse Marta we learn about the traditional principles of child education in the local families:

Patrzy na oręż, wciąż o wojnach słucha,
Hasa na koniu przez poła i jary.

Czytaniem kronik rozgrzewa ducha,
Z Żywotów Świętych uczy się ofiary.
Nic to nie szkodzi, niech przywyka wcześniej.
A czy on Niemiec, by się bawił w lalki? [3, pp. 199-200].

They look at the arms, listen about the wars,
Gallop on horseback through the fields and ditches.
They warm up their spirit by reading chronicles,
See the sacrifice in the Lives of the Saints.
It does not harm anything, let them get used early.
He's not a German to play dolls? (*Word for word translation*)

In H. Martsinkevich's poem *Evening* one of the main characters Vasil says that the peasants «are not the clamps». By repeating this rude word meaning an «uncultured», «uneducated» peasant, the landlord alludes to the natural wisdom of the people. Education was the privilege of the wealthy classes, so the playwright three times brings the idea of science and knowledge, which are both a dream for a common man and a way out of the impasse in his modern life:

Children will learn to read and write -
To know God and the people,
They will get many ways
How to live their lives [4, p. 87].

Shpilewski stresses in a scenic performance with Belarusian choruses, songs and dances entitled *Dazhynki. Belarusian Folk Custom* [5] that the main character Vera receiving an education abroad (in St. Petersburg) has not forgotten about her native land and the Belarusian culture. She understands the language in which prefect Navum addresses her. She easily changes her clothes into those of a simple peasant, goes to reap in the field, and then brings a festive wreath to the landlord - her betrothed Borys. The playwright stresses through their names - Vera Paleskaya («woodland»), Borys Draulianski («wooden»), Navum Shchuka («pike») - their closeness to nature.

Thus, the domestic playwrights were extremely concerned about the education of the young generation. Most often, the authors advocated the principles of time-tested love for the native land, respect for tradition and the Christian virtues.

Bibliographic references

1. ДУНІН-МАРЦІНКЕВІЧ, В. *Збор твораў*. У 2 т. Т. 1. Драматычныя творы, вершаваныя апавесці і апавяданні / Вінцэнт Дунін-Марцінкевіч; уклад. з тэкст. падрыхт., прадм., перакл. і камент. Я. Янушкевіч. Мінск: Маст. літ., 2007.
2. БАРИШЧЭЎСКИ, Я. *Выбраныя творы* / Ян Баршчэўскі; Уклад., прадм. і камент. М. Хаўстовіча. Мінск: Беларус. кнігазбор, 1998.
3. *Pisma epiczne i dramatyczne Władysława Syrokomli*. Т. 4. Poznań: M. Jagielski, 1868.
4. МАРЦІНКЕВІЧ, Г. Адвячорак / Г.Марцінкевіч. **В:** *Беларуская літаратура XIX стагоддзя*: Хрэстаматыя: вучэб. дапам. для студ. філал. спец. ВНУ / склад. і аўт. камент. А.А. Лойка, В.П.Рагойша. Мінск: Выш. школа, 1988.
5. ШПИЛЕВСКИЙ, П.М. *Дожинки*. Белорусский народный обычай. Спб., 1857.