

Dialogue with the Bible in the Verse Dramas by Lesya Ukrainka: Philosophical Reflections and Dominant Symbols

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Abstract. The article posits that the Biblical code is one of the most important pillars in interpreting the literary works of Lesya Ukrainka, one of Ukraine's renowned writers. Her verse dramas foreground Biblical intertextuality, which becomes a starting point for intellectual debates in the Ukrainian 'fin de siècle' on such essential problems as freedom and love, social and mental slavery, and the mission of art. The problems of (mis)treating the essence of God's Kingdom and the human relationship with God are also centrepieces of Lesya Ukrainka's dialogicality with the Bible. In the writer's verse dramas, the explicit and implicit Biblical intertexts specify the active double-voiced discourse, which exhibits an interaction of the different consciousnesses. Following this, the text of the Scriptures provides the background for the dominant symbols (harp, stone and light) that can be actualized by the informed reader both through the allusions and via the reminiscences in Lesya Ukrainka's dramatum.

Keywords: intellectual drama; Biblical code; Christian doctrine; double-voiced discourse; Bible-inspired symbols.

Introduction

The Biblical code is the essential lens through which the interpretation of the literary works by Lesya Ukrainka, one of Ukraine's most prolific female writers, can be performed. With this in mind, the overriding objective of the present study is to problematize the role of the creative appropriation of the Biblical motifs and images in the dramatic oeuvre of Lesya Ukrainka. The paper is structured around three main focus points: (1) historical contextualization and socio-cultural framing of Lesya Ukrainka's Bible-based narrative, (2) examination of a range of philosophical problems the writer touches upon in her verse dramas by appealing to the Scriptures, and (3) critical interpretation of the authorial

symbolic images caused by Biblical intertextuality. Such threefold orientation proposed here draws on the corpus-driven study of the following verse dramas authored by Lesya Ukrainka: *Одержима* (*The Obsessed*), *В катакомбах* (*In the Catacombs*), *На полі крові* (*On the Field of Blood*), *У нуші* (*In the Wilderness*), *Вавилонський полон* (*The Babylonian Captivity*), and *На руїнах* (*Upon the Ruins*)¹. A close reading of the dramas mentioned above enabled us to discover what books of the Scriptures appeared as an impetus for framing the characters' reflections and creating a figurative system in her texts, thus manifesting the authorial creative appropriation of the Biblical references.

Relying on such an exhaustive list of texts under analysis, the present paper takes novel relevance when observations are juxtaposed onto the previous scholarship on Lesya Ukrainka's Bible-inspired discourse. The Christian worldview of Lesya Ukrainka has provoked heated discussions among scholars since the middle of the 20th century. The Soviet-epoch discourse was set to stress the anti-religious orientation of Lesya Ukrainka's dramas and her protest against the spirit of slavery and humility (Oleksyuk, 1958; Stavys'tkyy, 1970). Most contemporary literary critics (Kukhar, 2000; Antofiychuk, 2002) put forward that Lesya Ukrainka neither defends religious postulates nor rejects Christianity. Moreover, some scholars (Sherekh, 1998; Dzyuba, 2007) emphasize the philosophical dimension of her dramas and foreground the relevance of cognizing Lesya Ukrainka's works through the lens of intellectualization of her writing. It has been noted that God-fighting motifs in her dramas should be associated with the anti-Christian mindset, widespread in the era of modernism (Aheyeva, 1999, p. 166; Hundorova, 2009, p. 156). In any case, religion is critiqued by Lesya Ukrainka with pure love, as Roman Weretelnyk (1989, p. 106) aptly put it: "it is a critique which arises out of caring, not out of scorn." Oksana Zabuzhko (2007, p. 193) considers Lesya Ukrainka "a heretic who has left her own apocrypha for us". Meanwhile, His Beatitude Svyatoslav (Shevchuk), the leader of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, tends to call her a believing thinker who rejects canonical dogmas and stands as an "apologist of Christianity", embodying a living communion with God (2020, pp. 17, 25, 40). These versatile position-takings call for coherent and well-elaborated further studies of her dramas.

