

Olha Maksymchuk

## THE TOPOS OF THE MISSING BELOVED IN IOAN MAKSYMOVYCH'S *THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD*

The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine

*Abstract:* The purpose of the paper is to investigate the reception of topos of the missing beloved in the poem *The Virgin Mother of God* written by Ioan Maksymovych. The topos is characterized by the combination of images from the Song of Songs with the motif of Christ's Passion, which can also be noticed in other Ukrainian poetical texts written in the XVII and XVIII Centuries. Moreover, the apocryphal motif of the lament of the Mother of God has an influence on the stylistics of the topos.

*Keywords:* Song of Songs, topos, the Baroque poetry, motif of Passion, Mariology

The role of the Bible in the development of the Ukrainian literature seems to be not easy to overestimate. Therefore, in the post-Soviet literary criticism, the examination of the use of Biblical motifs in writings of Ukrainian authors is considered to be an important and promising area of research.

Slavicist Dmytro Chyzhevskiy observes the special religious character of the Ukrainian literature of the XVII and XVIII Centuries [15, 116]. The Song of Songs altogether with other Biblical books is a constant source of images and motifs for the writers whose works are attributed to the Baroque style.

Among the most popular motifs from the Song of Songs which were adapted to the Ukrainian Baroque literature, there is a story about a missing beloved who was found after a prolonged searching by his bride (Cant 3:1-4, 5:2-9). The story appears in Ukrainian texts of different genres written in either prose or verse: the col-

lection of sermons *The Didactic Gospel* (*Євангеліє Учителное*, 1619) by Kyrylo Trankvilion Stavrovetskyi, the dialogue *A Meditation on the Passion of Christ, our Savior* (*Розмышляньє о муць Христа, спасителя нашего*, 1631) by Yoanykii Volkvych, the drama *A Comedy on the Dormition of the Mother of God* (*Комедія на Успеніє Богородицы*, ca. 1677) by Dymytrii Tuptalo, the collection of sermons *A Garland for Christ's Wreath* (*Вънец Христов*, 1688) by Antonii Radyvylovskiy, the anonymous drama *The Triumph of Human Nature* (*Торжество Естества Человѣческаго*, 1706), the poetical works *The Virgin Mother of God* (*Богородице Дѣво*, 1707) and *The Eight Gospel Beatitudes* (*Осм блаженств євангельських*, 1709) by Ioan Maksymovych, the dialogues *Narcissus* (*Наркисс*, ca. 1769-1771), *The Book of Achsah* (*Книга Асхань*, no exact date), *A Discussion, Called Two* (*Бєсьда, нареченная Двое*, no exact date), and *Lot's Wife* (*Жена Лотова*, ca. 1780-



1788) by Hryhorii Skovoroda, and the anonymous poem *A Song on Christ's Passion* (*Пѣснь на страсти Христови*) from the collection of devotional hymns *The Praise Book* (*Богогласник*, 1790).

It seems that in poetry, the same as in verse dramas, there is a certain dominating interpretation of the topos of the missing beloved. Usually, in such type of writings, the beloved symbolizes Jesus Christ while His last temptations and sufferings (e. g. Volkovych's *A Meditation on the Passion of Christ, our Savior*, the anonymous *The Triumph of Human Nature*, Maksymovych's *The Virgin Mother of God*, the anonymous *A Song on Christ's Passion*, etc).

The tradition to see in the figures of young lovers from the Song of Songs the Savior and the Church, or the pious soul, or even the Virgin Mary, was established by first Christian theologians. Hippolytus of Rome and Origen comprehend the Song of Songs as a prophesy about the first coming of Christ to the earth. Their principles of interpretation served as an example for their successors – Eastern and Western Church Fathers.

The Passion symbols or the descriptions of Christ's suffering and death are perceived in the text of Song of Songs by Origen, Ambrose of Milan, Philo of Carpasia, and Cyril of Jerusalem [10, 155], [16; 57, 82], [6]. Such understanding of the hidden, mysterious sense of the book was inherited from the patristic works by the Ukrainian authors of the XVII and XVIII Centuries who sometimes composed images from the Song of Songs with the motif of the Lord's Passion. Baroque writers created a literary topos in which the story about the missing beloved was regarded as the prediction of the capture of Christ and His three-day absence in the land of liv-

ing after the crucifixion. Using the terminology of Northrop Frye, it could be said that the type of the Old Testament story is transformed into the antitype of the Gospel events [14, 127–128].

