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## **IDEOLOGY AND STEREOTYPES WHILE CREATING DRAMATIC CHARACTERS IN THE TRAGEDY *RAQUEL* BY VICENTE GARCÍA DE LA HUERTA**

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After the introduction where the basic characteristics of the Spanish neoclassical tragedy were presented, the author deals with social and political background of the tragedy 'Raquel'. Historical circumstances in Spain under the Bourbons and especially the public turmoil, served the dramatist to explain his ideological preoccupations according to the neoclassical poetics of drama. That public turmoil was actuated by the Spanish nobility in 1766 and they wanted to defend their political interests and stand against the dominance of 'foreign elements' in the political life in Spain. There are many similarities between the historical circumstances and the drama itself. Finally, the connection among the ruling theory, ideology, the feeling of national identity and typology of the significant drama characters was presented. Huerta followed the course of writing drama pieces whose topics were taken from the national history and tradition and he used data from ancient, Hispanic chronicles where the story about the Castilian king Alfonso VIII and the beautiful Jew Raquel was written. García de la Huerta managed to suppress the traditional prejudice about the Spanish being incapable of creating original Spanish tragedy in the neoclassicism era.

**Key words:** *Vicente García de la Huerta, neoclassical poetics, "Raquel", ideology, didactics, neoclassical Spanish tragedy*

### **1. Introduction**

Neoclassicism showed resistance towards traditional Spanish literary works, especially towards 'new or the Spanish comedy' of the Golden century. Its biggest resistance was in the field of dramatic creativity and literary work of García de la Huerta and Ramón de la Cruz (Del Río 1998: 97). Francisco Ruiz Ramón in the work *Historia del teatro español* emphasizes that if we observe its literary value, the neoclassical tragedy is the paradigm of a failure. It is the failure caused by many factors and the most significant are: drama authors lack their own originality and talent so they tend to subserviently imitate French and classical role models; then there is the predominance of formal dramatic characteristics, there is neither the tradition of nourishing this type of drama in Spain nor the interested audience. The large number of tragedies published in Spain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century represent either translations or adaptations of French literary works of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century which were role models for Spanish dramatists. However, the only way to introduce the tragedy to Spanish people in the 18<sup>th</sup>

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century, who didn't want to see adaptations and translations of foreign tragedies in their national theatres, was to show the plays written according to neoclassical poetics. The theme was taken from national history and tradition because it was the standard used in the previous *époque* when drama had had great success. Although the authors chose themes from national history, the selection of themes was conditioned by certain aesthetic and pedagogical reasons according to the ruling enlightenment ideology (Ruiz Ramón 2000: 289-292).

### **1.1 POETICS OF NEOCLASSICAL TRAGEDY**

In the key theoretical text *Poetics*, Ignacio de Luzán gives the following definition of tragedy:

La tragedia es una representación dramática de una gran mudanza de fortuna, acaecida a reyes, príncipes y personajes de gran calidad y dignidad, cuyas caídas, muertes, desgracias y peligros exciten terror y compasión en los ánimos del auditorio, y los curen y purguen de estas y otras pasiones, sirviendo de ejemplo y escarmiento a todos, pero especialmente a los reyes y a las personas de mayor autoridad y poder.

We can single out several typical aspects of the Spanish neoclassical tragedy: it is about a play written only for stage performance where characters present their (author's) preoccupations and opinions. The basic function of the tragedy is to control the viewers' passion, to purge inappropriate feelings and to crystallize noble and socially acceptable feelings. The theme should be historical but the events in that drama piece don't have to be documentary. They could be imaginary but situated in the past and not in the modern age. That way, we avoid the reaction a viewer can have while seeing certain event on stage that is connected with current society. Only a neutral viewer can truly understand the message of the piece itself and that is how didactic intent of a piece is realized. The number of characters appearing in Spanish neoclassical tragedies is very small. The characters usually have moral and patriot characteristics, they are representatives of a certain ideology or a behaviour pattern and are made according to standing types. The most frequent are: *el héroe, la heroína, el poderoso, el caballero, el consejero, el mensajero, el galán, la dama*. In order to make the plot more comprehensible to the public, dramatists set up characters in two opposed groups: good and bad, rational and irrational, positive and negative, well-behaved and misbehaved (Cañas Murillo 2003: 1582-1587).

## **2. *Raquel* and the absolutist ideology**

Writing the tragedy *Raquel*, Vicente García de la Huerta (1734-1787) created a piece that possessed creativity and ideological background and differed from the myriad of unsuccessful tragedies of that time. According to Valbuena Prat, this piece contains the "balance between decorative baroque and pre-romantic sensibility" (1974: 46, 47). It was first performed in 1772 during the writer's imprisonment in Orán. It was performed officially in Barcelona in 1775 and in Madrid in 1778 but after only five days of excellent performing, by decree of the local government, it was replaced and could no longer be performed. The new drama piece that replaced it wasn't interesting to the audience (Andióc 1980: 250, 251).