For this research, it is particularly productive to take the methodological premises developed in the studies on intertextuality and semiotics as a departing point. In the practical analysis, we apply Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of *dialogism* and *active double-voiced discourse*, where dialogism is considered as an "interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which is an object for others" (Bakhtin, 2002, p. 24). The active double-voiced discourse represents the hidden controversy in the statement: "When the second interlocutor is present invisibly but keeps the deep trace in the words of the first one" (Bakhtin, 2002, p. 220).

To grasp the double-voiced discourse, Michael Riffaterre suggests treating a literary text as a sequence of presuppositions: "Words signify by presupposing an intertext either potential in language or already actualized in literature" (Riffaterre, 1980, p. 627). Such

¹ Here and afterwards, the translation of all Ukrainian titles and quotations is mine – M. H.

position-taking concerns lexical meanings of the word and encompasses a set of issues interpreted in the numerous texts of culture. With this in mind, it is reasonable to designate Lesya Ukrainka's verse dramas as "writerly" texts, which "make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (Barthes, 2002, p. 4). Referring to the consciousness of the "other", such a text can generate new meanings and messages. This overriding perspective yields to re-reading Lesya Ukrainka's oeuvre as an open text for complex dialogues with the Bible.

To go further, it is indispensable to rely on key tenets of archetypal literary criticism by drawing attention to religious motifs and symbols as to the Sacred manifested in the culture (Eliade, 1987, p. 11). In this, Lesya Ukrainka, like many other European writers, did address the Bible (namely, the Biblical imagery, motifs and narrative structures) as a "Great Code" (Frye, 1982) for her oeuvre.

The complex nature of Lesya Ukrainka's dialogue with the Bible (the socio-historical background of the Biblical references in her dramas, the fundamental tenets of Biblical philosophy actualized in the double-voiced discourse in the playwright's oeuvre as well as the authorial interpretation of the Bible-inspired symbols) is outlined in the following chapters to posit that the Scriptures take on the function of a coherently organized conceptual footing, in the dramatic works by Lesya Ukrainka.

1. Historical and sociocultural footing of Lesya Ukrainka's verse dramas

Lesya Ukrainka, a poet, dramatist and a leading figure in the Ukrainian modernist movement, lived in the times of the Russian empire. Around the turn of the 20th century, she concentrated on writing verse dramas inspired by the historical milieu and sociocultural setting of the era. Her utmost ambition was to free the Ukrainian culture of the image of provinciality and narrow-mindedness imposed by the discourse of the Russian empire. Lesya Ukrainka aimed to reflect on the social injustice, hardships and slavish souls of Ukrainians by channelling her dramatic oeuvre to intertextual framing and creating internal dialogicality with the motifs, images and narratives from Ancient Greece and Rome, Early Modern Europe, ancient Egypt and – undoubtedly – the Bible.

In this scope, one can substantiate Lesya Ukrainka's reliance on allusions and references to the Bible and ancient times based on main arguments. Firstly, by the Biblical context, the writer could express anti-imperial ideas and even criticize the dominant imperial views despite the pressure of censorship (Shkandriy, 2004, p. 309). Secondly, Lesya Ukrainka aspired to comprehend the fundamental problems of human existence in the universal coordinates. Authoring her plays in the epoch of European modernism (the latter was heavily marked by the influence of Nietzschean concepts of individuality and relativism), she still did not follow the popular philosophical trends blindly but processed the Biblical 'eternal truths' through her vision and perception of the world (Bychko, 2000, p. 45, 66; Moklytsya, 2011, p. 11, 57).

To frame it more generally, the 19th-century Ukrainian literature, namely the writings by Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) and Panteleymon Kulish (1819–1897), were replete

with allusions to and references about the Biblical texts, yet it was Lesya Ukrainka along with Ivan Franko (1856–1916), Olha Kobylanska (1863–1942) and Ahatanhel Kryms'kyy (1871–1942), her colleagues and prominent Ukrainian writers, who viewed *fin de siècle* as an epoch that could give an impetus for creative controversy with the Scriptures. Their dialogue with the Bible turned out to become a driving force for the intellectualization of their writings.

