

# Empirical Research on Vanbilov's Drama Theme

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Abstract: Alexander Vanbilov (1937-1972), a famous Soviet dramatist, was born at Irkutsk in Siberia. He was engaged in drama creation at the local with seven dramas in whole life—"Parting in June", "Eldest son", "Catching wild ducks", "Other provincial anecdotes", "Last summer in Venturi Tomsk State", "House with window facing field" and "Dating". By using distinctive methods in these works, Vanbilov detailedly described particular trivia and emotions in ordinary people's life, which were main source of Vanbilov's works theme. In this study, Vanbilov's drama themes were analyzed from three aspects—other provincial anecdotes, home and family relationship and moral choice.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Alexander Vanbilov (1937-1972), an famous Soviet playwright, had written seven major dramas—"Parting in June", "Eldest son", "Catching wild ducks", "Other provincial anecdotes", "Last summer in Venturi Tomsk State", "House with window facing field" and "Dating". In these works, Vanbilov detailedly described particular trivia and emotions in ordinary people's life by using distinctive methods. His main works theme can be generally assorted into three aspects—other provincial life, home and family relationships and moral choice. Vanbilov's drama theme will be analyzed in detail form the three aspects.

## 2 THEME OF OTHER PROVINCIAL LIFE

Vanbilov was born at a village in Siberian, where he spent his childhood. In his works, Vanbilov always described most familiar characters—people living in other provinces (i.e. not the capital). The writers were most interested in conflicts of social psychology and ethics of people living in particular environment—other provinces. Scenes in his script usually appears in local or district center. Plots mostly occur in students' dormitory, home, cafe, tea house and restaurant with heroes of ordinary people. "Other provincial" in Vanbilov's works contain two attributes—geographical meaning and emotional and moral significance.

Vanbilov praised beautiful countryside and nature in first drama "House with window facing field". Primary school teacher Tretyakov intended to return to city. Before leaving, he went to say farewell to head of cow farm Astaffyeva. However, he was affected with the women's humor and choir's cheerful singing. Then he gave up the idea of going back to city.

Zülow in "Catching ducks" was tired of working in institute of intelligence. The only way to get rid of real-life for him was "catching ducks"—dropping into embrace of nature. He was always ready to catching ducks so as to escape from city life. It was city's living environment that made him a person of half-hearted worker, sycophant subordinate and insincere husband. In the writer's opinion, city life was chaotic, unfair and harmful to people. Youth Pascal in this drama also became unreasonable due to living in city for a few years.

The ear that Vanbilov lived in was the time of Soviet's rapid development of science and technology. Money and power became the chasing target. Many people lost their moral standards, being spiritual emptiness and life confused. At that time, "issue of science and people" was a major problem in Philosophy and Social Science. Writers viewed city as a symbol of modern science and technology development. They discussed relationship between modern technology and people moral development from "city - village - people". Being aware of such problem as well, Vanbilov manifested it in his works. He believed that city life was the main reason causing people's moral decay. Urban residents were longing for broad, fresh-aired village, forest and field. They were eager to escape bustle of urban life

and find a spiritual home in other provincial nature, becoming a free man again. Thus in Vanbilov's drama, city, other province, suburban and village were no longer geography concepts, but are endowed with symbolic meaning in philosophy.

### 3 THEME OF HOME AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

There are two subjects in Vanbilov's home drama—dream of and pursuit for home and disharmony in family, which are interweaved as well. Heroes being homeless or far away from home are one of the important themes in Vanbilov's dramas. Koresov ("Parting in June") was homeless and had to live in dormitory or lodge in Chlotuev's villa. Boskin and Sylva in "Eldest son" found a place for covering in Sarafanov's home, while Vasia and Nina had to escape from warm house. In "Last summer in Venturi Tomsk State", the investigator Sharmanov leaved home in big city to remote town of Venturi Tomsk. Sisters Valentina went far away from home to pursuit their happiness. But in the end, all the efforts were in vain. Actually, none of Vanbilov's heroes had a complete home.

Even Zülow in "Catching ducks" still felt uncomfortable after he received a dreamed residential with everything. He had a house, but cannot feel at home. An inexplicable force drove him to leave the comfort decent house. He could find nowhere to pursuit peace heart except catching ducks. It was also sublimation of his home dream to some extent.

In order to highlight spiritual and moral pillar, Vanbilov put image portrayal of house and fence in the first place. The pillar and image are interrelated and complementary. For example, Valentina often repaired fence broken by teahouse guests. Hence, concept of home had typical sense of moral and philosophical.

## 4 THEME OF MORAL CHOICE

### 4.1 "Parting in June"

Moral choice theme was not fresh in literature. Traditional stories can be divided into two types. Hero overcomes himself and successfully gets out of dilemma. Or, hero ruins for not suffering intense inner struggle. Vanbilov was intended to find a new solution. His heroes eventually obtained spiritual rebirth at a desperate situation after experiencing a long fall.

At first glance, conflict in "Parting in June" was very simple, even cliché. The soon graduate college student Koresov had to make a tough choice—being expelled from school and losing job and favorite girl, or giving up diploma and better future for being along with the girl. He did not withstand the test at the beginning. In order to obtain the diploma and favorite work, he abandoned the girl. But in the graduation party, he felt ashamed of his behavior and tore up his diploma in public.

