

## B. BRECHT ON THE STAGE OF TATAR THEATRE

Liliya Nurieva , Milyausha Khabutdinova , Alfat Zakirzyanov  
Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia

### ABSTRACT

The article deals with the approaches of Tatar theater to learning the heritage of the German playwright B. Brecht. For a long time it has been thought that the aesthetics of German playwright is alien to Tatar stage. Kazan theaters were interested in Brecht only in the late 1970s. 1973 was the date of reference of creative experiments with Brecht's heritage on Russian stage of Kazan. Tatar theater came to studying German dramatist only three decades later. We are talking about the plays "Mother Courage" (directed by Rachid Zagidullin) (2000), "A Respectable Wedding" (directed by Iskander Sakayev) (2013), "The Good Person of Szechwan" (directed by Iskander Sakayev) (2015). The work reveals the dynamics of this process and the key trends on the basis of comparison of three performances from the repertoire of the Tatar performances. If in 2000 Tatar theater in Kazan considered Brecht's plays through the prism of epic tradition inherent in Tatar folklore, then a decade later in Almetyevsk we are witnessing the attempts to overcome the traditions of psychological theater. Tatar theater has achieved significant results in learning a new theatrical language. The plays by Brecht put in the stage became a milestone in the history of Tatar theater which tries to be in the movement. On the basis of the works by theater experts, art and literary critics the article generalizes observation about the specifics of stage director's concepts, set design and originality of the concepts of characters.

**Keywords:** German drama, Tatar theater, R. Zagidullin, I. Sakaev, "Mother Courage", "A Respectable Wedding", "The Good Person of Szechwan", reception.

### B. TATAR SİNEMA AŞAMASINDA BRECHT

#### ÖZ

Makale, Tatar tiyatrosunun Alman oyun yazarı B. Brecht'in mirasını öğrenme yaklaşımlarını ele alıyor. Uzun süre Alman oyun yazarının estetiğinin Tatar sahnesine yabancı olduğu düşünülüyor. Kazan tiyatroları Brecht'le 1970'lerin sonlarında ilgilendi. 1973, Kazan'ın Rus sahnesinde Brecht'in mirası ile yaratıcı deneylerin referans tarihi oldu. Tatar tiyatrosu, Alman tiyatro sanatçısını sadece 30 yıl sonra okumaya başladı. (2000), "Saygıdeğer Bir Düğün" (yönetmen: Iskander Sakayev) (2013), "Şçwan'ın İyi Nişancısı" (Yönetmen: Iskander Sakayev) (2015) adlı oyunlardan "Ana Cesaret" (yönetmen Rachid Zagidullin) ). Çalışma, bu sürecin dinamiklerini ve Tatar performanslarının repertuarından üç performansın karşılaştırılması temel eğilimlerini ortaya koyuyor. Kazan'daki 2000 Tatar tiyatrosunda Brecht'in oyunlarını, Tatar folklorunda yer alan epik gelenek prizması aracılığıyla değerlendirdiyseniz, on yıl sonra Almetyevsk'de psikolojik tiyatronun geleneklerini aşma girişimlerine tanıklık ediyoruz. Tatar tiyatrosu, yeni bir tiyatro dili öğrenmede önemli sonuçlar elde etti. Brecht'in sahnelediği oyunlar, Tatar tiyatrosu tarihinde hareket etmeye çalışan bir kilometre taşı oldu. Tiyatro uzmanları, sanat ve edebiyat eleştirmenlerinin eserlerine dayanan makale, sahne direktörü kavramlarının özellikleriyle ilgili gözlemi, karakter tasarımı kavramının tasarım ve özgünlüğünü belirlemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alman tiyatrosu, Tatar tiyatrosu, R. Zagidullin, I. Sakaev, "Ana Cesaret", "Saygıdeğer Bir Düğün", "Sevinç'in İyi Nişancısı", resepsiyon.

### INTRODUCTION

It is known that B. Brecht became an originator of a new theatrical language [White, 2004], never speaking it, any national scene deprives itself of the many potential discoveries [Williams, 2003; Williams, 2004]. "Kazan theaters, according to Rauza Sultanova, became interested in the heritage of Brecht until the early 1970s. The first staging of his drama was made by director Jurij Blagov in 1973 at the student stage - in the Kazan State Institute of Culture (it was the play : "Teresa Karrar's Rifles") in 1974, Vladimir Petrov in Kazan Bolshoi Russian Drama Theater named after V. I. Kachalov staged the play "Mr. Puntila and his Man Matti". Tatar director Damir Siraziev was next to refer to the heritage of the German playwright in 1980. In Kazan Theater School he staged "The Good Person of Szechwan". In 1992 the play was produced by director Boris Cejtlin in Kazan State Theater for Young Spectator.

