

The Narrator (Author) and the Hero in T. Shevchenko's Poem *The Funeral Feast* To the History of the Establishment of the National Prophet-Poet

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ANNOTATION

The study deals with the images of the narrator / author and the prophet – the lyrical character in T. Shevchenko's poem *The Funeral Feast* [Tryzna]. The purpose of the study is to comprehend the author's conception and to reveal the whole range of the ways of expressing the author's "self".

In this poem, the lyrical subject is variable. He functions as the author proper as well as the narrating author and the lyrical "I", sometimes getting the features of the lyrical character. At the same time, the narrator and the character have in common the motif of prophetic service, prophetic mission.

The sense structure of the image of the prophet presents in Shevchenko's poem a synthesis of traditional and original senses. Shevchenko combines the social with the philosophic and the ethical, the universal artistic with the individual ontological. A prophet is not just an artistic image but also a modus of social existence of the writer in his ambition through his works to promote God's laws of society and personality on the earth as a continuation of life itself.

Instead of abstract philosophic speculations and complete negation, the poet creates a special modus of his view of life and attitude towards people. This modus is love; however, it is not love in a simplified, trivial and commonplace meaning but in a deeper, religious-ontological comprehensive sense.

The Funeral Feast appears to have the main elements of the motif-symbolic complex of romantic literature: the estrangement of the hero longing for heavenly harmony, prayerful yearning for the heaven he keeps memories of, selectness, loneliness, and orphanhood in earthly captivity, the motifs of the lost heaven, of death as rest and death as meeting. The hero is represented as a creative personality that finds itself in a tragic contradiction with the world.

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One of the significant semantic oppositions is that of the word and silence. In Shevchenko's poem, this problem is considered in terms of a transition from silent act to action word. The work on *The Funeral Feast* actually reveals the insolvability of the contradiction between the prophet's two guises ("the meek prophet" – "the severe prophet"), thus forming a complex dualistic image.

In Shevchenko's creative development, *The Funeral Feast* was an important step in comprehending the theme of the poet and his prophetic vocation, it marks a significant stage of the author's spiritual and creative establishment. The poet in his higher mission is understood in the poem as a personality of a national and supernational, seraphic scale, which determines his role and place in society and in the world. The lyrical-epic nature of the genre made it possible to refer the self-expression of the author's lyrical "I" to the objectification and personification of the lyrical character. The lyrical subject includes various forms of expressing the author's consciousness, while the hero conceptualizes the perfect model of a creative personality in his / her prophetic essence.

KEYWORDS

narrator, author, hero, lyrical subject, poem, 19th-century Ukrainian and Russian literature, prophet-poet, romanticism

The poem *The Funeral Feast* [Тризна] is one of the few Russian-language works by T. Shevchenko that have until recently remained at the periphery of research. Rare works dealt with the issues of poetic language (BULAKHOVSKY 1944), sacred imagery (GUDYMA 2013, ZABUD'KO 2003), literary (primarily Russian) context (IVAKIN 1975), and critical reception (BORON' 2011). The newest research sometimes makes an effort at a modernization of the classical text. For instance, in A. Shestak's thesis, the characters of *The Funeral Feast* are considered as an embodiment of the archetypes of Self [Самость] and Shadow [Тень]. The symbols of Self are the number 12 and a round table, while a snake "as another guise of the hero himself and his essence" is the symbol of Shadow (SHESTAK 2009).

Among the modern studies of the poem, H. Hrabovych's work *The Crossroads of "The Funeral Feast"* should be paid attention to. The author considers the poem as an important stage of Shevchenko's creative evolution, reasonably stating that the Russian-language poems *The Funeral Feast* and *The Blind woman* "not only serve as an intermediary in the general opposition: Ukrainian-language poetry – Russian-language prose" but "can also serve as a key to the main problem of the connection between two radically different [...] creative and psychological modalities in Shevchenko's works" (GRABOVYCH 2014: 22). The researcher emphasizes that "in Shevchenko's canon, it is in many respects an autonomous, an almost unique work" (GRABOVYCH 2014: 26). Its originality is determined by the fact that *The Funeral Feast* "performs a unique double function in Shevchenko's poetry: on the one hand, it embodies and develops what can be called his myth about Ukraine, and on the other hand, it comments and intellectualizes this process and task" (GRABOVYCH 2014: 29).