Leopoldo de Gregorio, Marquis of Esquilache, and other Italian counsellors, who were brought to Spain by King Carlos III after his brother's death in 1759, were banished after the public turmoil in March 1766. These events significantly influenced the writing of the tragedy. Vicente García de la Huerta deals with many threats that stalk social and monarchist system unless the nobility is given the significance and place in pyramidal hierarchy of the old regime (Johnson 1981: 71). The nobility and other ruling groups considered King Carlos III the prototype of an enlightened absolutist. He introduced the politics of reformation; he tried to modernize the country with the help of social groups which were marginalized and away from the sphere of authority. The economic reasons for the mutiny are well-known: unsuccessful harvest and rising food prices. The citizens carried the financial burden of urbanization in Madrid which explains the ruining of street lights and other urban solutions that Marquis of Esquilache dealt with. The large number of foreigners in the ruling system of Carlos III is believed to have had influence on the economic crisis, the fall of monarchist institutions and the King's authoritarian power. A foreigner, the minister Esquilache, and not the King, was considered to be guilty of cruel despotism. The most common rebel cry was "¡Viva el rey, muera Esquilache!" (Ríos 2003: 28) The glorification of the "Spanish" is a part of the ideological system of aristocracy which manipulated with people's feelings and aspirations in 1766. It is about the conflict between the most conservative social classes and the very active Bourbon minority that wanted to pass the reforms and modernize the country. Xenophobia was a part of the drama and the famous historical event. The feeling of xenophobia unites nobility with the ruler in order to save the kingdom from chaos but it also leads to protection from strangers, foreigners and "those who don't belong to the same class" (national, religious, social). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, anti-Semitism was moderate in Spain, at least among the ruling structures. There was a need to

attract the capital for financial and economic development. According to Huerta, Jews are not a religious sect but a social community which deals with economy and finances and they are also considered to be tax payers. The new regime is tyrant and despotic, i.e. it is about the absolutist power with emphasized nostalgia towards feudal anarchy. The words of Carlos III: "El hombre que critica las operaciones del gobierno, aunque no fuesen buenas, comete un delito", represent the main principle of absolutism, where the king has no responsibility towards his ancillaries (Andióc 1993: 28-30).

The topic of the tragedy is the chaotic situation in Castile in the 12<sup>th</sup> century because of the conflict between nobility and King Alfonso VIII. He gave his lover, Raquel, a part of his jurisdictions and Rubén, her national, uses her as an instrument of uncontrolled ambition. The Castilian noblemen, lead by Hernán García, weren't ready to tolerate the situation so they conspired against Raquel. After the king's argument with the noblemen, he decided to banish Raquel. When Raquel bid farewell to the king, he decided not to banish her but to give her great authority to run the state affairs. Raquel wanted to avenge herself on the Castilian noblemen for the insult, so she decided to banish all her enemies and to raise the taxes. The situation became unbearable so the noblemen, lead by Álvaro Fáñez, decided to kill Raquel. Hernán García desperately opposed this decision and the noblemen tried to find the most convenient moment to fulfill their intention. They found that moment when the king went hunting and Raquel was killed by Rubén, who was promised freedom in return for his service. Having returned from hunting, the king found his mistress dead. He was enraged and he wanted to kill the culprits but his faithful vassal convinced him that the act itself was justifiable. The king however killed Rubén and forgave his citizens (Pedraza Jiménez and Rodríguez Cáceres 1981: 309, 310).

### **3. Documentary basis of the tragedy *Raquel***

The oldest sources where the story about the Raquel is mentioned are: *Primera Crónica General*, *Crónica de 1344*, *Tercera Crónica General*, *Castigos y documentos del rey Don Sancho*. However, *Tercera Crónica*, originally named *Las Quatro Partes Enteras de la Crónica de España* and published in Zamora 1541 by Florián de Ocampo, is considered to be one of the most reliable sources. It was the only printed source and used mainly by the authors of the Renaissance and the Golden Century. The legend about the king and the Raquel could be seen again at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in *Historia de España* written by Father Mariana. This tragic event had also drawn attention of the famous Lope de Vega who dealt with this topic in *Jerusalén conquistada* (1609). This is the first time

Fermosa was mentioned under the name Raquel. Couple of years later, Lope returned to this topic in *Las paces de los reyes y judía de Toledo* (1617). Luis de Ulloa y Pereira wrote the famous poem *La Raquel in 1650. La judía de Toledo*, taken from *Parte 27 de comedias varias* (1667), is another adaptation of this topic, most likely written by Juan Bautista Diamante. According to expert researches, the last two are the most similar to Huerta's version of this legend about the beautiful Jew (Fusilla 1976: 15-18).