This story seems to be very naive with an indeed cliché plot but common principle. You cannot betray love and conscience to compromise the reality. However, this work is not a simple love drama, although it is formally theme of love. A. Jemiov incisively pointed out that in this work readers "should not overestimated heroes' love" in "Vanbilov anthology" (published in 1975) after he read "Parting in June". Then, E. Gusanskaya compared different versions of the drama. She concluded that "Koresov and Tania's love did not exist in the drama, although the drama seemingly described love.". Indeed, the love it described was only Tania's love for Koresov. The hero's behavior and whole story showed that he obviously had not experienced the same feelings of Tania despite of favorable impression. Thus for him, it could be betrayal that he accepted Repnikov conditions without hesitation. However, after explanation to Tania, anxiety in Koresov's heart increased dramatically, turning into lost and desperate. Hero finally understood that he had made an ethics mistake. He had betrayed Tanja's love, even himself, just in order to obtain a diploma. In the end, he successfully withstood temptation, tearing diploma in front of everyone. He felt he was no longer the past Koresov but another person.

In this drama, Vanbilov extracted natural lifelike image from bland plots. He turned usual didactic moral into serious social and moral conflicts combined with conscience and moral choice.

The innovation of Vanbilov's dealing with moral theme was that heroes knew what to choose before decision with realization of finding problems in life and recognizing them. For example, Boskin in "Eldest son" was uncertain about love, selflessness and sympathy in human before he entered Sarafanov's home. He said: "People have thick skin not easy to be torn. But only by tearing it can people learn to trust and sympathize." In fact, Sarafanov family trusted him immediately. They treated him as son and eldest brother, talking all the family problems to him and seeking his help and support. Boskin quickly realized the cruelty of his own reckless behavior. He was faced with a lot of problems: How to do next? How to get out of the dilemma he causes? Escape? Continue to play role to

deceive others? Or confess? He engaged in a fierce struggle in the heart. At the same time, he was also worried about Sarafanov. He was unwilling to make Sarafanov pain, for this man had become his relative. With the lie slowly being lifted, Boskin found it has no practical significance whether he cheated to Sarafanov. Because Sarafanov was a "saint", Boskin saw the opportunity to choice and recognized the necessity of choice.

#### 4.2 "Catching Ducks"

Zülow was faced with a completely different choice: How to live? Whether it is worth to live? In fact, he had considered the issue long before receiving wreath. The cruel joke just became start of deep understanding of suffering. He was looking for a heart way to get out of dilemma and to be harmony with world and himself.

Viewing Zülow's life carefully, we could find his life was ordinary but with a cartoon style. Everything here was usual but very "gloomy". Disgusting work, boring entertainment, cliché topics and worthless care washed life's meaning and people's personality.

It seemed like a happy, fulfilling and comfortable world. Actually, it was artificial and unnatural unreal world, where everything lost its true meaning and value. People pretended to work, caring about nothing except own happiness. The most important things were "Do not get excited." and "Do not destroy collectively recognized game rules, even though they are absurd." The drama reflects absurd and ridiculous world. For example in one plot (place 2, scene 2), Sayabin's wife was ready to betray her husband and to date with leadership for getting desirous residence. But her husband was not ashamed, even proudly acclaiming her as "living companion.". How absurd! When Zülow witnessed all, he was shocked and could not help but say: "Yes, you have had home."

For Zülow, betrayal was common. In his world, as long as it was profitable, betrayal could happen regardless of big or small, open or concealed, others or themselves. For example, his friends had betrayed him more than once. Sayabin, one of the hero's colleagues, seemingly wanted to help Zülow get rid of suicidal thoughts. But once Zülow determined to commit suicide, he involuntarily looked at floors and walls, planning to decorate them. It seemed that Zülow had shot himself, and he had become owner of residence. Until now, the hero completely awakened: "I am still alive. What are you doing? Is it little that you own? ... Scrooge! ". Naked betrayal astonished Zülow. He had to recognize a lot of things. He continued his life with inner awake emotion, but long and complicated rebirth road just began. Vanbilov leaved an open ending.

#### 4.3 "Last Summer in Venturi Tomsk State"

Rebirth of hero is much simpler in another Vanbilov's drama—"Last summer in Venturi Tomsk State" with Sharmanov. Moreover, his choice reflects more distinct social significance.

At the beginning, Sharmanov showed in front of us was indifferent to everything around, even himself. He thought that nothing was important and he wanted nothing. Lazy and snooze had controlled him. Everyone knew Valentin's love for him, but he did not take note of the feeling. Finally, it was Valentin's confession that drove him awake. He found himself again as part of the world. "All come back: night, streets, forest. I'm walking in the forest with grass, trees, scent. I firstly feel these words fresh after birth.". All were active again in his life. Sharmanov also found his responsibility and ability to participate in and improve life like before.

### 5 CONCLUSIONS

Vanbilov has a very deep understanding of life, and can express life in particular way. With characteristics of life being fully presented, life in Vanbilov's writings is more active, impressive and powerful. Vanbilov successfully captures essence of modern life, and creates a unique theatrical world. Vanbilov's dramas are full of authenticity. Each of his dramas will not lose reality despite of time lapse.

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