As already mentioned, usually the correlation between the topos of the missing beloved and the motif of Christ's Passion appears in texts which are written in verse. One of the Ukrainian Baroque poets who elaborate the topos in his works is Ioan Maksymovych, alumnus of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Bishop and Archbishop of Chernihiv, and Metropolitan of Tobolsk. The research aim of this paper is to examine the interpretation of the topos of the missing beloved in *The Virgin Mother of God*, the poetic book of Ioan Maksymovych, published in Chernihiv in 1707. Analyzing literary topoi requires from the researcher to resort to the thematological approach.

For further research, it is necessary to specify the meaning of the term "topos" which is applied in this paper: Janina Abramowska states that the topos concerns the thematic unit which is narrower than the theme or the image [1, 359–360]. For example, the image of the garden serves as a basis for developing of the entire bunch of topoi among which are: the garden of delight, the garden of countenance, the garden of soul, etc [1, 362]. All of them concretize the image with somewhat fixed descriptions and interpretations. Ernst Robert Curtius, long before Janina Abramowska, suggested to use the term of topos defining it as a literary commonplace derived from the rhetorical techniques. Topoi are reproduced in different texts belonged to the same tradition accordingly to certain commonly accepted patterns. For instance, in the European

literature created under the influence of the classical antiquity, the topos of the pleasant place (*locus amoenus*) usually includes the mentions of bird songs, murmur of brooks, fragrances of flowers and shadow of the branchy trees [7, 220–225].

So, the main feature of the topos is its permanence in form and usage. The topos occurs in texts connected by the impact of the same tradition and has some components which are repeated almost invariably.

Ukrainian Baroque poets elaborate the topos of the missing beloved following the more or less stable pattern. As a rule, the topos of the missing beloved contains the denotations of the urban space where the story takes place: streets, crossroads, and squares. These city markers correlate with Cant 3:2 (“I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth”)<sup>1</sup>. Then, elaborating the topos of the missing beloved authors usually refer to the encounter of the girl with daughters of Jerusalem which is described in the Biblical book (Cant 5:8–9): “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love. What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?”<sup>2</sup> Finally, the topos often includes such stylistic devices as

<sup>1</sup> In the Ostroh Bible: “Въстану убо и обыйду въ градъ, и на тръжищех и на стогнахъ, поищу егоже възлюби душа моя.”

<sup>2</sup> In the Ostroh Bible: “Заклях вы дщери іерусалимскія в силах и в крѣпостех села. Аще обрящете брата моего [възвѣстите] ему, яко уязвленна любовію аз есмь. Что брат твой от брата, добрая в женах, что брат твой от брата, яко тако заклѣ нас.”

exclamations, addresses, and questions. They are the part of the speech of the bride and directed to the interlocutors – the daughters of Jerusalem and even to the absent beloved. Similar stylistic peculiarities can be found in the text of the Song of Songs (Cant 3:3,5; 5:8–9). All of the listed features are inherent to the examples of the topos of the missing beloved in the writing of Ioan Maksymovych.

Archbishop Ihor (Isichenko) defines the genre of *The Virgin Mother of God* as a metaphysical poem [4, 422]. In his work, Ioan Maksymovych glorifies the Blessed Mary recounting the main events of her terrestrial life and the prophecies from the Old Testament which foresaw Mary’s role in the salvation of humankind. The topos of the missing beloved is used in the poem twice. Each time Jesus is represented as a lost beloved whereas Christ’s Mother stands for the bride. The Mariological interpretation of the Song of Songs according to which the image of the bride symbolizes the Virgin Mary has their adepts in the Christian exegesis. One of the first theologians who proposed such an explanation is the respected in Baroque Ukraine Church Father Ambrose of Milan with his *On the Birth of a Virgin and the Perpetual Virginity of Mary* [2, 195–198]. He was succeeded by Hugh of Saint Victor, Rupert of Deutz, Alan of Lille, and other Western Christian exegetes [19, 151–170]. The Mariological explanation of the Song of Song can also be distinguished in the sermons of John of Damaskus whose works were known in Early Modern Ukraine [5; 257, 268, 271, 281, 296].