Intellectualization of creative writing lies in the juxtaposition and proliferation of double-voiced discourse, which uncovers multiple perspectives on complex philosophical problems by fusing into the text various intertextual links and forming parabolic chronotopes. In doing so, the readers play an active role in unearthing and constructing the meaning. It can be proposed that intellectualization in Lesya Ukrainka's works makes them "writerly" (in the metalanguage of Barthes) texts that become sites of resistance to then-dominant sociopolitical context. The inclination of the verse dramas by Lesya Ukrainka to the intellectual genre is essential in understanding the peculiarities of the authorial dialogue with the Bible.

2. Active double-voiced discourse in the verse dramas by Lesya Ukrainka and Biblical prototext

In the dramas by Lesya Ukrainka, the dialogue with the Scriptures is closely related to the writer's search for the answers to complicated questions about the human relationship with God and the entire world. The characters' explicit or implicit controversy with the Biblical doctrine provides the functioning of double-voiced discourse, which actualizes a range of issues considered important by the author.

Especially explicit becomes the Biblical intertext in the dramas *The Babylonian Captivity* and *Upon the Ruins*. The Samaritan Prophet, the Jewish Prophet and the Levit cannot agree on the place that should be recognized for the religious centre – the Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. Their disputes in Lesya Ukrainka's plays are enrooted in the Old Testament (see Deut. 27:12; Ezra 4:1-3), particularly, in the mentions of people's disunity in the matter of adoring God. Every character in her dramas seeks to glorify one's homeland; however, they find it difficult to comprehend God's Wisdom. The readership can interpret this complex controversy only through the dialogue with the New Testament, which clarifies that true worshipers must worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in the Spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

The essence of **God's Kingdom** is difficult to comprehend even for the early Christians, as introduced in Lesya Ukrainka's dramas. The characters have got absorbed into the idea of God's Kingdom as the world of truth, love and freedom; however, they are more worried about material goods or the rewards in the form of eternal happiness in Heaven. For instance, in the drama *On the Field of Blood*, Judas accused Jesus of deception since he had sold all his property for the sake of God's Kingdom but could not see it. The Neophyte Slave (*In the Catacombs*) wants his suffering child to have the better distinction in Heaven than the Patrician's one. He also cannot accept the Bishop's homily about the

way to the God's Kingdom: "Не говори: 'ось тут' чи 'там воно'. Воно є скрізь, де Бог є в людських душах"² (Ukrainka, 2021 (hereinafter: LU), v. 1, p. 243). The Bishop's statement represents an explicit quotation from the Gospel: "The coming of the Kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is', or 'There it is', because the Kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:20-21). This episode evidences that such wisdom is incomprehensible to the Neophyte.

Nevertheless, in her letter to Kryms'kyu, Lesya Ukrainka mentioned that even the first Christians had begun to forget meekness and charity as the proper foundations of Christianity (LU, v. 13, p. 426). The author laid the responsibility for this state of affairs on the spiritual leaders who frequently put their interests above the Biblical values. The Bishop (*In the Catacombs*) urges to consider the Neophyte a sinner based on his rebellious speech and tells of leaving him without the slightest hesitation. Similarly, the drama *In the Wilderness* displays the pastor of a Puritan community who was filled with indignation because of Richard Ayrton's decision to help the poor woman rather than him. However, the Scriptures assert the necessity of sacrifice by "leaving the ninety-nine sheep in the open country and going after the lost one" (Luke 15:4) as well as warn people against false prophets who "devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers" (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47) These fragments from the Gospels are not directly quoted in Lesya Ukrainka's text, but they can be easily actualized by the reader, familiar with the Bible.

