

THE HISTORY OF GERMANY IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the subject of the perception of German history of the twentieth-century in German drama of the turn of XX – XXI centuries. After the Second World War, German writers often refer to historical facts in their works. The theme of guilt and responsibility becomes the key, which is reconsidered in the literature over the past 60 years. In the last decade to the forefront of the drama come not so much historical events and attitude towards them, but a person inside these events. This article analyzes the plays "Vatersprache ("Language of the father," 2002) by A. Ostermaier, "Der Stein" ("The Stone", 2008) by M. von Meyenburg and "Kein Schiff wird kommen" ("No Ship will come", 2010) by N.-M. Stockmann. The central theme of these works becomes the reflection of past events – the Second World War and the Holocaust, divided Germany and the "revolutionary" 60-ies, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the country. Analysis of dramas allows to conclude that young people are abandoning their past, which causes the crisis of personality of the characters. In addition, on the background of the ousting of the past arises the problem of German identity. Renouncing the history, the heroes abandon their parents, language, native country.

Keywords: *German drama, the latest German drama, Ostermaier, Mayenburg, Stockmann, the theme of guilt, the historical facts in the literature, interpretation of the history in drama, the theme of memory, the theme of oblivion.*

INTRODUCTION

For more than 65 years German writers turn to the era of the domination of the ideology of national socialism in Germany, to the period of the Second World War and the Holocaust. The theme of guilt and responsibility is the key for the German literature of the second half of the twentieth century. In the late 40-ies it was addressed by the writers passed through the crucible of the Second World war, representatives of the so-called "ruins literature", such as V. Borchert, H. Böll and others. The authors of the post-war years sought not only to works of art, but to speak as witnesses .

In the 1960s a new generation of writers entered German literature. These people are also managed, to thirty years of age, to survive the mobilization of the Wehrmacht, and the front, and being wounded, some of them have been in captivity. Such writers as D. Noll and M. W. Schulz, G. Grass and S. Lenz, had similar lines of fate. But the temporal distance in relation to the described events allows them to go beyond personal testimony, to overcome "the poetics of trauma" and to present the events of German history more detached - as a tragic farce, a bloody absurd, etc.

A new round of reflection of the past comes at the end of XX – beginning of XXI century, when questions are asked by the children and grandchildren of participants of the tragic events .

If we turn to German drama of the late twentieth century, namely the post-reconstruction period, it becomes obvious that it didn't really actively develop the theme of the recent past of Germany.

Understanding of the history of the twentieth century and of a wide range of issues, is associated with - power and personality, life under the dictatorship, the mechanisms of violence, forms of freedom, intelligence and power, the universal nature of the correlation of forces in the historical arena, etc. – was at the center of the work of a prominent playwright H. Müller, who passed away in 1996 [1]. In 1989, another major German playwright B. Strauss wrote the play "Final chorus" ("Schlußchor"), in which in encrypted, metaphorical form he reconstructs the picture of the unification of Germany, destroying the official myth of the long-expected acquisition by the Germans of national identity [2].

Otherwise, the theatre of Germany has not responded to fateful events of recent German history with such active interest as was expected of him. Apparently, some time distance is necessary for understanding what is happening, and experience of life in a United Germany. Recently, young German authors who came to the drama in 90-e years, begin to turn increasingly to the history of their country. In some cases, they are interested in a timeless problem – people when making vital decisions, the correlation of historical truth and myth, the role of a woman in the political struggle, the relationship between executioner and victim (D. Loher "Olga's Room", "Leviathan", etc.), in others – the actual "German destiny" (M. von Mayenburg's "Der Stein" (M. von Mayenburg "The Stone"), in the third - problems of self-identity and German identity (A. Ostermaier "Vatersprache" (A. Ostermaier, "Language of the father"), N.-M. Stockmann "Kein Schiff wird kommen" (N.-M. Stockmann "No Ship will come"). Understanding of modern reality and rethinking of German history of the twentieth century, are becoming important themes of the German drama of the turn of XX – XXI centuries. However, in contrast to the drama of the previous decades, to the forefront are placed not the historical events themselves and the attitude towards them, but a person inside these events [3].

METHODS :

In this article we will look at how the facts of history of the twentieth century and German history are refracted in the modern drama of Germany. The object of research were the plays "Vatersprache" (2002) by A. Ostermaier, "Der Stein" (2008) by M. von Meyenburg, "Kein Schiff wird kommen" (2010) by N.-M. Stockmann, which deal with the question of connection of heroes with the past of their country. In this case the past occurs not in the context of global history but of the history of a particular family. Central place in these plays take such events of the past as the Second World War and the Holocaust, division of Germany, a political movement of 60-ies, the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of the country.

The main method of research is a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the text. Author's point of view is revealed during the analysis of the problem-thematic, plot and compositional level of the plays and means of artistic imagery. Interdisciplinary approach also seems to be effective.

RESULTS :

Albert Ostermaier (1967) is one of the most popular of modern German dramatists, refers to the history of Germany in the play "Language of the father".