In terms of studying Shevchenko's development as a poet and finding the regularities in the formation of the prophetic principle of his artistic and autobiographic consciousness, of great interest are the images of the narrator (author) and the prophet – the lyrical character, which brings up the issue of the literary and non-literary determinants of the work. An analysis of the



poem *The Funeral Feast* in the above aspect will make it possible to comprehend the author's conception more deeply, to reveal the whole range of the ways of expressing the author's "self".

In understanding the problem of the author, modern literary studies rely on the works by M. Bakhtin, V. Vinogradov, B. Korman, and others. M. Bakhtin distinguished the biographic author, i.e. the primary author (the author who is a creator as a subject of aesthetic activity) and the secondary author, that is the image of the author created by the primary author (BAKHTIN 1979). V. Vinogradov considered the author as a "concentrated embodiment of the essence of the work" (VINOGRADOV 1971: 118). B. Korman defined the author as the bearer of the work's conception, a certain "view of reality which is expressed by the whole work as a unity" (KORMAN 1992: 134). In terms of modern narratology, the analogue of the "conceptuated" author is the implicit author, who "is the point of integration" of all the narrative techniques and properties of the text, the consciousness in which all the elements of the text image make sense" (quoted by IL'IN 1999: 46).

According to B. Korman, the subjective forms of expressing the author's consciousness include the narrating author, the author proper, the lyrical character, and the character of the role lyrics (KORMAN 1978). S. Broitman also included here the lyrical "I" as another type of the lyrical subject: "if we imagine the subjective structure of the lyrics as a certain unity whose two poles are the author's plane and the character's plane, the narrating author and 'the author proper' will be closer to the author's pane; the character of the role lyrics is closer to the character's pane (almost coinciding with it); the lyrical 'I' and the lyrical hero will be somewhere in the middle" (BROITMAN 2004: 144). The author proper "is not an object for himself / herself", it is not he / she who comes to the fore but some event, circumstance, situation, phenomenon, and landscape (KORMAN 1978: 46). The narrating author "tells about some other person and his / her life" but has no person that would be expressed grammatically; it is the least obvious lyrical subject. The lyrical character is both "the bearer of consciousness and a subject of representation", "the reader's attention is mainly concentrated on what kind of person the lyrical character is, what happens to him / her, what his / her attitude to the world is, etc." (KORMAN 1978: 48). The lyrical "I" differs from the author proper in that the former directly expresses his / her attitude to the described. Due to the above, "the speaker becomes a *subject-in-himself-herself, an independent image*, which was not clear in case of the narrating author and the author proper" (BROITMAN 2004: 146).

In the poem *The Funeral Feast*, the lyrical subject (the narrator) is variable. He functions as the author proper as well as the narrating author and the lyrical "I", sometimes getting the features of the lyrical character. At the same time, the narrator and the character have in common the motif of prophetic service, prophetic mission. This motif can be traced throughout the poem: "ты божьё волю короткой жизнью освятил", "как волхв, вещатель молодой", "да провещаю гимн пророчий и долу правду низведу", "да провещаю благостыню, что заповедана тобой", "помяните предтечу, друга своего", "и мир пророка потерял, и слава сына потеряла", "благословен твой малый путь, пришлец неславленный, чудесный" (SHEVCHENKO 2003a: 239–251).

L. Bulakhovsky claims that the poem is not autobiographic but egoistic, it has a personal colouring (BULAKHOVSKY 1944: 71). V. Smilianska is of a different opinion: "The image of the poem's character is expressively autobiographic" and the poem itself is a lyrical romanticized self-portrait (SMILIANSKA 2010: 13). The biographic principle is not expressed directly and immediately in the poem; the autobiographism becomes more evident if the work is considered in a wide creative context of the author and the regularities of the artistic image development are accentuated



as well as the formation of an artistic picture of the world and the development of themes and motifs, etc.

