

THE IMAGE OF THE IMPOSTOR RULER IN TRADITIONAL RUSSIAN FOLKLORE

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ABSTRACT

This article is dedicated to the analysis of the artistic reflection of the Image of False Dmitry I in Russian historical songs and legends from the beginning of the 17th century. It investigates the key folklore genres of the Time of Troubles in which the spontaneous and uncompromising attitude of the people toward the Impostor manifested. Particular attention is paid to the specifics of the demonization of False Dmitry I, examining the development of his image into an infernal messenger. This is reflected in later legends, particularly in the plot about a "Faustian" pact with the devil, which explains his temporary success on the throne.

Keywords: False Dmitry I, Time of Troubles, Historical Song, Folklore, Grigory Otrepnev, Demonization, Legend, 17th Century, Faustian plot.

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of Folklore Genres

The main folklore genres that reflect the image of False Dmitry I are historical songs and legends, composed in the first quarter of the 17th century.

"Historical songs as a genre emerged in Rus' during the era of the Mongol-Tatar invasion and survived until the middle of the 19th century. Their vitality can be explained by their high dynamism, bringing them close to *chastushkas* (folk ditties), and a rather simple composition, which usually includes a single plot built on the principle of a monologue or dialogue" [4. p. 5]. The historical songs of the Time of Troubles are dedicated to the historical events and figures of the late 16th – early 17th centuries, expressing popular interests and ideals. They are smaller in volume than *bylinas* (epic poems). The plot of historical songs is usually limited to one episode. All existing songs are customarily divided into senior and junior. The senior historical songs of the 13th–16th centuries, which include the works of this genre about the Time of Troubles, are closer to *bylinas* due to their developed plot and style.

The historical songs of the early 17th century reflect the national struggle of the "Time of Troubles." After the death of Ivan the Terrible, his son Fyodor ruled, while the young Tsarevich Dmitry, along with his mother Maria Nagaya, was exiled to Uglich, where he died in 1591. Historical songs accuse Boris Godunov of his murder: "He gained the Tsardom by the death of the Tsar, / By the death of the glorious, holy Tsarevich Dmitry" [1. pp. 417-418].

Boris Godunov was crowned Tsar in 1598, after the passing of Fyodor Ivanovich. In 1605, after the death of Boris Godunov, the Impostor, False Dmitry I, appeared, identified in the Russian folk tradition with the runaway monk of the Chudov Monastery, Grigory Otrepnev. His supporters killed Godunov's widow and son.

The responses of folk art to the events of the Troubles must have been much more numerous and diverse than can be judged from the texts preserved in the oral tradition and in records from the 17th–18th centuries. The censorship of the new government undoubtedly eradicated songs and stories from popular use that too clearly recalled the opposition sentiments of the

early 17th century. Nevertheless, historical songs relating to all the main moments of the Troubles have come down to us in records from the early 17th century and from modern times. These songs also preserve traces of the people's assessment of the events, which did not always coincide with the judgments expressed in book literature, although the influence of this literature on the factual content of some songs is difficult to deny. The specificity of the embodiment of the first Impostor's image in oral folk art implies its spontaneity and uncompromising nature, which was a reaction to the rumors disseminated by the government about the crimes committed by the "false Tsar" in Moscow and beyond. By demonstrating his pro-Western attitudes—in clothing, music, and food—False Dmitry created a situation of cultural dissonance, to which he ultimately fell victim. The Russian cultural code firmly judged the "false Tsar's" actions as heretical and "sorcerous."

Six lyric-epic Russian songs from the Time of Troubles were preserved thanks to the English pastor Richard James, a member of King James I's embassy to Michael Romanov in 1619. The themes of five of these songs relate to the events of the late 16th – early 17th centuries. The researcher of R. James's collection (V. V. Danilov), analyzing the content of the songs recorded therein, showed that the collection was compiled in Moscow at the Grand Embassy Courtyard, where the English embassy lived; that the songs included in it were composed in the merchant and service circles of Moscow; and that the authors of these songs were closely familiar with the official views on the depicted events.