In addition to the complex Biblical references underscoring the distortion of the Christian doctrine, the active double-voiced discourse is especially apprehensible when Lesya Ukrainka raises the problem of *slavery and freedom*. In this case, the dialogue with the Bible is enhanced by the "mediated" type of intertextuality: "reference of the text to the intertext is effected through the intercession of a third text functioning as the interpretant" (Riffaterre, 1980, p. 627). In Lesya Ukrainka's plays, the "mediating" text is represented by the religious literature, thoroughly studied by the writer.

For instance, the drama *In the Catacombs* depicts the Neophyte who cannot put up with the existence of slaves – either in the society or in relation to God: «Господній раб? Хіба ж і там раби? А ти ж казав: нема раба, ні пана у царстві Божому!»³ (LU, v. 1, p. 240). In her letter to Kryms'kyu, Lesya Ukrainka stressed that her personage rebelled against the slavish spirit, enrooted in the Pauline Epistles and the Gospel parables and then spread among the Christians (LU, v. 13, pp. 425–426). In her opinion, the opposition *slave/lord* is wrongly considered the only possible form of relationship between a man and his God. As Maria Moklytsya (2011, p. 41) stated, Ernest Renan's emphases on "human spiritual congeniality with God" were appreciated by Lesya Ukrainka. However, the mentioning of "a lord", "a slave", as well as "a servant" in the Biblical parables proves that Christ preached to people by appealing to their everyday life in a language they understood. Christ addresses his disciples as friends or even children as long as they demonstrate love and faith: "Love each other as I have loved you <...> You are my friends if you do what I

² "Don't speak: 'here it is' or 'there it is'. It is wherever God is in people's souls."

³ "The Lord's slave? Are there also slaves? But you said: there is no slave, no lord in the God's Kingdom!"

command. I no longer call you servants” (John, 15:12-15); “So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child” (Gal. 4:7). Moreover, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28); thus, Christ set an example of voluntary service to one another. It is the person who is free to choose the level on which one’s dialogue with God will occur. However, no one among the personages can explain such nuances to the Neophyte.

Lesya Ukrainka’s characters rebel against social slavery, yet the writer emphasizes that mental slavery is a worse disaster for the people. This problem gains particular importance in the plays *The Babylonian Captivity* and *Upon the Ruins*, where the prophets (Eleazar, Tirca) strive to overcome “the mental plebeianism” in the people’s consciousness (Dems’ka-Budzulyak, 2009, p. 92). Lesya Ukrainka portrays the enslaved Israelites forced to build temples for Baal and Moloch in Babylon, while their temple in Jerusalem is in decay. However, the Biblical prototext brings to the fore that the Babylonian captivity was the Lord’s punishment for worshipping idols by the Israelites (Isa. 2:8; Jer. 5:19). Nevertheless, the Lord’s Temple cannot be destroyed: “the sanctity of the temple is proof against all earthly corruption; it is by virtue of the temple that the world is resanctified” (Eliade, 1987, p. 59). Therefore, Tirca (*Upon the Ruins*) calls for a new temple in Jerusalem, which would symbolize the regeneration of people.

In Lesya Ukrainka’s dramas, mental slavery can be revealed both in the people’s betrayal of their faith and despair or apathy. Following this, in *Upon the Ruins* Tirca sets a goal to wake people up from their slave-like sleep. The prophetess urges the Israelites to sow grain and build a house because people who have lost their thirst for life do not deserve liberation. An indifferent sleepy person would treat an enemy who gives shelter and bread like a benefactor: “Розкуй меч на рало <...> Бо прийде ворог і розоре землю <...> Бо скажуть вголос сироти й вдовиці: благословенний той, хто хліб дає! Лежачим краю рідного немає.”⁴ (LU, v. 1, p. 168). The image of the sword is usually associated with a weapon used in fighting for freedom; however, the Old Testament tells us that beating the swords into plowshares and building houses will testify to people’s readiness for revival: “They will beat their swords into plowshares” (Isa. 2:4); “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce” (Jer. 29:5). Such allusions in the drama to the Biblical text reveal the writer’s search for different ways people can take on their path to freedom.

