



THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A PRETENDER: FALSE DMITRY I IN EARLY 17TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN CULTURE — FROM DEMONIC FOE TO ADVENTUROUS ARCHETYPE

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Abstract. *This article examines the evolution of the image of False Dmitry I within the cultural landscape of the Time of Troubles. Based on an analysis of historical songs, legends, and early literary monuments (such as "The Tale and Story of Grishka Otrepyev" and the "Annals" by Katyrev-Rostovsky), the author identifies the mechanisms behind the formation of the Pretender's negative persona under the influence of state propaganda. Special attention is paid to the providential interpretation of events, the attribution of anti-Christian traits to the protagonist, and the gradual emergence of adventurous and heroic qualities in his literary portrait.*

Keywords: *False Dmitry I, the Pretender, Time of Troubles, folklore, providentialism, infernalization of the image, Old Russian literature, Grigory Otrepyev.*

The image of the Pretender False Dmitry I finds its initial embodiment in works of oral folk art — historical songs and legends that reflect the spirit of the national struggle in Russia at the beginning of the 17th century. The formation of folkloric genres during this period occurred under significant pressure from the government propaganda of Tsars Vasily Shuysky and Mikhail Romanov. In order to legitimize and strengthen the authority of the ruling power, the image of False Dmitry was subjected to deliberate infernalization, acquiring the traits of a "false" and unrighteous tsar.

A central place in this process is occupied by the historical song "Grishka Otrepyev," preserved in manuscripts from the early 17th century. According to official censorship, it condemns the heretical behavior of the defrocked monk, while his accession to the throne is interpreted within the framework of medieval providentialism as a manifestation of God's wrath. Folk tradition attributed the Pretender's "mortal sins" to his marriage to a woman of a different faith, the violation of church fasts, and the holding of wedding celebrations on the eve of Orthodox holidays. This demonization was so persistent that folk legends as late as the 19th century preserved a story about the Pretender's pact with the devil, according to which he received the Muscovite state in exchange for his soul.

In literary works of the early 17th century, the providentialist motif also plays a leading role. However, the interpretation of the image here becomes more complex and dynamic. While at the beginning of "The Tale and Story of Grishka Otrepyev," the Pretender appears as a "punishment" sent to Boris Godunov for the murder of Tsarevich Dmitry, he later transforms into a "forerunner of the Antichrist," sent to punish the entire





MODERN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS

nation. Literature expanded the folkloric set of epithets, labeling False Dmitry a "false prophet" and a "most crafty heretic," which made his assassination appear in the eyes of contemporaries as a truly God-pleasing act.

Nevertheless, following the principles of medieval historicism, writers did not limit themselves to creating a purely negative portrait. Due to the detailed description of the Pretender's adventure and the inclusion of complimentary accounts from foreigners, the image began to be endowed with traits of an adventurous-heroic archetype. Certain positive qualities and the exceptional nature of the character are found even in the verbal portraits of that time, such as in the "Annals" (Letopisnaya Kniga) by Katyrev-Rostovsky, indicating the ambiguity in the perception of this historical figure in Russian culture.

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