In fact, through the literary cover we can see the restless soul of the poet, who realizes his higher purpose and the difficulties of the path of sacrifice which needs to be travelled for his mission to be fulfilled. This idea is clearly expressed in the dedication to Varvara Repnina: “Душе с прекрасным назначеньем / Должно любить, терпеть, страдать; / И дар господний, вдохновенье, / Должно слезами поливать” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 239). The dedication indicates the soul’s rise over the mortal vale through creation-service which releases one from earthly fetters: “Для вас я радостно сложил / Свои житейские оковы, / Священнодействовал я снова / И слезы в звуки перелил” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 239). Undoubtedly, *The Funeral Feast* as well as *The Blind Woman* are among the early works in which the poet’s prophetic role to be realized and developed in detail in his later poems becomes absolutely apparent.

Addressing the issue of the prophet has objective general literary and non-literary preconditions. In prehistoric epochs, there appears a prophet in the person of a religious writer in the society which is in the life-changing, often critical, stages of its existence. The cultural epochs of modern times and the public consciousness also inspire the need of prophetism, which finds its reflection in the artistic sphere. The cultural-historical generalization of the prophet-poet’s personality as well as the development of prophetic themes and motifs became especially important in the first half of the 19th century, in particular in Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian literature.

In Russian Decembrist lyrics, well known to Shevchenko, the prophet-poet was a proclaimer of freedom, an irate exposor of vices, a people’s leader and tribune. In V. Kiukhelbeker’s poem *The Prophecy* (1822), God addresses to the poet: “Ты дни влачишь в ленивом сне, / В мертвящей душу, вялой неге! / На то ль тебе я пламень дал / И силу воздвигать народы? / Восстань, певец, пророк свободы! / Вспрянь! Возвести, что я вещал!” (КИУКХЕЛБЕКЕР 1939: 60–61). A similar call can be found in F. Glinka’s *The Calling of Isaiah* (1822): „Иди к народу, мой Пророк! / Вещай, труби слова Егovy! / Срывай с лукавых душ покровы / И громко обличай порок!” (ГЛИНКА 1957: 150). Shevchenko also has a prophetic mission: to sing of freedom on the slave land, defend the people with noble courage, and punish the evil (“с благородною отвагой / Стать за народ и зло казнить”). As a matter of fact, if we consider *The Funeral Feast* in an autobiographical context and the poetic megatext of *Kobzar*, we should refer not only to the mission of the prophet in his artistic virtuality but – in a wider dimension – first of all to the narrating author’s vocation as projected onto Shevchenko’s sociobiographic personality. The matter is that, as M. Kotsiubynska rightly points out, “the presence of the author’s ‘I’ is not hypothetical but absolutely real, active, and steady in Shevchenko’s poetry. Everything in his poetry, from the idea-image ‘macrocosm’ to the seemingly specific stylistic processes, everything bears a distinct impress of his individual character and is directly and unmistakably connected to the poet’s personality, with ‘Shevchenko complex’; and thus sounds differently and has a different sense compared to other poets” (КОТСИУБЫНСКА 2004: 57). The mission of freeing the people from national bondage and social oppression becomes the poet’s life calling, which finds its form in the sense structures of the narrating author.

Despite all the evident similarities to free-loving Decembrist poetry, Shevchenko as a prophet-poet goes beyond the Decembrist ideas. Pushkin’s wider understanding of a wordsmith’s poetic mission is closer to him; but not so much so as to fail to notice the peculiar character of the sense structure of the narrator’s prophetic image in the analyzed poem.