The voluntary serving to people and the willingness to self-sacrifice for others is maintained by *love*, which is the value Lesya Ukrainka admired in Christianity (LU, v. 13, p. 426). In her dramas, different aspects of love are put into the heart of Biblical dialogicality. For instance, in *The Obsessed*, the Messiah still loves people, even for the crowd that sent him to Golgotha. His example manifests the axiom: “God, at His essence, is love that never fails” (1 John 4:8). Following Christ from the Gospel (John 13:34-35; Luke 6:27; Matt. 5:43-45), the Messiah urges to love one another and one’s enemies, and this commandment is often racking for the characters of Lesya Ukrainka. As Serhiy

⁴ “Beat the sword into a plowshare, for the enemy will come and will plow the land <...> For the orphans and widows will say aloud: blessed is one, who gives bread! There is no a native land for the slothful people.”

Romanov remarks, “it is already the domain of the sacred” (2019, p. 128). Miriam did not merely fail to love the enemies but also hated the Messiah’s friends (in particular, the apostles sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane), who turned out to be rather weak. Literary scholars rightly remarked that Miriam’s maximalistic passion could not surpass the all-forgiveness of the Messiah’s love (Dzyuba, 2007, p. 180; Bychko, 2000, p. 48). Like Christ from the Gospel, the Messiah-personage states that it is impossible to love the Lord and simultaneously hate people.

Moreover, the hatred of people, conditioned by the love for the Messiah, devastates Miriam. Even the Messiah’s resurrection is not able to fill her with joy. Miriam, whom Roman Weretelnik (1989, p. 76) tends to call a “female Christ figure”, understands that she cannot be equal to the Messiah, but she wants to sacrifice her life for him. Miriam, named in the drama as “the obsessed with spirit”, accuses people of indifference and being unworthy of the Messiah’s bloodshed, while the Messiah himself treats bloodshed for him without pacification and love for fellow humans as a useless sacrifice that is even worse than arrogance. The dialogue between the characters takes place on the Gadarenes coast of the lake, namely, in the land where, according to the Gospels (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-13; Luke 8:26-33), Christ healed “the demon-obsessed” man. This comparative perspective is important for understanding that spiritual ardour without peace in the heart leads to a state of obsession. Nevertheless, when sentenced to death, “the obsessed with spirit” gives her life under the hail of stones because of love to the Messiah: “За тебе віддаю... життя... і кров... і душу <...> не за небесне царство... ні... з любови!”⁵ (LU, v. 1, p. 144). Love, which was the core of the Messiah’s sermon, turns to be the last word of Miriam and the last word in Lesya Ukrainka’s play.

Freedom of the spirit is one of the greatest values for Lesya Ukrainka’s characters, particularly for artists, who prove the high mission of *art*, recognized even in the Bible. In *The Babylonian Captivity*, Eleazar is held in captivity, yet he never glorifies the power and authority of the enemy. For instance, he does not sing a Zion song, often referred to as “a bride in Jerusalem” and “a concubine” in Babylon (LU, v. 1, p. 154). He distinguishes between singing as a way of earning on the squares and singing as a sacred act that awakens enslaved people’s memory. Moreover, in the play *Upon the Ruins*, the prophetess Tirca blames the singer for his sluggish attempts to reproduce *Jeremiah’s Lamentations* on the rusty harp strings and emphasizes that the artist must recall not only the former chant but also create his song that would testify to the life of people’s eternal soul, even upon the ruins.

The pictorial art is questioned by the Puritan community in the drama *In the Wilderness*. Godvinson, the pastor, reflects on the sculpture as idolatry and accuses Richard Ayrton of violating the Biblical precepts. In his attempt to convince people of the sinfulness of Ayrton’s artistic activity, Godvinson pulls out the beforehand prepared words from the Scriptures: “Будь проклятий той, хто виліпить чи вилле бридке перед Богом діло рук

⁵ “I give my life... and blood... and soul... for you <...> not for the Kingdom of Heaven... no... because of love.”