It seems that Ukrainian authors of the XVII and XVIII centuries are well acquainted with the principles of the



Mariological understanding of the Song of Songs. They can be accepted either directly from the commentaries on the Biblical book or through the mediation of other European literatures.

For example, in 1607 Polish poet Stanislaw Grochowski publishes his adaptation of the first part of *Floridorum libri octo* (*Eight Books of Floridorum*), the poetical collection of German Jesuit Jacobus Pontanus. In his *Wirydarz abo Kwiatki rymów duconnych* (*The Garden or Flowers of Spiritual Rhymes*), Grochowski follows Pontanus in the usage of the love language from the Song of Songs when describing Mary's affection towards her newborn Son [17, 23–26]. So the penetration of the Mariological interpretation of the Song of Songs into the European literatures could serve as an example for some Ukrainian authors who were familiar with the tendencies of the cultural life in catholic countries.

The text of *The Virgin Mother of God* is divided into several parts most of which begin with words from the Orthodox version of the *Hail Mary* prayer. The content of parts correlates with their headings; so is the “chapter” where the topos of the missing beloved is mentioned. This part of the poem commences with the exclamation from the angelic salutation “The Lord is with thee.” Accordingly to the design of the text, the fragment contains the examples from the Holy Scripture that provide the proofs of the spiritual intimacy between Christ and His Mother. For instance, Maksymovych paraphrases the story from the Gospel of Luke wherein the twelve-year-old Jesus is preaching in the Jerusalem temple while the worried Blessed Mary tries to find Him in the city (Lk 2:41–52). In the poem of the

Ukrainian author, the Mother of God is desperately looking for her Son:

“Возопи з воплем многим: о чадо сотвори  
 Что нам тако? Радост нам во слези  
 претвори,  
 Гдѣ обѣтаєшися? Гдѣ перебуваєши?  
 Кто тя питаєт свѣте? Як почиваєши?  
 Во всем житіи моем єдина утѣха,  
 Возываю, обходя стогны, без успѣха,  
 Почто тебе пояхом во путь со собою?  
 Почто не удержан бѣ за десницу мною?  
 [...] Призри Небесный Отче на горкія  
 слезы,  
 Обходя стогны града, омакаю стезы.  
 [...] Не могу бо без него мало время жити,  
 И збираю умърти, неже не видѣти  
 Возлюбленна моего, и твоего Сына,  
 Он ми в житіи моем надежда єдина.  
 [...] О прелюбезный Сыне! Вижд  
 въздыханія,  
 Оуслыши сердечная моя моленія.  
 Изяви минѣ зрак свой, слышан сотвори  
 глас,  
 Да не буду сотерта яко пшеничный клас”  
 [8, f136r–f137r].

(She cried out with a loud cry: “My child what have you done with us? You have turned our joy into tears. Where are you dwelling? Where are you living? Who nourishes you my light? How do you repose? You are the only comfort of my life. Going about the streets I am calling you on without success. Why did I take you with me on the journey? Why did I not keep your hand in mine? [...] Beg you the Celestial Father to look at my tears. Going about the streets of the city I pour out my tears on my way. [...] I cannot live without him for a minute. I would like to die if not seeing my beloved and your Son who is the only hope of my life. [...] Oh my dearest Son! See my sights and hear the praying of my heart! Let me see your countenance, and let me hear your voice lest I be rubbed like a wheat spike.”)

The resemblance of this scene to the story of searching from the Song

of Songs lies in mentioning of the city streets where the bride (or Mary) is walking around. The Blessed Virgin names Jesus her beloved as if He were her lover. Numerous rhetorical addresses and questions to the absent Christ link this fragment of the poem with the other examples of the topos of the missing beloved in the Ukrainian Baroque texts. For instance, the same features can be discerned in the monologue of the allegorical figure of the Piety from the anonymous Ukrainian school drama *The Triumph of the Human Nature* [13, 239–240]. Praying of Mary (“Let me see your countenance, and let me hear your voice”) refers to Cant 2:14: “...Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”<sup>3</sup> Although being usually attributed to the bridegroom instead of the bride, these words remind readers of the permanent interchange of separations and reunions which characterizes the story line of the Song of Songs. Thus it can be scarcely doubted that the Ukrainian author appeals to the Song of Songs in attempts to connect the episode from the Gospel of Luke with the topos of the missing beloved.