In 2000, Aleksandr Slavutskij (Kazan Academic Bolshoi Theater of Russian Drama named after V. I. Kachalov) and R.Zagidullin (Tatar State Drama and Comedy Theater named after K. Tinchurin) staged Brecht's plays [Sultanova, 2009 p. 182].

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS.**

The aim of our research is to reveal the originality of interpretations of B. Brecht's plays on Tatar stage. The objects of our attention are three performances in which Brecht's characters speak Tatar. These are "Mother Courage" (stage director R. Zagidullin), "A Respectable Wedding", "The Good Person of Szechwan" (stage director Iskander Sakaev). In developing the theme we used descriptive, cultural, historical, historical-typological methods. Bibliography of works more or less dedicated to the reception of Brecht in Russia is comprehensive. However, the number of works, conceptualizing originality of interpretations of plays by German playwright by Tatar theater is low. Until recently the circle of these sources has not been the subject of attention of critics. We will try in our work to analyze the history of entering Brecht into the thesaurus of the Tatar culture and to systematize information about Tatar translators of his plays. At the same time, we will summarize the material available in the press about the directors' concepts in the interpretation of Brecht's heritage.

### **RESULTS**

For a long time it was believed the Tatar audience not to accept Brecht. R. Zagidullin has risked. Since his arrival in K. Tinchurin Tatar Theater of Drama and Comedy, it has been the time of creative experiments. The performance came at the height of the counter-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus. Thanks to the translator I. Mahmutova Brecht first spoke Tatar. "The director - as correctly noted I. Iljalova, - created a clear concept and at the same time very entertaining theatrical performance" (I. Iljalova, 2016). In its genre structure, it is conceived as a tragicomedy. "War loosens the tongue and frees the hands. Intellectual education in the war is not required, because it is very dirty job. Base humor, filthy language, gestures have the right to existence in this situation... Human qualities - kindness and gentleness or cruelty and anger - during the war comes to the absurd and the reduced to the absurdity may cause laughter or tears", - so explained the director the nature of his concept in an interview [I. Iljalova, 2014 p. 80]. The chronotopos of the performance is expanded by newsreel footage of the Great Patriotic War and the Second World War, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean wars. The viewer sees the shots of destroyed cities and realizes the enormity of the war. The emotional impact of these scenes is strengthened with disturbing music by G. Abyzov.

R. Zagidullin has changed the personage system. He has introduced the mask of Death that is transformed into a significant symbol of fate and war. The structure of this image is called up by the Venetian carnival masks. The mask plays the role of the characters' partner. The stage director gives to it a prophetic function: Mask foretells the death of the children of Mother Courage. The dance of Mask with Catherine to fiery-blood red flashes of light at all bravura is full of so expressiveness that the audience find disturbing. The emotional tension of the mise-en-scène reaches the peak when Catherine dies. The "trick" of Masks does not leave anyone indifferent: It gives to Mother Courage alms as a token of gratitude for the fact that she has given her children to Death.

"Artist Morov's introduction into the theater set design solution "Mother Courage", according to R. Sultanova, is a multi-layered curtain covered with drawing in the form of pendants, which gives a kind of romantic events. The artist used the possibilities of silver color which, when illuminated, generates a multicolored effect. "Pendants" are visible color "chords" being in tune with an emotional content of the episode. Exhibiting various transformations and changes not only of the shape and plastic, but also the color (from lilac, violet to dark red, cherry red), they lived a whole gamut of emotional states in the black space of the war. In the final scene the created vivid image determines an extremely high level of generalization of the main theme of the play: it creates an image of the destroyed Temple, desecrated shrine, and offers a great depth of meaning in the scenographic metaphor: the souls of the characters are something like this burnt church. They were also singed by the war, they were disharmonized. War cripples not only the body but also crushes the soul. And, perhaps, most important is to preserve the soul amidst fire and death. Approximately in this way we can formulate the basic idea of the stage design solution of the play "Mother Courage and Her Children" in the Theater named after K.Tinchurin" [Sultanova, 2009 p.186].

The final film frame with children drawing peace appeals to the audience: "All children of Mother Courage have died. And those that frolic in the frame, do they grow for the next slaughter - next children of Mother Courage?" . The performance by R. Zagidullin was warmly received by

the public and the press. It was filmed and included in the archive State Film Fund of the Republic of Tatarstan. The staging is occasionally repeated on regional channel TNV.

Almetyevsk State Drama Theater for the first time has referred to the works by B. Brecht in 2013, when the director Iskander Sakaev started on the production of “A Respectable Wedding”, who received the award of the National Theater Contest “Tantana” ( “Triumph”). The director has left only the word “Wedding” in the Tatar language. Iskander Sakaev has achieved that “philistinism” permeates the entire space of the performance, making itself felt in the aesthetics.

