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The Main Messages of Modern Ukrainian Political Cartoons as Humorous Creolized Text

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Abstract. The modern Russian-Ukrainian war revived the genre of political caricature as humorous creolized text. This allows conveying the important political, social and philosophical messages to a wider audience in an entertaining format through satirical drawings, in particular to actively influence the formation of public opinion. The illustrations are taken from the authors' Facebook pages. These works have been posted in public places by their authors and are available for free viewing.

Keywords: political cartoons; public opinion; message; satirical graphics poster

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Objectives of political cartoon. Political discourse in its different genre space is in the focus of increased public attention since the beginning of Russian aggression in Ukraine. The modern Russian-Ukrainian war revived the genre of political caricature – “an artistic vehicle characterized by both metaphorical and satirical language. It may point out the contexts, problems, and discrepancies of a political situation (...). During the process of rendering opinions into such a visual form, many artistic decisions (regarding symbols, allegories, techniques, composition, and so forth) must be made (...). When successful, political cartoons can fulfill an important criticizing and controlling function in society. In addition, political cartoons can

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encourage the process of opinion formation and decision making as well as provide entertaining perspectives on the news” (Knieper, 2007).

Political cartoons and public opinions. The message of a creolized political cartoon with the focus on its comical aspect is primarily opinion-oriented medium. The subject of political cartoons is usually connected with the current and breaking political events. In order to understand the meaning of political caricature, the recipients should have some basic knowledge about the subject of the satirical image, as well as have a more or less broad erudition to understand the subtleties and the author’s subtext. Paradoxes and puns usually help to create a comic effect, make allusions, and touch the creative imagination.

Orest Symotiuk, a leading Ukrainian researcher of political cartoons, identifies their following genre features and functions, like as: a hybrid text consisting of verbal and non-verbal elements; a genre of journalism; visual and satirical commentary; a means of propaganda and influence on the audience. According to Orest Symotiuk, the cartoon serves as a tool of political communication; it contributes to the formation of the image of a country/political figure, as well as the socio-cultural picture of a particular nation and the world as a whole (Symotiuk, 2021).

Political cartoons and democratic values. The importance of democratic values in satire in general and in political cartoons in particular cannot be overestimated. The tradition of political satire has long and deep roots: the invective as a genre of sharp denunciation close to the pamphlet dates back to antiquity. Sharp sketches with a little commentary have always served as a serious element in the positive transformations of democratic society. Many contemporary periodicals use satirical graphics to reflect their views on political and social morality. The sharp humour in the combination of picture and text to criticize various aspects of political and social life is invariably popular with readers. Freedom has turned satirical drawings into a strong weapon of opposition. Moreover, there is no taboo for personalities, including the top people of any country: members of the government, prime minister and the president or members of European royal dynasties. All more or less famous people of the country can come under the fire of criticism and become the target of political caricature.



Ukrainian political cartooning culture.

Ukrainian comic culture has a long and unbroken tradition: from “a magical fusion of sad laughter and smiling sadness” (Stepan Shevryyov) in “The Word of Danylo Zatochnyk”, in Ukrainian burlesque poetry, Hryhorii Skovoroda’s diatribes, Ivan Kotliarevskyi’s “Aeneid”, and the sparkling humour of Mykola Gogol. During the 20th century, not only the writers (Ostap Vyshnia, Fedir Makivchuk, Stepan Oliynyk) but also Ukrainian artists contributed to political debates with their smart, proper, and at the

same time “sharp” drawings. In 1922, a humorous illustrated magazine “Chervonyi Perets” (Red pepper) was set up in Kharkiv.