One of the main works of the folk narrative genre, which vividly revealed the features of an infernal messenger and usurper, is the song about "Grishka Otrepnev," composed a few years after False Dmitry's murder in Moscow, during the reign of Vasily Shuisky.

Several editions or variants of the song dating back to the 17th century are known. The folk narrative, maintained in accordance with the demands of the official Tsarist censorship, conveys the most essential moments of False Dmitry's short period in power.

The song begins with a plea to God regarding Otrepnev's appearance in Moscow: "O God, God, Merciful Savior! / Why have you become angry with us so early - / God has sent us a deceiver, / The evil Apostate monk Grishka Otrepnev" [1. p. 418]. The subsequent lines express indignation at the unprecedently audacious crimes committed—the theft of the sovereign's throne and the appropriation of the royal heir's name by a runaway monk: "Did he, the Apostate, sit on the throne? / The Apostate calls himself the rightful Tsar, / Tsar Dmitry Ivanovich of Uglich" [Ibid.].

The song focuses on key moments of the "Tsar's" ungodly rule: the Impostor's marriage to a non-believer, Marinka Yuryeva (Marina Mniszczek), the wedding on the eve of St. Nicholas Day, his visiting the bathhouse during morning liturgy, and his disregard for fasting: "The Apostate desired to marry.../ He took, the Apostate, in accursed Lithuania, / From Yury Pan Sedomirsky / His daughter Marinka Yuryeva, / The evil, godless heretic... / On Thursday the Apostate's wedding was, / And on Friday was St. Nicholas's Day. / Princes and boyars went to Matins, / But Grishka the Apostate went to the bathhouse with his wife... / The Apostate comes out onto the red porch, / He cries and roars with a loud voice: / 'Hey, my pantry keepers, my assistants! / Prepare various dishes, / Both Lenten and meat dishes'" [1. pp. 418-419].

The actions mentioned in the text, committed by the actual historical person False Dmitry, are presented in the popular consciousness as a grievous sin, a crime against the Orthodox faith.

In the song, the *streltsy* (musketeers) begin to doubt the ruler's authenticity, and they turn to Tsarevich Dmitry's mother for resolution. Finally, the former Tsarina reveals the truth about the Impostor to the Muscovites: "An Apostate sits on your throne / Grishka Otrepnev's son; / My son, Tsarevich Dmitry Ivanovich, was lost in Uglich / By those Godunov boyars" [1. p. 419]. The acknowledgement of Ivan the Terrible's widow regarding her son's death prompts the people to take decisive action and overthrow the Impostor. In another variant of this song, Pyotr Basmanov is sent to the hero to expose him, who, contrary to historical truth, calls himself a choirmaster at the Chudov Monastery, where Otrepnev resided.

Another variant of the song about "Grishka Otrepnev" was recorded by P.V. Kireevsky in the Tula province. This work of epic poetry was published with the note "Tula province, Chernsky district, village Sokoly." The historical song of the Time of Troubles, which quite accurately conveys the biographical milestones in the life of the first False Dmitry, is composed according to the same outline that was put into circulation by government decrees.

The fact that the song was recorded by Kireevsky in the 19th century directly from the narrators who preserved it, and was not copied from an ancient Russian manuscript, dictates the presence in it of linguistic and historical features that were reflected in it throughout its existence from the moment of its composition.

The linear plot of the work opens with a mention of the life of the faithful brethren of the Simonov Monastery in Moscow, among whom one unfaithful monk appeared, who "betrayed the Tsar and God, / sent his own soul to hell" [2. p. 58]. The punishment for his sin is expulsion from the monastery. But even after his defrocking, which the former monk should have perceived as the gravest punishment, Grigory Trepushkin—the name the Impostor bears in the Tula variant of the song—continued to "stir up" the people, spreading the rumor that "Tsar Dmitry is alive, / that he himself was he" [Ibid.]. Realizing the ineffectiveness of his deception on the Muscovites and fearing the people's retribution for his heresy, Trepushkin flees to the "Polish lands to the magnate of Satan" [Ibid.]. An interesting point in this song is the Impostor's address to the Polish king's "magnate," and not to the king himself, which can be viewed as a folkloric simplification or generalization of the Polish aristocrats with whom the historical False Dmitry had contact. The further assertion about the magnate's desire to give his daughter Marina in marriage to the Impostor reveals him as the key figure in the adventure of Ivan the Terrible's false son, Yury Mniszech. Having received military aid from the Poles, Trepushkin intimidated the Russian "senseless people" [Ibid.], and forced them to recognize him as the legitimate Tsar. The simplicity of the popular consciousness is manifested in the lightning-fast change of mood in the song: the Muscovite people soon came to their senses and found for themselves "the true Tsar Vasily Ivanovich" [Ibid.]. The presence of this fact indicates the time of the song's creation—the period of Shuisky's reign.