At first, the audience take their seats in the parterre. Attention is attracted by poor curtains where hang wedding posters familiar for many people. Soon the audience will find themselves on the stage. At first, the stimulus appears to be light, smooth and dull, intentionally “bad”. The back wall of the scene resembles a slate. On it someone unskillfully drew with a piece of chalk windows and doors leading to nowhere, kitchen utensils. In the center of the space there is a pile of the chairs under which the artists have settled. The audience are watching how “the mountain” of bodies begins to move and each finds individuality. The tangible world of the performance becomes wider by the image of the table which is descended from above on the rope. The performance meets the aesthetics of “Poor Theatre” by Ezhi Grotovskij.

The basis of the director’s conception of the play was Mejerhol’d biomechanics. Iskander Sakaev makes the external transformation a notional dominant image. “The actors move as smoothly as a machine goes, like mannequins, their individuality is led away to a purely visual sphere, and plastic designs, complementing the overall picture, copy each other”, - N. Iglamov shares his impressions [Iglamov, 2013]. The play turned out to be ensemble. M. Gajnullina, N. Nazhipova, R. Minhanov, R. Tagirov and others managed to create versatile individualities. They are “hypermarionettes” obedient to the puppeteer-director’s will. According to the laws of wedding, leading is the couple bride-groom (Je. Jagudina, I. Hajrutdinov). Innovation by Iskander Sakaev in this staging, according to theater experts, is manifested in the creation of megastory and postmodern discourse [Iglamov, 2013].

In 2015, Iskander Sakaev referred to the play “The Good Person of Szechwan”, in which B. Brecht tries to convince humanity of the need for change by means of the parable. “This play for me is about the integrity of a person: how to combine the two polarities in order to become integral, to find inner strength” - the director shares his perception of the product [The Protocol of the seminar “Tendencies in the development of national theaters of Russia”, 2015].

The performance by Iskander Sakaev fascinates the audience with its expression and energy. The play-parabola is presented from the unusual perspective [Khabutdinova, 2016] By placing the audience on the stage, Iskander Sakaev extremely exposed the backstage. The whole performance is perceived as a mute cry of the people of their misfortune. In Iskander Sakaev, as well as in a series of paintings by Munch Munk “Scream” (1893-1910), the negative emotion of the subject dominates the world, continually gaining in universal scope.

Paying tribute to paroemia with oriental motifs, the creators of the play present human society against the background of wrapping paper to clear designate the transformation of people into the society of universal consumption. Iskander Sakaev retains Chinese names of the characters, but refers to the conditional Chinese province through “outskirts of town”. Owing to this, the non-indigenous material becomes dearer, clearer and closer to the Tatar audience. The script with the name of the town refers the sophisticated audience in Tatar 1920s when for the first time in the Tatar society there the destructive consequences of break with the patriarchal tradition had become apparent.

This tradition is given in the play through the chronotopos time-space: the antithesis of the sacred with the profane. Gods descend from “the heaven” – “forests” scene - onto the ground to check the strength of the divine set. The stage space is almost without decorations. The dominance of wrapping paper is observed in everything. On the one hand, the paper as the invention of mankind sends us away to China, on the other hand, the motif of paper is realized in money – the symbol of wealth. However, the very idea of wealth in the play turns out to be a convention. A tobacco shop did not bring a desired happiness to Shen Te. The tobacco factory has become a symbol of hard work, savage exploitation. In the episodes at factory there is no shade of the ease inherent in the smoke from the cigars. A cigar smoke ring is transformed into the life loop,

speeding up the movement of the stage circle is associated with madness, the Nativity play of life, from which a spectator wants to escape.

As the action of the degree of tension of internal conflict is growing, and growing expression of scenes. Iskander Sakaev proved that Brecht's performance can be ironic, with elements of play-acting dell'arte (Buffon tricks, tomfoolery), but that does not reduce the degree of plot intrigue.

The director uses "the hindered form" from the arsenal of the Factory of an Eccentric Actor (Petrograd, the Soviet Russia, 1921-1926). Iskander Sakaev takes a thing out of the usual context and places it into a different environment. In this way, on the stage there appears the door, the "mobility" of which is realized not by the opening / closing, but by moving through the space scene ... The paper curtain, that fills the space of the door, suddenly "hardens", not letting a regular customer, who must "discover" a solution to the financial difficulties of the prostitute ... Iskander Sakaev achieves the desired eccentric effect of the combination of man with things. The characters of his play grasp and move the door, as if dealing with a "hanger" for a costume .... Thus the hidden semantics of different incarnations in the human nature is formed...

The movements of actors are adjusted, very expressive, not standard. There is no imitation of life in them, there is a feeling of creative will of the actor. The story of a pure and kind prostitute Shen Te is told by Nailja Nazipova simply with outrageous, exceeding passion. Avid crowd in the performance, thanks to the brilliant acting, is individualized (Je. Jagudina (woman), R. Minhanov (Fu Shu Shu Fu), G. Kashipova (Ms. Shin Mrs. Shin), R. Fayzullina (Ms. Young Mrs. Jang)). Especially expressive turned out the role of water-carrier Wang (D.Husnutdinov).