The periodical went through several waves of closure due to the lack of funding (1922) and repressions (1927-1934), after the editors were accused of subverting the work of the party and the working class in building a socialist Ukraine. In 1946, the magazine was resumed under the name “Perets” (Pepper). Its popularity and circulation peaked in the 1980s (3.5 million copies). Kateryna Yermieieva writes that “Perets was a transmitter of official political humour, through which the Soviet government tried to control the society, establish normativity of a certain way of social behaviour, fight deviance, conceptualize political topics in everyday life, and doubt the competence of certain minor statesmen and officials. The magazine, like the other satirical publications in the USSR, was aimed at fighting with certain social vice and forming the system of values necessary for the authorities” (Yermieieva, 2016: 14). The researcher claims: “The authors of the magazine mostly focused on ridiculing the drawbacks of Soviet everyday life, rather than on foreign policy issues. Starting with the second half of the 1950s, the content of the magazine was gradually negated, with problems being portrayed less and less as “local excesses” and more and more as a systemic crisis. Increasingly, instead of focusing on creating the myth of a worker-hero, the emphasis was shifted to the consumer’s rights of Soviet citizens. In contrast to the topics related to Soviet everyday life, the depiction of capitalist countries from the late 1970s onwards saw a reduction in the scale of the problems depicted, and by the late 1980s life in the West was already being portrayed as better than in the USSR. Unlike in the 1940s and 1950s, since the period of stagnation in the establishment of a positive emotional regime, the actualization of

the basic ideological myth took place mainly in the context of Soviet holidays. This led to a gap between the sacred (ideology) and the profane (everyday life)” (Yeremieieva, 2016, p. 15).

In the history of independent Ukraine, the magazine lost its sharpness, as the socio-political topics of the Soviet period ceased to be relevant, and the challenges of modern times required different approaches. In 2013, the magazine ceased to exist, but since 2017 it has resumed its work on a volunteer basis under the name “Pepper. Happy Republic” in electronic format (Perets’. Vesela respublika).

Ukrainian caricature of wartime period. Since 2022 the satirical political discourse in Ukraine gets new forms. There has been a complete reset of the value attitude towards the state and the mental sense of Ukrainianness, including a surge in the responsibility and effectiveness of artists on the cultural front. “Ukraine found itself at the epicenter of the modern geopolitical crisis (...) After the Russian invasion of Ukraine almost all the artists (painters, poets, even researchers) stated that they had felt shock, stress and inability to tear themselves away from the horrific flow of news from both the occupied territories and those under constant fire during the first weeks of the war. For a while the creative process stopped completely... And no wonder! It is impossible to abstract from the horrors of war and create an attractive world of love, goodness and beauty. After a while aesthetic reflection switched to what worried us and what continues to concern us most: the fate of Ukraine and belief in the complete victory of our country” (Shevchuk, 2022, p. 74).

Ukrainian cartoonists Viktor Holub, Oleh Hutsol, Oleksandr Dubovskyi, George Klyuchnyk, Viktor Kudin, Oleksii Kustovskyi, Oleh Loktev, Ihor Lukianchenko, Valerii Momot, Oleh Smal, Leonid Storozhuk, Oleh Shupliak, Yuri Zhuravel create contemporary visions of the Russian-Ukrainian war through the prism of humour and satire.

The works of contemporary artists are generally a reaction to all current political events, which are reflected in the context of their critical and satirical and humorous perception, reinforced by the existential challenges of military confrontation and horrors. The image of the Ukrainian defender is empowered with all possible virtues. A lot of allusions are connected with the collective image of the Ukrainian Cossack armed with advanced weapons; heroes of Ukrainian folklore (Mamai), literary prototypes (blacksmith Vakula):



Oleksiy Kustovskyi.
Hymers works



Oleksiy Kustovskyi.
Дуель



Oleksiy Kustovskyi..
Blacksmith Vakula

Artist Nikita Titov has created a collection of posters “I never thought I would wear this uniform, but this is my land!” for the project “позивний Україна” of the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation. They depict real people of different professions who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine to defend their homeland from the enemy invasion. In December 2022, on the occasion of the Day of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan exhibited the posters by Nikita Titov during a month, dedicated to people of peaceful professions in Ukraine who donned military uniforms to defend their land from the enemy.



Nikita Titov.
Andriy Yastrebov, two-time
Ironman world champion,
coach



Nikita Titov.
Artem Polezhaka, poet



Nikita Titov.
Radio DJ.