In Russian poetry, the concept of the prophet poet is established by the homonymous poem by A. Pushkin and forms a paradigm of romantic texts. In Pushkin's works, the formation of a prophet-poet's image begins with an interpretation of the parable about a sower (*Behold a sower*, 1823), where the idea of "prematurity of the sower's preaching to the not yet freed humanity" (STARK 1991: 53) can be considered as certain polemics with the Decembrist interpretation. However, the lyrical "I" of the poem is not associated with a Biblical prophet but with Christ himself, which is due to "deification of the poetic service" (STARK 1991: 61). The same analogy is suggested by the clear enough evangelic allusion of *The Funeral Feast*: twelve participants of the feast are praying for their deceased best friend ("наилучшего друга"), who is the main character of the poem. With further evolution of Pushkin's works, the poet becomes a prophet proper, that is a speaker of God's words, an intermediary between people and God, a prognosticator of higher will and higher truths. In the image of a Biblical prophet, filled ("исполнившегося") with God's will, Pushkin realized the ideal of the poet which is close to Shevchenko: "Пошли на ум твою святыню, / Святим наитием напой, / Да провещаю благостыню, / Что заповедана тобой!.." (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 242).

The sense structure of the image of the prophet presents a synthesis of traditional and original senses in Shevchenko's poem. While Pushkin leaves out the social aspect, Shevchenko combines the social with the philosophic and the ethical, the universal artistic with the individual ontological, so for Shevchenko, a prophet is not just an artistic image but also a modus of social existence of the writer in his ambition through his works to promote God's laws of society and personality on the earth as a continuation of life itself. The poet exposes people's executors ("народных палачей"), sympathizes with the grief of the hungry brother ("голодного брата"), and serves as advocate for the whole humanity with the Lord: "У Бога правды и свободы / Всеми живущему молил". According to researchers, Shevchenko "turns to taking the functions of a national prophet, creating his own authorial myth, and combining in it the authentic Ukrainian principle with the Christian one" (YURCHUK 2011: 91–92).

In a different dimension, the central images of the narrator and the prophet which interact closely but are not equalled integrate the literary-romantic, the individual-personal, and the national. The author tries to combine in a romantic personality the ideal values of the civil, the psychological and national-patriotic trends of romanticism. At the same time, the hero is contraposed to literary clichés: "...он не толковал / Своих вседневных приключений / Как назидательный роман; / Не раскрывал сердечных ран / И тьму различных сновидений / И байронический туман / он не пускал; толпой ничтожной / Своих друзей не поносил; / Чинов и власти не казнил" (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 244). Creating the image of a true prophet, the author rejects both abstract philosophic speculations and complete negation. The author's words "И тот, кто мыслит без конца / О мыслях Канта, Галилея, / Космополита-мудреца, / И судит люди, не жалея / Родного брата и отца; Тот лжепророк! Его сужденья – / Полуидеи, полувздор!.." (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 244) show that instead of abstract philosophic speculations and complete negation, the poet creates a special modus of his view of life and attitude towards people. This modus is love; however, it is not love in a simplified, trivial and commonplace meaning but in a deeper, religious-ontological comprehensive sense. It is notable that love is among the fundamental values of Shevchenko's artistic consciousness: "Всемогущий и Премилосердый Господь не оставил меня здоровьем в этом долголетнем и суровом испытании; и любовь, которую я с раннего детства бессознательно питал к прекрасным искусствам, теперь посылает Он мне любовь сознательную и светлую и крепкую, как алмаз. Живописцем-творцом я не могу



быть, об этом счастье неразумно было бы и помышлять. Но я, по приезде в Академию, с Божью помощью и с помощью добрых и просвещенных людей, буду гравером à la aquatinta и, уповая на милость и помощь Божию и на ваши советы и покровительство, надеюсь сделать что-нибудь достойное возлюбленного искусства. Распространять посредством гравюры славу славных художников, распространять в обществе вкус и любовь к доброму и прекрасному – это чистейшая, угоднейшая молитва Человеколюбцу Богу. И посылно бескорыстная услуга человеку” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003b: 68–69). The author’s reflections on the artistic creation as connected to love as well as on love as connected to religious feelings and faith (love in its dual life-art role) show that Shevchenko’s conception of love is a means of interaction of various conceptual senses that have ancient cultural roots. Shevchenko’s love as a constituent of the poet’s artistic-religious consciousness that grows from religious faith appears as a complex intellectual-emotional phenomenon, which determines a specific character of generalization and topologization of the artistic cognition of the world. Love can be understood as a view of the world, in which the value sense and emotional orientation of the poet’s life activity in his striving for harmony of social life and man is revealed.