мистецьких і покладе його у схові!” (LU, v. 3, p. 82). However, when he quotes the relevant passage from the Torah (“Cursed is anyone who makes an idol – a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands – and sets it up in secret” (Deut. 27:15)), Godvinson deliberately omits the word “idol” that has important stress in the Biblical verse. Richard is fully aware that the Bible does not prohibit the art of sculpture; it only warns against casting idols for worship (cf. Lev. 26:1; Isa. 44:9-20). Furthermore, the informed reader of the drama can realize that creative spirit is interpreted in the Scriptures as God’s gift: it was the Lord who endowed the artists with the necessary abilities and inspired them to build the sanctuaries and temples (cf. Exod. 31:2-5; 1 Kings 6-8; 2 Chron. 2-7). In her plays, Lesya Ukrainka asserts both the value of the artist’s revelation and the freedom of his spirit.

Having analyzed the central thematic dialogical links in Lesya Ukrainka’s dramas, it is possible to underscore that Biblical intertexts are significant in creating a double-voiced space where the characters reflect on a set of issues re-considering God’s truth. The main Bible-based symbols in her oeuvre also require a zoom-in scholarly intertextual view, which is the subject of the ensuing part of the paper.

3. Dominant symbols in the verse dramas by Lesya Ukrainka: Biblical allusions and reminiscences

As it has been noted above, the Biblical prototext is actualized in Lesya Ukrainka’s dramas through the characters’ controversial dialogue with the statements of the Scriptures. Equally important are the Bible-inspired symbols represented in the verse dramas by Lesya Ukrainka, both as allusions and reminiscences. The allusion is usually viewed as “a conscious, significant referring to another literary work”, while the reminiscence is defined as “the trace of another work which is observed by the reader but not always realized by the author” (Głowiński, 2008, p. 27, 468). Such relationships between texts can be brought to light only by the informed reader by his/her associative thinking.

The Biblical allusions used by Lesya Ukrainka in her dramas concern the sphere of art. Her first remark to *The Babylonian Captivity* mentions *harps* that hang on the willows above the prophets (LU, v. 1, p. 145). This motif refers to the Psalms where harps were hanging on the willows by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. 137:1-4). The image of harps that are not used for their intended purpose demonstrates that the Lord’s song cannot be performed in captivity. The harp symbolises free and high art in the writer’s dramas. Eleazar (*The Babylonian Captivity*) can earn by singing on the squares among strangers, but he is not allowed to accompany on the harp. The use of the sacred musical instrument in the captivity to entertain the enslavers will only put both the singer and the harp to shame. The highest purpose of art, symbolized by a harp, is actualized in the Bible through the frequent mentions of musical instruments, treated as a source of joy (cf.: Isa. 23:16; 1 Chron. 15:28), and as a mode of glorifying the Lord: “Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre <...>” (Ps. 150:3). In the drama *Upon the Ruins*, Tirca throws the harp into the waters of the Jordan. Thus, after it belonged to David and Jeremiah and after

bewailing the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (LU, v. 1, p. 174), this sacred instrument could only be revived by the man who is able to awaken the indifferent enslaved people.

Among ambivalent symbols that are dominant in the works by Lesya Ukrainka, it is worth mentioning a *stone*. The analysis of the plays shows that the fundamental attribute ascribed to the stone is its firmness. Therefore, the characters feel the need to lay all the stones in the foundation of a new house or temple (LU, v. 1, p. 178). Such treatment of the stone is reminiscent of the Biblical context: David calls the Lord his “rock and fortress” (Ps. 18:2-3), whilst Christ advises “building his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24-27).

At the same time, the stone is also associated with dead nature that can penetrate a person’s inner world. In the play *In the Wilderness*, the sculptor Richard Ayrton states with sadness that reviving the people’s hearts is sometimes more difficult than bringing a stone to life (LU, v. 3, p. 88). The “stoneness” of humans cannot be accepted either by Tirca in the drama *Upon the Ruins*, or by Miriam in *The Obsessed*. While Tirca blames people for their stone-like sleep and compares them to apathetic slaves, Miriam is convinced that the sleeping apostles are harder than stone (LU, v. 1, p. 134).