The action of the monodrama takes place in an empty apartment in one of the German cities. A young man, a hero of the play, comes to the apartment of his deceased father, to settle legal issues related to inheritance. Hero wants to remember something connected with the father who abandoned him in early childhood, but he fails. As a result, he begins to lead an imaginary dialogue with his parent, in which he refers to the history of the country which he left, but part of which was his father. In the monologue the character tries to define his attitude to Germany and to his father. The conflict between father and son from the first lines turns into a conflict of the son, and of his native country, Fatherland .

Attempts to remember anything about his father cause in his mind various images of "a German man", which he tries to his father. The first of the possible "fathers" becomes a Nazi, proud of his past and not repentant in it. There is a reference to the theme of guilt, peculiar to German literature of the second half of the twentieth century. The word "guilt" is repeated in the monologue not once. The theme of complicity and collective guilt are does not move to the background. The hero of the play constantly asks the question about how he would act instead of his father. In the representation of the hero of the monodrama, the German language which he would like to forget, becomes linked with the theme of Nazism .

Another possible father of the hero of the play becomes another historical type – terrorist, a member of the RAF. In the monologue of the son, the leader of the radical RAF group Andreas Baader is named, as well as other realities of the 60-ies [4, p. 30].

This revolutionary, possible the father of the hero of the play, is an active fighter for ideals. According to the dialectical laws, the old dies to make space for the new, the best. However, according to Ostermaier, a new generation seems only a pale reflection of the busy lives of the fathers. The imaginary father, a representative of the generation of the 60's, fought for the idea of freedom, sacrificed his life and the lives of hundreds of people for a cause which seemed noble. The son is a typical representative of a generation of postmodern age: "something small, mediocre, building its existence in accordance with the requirements of changing fashion for views, products and other" [5, p. 216]. The sons of the late 90's-early 2000's – are just only "zitate aus eurem leben" ("quotes from your (fathers) life" [4, p. 31], eternally dissatisfied consumers, too lazy to come up with something new. This is a generation without ideals and clear guidelines. They criticize the cruelty of their fathers in their struggle for justice, but do not offer anything .

In the postmodern perception of the son, his whole life is a game. A kind of anthem of the generation of the fathers in the play became the phrase of songs by Neil Young, representative of the postwar generation: "the damage is done and it's better to burn out than to fade away" that the sons can only reply with a line from a song by the group Nirvana: "here we are now entertain us" [4, p. 32]. It is significant that shortly after writing this song, the lead singer of Nirvana Kurt Cobain died from a heroin overdose that was the result of a personal crisis of the musician.

Not understanding what his father was, at the end of the play the son shifts that task to his father. Roles are changing, the son renounces his past and father. The play ends with the word "cold", which symbolizes the hopelessness. The hero of Ostermaier is a man, renounced his past, without homeland, without father, without interests and perspectives.

In the play by M. von Meyenburg "Der Stein" (The Stone, 2008) it is the fate of a Dresden house, in which the most important milestones of German history converge. Using fictional characters, but based on real facts, the playwright depicts the vicissitudes of the past, moving towards the recognition of the unpleasant truth, exposing the whitewashing family legends and myths that are directly associated with the "German destiny" in the XX century [6]. In alternating scenes from the 34th, 35th, 53rd, 78th and 93rd years life pages of different inhabitants of the house are depicted. After coming to power of the Nazis, a Jewish family Schwartzman, the first owners of the house were forced to sell it cheaply to Vita, one of the main characters of the play, and her husband Wolfgang. Nazi Wolfgang committed suicide when the Russian troops entered Dresden, leaving his wife with baby-daughter Heidrun alone. Later Vita and Heidrun run away to FRG, and some new families had settled in the house. After the unification of Germany Heidrun, her mother Vita and daughter Hannah, born in the West, came back to their house. But Stephanie, who lived there after their escape from East Germany, continues to present her claim to the house .

The topic of truth and relationship to it becomes important in the play. The representatives of older generations hide reality from their children. Junior Hannah was told that her grandfather died in the war, and the house was bought from Schwartzman to help them escape from Germany. Heidrun, being a child, finds a Nazi symbol of her father in a yard, but the mother says that it was she, who had to join the party, as she looked like the Jew. Later, Vita says to granddaughter Hannah that it is the order "for the care of gravestones of fallen soldiers", "a cross for merits before Fatherland". Heidrun, who wants to hide from her daughter the truth about the Nazi past of the family, says that "has no idea" of what the grandma is talking about. However, in the course of action, we find out that Wolfgang shot himself when he knew that Germany had been defeated and met death "like a true German", with the words: "Heil Hitler" [7, p. 238]. The Schwartzmans could not escape: "someone reported that they said something, and they were arrested just at the gate with suitcases" [7, p. 244] (this was probably Wolfgang). Criminal Nazi past is initially hidden from the Heidrun, and then from Hannah .