Traditional semantics represented in the central image has to do primarily with the motifs of God’s word, of apprehending the truth and of spiritual salvation, which are already specified in the epigraph to the poem: “Души ваши очистивши в послушании истины духом [...] словом живаго Бога и пребывающего вовеки. [...] Се же есть глагол, благовествованный в вас” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003a: 239). It is worth pointing out that in the first Epistle General of Peter (1: 10), where the epigraph was taken from, the mission of prophets is mentioned: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully” (“О нем же спасении взыскаша и испыташа пророцы, иже о вашей благодати прорекоша”). But the fragment that Shevchenko chose accentuates the motifs of spiritual brotherhood and brotherly love: “for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (“в братолюбии нелицемерно, от чиста сердца друг друга любите прилежно”) (1 Peter 1: 22). These motifs are vitally important for understanding the author’s conception of the poem. It is worth emphasizing that the epigraph accentuates the apostolic mission of the brotherhood members: the twelve brother-friends.

Love is contraposed to friendship as the highest unattainable ideal value. Heavenly sunrays (“Небесные солнечные лучи”) appear to be the fire of love (“огнем любви”), and the character’s main aspiration is to melt the heart in heart and get drowned in self-oblivion (“сердце в сердце растопить / И утонуть в самозабвеньи”) (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003a: 248). Love is perceived as a unity of lovers, both spiritual and corporeal. Thereupon the peculiar organic combination of the poem’s literary and intentionally autobiographic character must be pointed out. Most of the researchers of the poem consider its high literary character an important feature (BULAKHOVSKY 1944, GRABOVYCH 2014). This literary character is the outer form that makes it possible to explain the genesis of the poem, its intertextual elements. At the same time, one cannot help noticing that a most important system-forming element of the plot structure is the culturally significant code, primarily with numeric symbols in their organic unity with the pagan and Christian constituents. Number twelve plays an important role in the New Testament as the number of elects. Jesus appointed twelve apostles (Mark 3: 14), which probably was a symbol of Israel’s revival: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (“В пакибытии, когда сядет Сын Человеческий на престоле славы Своей, сядете и вы



на двенадцати престолах судить двенадцать колен Израилевых”) (Matthew 19: 28); see also the mention of twelve gates in New Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 21).

It appears the twelve members of brotherhood are intended by means of a sermon of love to lay the foundation of the spiritual revival of the people, continuing the legacy of the deceased poet: “Ты силой Господа чудесной / Возмог в сердца людей вдохнуть / Огонь любви, огонь небесный. / Благословен! Ты Божью волю / Короткой жизнью освятил; / В юдоли рабства радость воли / Безмолвно ты провозгласил” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 240).

The Funeral Feast appears to have the main elements of the motif-symbolic complex of romantic literature (MANN 2001, VAISKOPF 2012): the estrangement (escape, exile, wandering) of the hero, longing for heavenly harmony, prayerful yearning for the heaven he keeps memories of (“Взглянул на небо: ‘О, как ясно, / Как упоительно-прекрасно! / О, как там вольно будет мне!..’ / И очи в чудном полусне / На свод небесный устремляет...”) (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 242), selectness, loneliness, and orphanhood in earthly captivity (“Душа избранная, зачем / Ты мало так у нас гостила? Тебе здесь тесно, трудно было!”) (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 240), the motifs of the lost heaven, of death as rest and death as meeting (“О дайте вдохнуть, / Разбейте мне череп и грудь разорвите, – / Там черви, там змеи, – на волю пустите! О дайте мне тихо, навеки заснуть!”, “Отрадно смерти улыбнись, / И к вечной жизни с упованием / К тебе на небо вознесусь”, “и ждал конца нетерпеливо”) (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 248). The hero is represented as a creative personality that finds itself in a tragic contradiction with the world. The fatality of the “arrival” is emphasized by the motif of doom and fate: “Но тайной волей, высшей силой / Путь одинокий до могилы / На камнях острых проведен” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 249).