It is necessary to indicate that in the cited passages of the poem Maksymovych likens the topos to the lament of the Mother of God. This common in the Ukrainian Baroque literature motif was developed under the influences of the folklore and Western songs devoted to the suffering of Madonna beneath the cross which were in their turn derived from Syrian and Byzantium laments [12, 26]. Mary's cry over her missing twelve-year-old Son is similar to the weeping of the Mother of God on

the Golgotha. According to the evangelist Luke, Mary and Josef were seeking Jesus during a long period of time, and only “after three days they found him in the temple” (Lk 2:46). For the Ukrainian Baroque authors who constantly look for analogies and parallels in the books of the Bible, the finding of Christ after his three-day absence can symbolize His death and resurrection. This is possibly why the topos of the missing beloved combined with the short episode from the Jesus' childhood is connected by Maksymovych with the popular in Baroque Ukraine motif of the lament of the Mother of God.

Further in the same part of the poem, Maksymovych uses the topos of the missing beloved once more. As well as in the previous fragment, the author elaborates the topos adding the connotations of the lament motif. Therefore, one can presume that these two interpretations of the topos are related with one another. The second example of the topos is dominant because it contains more allusions to the Song of Songs. Moreover, it is directly associated with the motif of Christ's Passion which is the feature that usually characterizes the topos of the missing beloved in other poetical texts of the Ukrainian Baroque literature. In *The Virgin the Mother of God*, the first example of the topos is a preparation or prediction of the next one so far as the story of the three-day loss of the child Jesus betokens His future violent death. Mary, then, is seeking her adult Son on the streets of Jerusalem while He was captured and sentenced to execution:

“Марія в Єрусалим с прочіими прийде,  
И вся стогны градскіе ищущи обійде.  
Мню, многажды возопи: о граждански  
дщеры,

<sup>3</sup> In the Ostroh Bible: “Яви ми зрак твой, и услышан сътвори ми глас твой.”



Отверзѣте внутрнѣе мнѣ вси своя дѣвери.  
 На одрѣ бо поискахъ, всѣ стогны обѣйдохъ,  
 В Єрусалим печална зѣло скорбна  
 прѣйдохъ.  
 Ни от кого малѣйшой не имѣю вѣсти,  
 Что сотворю? Взыщу ли, или имамъ състи.  
 Востану, и обѣйду убо стогни града,  
 Попрошу в распутіяхъ избраннаго стада.  
 О превозлюбленіи! Аще гдѣ видѣсте,  
 Слышасте возлюбленна ми, ли сами  
 вѣсте.  
 Тако ей обходящей от стражей  
 взысканна,  
 Чрезъ николико время от ныхъ удержанна.  
 Могла рещи зъ душою боголюбивою,  
 По своемъ возлюбленномъ зѣло  
 плачливою.  
 Ємши мя стражи нощны биша и язвиша,  
 В поруганіяхъ єдва живу отпустиша.  
 Дщери Єрусалимски, паки возываю,  
 Извѣстѣте любима, гдѣ ест? Ожидаю,  
 Видѣте ли егоже душа моя любитъ,  
 И чрезъ долгое время безперестанно  
 трудитъ" [8, f147v–f148r].

(Mary came with others to Jerusalem, and seeking her Son she made the round of all city streets. I think she cried out many times: "Oh daughters of the city please open me your inside doors. On the bed I sought him; all streets I was walking around. I came to Jerusalem being sad and much sorrowful. I do not have the least knowledge about him. What shall I do? Shall I seek or shall I settle down? I shall rise now, and go about the streets of the city. I shall inquire of him on the crossroads of the chosen flock. Oh my dearests! Have you anywhere seen my beloved? Have you heard about him or do you know anything about him?" While she was going around she was caught by watchmen. During awhile she was detained. She could say within her God-loving soul grieving for her beloved: "The watchmen smote me and wounded me; after having mocked me they released me

when I was more dead than alive. Oh daughters of Jerusalem I appeal to you once more: let me know where my beloved is? I am waiting for him. Have you seen him whom my soul loves and whom it seeks for a long time?")