The “stoneness” of souls turns a stone into a weapon. In *The Obsessed*, Miriam dies among the crowd under a hail of stones. Meanwhile, the prophets raise their hands with stones against each other in *The Babylonian Captivity* and *Upon the Ruins*. In the last scene of the drama *On the Field of Blood*, the Pilgrim throws a stone at Judas, yet it fails to reach the target. His Beatitude Svyatoslav rightly remarked that this scene should be interpreted in the light of the famous episode from the Gospel about a woman caught in adultery: “Let anyone of you, who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). In this line of reasoning, the Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Church sums up that a person should not judge the other one but should test one’s conscience (Shevchuk, 2020, p. 25).

The Gospel (Matt. 27:3-10) tells that Judas, overwhelmed with remorse, hung himself. In Lesya Ukrainka’s drama, Judas continues to live and buys a field of blood with thirty pieces of silver. The author transforms the potter’s field from the burial place into a poor croft with weeds and stones so that the reader can question the character’s benefits from the betrayal. Judas works hard to turn the wasteland into fertile soil. The character’s struggle with the stones is not merely material. Judas himself has become similar to rocky soil. It is reminiscent of the Biblical parable of the sower (Matt. 13:5-6; Mark 4:5-6; Luke 8:6-7): Lesya Ukrainka’s character seemed to listen to the word, but because of his weak faith, he did not allow the sown seed to grow.

Alike, Miriam (*The Obsessed*) recognizes the life-giving power of the Messiah’s words; however, she does not believe that his words can heal her soul: “[...] вона чорніша, ніж хата-пустка, що після пожежі чорніє порожнечю. Вода твоїх речей, цілюща та живуща, душі моєї вигоїть не може” (LU, v. 1, p. 128)⁶. For her, the darkness has not been overcome by light yet.

⁶ “... it is blacker than the wasteland-house that is blackening with emptiness after a fire. The water of your words is healing and living but it cannot cure my soul.” This motif is reminiscent of the famous treatment of Christ’s word as the living water in the episode about His encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:10).

In the works by Lesya Ukrainka, the *light*, as opposed to darkness, is particularly embodied in the image of fire. The fire is frequently associated with freedom and knowledge, as in the case of the Neophyte Slave (*In the Catacombs*). This character experiences a special longing for light; however, he appreciates Prometheus rather than Christ: “Я честь віддам титану Прометею, що не творив своїх людей рабами, що просвіщав не словом, а вогнем”⁷ (LU, v. 1, p. 261). In ancient Greek mythology, Prometheus rebelled against the supreme god. The titanium stole the divine fire from Olympus and gave it to people, revealing the light of knowledge and abilities to various crafts. In Lesya Ukrainka’s drama, the Bishop calls the Neophyte a son of darkness since the latter adores the pagan figure and questions the words of the Church representatives. However, when appreciating Prometheus, the Neophyte Slave protests not so much against Christ but rather against the slavish spirit preached by the Christian leaders. The rebellious personage does accept the values emphasized by Christ, among them – love to the people: “Любови чистої бажаю в серці, без задрощів, без сумнівів нечистих”⁸ (LU, v. 1, p. 258). The Neophyte’s longing for light proves the “spiritual synthesis of Prometheus and Christ” in his mind (Zborovs’ka, 2002, p. 88).

The Holy Scripture often reminds us of the grace of enlightenment promised to people by God. Owing to Christ, the people who lived in darkness for a long time managed not only to see the light of truth and life (Isa. 9:1; John 8:12) but to get the possibility of becoming “children of the light” and “the light of the world” (Eph. 5:8; Matt. 5:14). For this reason, the Messiah (*The Obsessed*) rebukes Miriam for allowing darkness to rule over herself. Miriam believes in the light of his spirit, yet she feels only a gloomy night in her soul and treats other people as “darkness”. Such opposition of the light and the darkness permeates *The Obsessed* and is considered by Oksana Zabuzhko to be a proof that the playwright’s interpretation of the problem adheres to the Manichaeism ideology. According to Zabuzhko’s argument (2007, p. 157), the Manichaeism ideology asserts light and darkness as valid and fundamental concepts, unlike the Christian orthodoxy, where darkness, or evil, is treated as the absence of light or good. Nevertheless, in our opinion, the Messiah’s position correlates more to the Biblical perspective: “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness” (1 John 2:9). Neither the Messiah nor Miriam accepts darkness as such. Moreover, the Messiah asks for a special kind of love from Miriam: “А та любов, що я від тебе хочу, повинна бути як сонце – всім світити”⁹ (LU, v. 1, p. 132). Only love of one’s fellow human proves the acceptance of the divine light and helps a person be a light for others. This is the truth that Lesya Ukrainka carries through her verse dramas.