The loneliness, the secret sadness, sorrow of the main character have double motivation: on the one hand, it is separation with his native land, where nobody is waiting for him, and the impossibility to be able to serve the homeland (“полезным быть родному краю”), and on the other hand, it is the “otherworldliness” and aspiration towards the higher values: “Приязни братской было мало, / Не грела теплота друзей – / Небесных солнечных лучей / Душа парящая алкала” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 248). For such a type of person, even the holiday of Bright Resurrection brings centuple sadness (“тоску сторичную несет”).

The motif of the poet’s loneliness and incomprehensibility traced in *Behold a sower* and other Pushkin’s poems is represented in Shevchenko’s poem as a Lermontov variation of a rejected prophet beaten with stones: “Провозглашать я стал любви / И правды чистые ученья: / В меня все ближние мои / Бросали бешено камня” (*The Prophet* [Пророк], 1841) (LERMONTOV 2014: 347); “Великим словом божью волю / Сказать тиранам – не поймут! / И на родном прекрасном поле / Пророка камнем побьют!” (*The Funeral Feast*) (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 245). This motif will later be conceptually implemented in the image of the prophet in Shevchenko’s homonymous work of 1848.

The outlandishness of the “arrival” (“пришлеца”) is represented both in the angelic and the diabolic variants, which accentuates the dual character of the hero’s soul: “В крови гордыня клокотала... / Он хохотал, как демон лютей... / Он снова чистый ангел рая, / И на земле он всем чужой”. Revolt and loneliness are of a cosmic scale: “О, если б мог он шар земной / Схватить озлобленной рукой, / Со всеми гадами земными; / Схватить, измять и бросить в ад!.. / Он был бы счастлив, был бы рад”; “Планета наша, / Прекрасный мир наш, рай земной, / Во всех концах ему чужой”. The duality of the romantic personality is overcome by spiritual effort: “Воспрянул дух, как голубь горный, / И мрак сердечный, мрак юдольный / Небесным светом озарил...” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 242–244).



The opposition of the earthly and the heavenly, which is characteristic of romanticism, is varied and complicated in Shevchenko's poem. The poem constantly changes the scales, perspectives, and evaluations. At one moment, the earth is represented as the native village, native land, holy motherland, native country (“родное село”, “край родной”, “святая родина”, “страна родная”), and at another, as the globe, our planet (“земной шар”, “планета наша”). The Earth in its “sinful” guise is the abode of vain, proud people and a vale of slavery, a kingdom of people's executors and tyrants. At the same time, the author glorifies “earthly well-being” (“земное благожитие”), the beauty of the holy nature, emphasizing that the hero's soul loved the captivity of the place (“любила здешний плен”). The romantic double world is also varied: native land – foreign land (“родной край” – “чужая сторона”); the dark deceitful world, the vale of slavery – the holy height, the holy sky (“мир темный и лукавый”, “юдоль рабства”, “грешная земля” – “святая высота”, “святое небо”); the earthly darkness – the heavenly light, the heavenly fire (“мрак юдольный” – “небесный свет”, “огонь небесный”). The afterlife being is also thought of ambivalently. On the one hand, “Его тоскующей мечте / В грядущем что-то открывалось, / И в беспредельной высоте / Святое небо улыбалось”, and on the other hand, “...за крестом / Граница вечности чернела / В пространстве мрачном и пустом” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 249).

One of the significant semantic oppositions is that of the word and silence. In apostle Peter's first Gospel, there is a mention of “the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious” (“сокровенный сердца человек в нетленной красоте кроткого и молчаливого духа, что драгоценно пред Богом”) (Peter 3: 4); compare *The Funeral Feast*: “Благоговею пред тобою, / В безмолвном трепете дивлюсь; / Молюсь тоскующей душою...” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 241). In the romantic conception of creation, the problem of the word and silence was mainly represented in a philosophic-ontological aspect. In Shevchenko's poem, this problem is considered in terms of a transition from silent act to action word: “Свободу людям – в братстве их / Ты проявил великим словом: / Ты миру мир благовестил; / И, отходя, благословил / Свободу мысли, дух любви!” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 240).

