

Title: From Ridiculous to Sublime: The Tragicomedy of Characters in Vampilov's "Duck Hunting."

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In this paper I explore the character development in the most well known play of Aleksandr Vampilov (1937–1972). Relatively little work has been done on the nature of the dramatic character in Vampilov's "Duck Hunting" (1967). Continuing the Gogolian grotesque tradition in Russian drama, Vampilov's play presents a buffoon, Zilov, as its main protagonist. In the play social satire and the individualization of character are paradoxically combined. In my paper I argue that Zilov's character acquires individuality through elements of the absurd and the grotesque. These elements allow him to transcend the narrow scope of daily routine and the particularities of the social agenda of the period. Like Shakespearean protagonists, Zilov questions and responds to the most intrinsic human values. In my paper I will try to answer the following questions: what gives Zilov individuality and makes "Duck Hunting" stand out among other dramatic works of its time? How does Vampilov reach a unique balance between the buffoon type of the protagonist and the individuality of his character?

The paper explores the origins of Zilov's buffoonery and the deep dramatic effect of his character. I will also touch upon the affinity between "Duck Hunting" and its precursors vis-a-vis plot: A. V. Sukhovo-Kobylin's comedy-joke "The Death of Tarelkin" (1869) and N. R. Erdman's comedy "The Suicide" (1928). While the plays are similar in terms of theme and theatricality, I will focus on the protagonists' sham deaths, used in each play to turn performance into life. I argue that Vampilov's use of the fantastic is subtler and more profound. Initiating the genre of urban grotesque, Vampilov sets out to prove that the absurd is often but a different aspect of the truth.

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