D. Tarasenko's costumes emphasize parable foundation of the play (burlap, canvas), are characterized by exaggerated grotesque (especially the costume of a policeman). The costumes of gods express their alien essence: on their heads there is something resembling an environmental suit. The wicker basis of clearly designated circles and cells is a metaphor of consciousness, seeking to take the form / order (space) through self-cultivation of the soul.

The play ends with the excerpts from song. The translation by F. Ismagilova sounded natural. By efforts of the extraordinary creative team "The Good Person of Szechwan" was brilliantly and eloquently sounded in Tatar, partly the Tatar way ...

## SUMMARY

Tatar theater came to the realization of the aesthetics of German playwright through the development of national classics. The first steps towards were made by director M. Salimzhanov who lined up "director's theater, which defines the main idea of the performance, where there is an ensemble and an ensemble leader, and not a prime and extras, where there is a prevailing action and a supertask is fulfilled". He came to Brecht's epic theater through productions of works by K. Tinchurin [Shevchenko, 2012 p.51].

Tatar Theatre has gone through two stages in studying Brecht's heritage. Actually he referred to the works of the German playwright under post-perestroika. For example, in "Mother Courage" Brecht (directed by R. Zagidullin) Brecht, as correctly noted R. Sultanova, is perceived as a part of the cultural space, elements of which can be introduced into the performance, in general, focused on the existing tradition. "These new elements of the Brechtian system are appealed only to supplement, enrich, modify somewhat what has been accumulated and fixed in the theater mind. In this case, Brecht's innovations are conceptualized through the well recognizable - through an epic spirit that has always been inherent in Tatar culture, Tatar verbal creativity, especially in its ancient forms (tales, legends, and beits and others)" [Sultanova, 2009 p.185]. In the play the "A Respectable Wedding" we see that the creator of the staging associates the theatrical aesthetics with the system renovation of the principles of theatrical art. Iskander Sakaev here follows the Russian theaters. This tactic coincides with the global tendency [See: Zuber, 1980; Zuber-Skerritt, 1988; Wright, 1989]. In "The Good Person of Szechwan" the director draws the staff of theater into the space of artistic experiment, at the same time not standing apart from "signification" of the space.

## CONCLUSION

The repertoire of Tatar theater since its foundation has been enriched by foreign classics. Performances by Brecht on Tatar stage are indicative of the fact that Tatar theater, on the one hand, takes its time in getting rid of the traditions of psychological drama, on the other hand, is open for creative experiments.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

## REFERENCES

- White, John J. (2004): Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory. New York: Camden House.
- Williams, J. F. (2003): "Brecht's Originality: The Problem of Influences". Forum for Modern Language Studies 39 (1): pp. 53–73.
- Williams, Katherine J. (2004): "'Original Meaning' in Two English Translations of Brecht's 'Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder'." In: Coelsch-Foisner and Klein (2004), pp. 415–33
- Sultanova, R. (2009) Brecht on Kazan Stage (The Problems of Theatre Set Design) // The Herald of N. I. Lobachevsky Nizhny Novgorod University. – 2009. – № 6(2). – P. 182-185.
- Ilyalova, I. (2016) Long Road to Brecht // The Republic of Tatarstan. 2016. April 4.
- Ilyalova, I. (2014) Rashid Zagidullin. Kazan: Kazan-Казань. 158 p.
- Iglamov, N. (2013) Almetyevsk is a step from provocation // Great boulevard, 10. – 2013. – №7 (157).
- The protocol of seminar on "Tendencies of the Development of National Theaters of Russia", 2015 (unpublished source) // M.M. Khabutdinova's personal files.
- Khabutdinova, M. (2016) Confession of Pulsating Heart // Сәхнә. – 2016. -- №1. – P. 30-33.
- Zuber, Ortrun (1980): "Problems of Propriety and Authenticity in Translating Modern Drama". In: The Languages of Theatre: Problems in the Translation and Transposition of Drama, edited by Zuber, Ortrun, Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 92–103.
- Zuber-Skerritt, Ortrun (1988): "Towards a Typology of Literary Translation: Drama Translation Science". Meta XXXIII (4): pp. 485–90.
- Wright, Elizabeth (1989): Postmodern Brecht. A Re-Presentation. London: Routledge.
- Shevchenko Ye. K. Russian-German Literary and Cultural Ties. – Kazan: KSU, 2012 // URL: [http://kpfu.ru/main?p\\_id=11021&p\\_lang=&p\\_type=12](http://kpfu.ru/main?p_id=11021&p_lang=&p_type=12) (the date of access 23.12.2014).