⁷ “I will honor Prometheus the titanium who did not make slaves of people and who did not enlighten with words, but with fire.”

⁸ “I am longing for the pure love in my heart, without envy as well as without impure doubts.”

⁹ “And the love, that I want from you, must be like the sun – must shine for all.”

Conclusion

Dialogue with the Scriptures in Lesya Ukrainka's dramas is an outcome of the playwright's aspirations to comprehend the fundamental problems of human existence in the universal coordinates. Such dialogicality also arises out of the *fin de siècle* tendencies in European literature, which gave ground to raise controversial questions in her dramatic narratives.

The verse dramas by Lesya Ukrainka intertwine Biblical intertextuality with the philosophical reflections, which bring to light the individual outlook of the playwright as well as her interpretation of the anti-Christian views widespread at the turn of the 20th century. The active double-voiced discourse, which premised on the Old Testament (The Torah, the Book of Psalms, the First Book of Kings, the Books of Chronicles, the Book of Ezra, and, in particular, the works of Isaiah and Jeremiah) and the New Testament (The Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles), is the driving force for intellectualization of the writer's plays.

Lesya Ukrainka's dialogism exhibits an interaction of several voices, where the authorial voice is distributed among her characters. The dialogues between the personages represent a clash of consciousnesses that search for truth, which frequently appears ambivalent in her dramatic oeuvre. While using quotations from the Scriptures and presupposing actualization of the Biblical intertexts by the informed reader, the author uncovers multiple perspectives on complex philosophical problems. God's wisdom is frequently incomprehensible for the characters, yet their dialogue with the Holy Bible represents the desire to understand the essence of the Kingdom of Heaven and the human relationship with God and with each other. The characters also realize the value of love, yet they find it difficult to accept the need of loving the enemies.

Lesya Ukrainka puts the issue of freedom and slavery, which can be social and mental, by appealing both to the explicit and implicit Biblical intertexts. In addition, the authorial interpretation of this problem is revealed through the mediated type of intertextuality, which presupposes intercession of the religious literature studied by the writer. While reflecting on the spiritual mission of art, the characters allude to the Scriptures; however, the Puritans-personages distort the Biblical statements in order to forbid the artistic activity in their community.

Biblical allusions and reminiscences specify the dominant symbols in Lesya Ukrainka's verse dramas. Through a series of deliberate references to the Bible, allusions are represented by the image of the harp. The harp is often mentioned in the Scriptures as an instrument for sacred art that cannot be performed in captivity; thus, in the writer's plays, it symbolizes free art, which brings a man to the high spiritual realm. Established by the associative reading, the Biblical reminiscences can be represented by the symbol of stone. Enrooted in the Bible, the stone provides a hard and firm foundation for a house, but it is also associated with the inaccessibility and crustiness of the soul. The stony field, which is reminiscent of the Gospel texts, is interpreted as the retribution of a man for his unrighteous deeds. The image of light alludes to the Promethean myth, where fire symbolizes a human

desire for knowledge and enlightenment. At times, in Lesya Ukrainka's verse dramas, the light is reminiscent of the Biblical text as a symbol of truth, righteous life and love.

The analysed verse dramas prove the author's deep connection with the Bible and manifest that the Scriptures became a conceptual source of imagery in her works and gave impetus to her individual reflections on the human relationship with God and society.

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