#### **4. Ideology, characters and stereotypes**

The analysis of the characters in the tragedy *Raquel* cannot be separated from the ideological and political function they have in the drama structure. Huerta's characters, unlike other Spanish neoclassical pieces, are extremely individualized. They are constantly present on stage, making the viewers focus on what they represent and symbolize. Not until one realizes a dramatist's vision of reality, is the conflict and problem solved.

**Hernán García**, a noble knight, represents the values and patterns that enable the salvation of the kingdom that was in total chaos. The feeling of fidelity and belonging and the wish to prevent this chaos in Castile, make him constantly opposed to all the other characters. The only symbolic conflict is with the Jew, Rubén; because it is represented as a conflict between virtue (García) and evil (Rubén). García is the biggest critic of Raquel. According to him, she ruined the aristocracy and she symbolizes the reason for the king's blindness and inability to rule and make rational decisions. However, as an honest and righteous vassal, he eventually tries to save Raquel and enables her to run away from the enraged citizens (Ríos 2003: 37-39). He represents the voice of reason and he acts according to his vision of hierarchical and pyramid structured society which was considered to be the natural order. He believes that nobility should point out the king's inappropriate behaviour, should assist in solving the country's problems, always defending the interests of the king and the monarchy. The nobility has also the role of a mediator between the king and the people. Hernán represents the idea of "governing the people without the people" but he doesn't believe that the end justifies the means. All actions should be carefully considered and harmonized with noble motives.

Unlike the paradigm of virtue presented by Hernán García, **Garcelán Manrique** is another representative of nobility according to whom God gives the king his power and only God can judge the king's actions. From the theoretical point of view, this character presents the defense of the baroque ideology that was present in the different types of drama in the past, i.e. *the new comedy*-the

idea of theocentric monarchy discarded by the philosophers and the intellectuals of the Enlightenment.

**Álvar Fáñez**, the third representative of nobility, was used in order to criticize the situation in the kingdom caused by Raquel's influence on the king. The only solution is to eliminate Raquel and he justifies the act with the feeling of being loyal to the king. In order to make the act of murder more dramatic, the dramatist frees Fáñez of a direct responsibility for the murder, but he finds him guilty of conspiracy and organization. That is why Ruben is the one who kills the Jew. The king's irrational love and blind passions can cause many dangerous situations. Therefore, this character symbolizes the radical alternative of the enlightened despotism (Ríos 2003: 42).

**Rubén**, the Jew, symbolizes the ancient Castilian problem of ethnic intolerance (Johnson 1981: 74). He is Raquel's personal advisor and the reason why there are so many intrigues in this tragedy. His main characteristics are: avarice, intrigue, cunning and cowardice and these could be seen in the Spanish tradition as common stereotypes about the Jews. The dramatist used the Jew characters according to his ideology where similarities with historical figures and representatives of the Enlightenment can be seen. It is Ruben's sordidness and treason that make the viewers change their opinion about Raquel because they realize that she is the victim of deception and that is how they identify with her. The author uses this character to show political utilitarianism where the end justifies the means and there are no moral norms. Being cunning and rational, he is a perfect prototype of the Enlightenment. In order to act carefully and advisedly, he observes people and events so that he could be able to avoid the unwished consequences. He analyzes people and their flaws so that he could use it against them and make them do something according to his interests. Ruben doesn't deserve forgiveness or compassion so he'll be the victim of poetic justice and therefore severely punished. He dies at the end of the tragedy.

**Raquel** is the most complex character since she goes beyond the simplicity that is typical for other characters. She seems to be dignified, vindictive and she also has an insatiable ambition. She is willing to do anything to fulfill her interests. She has passion and love towards Alfonso VIII, but during that short period when she held the throne, she took revenge on the Castilian nobility. Raquel is a heroine who is dichotomous between her love towards the king and the influence that her advisor Ruben has on her. That influence and trust will cost her life at the end of the tragedy:

*Raquel*

¿Tú me hieres, Rubén? ¿Tú? ¿Satisfecha  
no estaba tu maldad con haber sido  
la causa de perderme -idura pena!-  
sino que eres, infame, el instrumento  
de mi muerte también? Mas no es tu diestra,  
Hebreo vil, la que me da la herida:  
Amor me da la muerte. ¡Qué torpeza  
Mis miembros liga! ¿Amado Alfonso mío,  
Dónde estás? ¿Qué descuido así te aleja?  
¿Así morir consientes a quien amas?  
¿En cuanto mal a quien te adora dejas?  
Vuela, Alfonso, ¡ay de mí! ¡Oh amor! ¡Oh muerte!