Such dynamics of unwinding the image of the prophet determines its sense significance. On the one hand, the compositional framing of *The Funeral Feast* is the funeral meal for which, according to the vow, twelve friends are to gather to sing in assembly (“собором”) *Memory Eternal* (“вечную память”) to the brother who died before time: “Счастливое братство! Единство любви / Почтили вы свято на грешной земли” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 240). Shevchenko bases not so much on the romantic as on the Christian understanding of brotherhood in love. Meekness, as far as known, is one of the virtues of the Christ and Biblical prophets: “Come to me, [...] and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (“Придите ко Мне [...] и научитесь от Меня, ибо Я кроток и смирен сердцем”) (Mathew 11: 28–29); “With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone” (“Кротостью склоняется к милости вельможа, и мягкий язык переламывает кость”) (Proverbs 25: 15); “Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth” (“Моисей же был человек кротчайший из всех людей на земле”) (Numbers 12: 3); “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (“Блаженны кроткие, ибо они наследуют землю”) (Mathew 5: 3); “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (“Братия! если и впадет человек в какое согрешение, вы, духовные, исправляйте такового в духе кротости, наблюдая каждый за собою, чтобы не быть искушенным”) (Galatians 6: 1); “urge you to walk



in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (“умоляю вас поступать достойно звания, в которое вы призваны, со всяким смиренномудрием и кротостью и долготерпением, снисходя друг ко другу любовью, стараясь сохранять единство духа в союзе мира”) (Ephesians 4: 1–3). E. Nakhlik, considering the topoi of the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament apostle in Shevchenko’s poetry, comes to a conclusion that in *The Funeral Feast*, the author marked “a perfect path of life of an exemplary person”, “a path of a Christian saint – more an apostle full of love to the neighbour than a prophet who is inclined to ireful blame of people for their misdeeds [...] The author of *The Funeral Feast* is sure that a prophet should be neither a severe judge nor a heartless rational thinker but should be guided by Christian mercy and kindness” (НАХЛИК 2015: 6). Such a statement, to our mind, somewhat simplifies the author’s conception of the poem. The work on *The Funeral Feast* actually reveals the insolubility of the contradiction between the prophet’s two guises (“the meek prophet” – “the severe prophet”), thus forming a complex dualistic image of a young prophesier (“вещателя молодого”) who at times combines the two guises: he is called both to soften people’s executioners by gentle speech and meekness (“речью кроткой и смиреньем / Смягчать народных палачей”) and with noble courage to defend the people and punish the evil (“И с благородною отвагой / Стать за народ и зло казнить”) (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 246). Still, it is meekness and overall love that become dominant properties of this “selected soul” (“избранной души”): “Людей изведать – и любить / Незлобным сердцем сожалея / О недостойных их делах”, “У бога правды и свободы / Всему живущему молил, / И кроткой мыслию следил / Дела минувшие народов, / Дела страны своей родной” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 244–245). The “non-meekness” of the prophet is peculiarly reflected in the sense representation of the significant for *The Funeral Feast*’s author motif of sacrifice made by the prophet for the sake of freedom of his motherland: “...праздник жизни, / Великий праздник, божий дар, / Должно пожертвовать отчизне, / Должно поставить под удар” (ШЕВЧЕНКО 2003а: 246). The hero’s tragic fate, the fatality of his prophetic mission are determined by the impossibility to bring together and combine the Christian commandments and the reality of the world plagued by contradictions.

We think it necessary to interpret the end of the poem in the Biblical context. Modern researchers explain the death of the central character in different ways: “The death of the poem’s character is, of course, determined by the impossibility, against his will, to be useful to his motherland... It is important for him as a preacher of freedom to establish it not only in mind, in display of feelings, in words but also in actions, to be able to influence the course of action and by this to prove his involvement in life. [...] in the fact that the hero dies exactly at dawn, we find a resource for his further being, hence the evidently grounded appeals, full of piety, to the hero, asking to enlighten, to teach” (ГУДЫМА 2013: 196); “through death, the hero’s earthly nature, his ‘ancestral sin’ and ‘damnation’ are cleaned and atoned for, while his blessed nature finally triumphs; with death, people’s weaknesses that turned Word to tears are discarded and his strength is set free, with death, *he* can now become Word” (ГРАБОВУЧ 2014: 52). The suggested interpretations can be specified to a degree which is determined by the end of the poem and its key image of a lonely old man.