Both the Ukrainian defender and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU / ЗСУ) in general are portrayed with respect and admiration in contemporary Ukrainian oil paintings and posters as an Army of Light defending its land. The abbreviation ЗСУ is compared to the three pillars on which the state is based.



Nikita Titov.
The heart of the Armed Forces
of Ukraine



Олег Шупляк.
Armed Forces of Ukraine
(canvas, oil, 70x70)



Oleksiy Kustovskyi.
The mighty coat of arms
of indomitable Ukraine.

The cartoonists reflect on Z-propaganda and its destructive impact. It concerns the deluded Russian consumer who supports the war and the part of the Russian-speaking population in the east of the country that supported the “Russian world” in 2014 but now has seen its true face and intentions. The cartoon by Heorhiy Kliuchnyk depicts a mentally retarded woman praying in front of a television set, on which the face of the aggressor country’s leader is recognizable. The wall of the poor apartment is decorated with Orthodox crosses, as the Russian Orthodox Church has blessed the war and the flags of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic and the Russian Federation with the words “Russia, come!”. In the second part of the satirical miniature, the author demonstrates the result of the woman’s prayers: an armed rushist breaks into the house, killing her.



Georgy Klyuchnik.
Did you call me?



Oleksiy Kustovskyi.
Z- propaganda

The artists depict the war from different perspectives. A special emphasis is placed on the misery of children who suffer from psychological trauma during bombings, lose their parents, and are deported.



Viktor Golub.
Do you want a candy?



Nikita Titov. Poster
“Ukrainian children”



Oleksiy Kustovskiy.
Dolls save

In spring 2022, during the occupation of northern Ukraine, the whole world was shocked to see the depravity and looting of the ruskist troops who robbed Ukrainian homes and sent the bloody gifts to their families through Belarus. They consisted of basic household items: washing machines, toilets, appliances, clothes, toys. A washing machine and a toilet bowl have become the symbols of Russian success in contemporary caricature.



Oleg Shuplyak.
The ruskist's walgal.



Yuriy Zhuravel
Bloody gifts



Oleksiy Kustovskiy.
Fur coats for the occupiers widows
in Donbas.



Oleksiy Kustovskiy. Gollum.

An important political message is to portray the image of the enemy as laughable or disdainful and disgusting. The artist Oleh Shuplyak created a series of paintings entitled “Androphages in Ukraine”, motivated by information about the existence of a rushist fighter with the call sign ‘Ogre’. He became known after propaganda

media made a video about him and his appeal to mobilized Russian soldiers. During the fourth month of his stay in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Armed Forces liquidated the ‘Ogre’ in November 2022. Androphage in Greek means cannibal, ogre. According to Herodotus, this tribe lived in the north of Scythia, where the territory of modern Russia is. The Androphages had the most savage customs among the Scythians and their neighbors; they had no rights or laws. Thus, in Oleg Shuplyak’s cycle “Androphages in Ukraine”, the images of Russian invaders are endowed with the features of savage creatures who are not familiar with civilization and the basics of morality.



Oleg Shuplyak.
Androphage
expulsion



Oleg Shuplyak.
Ukrainian forest



Oleg Shuplyak.
Scum in Ukraine



Oleksiy Kustovskiy.
kremlin skeleton.

Conclusions

Full or at least partial understanding of the meaning of a political caricature is possible through an adequate perception of its visual-spatial images and verbal component. Visual and verbal codes, in turn, interact with the social, cultural and ideological code of the nation, without knowledge of which it is impossible to understand the deep meaning of the message. The elements included in the core of the cognitive space of a certain national culture may be little known to representatives of other cultures. Modern Ukrainian caricaturists, whose works are displayed on world-class portals, perform an important culture-creating function. They reveal the global features of the Ukrainian mental code, introduce official state symbols, literary and folklore images. They attract the attention of interested readers who are familiar with the realities of the political situation and want to learn more about Ukraine and the current political situation in the country through political cartoons.

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