For Vita and Heidrun the house has a special meaning as a symbol of the past, a sign of connection with it. In contrast, Hanna doesn't feel the pressure of the past and doubt the story of a family told by his mother and grandmother. She refuses from home, not only this house a stranger to her but also the city and even the language: the girl does not understand the Saxon dialect. She, like the hero of the monodrama by A. Ostermaier, "Language of the father" refuses the past of her family, and doesn't want to know anything about it. She doesn't want to live in the house, taken once from a Jewish family. She is a representative of a young generation deceived by the elders. Fiction substitutes for truth, which is forgotten after a generation .

The theme of the story is emphasized by the complex structure of the play. Short scenes are dated by a particular year and are separated by decades. Each new scene reveals new facts and details from the life of the characters of the play, forcing a critical attitude to the presented variants of truth.

Rethinking of historical past continues young playwright Nis-Momme Stockmann (born. in 1981) in his play "Kein Schiff wird kommen" ("No Ship will come", 2010). He turns to the most important historical event of the late twentieth century – the fall of the Berlin wall. Stockmann's drama having an epic character, is a recorded on tape the story of a young German writer about the creation of his play to one of the theatres (the text of the play is also included in the drama). A nameless writer, the hero of the play, is forced to write about the events of twenty years ago, to which he has no matter. As a representative of the generation, far from politics, he perceives the Wall merely as a "theme for show", "demagogic simplification of many things" which "bothered the whole of Germany" [8, p. 469, p. 439].

To collect the material, the writer went to the house where he spent his childhood on the island of Föhr in Northern Germany. His father who is a witness of those events lives there, his experiences could be the basis of the ordered play. However, conversations with his father do not lead to rapid writing of nonfiction play, and cause the strengthening of the internal conflict of the character, his creative and personal crisis.

It turns out that the writer deliberately erased from my memory the events of twenty years ago. In those days, after a serious illness his mother died, and the fall of the Wall is not a distant global political event for a hero, but a personal tragedy. In contrast to the son, his father constantly refers to distant events, recalls amusing episodes of the past. The fall of the Wall for the father is a part of his personal history, just in the 89th year the illness of his wife began, "the whole story with my mom" [8, p. 442]. Talking about those events, the father said that it was a time of change, of a generation, able to revolt, whereas all the activities of today's young people is focused on making a profit and a meaningless pastime. But for the son the late 80-ies – it is only "the era of cheap and toxic synthetics" [8, p. 449].

Trying to find a way out of a creative deadlock, writer allows himself to remember, finally, his mother and her last days before her death, at a time when the Berlin wall was crumbling. Being opened to history, to his past, he still would write the play, however, its subject is not the fall of the Wall, but his mother's death and unity with the father. It is the mother who loses her mind and memory from Alzheimer's, inspires her son to stay a person, who needs to continue to feel and remember. Having voiced in his play the tragic memories, the hero gains a new perspective in his life .

In the epilogue of the drama, the dialogue of the father and the son about the fall of the Wall has been set up, and the question of German identity arose. For the son, although he was a German, "the fall of the Wall plays no role. Just as for millions of Germans" [8, p. 472]. The father gives an ambiguous answer: "Well, in that sense, it really plays no role" [8, p. 473]. On the one hand, the wall, in general, have never shared the German nation, for example is the family of the character: his mother is a native of East Berlin, the father - of West Germany. On the other hand, the destruction of the Wall has not solved existing problems, but rather added a new one: after the unification has deteriorated economic and social situation in Germany. According to I. Uberman in his play, Stockmann shows that "wenn die älteren Deutschen heute behaupten, es sei das glücklichste und wichtigste Ereignis in ihrem Leben, dies ist unwahr <...> oft waren sie vor allem mit dem eigenen Alltag beschäftigt" ("when the older Germans claim that it was the most important and happiest event in their lives, they are not telling the truth <...> at that time they were primarily concentrated on themselves")[9].

Adopting the mental suffering of his mother, accepting his past, the hero remains alone in the final of the play. Now he sees "his giant gray past", but the world around becomes even less interesting for him: "And besides, I don't see anything". A final remark reflects a pessimistic perception of the world, characterizing the majority of modern playwrights.

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CONCLUSIONS :

The plays analyzed in this article, allow to make a conclusion that the playwrights of the turn of XX – XXI centuries, like many other representatives of German literature of the previous decades, turn to the themes of German history in the second half of the twentieth century, noting that there is no future without memory of the past. The characters of analyzed dramas by A. Ostermaier, M. von Meyenburg, N.-M. Stockmann do not know their past, that causes a crisis of personality. Appeal to the history of the family and the country could solve the problem of self-identity, but it is impossible for characters of the plays. The past is hidden by the older generation, by witnesses of history, such as in the play by M. von Meyenburg. The young people themselves refuse their past due to the lack of internal forces, as the characters in the plays by A. Ostermaier and N.-M. Stockmann. The displacement of the past leads to a crisis of German identity. Refusing the history, the heroes abandon their parents, language, native country. Enjoying the benefits of civilization, they choose the stance of passive observer.

LITERATURE

RAF – Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion), a German radical leftist terrorist organization that operated in West Germany from 1968 to 1998, accused the German society in the Nazi development and trends in quality of disagreement with the activities of the government, conducted terrorist acts on the territory of Germany.

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