The denouement of the narrative has a traditional folk character, depicting the villain's execution:

And the robber Grishka they began to torment and execute;

They tormented and executed him, and struck his unruly head from his shoulders [2. p. 58].

In most variants of the song about the Impostor, the idea is conveyed that Otrepnev's ascension to the throne was a manifestation of God's wrath: in this mood, the folk song aligns itself with the literary tales on the same topic. The Impostor is always the "impious Tsar," who married an unbaptized woman, trampled the faith, and mocked customs. In certain variants, fantastic details began to appear over time: Grishka sits in prison for 30 years before becoming Tsar, where he "grew" a diamond cross on his chest to resemble Tsarevich Dmitry; he is depicted as an unsuccessful sorcerer who tries to build himself wings to fly away, and so on.

The same character occupies a central place in the "Lament of Ksenia Godunova," known in two variations contained in R. James's collection. The song was composed after the Impostor's death, who is named in it as the "Apostate" and "traitor." The history of Boris Godunov's daughter, who, according to some reports, became False Dmitry's concubine after he seized power and later, under pressure from the Impostor's father-in-law, Yury Mniszech, became a nun at the Beloozero Monastery, formed the basis of the folk work. In the folk song, the Tsarevna mourns her bitter fate: "Woe is me, young one, to grieve, / That the traitor is coming to Moscow, / Namely Grisha Otrepnev the Apostate, / Who wants to capture me, / And having captured me, wants to shear me, / To impose the monastic order!" [1. p. 420].

The Faustian Plot and Demonization

The question of False Dmitry's infernal nature is solved in its own way in the Russian folk tradition. According to the historian N. I. Kostomarov, a legend arose in folk tradition, similar to the Faustian one, about Otrepnev concluding a blood-signed pact with the devil, selling his soul in exchange for receiving the Muscovite Tsardom: "There was," this legend says, "Grishka the Apostate, nicknamed Otrepkin... He went at midnight over the ice under the Moskvoretsky Bridge and wanted to drown himself in the open water. And there the evil one came to him and said: – 'Don't drown yourself, Grishka, better give yourself to me; you will live happily in the world. I can give you much gold and silver and make you a great man.' Grishka said to him: – 'Make me the Tsar in Moscow!' – 'Very well, I will do it,' the evil one replies: – 'only you give me your soul and write the agreement with your blood.' Grishka immediately got paper, cut his finger, and wrote in blood the record that he gives his soul to the evil one, and the latter undertakes to make him the Tsar in Moscow. Only Grishka forgot to put a term in the record for how long he was to reign. And so the evil one led him to the Lithuanian land and there cast such a fog upon everyone that the Lithuanian King and all his magnates recognized Grishka as the Muscovite Tsarevich Dmitry Ivanovich and led him with their military force to Moscow, to install him on the throne there. Here the evil one cast a fog upon all the Muscovite people, blinding everyone's eyes... He sat on the throne. Then the evil one began to incite him to eradicate the true Christian Orthodox faith throughout the Muscovite State and introduce the foul Latin heresy. The Muscovite people became frightened and began to pray to God... Then, little by little, the fog began to lift from the eyes of all the people, and everyone saw that it was not Dmitry Ivanovich sitting on the throne, but the evil heretic Grishka the Apostate, nicknamed Otrepkin, and they killed him" [3. p. 287].

This story, which contains the plot about the Impostor's contract with an "otherworldly power," was composed later than the literary monuments of the early 17th century and, according to N. I. Kostomarov, was preserved in popular memory right up to the 19th century.

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