(García de la Huerta 2003: 178)

Her actions are the result of Rubén's influence and her duties towards the caste. Finally, it seems that Raquel is innocent. Although she loved the king sincerely, she shouldn't have been so haughty and she shouldn't have allowed being an instrument of interest against the kingdom and the nobility. That is why her punishment has a tragic tone.

According to traditional critics, **King Alfonso VIII** is the most negative character in this tragedy. His character isn't well-defined, he is constantly anxious while making decisions and he behaves inappropriately. His character's traits were opposed to the pattern of behaviour that a king had to have.

*Alfonso*

Tienes razón, que el santo Cielo ordena,  
Por más atroz que sea su delito,  
Que quien le cometió, disculpa tenga.  
Yo tu muerte he causado, Raquel mía;  
Mi ceguedad te mata; y pues es ella  
La culpada, con lágrimas de sangre  
Lloraré yo mi culpa y tu tragedia.  
Yo os perdono, Vasallos, el agravio:  
Alzad del suelo, alzad. Sírvaos de pena  
Contemplar lo horroroso de la hazaña  
Que emprendisteis en esta beldad muerta. (García de la Huerta 2003: 183)

Another important character in this tragedy is **the people**. It is an almost imperceptible character and it appears in the most significant moments during all

the three acts. Its latent presence influences the actions of other characters, so it represents an element of pressure.

People are shouting slogans against Raquel and they are asking for her death the same way the citizens of Madrid shouted and asked for minister Esquilache's death in 1766 (Ríos 2003: 43-46).

## 5. Conclusion

Spanish neoclassical tragedy has utilitarian character and its aim is to show the viewers certain ideology and vision of reality. Therefore, the authors most frequently use historical events that are distant from current auditorium in order to avoid recipient's identification with actual events. Having made this distance, it is easier to understand the ideological messages.

The violence culminated with Raquel's death at the end of the tragedy and it served for making balance. Having used the characters to present his own ideology and the concepts of absolutist monarchy, García de la Huerta presented at the same time the mechanisms for preventing violence.

Monarchy is a very frequent topic in tragedies and the basic idea is that it represents the best way to rule, especially the absolutist monarchy. The king is shown as a *protector-father* of the nation, whose power is divine and who takes care of his people providing security and prosperity. Esquilache's banishment and Raquel's death enabled aristocracy to have a privileged position next to the king.

Huerta followed the course of writing drama pieces whose topics were taken from the national history and tradition and he used data from ancient, Hispanic chronicles where the story about the Castilian king Alfonso VIII and the Jew Raquel was written. García de la Huerta managed to suppress the traditional prejudice about the Spanish being incapable of creating an original Spanish tragedy in the neoclassicism era.

The appearance of stereotypes concerning the Jews in this neoclassical tragedy shows the level of anti-Semitism in the contemporary Spanish society. Drama authors have the potential to mark the negative characters based on the elements that aren't traditional and are hostile towards the Spanish catholic society.

The tragedy *Raquel* appeared when the Spanish neoclassical tragedy, as a type of drama developed intensively. The critics agree it is the biggest achievement of this type of drama for that time, that it is the best Spanish tragedy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the best neoclassical drama.

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### Apstrakt

#### **IDEOLOGIJA I STEREOTIPI U FORMIRANJU DRAMSKIH LIKOVA TRAGEDIJE RAKEL VISENTEA GARSIIJE DE LA UERTE**

Nakon uvodnog dela rada, u kojem su predstavljene osnovne osobenosti španske neoklasičarske tragedije, autor se bavi društveno-političkom pozadinom nastanka drame Rakel. Istorijske prilike u burbonskoj Španiji tokom vladavine Karlosa III, a posebno narodna pobuna, poslužile su dramaturgu da formuliše i, u skladu sa neoklasičarskom poetikom drame, izrazi svoje ideološke preokupacije. Narodnu pobunu je podstaklo špansko plemstvo 1766. godine braneći svoje ugrožene političke interese i suprotstavljajući se sve većoj dominaciji «stranih elemenata» u političkom životu Španije. Postoji čitav niz podudarnosti između istorijskih prilika i ove drame. Konačno, u radu je predstavljena i spona između teorije vladanja, ideologije, osećanja nacionalnog identiteta i tipologije značajnijih likova u drami. Dramatrug je deo pozorišne struje koja je pisala dramska dela sa temama preuzetim iz nacionalne istorije i tradicije, te je iskoristio podatke iz drevnih hispanskih hronika, u kojima je zapisana povest o kastiljanskom kralju Alfonsu VIII i njegovoj ljubavi sa Jevrejkom Rakel. Garsija de la Uerta uspeva da savlada tradicionalne predrasude o nesposobnosti Španaca da u epohi neoklasicizma stvore originalnu špansku tragediju.

**Ključne reči:** *Visente Garsija de la Uerta, poetika neoklasicizma, „Rakel“, ideologija, didaktičnost, španska neoklasičarska tragedija.*