

СЕКЦІЯ XVIII. ФІЛОЛОГІЯ ТА ЖУРНАЛІСТИКА

DIALOGUE WITH EXPRESSIONISM: A PERSON IN AN EXTREME SITUATION IN THE EXPERIMENTAL THEATER OF A. OSTERMEIER

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Expressionism was an artistic form of manifestation of the spiritual crisis at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries, caused by the economic and political crisis. As you know, expressionism was an artistic movement that affirmed the existence of an alienated person in a hostile world. As a hero of the time, he put forward a restless personality, overwhelmed by emotions, unable to bring harmony to a world torn by passions. Expressionist drama went down in literary history as “scream drama.” The person in it experiences horror at the imperfection, disharmony and cruelty of the world, which internally devastates him and destroys his personality. The heroes can only scream about their pain and despair, therefore the characters in the drama of expressionism are presented not in their development, but in moments of the highest tension of mental strength.

The influence of expressionist aesthetics in the dramas of the famous German playwright Albert Ostermeier (born 1967) can be traced at all levels of the text. The works of German literary scholars F. Radatz [3], J. Ryan [2 – 4], F. Schlöser [5], K. Weiler [6] were devoted to the analysis of the poetics of individual plays by the author. In the works of O. N. Shevchenko, the main attention was paid to the problem of the author in the work of A. Ostermeier and the problem of conflict in the work “The Language of the Father” [10; 11]. The works of the Ukrainian scientist N. Yugan analyzed genre transformations in the play “Toller’s Topography” [1], the features of the author’s use of the documentary play genre in his work [7], the functioning of fictional characters [8] and the psychological characteristics of the behavior of individual heroes of Ostermeier’s plays in extreme situations [9].

Like expressionist playwrights, A. Ostermeier places at the center the image of an alienated person living in a world hostile to him and not finding understanding from other characters. All of A. Ostermeier’s heroes are lonely and alienated from each other, which is why the dominant role in all A. Ostermeier’s plays, as in the dramaturgy of expressionism, is played by the monologue, which becomes the main means of expressiveness of a person’s internal, shattered state. The monologue, as the hero’s lyrical reaction to the imperfections of the world or as a means of understanding his past, plays a dominant role in the plays: “Toller’s Topography”, “Tatar Titus”, “Zuckersüss and Leichenbitter”, “Radio Night” and “The Language of the Father”. The peculiarity of the first three plays is that, being duodramas in form, they are monodramas in content, since the hostile part of their personality acts as the heroes’ antipodes, and the whole play, in fact, is a frank and merciless conversation between the hero and himself. On the contrary, in the last two plays, in the monologue of a single character, another voice or several voices are heard.

A. Ostermeier uses the discrepancy between artistic form and content in order to

express the problem of the “identity crisis” that modern man faces. All of A. Ostermeier's heroes experience an acute internal split caused by the discrepancy between the role they are forced to play and their true aspirations. In the dramas of the late period, this theme is associated with the author's criticism of the capitalist conditions of existence that are unacceptable for humans and the capitalist thinking of the characters themselves, which is one of the leading motives in the dramaturgy of expressionism. In the early plays, internal conflict is caused by the characters' inability to come to terms with their past, their inability to make decisions in the present, or the lack of cultural models for their self-identification. Almost all the heroes of A. Ostermeier's mono and duodramas are faced with their alter ego, and sometimes they are not even able to distinguish their real self from the mask they acquired.

A. Ostermeier's heroes, especially the heroes of his mono- and duodramas, like the heroes of expressionist dramas, are depicted at moments of spiritual crisis, rethinking their fate (Toller, Titus, son) or in a state of agony before their death (Zuckersüss, Parthenope, Desmond, Nolk). Their speech is characterized by heightened, inflated emotionality, excessive pathos; the heroes are obsessed with an idea, which often becomes obsessive and plunges them into madness (Titus, Zuckersüss, Nolk). The state of the characters in the plays is taken to the extreme, their emotions are depicted “at the limit”.

Attempts by characters to communicate and express themselves to each other often in A. Ostermeier's dramas turn into “deaf dialogue,” also actively used by expressionist playwrights, in which the characters do not hear or understand each other, but everyone talks about their problems and experiences. The active use of “deaf dialogue” is also characteristic of A. Ostermeier's later plays: “We're Making a (Second-Rate) Movie,” “At the Crossroads of the Dead Valley,” “The Last Call,” and “99 Degrees.” The peculiarity of the last two dramas is that with a large number of characters there is no division into main and secondary characters, and these plays are also characterized by a constant alternation of monological and dialogic scenes. Thanks to these features, A. Ostermeier manages to put each individual person in the center of attention, to depict the inner world of people with different professions and lifestyles, and thus give a large-scale character to the problem of total loneliness, isolation and alienation of people from each other in the modern world. People find themselves unable to find a common language, and therefore at the end of the plays they are overtaken by a catastrophe – a motif consonant with the motif of the death of the old world in the drama of expressionism.

A. Ostermeier's plays contain a wide range of expressionist themes and motifs. These include: the motif of horror, despair, hopelessness, chaotic existence, robotization and devastation of man in the capitalist world, a premonition of an impending catastrophe, the imminent death of humanity, the image of apocalyptic pictures, hallucinating visions, a gloomy atmosphere, “demons of the city”, the theme of city power is introduced – monsters over the souls of people, the theme of the disintegration of personality, internal split, conflict between fathers and children, the messianism of the poet. A. Ostermeier complements these topics with some others. Thus, the playwright examines the relationship between language and power, the problem of the artificial construction of personality by the media, includes the motive of duality, the staging of death, which turns out to be genuine for the characters, the motive of the absorption of reality by fiction, the characters changing roles and masks, and raises the issue of guilt and responsibility.

A. Ostermeier in his dramas uses the form approved by expressionism (“autopegata”, in which the action does not develop sequentially, but moves in jerks from one scene to another. The action in it unfolds in a conventional setting, without connection with real time and space. Dramas by A. Ostermeier exhibit these features: they are divided into separate

scenes, episodes or “segments”, characterized by the intensity of internal and external action, many of them take place in an unreal space that does not obey the physical laws of time. The space depicted in dramas is conventional and symbolic, which was also characteristic of expressionist dramaturgy: for example, the boxing ring in “Toller’s Topography” symbolizes the poet’s internal struggle, film projections expand the associative space, visualize the hero’s internal state; the airport in the drama “The Last Call” symbolizes the restlessness and homelessness of the characters, being in the elevator of the characters causes them acute and uncontrollable panic attacks and indicates their isolation, the desert in the play “At the Crossroads of the Dead Valley” means the emptiness, loneliness of the main character and his alienation from others, and the rooms frozen from the cold of the air conditioners in the drama “99 Degrees” symbolize the inner coldness and inability of the characters to love.

In the late dramas of A. Ostermeier, scenes depict parallel events. In accordance with the dramaturgy of expressionism, in the plays of A. Ostermeier there is no gradual increase in conflict. There is a demonstration of a conflict situation, which, as a rule, is not exhausted even with the death of the hero.

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