The poem finishes with the image of a lonely old man (the last of the twelve brother friends) who is waiting in vain for his friends at the memorial meal. A similar final of a friendly (if not memorial) meal was foreseen by Pushkin in the poem dedicated to the lyceum anniversary of



1825: “Увы, наш круг час от часу редеет; / Кто в гробе спит, кто дальный сиротеет; / Судьба глядит, мы вянем; дни бегут; / Невидимо склоняясь и хладея, / Мы близимся к началу своему... / Кому ж из нас под старость день лица / Торжествовать придется одному?” (19 October [19 октября], 1825) (PUSHKIN 1977: 247).

The final picture of *The Funeral Feast* is the scene of the last non-meeting, when there is no one to perform the last sacred brotherly law (“закон священный братский”). It is remarkable that the cup of friendship is drunk by the servant, i.e. a chance person who does not understand the point of what is happening. The author’s voice (“И день уж проходит, / Никто не приходит, / Навеки, навеки забыты оне”) (SHEVCHENKO 2003a: 251) changes the theme of memory and fidelity to the theme of eternal oblivion. The unrealized passing of the lire, the behest of the dying poet to his brethren (“Сходитесь долго и песнею новой / Воспойте свободу на рабской земли”, “Сложите вы псалом суровый / Про сонм народных палачей; / И вольным гимном помяните / Предтечу, друга своего”) (SHEVCHENKO 2003a: 240) can be considered both as a variation of the motif of the poet’s loneliness, his failure to be understood and as a hidden polemic with the idea of poetic immortality; let us remember Pushkin’s words: “Нет, весь я не умру – душа в заветной лире / Мой прах переживет и тленья убежит – / И славен буду я, доколь в подлунном мире / Жив будет хоть один пиит” (PUSHKIN 1977: 340). Let us add that the funeral feast ceremony itself included a repast and memorial songs (or singing favourite songs of the deceased) (VELETSKAYA 1978), so the brethren (“собратья”) also violate the ritual of the memorial ceremony. Compare the poem by A. Odoevsky *Trysna* (1828), where the ceremony is comprehended in the light of the Decembrist ideas but with the main formal and substantial features preserved: “Златится мед, играет меч с мечом... / Обряд исполнили священный, / И мрачные воссели пред холмом / И внемлют арфе вдохновенной” (ODOEVSKY 1958: 70).

Rendering the content of the memorial song, Odoevsky emphasizes the succession between the dead and the living, the inviolability of civil ideals: “Утешьтесь! За павших ваш меч отомстит. / И где б ни потухнул наш пламенный жизни, / Пусть доблестный дух до могилы кипит, / Как чаша заздравная в память отчизны” (ODOEVSKY 1958: 70).

In Shevchenko’s poem *The Funeral Feast*, the poet’s destiny is different but the author makes quite a pessimistic conclusion about the tragic fate of the poet who has not realized his mission (using Pushkin’s words “вышел рано, до звезды”). That is why he was never to get over death, in poetic word at least, and the “guaranteed resurrection” (FREIDENBERG 1936: 66) promised by the association with the repast of the Last Supper suggested at the beginning of the poem cannot be realized. However, there is a permanent truth stamped in the author’s consciousness: “Глагол же господень пребывает вовеки. Се же есть глагол, благовествованный в вас” (SHEVCHENKO 2003a: 239).

In Shevchenko’s creative development, *The Funeral Feats* was an important step in comprehending the theme of the poet and his prophetic vocation, it marks a significant stage of the author’s spiritual and creative establishment. The poet in his higher mission is understood in the poem as a personality of a national and supernational, seraphic scale, which determines his role and place in society and in the world. The lyrical-epic nature of the genre made it possible to refer the self-expression of the author’s lyrical “I” to the objectification and personification of the lyrical character. The lyrical subject includes various forms of expressing the author’s consciousness, while the hero conceptualizes the perfect model of a creative personality in his / her prophetic essence.



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