It is apparent that the second example of the topos of the missing beloved is more dependent from the third and the fifth chapters of the Song of Songs than the previous fragment of the poem. Mary looks for her Son on the streets and crossroads of Jerusalem (Cant 3:2) where she comes across its inhabitants, namely, the daughters of Jerusalem (Cant 5:8). In her ceaseless search, she penetrates into their houses and seeks Jesus even in the inner chambers and bedrooms of the buildings (Cant 3:1). Her dialogue with the girls contains rhetorical appeals, exclamations, and questions. This stylistic peculiarity occurs in the conversation from the first fragment of the poem as well and is a constant feature of the topos of the missing beloved in the Ukrainian Baroque poetry. The dangerous meeting with the watchmen is also a part of the story line of the Song of Songs (Cant 5:7).

However, not only the Bible has an impact on the second example of the topos in Maksymovych's poem. The wanderings of the Blessed Virgin resemble the apocryphal story from the *Passion*, the manuscript found by Stepan Teslevtsiovych and published by Ivan Franko [3, 235]. In the apocryphal text, Mary has a presentiment of the approaching catastrophe and tries to persuade her Son to stay with her and not to start out for Jerusalem. Still Christ leaves His Mother and goes to the mortal anguish. Mary follows him in effort to prevent the tragedy:

"В той час, коли Христа мучено,  
 пресвятая Богородица чула на души



своєю, иж то нерядно чинит ся над Сыном єь. И уставши бѣгла борзо в пятницу до Іерусалиму видѣти, що ся чинит над Сыном єь наймилшим. И приходячи до ворот стрѣтила там єдиного челоуѣка; станет єго звѣдовати, що ся чинит у Єрусалимѣ и где єст Сын мой?" [3, 232]

(Meanwhile, when Christ was tortured, the most Blessed Mother of God felt by her heart that something was wrong with her Son. And arising she run quickly to Jerusalem on Friday to see what was happening with her dearest Son. And coming to the gates (of the city – *O. M.*) she met a man and began to interrogate him: "What is happening in Jerusalem and where is my Son?")

So in the *Passion*, the Blessed Virgin goes to the capital of Israel to look for Christ while He was seized and sentenced to death. The patterns of this story line remind readers of the second interpretation of the topos of the missing beloved in the poem written by Maksymovych. Franko states that the Ukrainian manuscript is a translation of the Polish *Passion* which he failed to find [3, 235]. It is probable that this apocryphal text or its variations were known to the authors of the Early Modern Ukraine and could have an influence on Maksymovych and his work.

To sum up, in *The Virgin Mother of God*, the metaphysical poem of Ioan Maksymovych, there are two different but meanwhile connected representations of the topos of the missing beloved. In both examples, the author combines images accepted from the Song of Songs (city streets and crossroads, figures of lovers, daughters of Jerusalem, and watchmen) with the motif of Christ's Passion. At first the allusions to the crucifixion of Jesus

are implicit as the topos is used when paraphrasing the Gospel story about the disappearance of the twelve-year-old Jesus. The grief of the Mother who lost her boy reminds readers of Mary's suffering at the cross of Christ. In the second example, the connection of the topos with the motif of Lord's Passion is explicit. When Jesus is to be crucified, Mary knowing nothing about it goes to look for her Son on the streets of Jerusalem. Maksymovych describes her search as if she were the bride from the Song of Song who tries to find her beloved. The motif of the lament of the Mother of God and the apocryphal story about Mary's wandering around Jerusalem streets have probably an impact on the variations of the topos in the poem of Ioan Maksymovych.

Besides the topos of the missing beloved, there are many others images and motifs which were implanted from the Song of Songs to the Ukrainian Baroque literature. The aim of the further researches will be to explore their receptions and interpretations in the diverse texts written by Ukrainian authors of the XVII and XVIII Centuries.

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