

The Problems of the Western Society in the Mirror of a New German-Speaking Drama

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Abstract

The authors in the proposed article refer to modern German drama, namely to the plays of such authors as Hübner, Nemitz and Neidhart. A new generation of dramatists writes about the present, but at the same time adds a variety of innovative, experimental forms and techniques created by the previous era to their arsenal. The focus is on the problem of migrants, tolerance, addressed by German playwrights Hübner and S. Nemitz in the play *Willkommen*. Despite the fact that the problem of migrants is relevant in Europe in the last few years more than ever, the German writers do not pay much attention to it. There is the notion of migrant literature, but the writers of non-German origin who write in German refer, first and foremost, to it. The theme of attitudes toward migrants is connected with the problem of individualism in modern society. It becomes a key in the works by Neidhart. The article analyzes, first of all, her play Lisenko and Shevchenko. This play represents a vivid example of verbatim drama. It covers the crisis of fertility in modern Europe, which is connected with the growth of individualism and egocentrism in modern society.

Keywords: Linguistics; Hübner; Neidhart; Migrantenliteratur; Migrant; German.



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1. Introduction

In the mid-90s in the German-speaking countries – Germany, Austria, Switzerland – a new generation of playwrights asserts itself brightly. Young talented authors, very different in style and talent, are united by interest in modern play, a turn towards reality, a subtle sense of reality. They write about what disturbs a modern person: about family and social problems, about new sources of information and their impact on our life, about globalization and the pressure of competition, about interpersonal relations, individualism, about sadism and aggression, about fears and complexes, about estrangement and loneliness. Thus, a new generation of playwrights addresses modernity, but at the same time adopts the arsenal of a variety of innovative, experimental forms and techniques created by the previous era. By the way, this is typical of the new Russian drama (Beumers and Lipovetsky, 2009; Prokhorova and Shamina, 2014).

The most acute question of the life of modern Germany and other European countries – the problem of migrants, tolerance and its reverse side – intolerance turns to be within playwrights' eyeshot. This theme is consistently developed by the talented German playwright, (Hübner and Nemitz, 2017), especially, in his plays „Ehrensache (‹The Point of Honor›), *Willkommen* 2017 (co-authored with Sara Nemitz). The theme of migrants in Europe in general and in Germany in particular is relevant in the last few years as never before. People from less wealthier countries have constantly been moving to the country since the 50-ies of the 19th century. However, in recent years, migration processes have intensified, which causes concern of the governments of the EU countries, and, probably, to a greater extent, their inhabitants. The theme of attitude toward migrants is directly related to the problem of individualism in modern Western society, which becomes one of the central themes in the work of German-speaking playwrights of the new generation. Modern Swiss playwright and director (Neidhart, 2013) adverts to this topic in his drama (Lisenko and Shevchenko, 2016).

2. Methods

The present article brings the mentioned problems of the modern western society to light in the plays by young German-speaking dramatists. The object of research are the plays *Willkommen* by (Hübner and Nemitz, 2017; Lisenko and Shevchenko, 2016). The complex descriptive analysis of the text is the main method of investigation. The author's point of view is exposed in the course of analysis of the problem-thematic, plot-compositional level of plays and means of literary figurativeness. Interdisciplinary approach also appears to be productive (Akimzhanov *et al.*, 2018).

3. Results and Discussion

In modern German literary criticism, there exists a notion of migrant literature or literature of migrants, which includes, first of all, works by non-German authors who live in Germany and write in German. The number of such authors in Germany is constantly growing. A number of scholars, including (Cheesman, 2002; Egger, 2015; Göbenli,

2006). study their works. The works on the theme of migration written by the Germans are not so many. This topic is a kind of taboo broken by famous German playwright Lutz Hübner (born in 1964). He was first who touched upon the theme of migrants and interrelations of the representatives of different cultures in one environment in his play (Zavyalova and Shamina, 2016). In the drama the author poses the problem of interethnic relations in a country that has lost its former monoculture. In 2017, co-authored with Sarah Nemitz, Hübner wrote the comedy *Willkommen*, in which he again refers to the topic of migrants but considers it in a different vein.

Lutz Hübner is one of the most successful contemporary German dramatists whose plays are often staged. The author is very productive, he has been working in partnership with Sarah Nemitz recently. Their comedy *Welcome* adverts to the topic of refugees and the Germans' attitude towards them. The comedy reflects the situation existing in Germany today: the Germans, who declared about the culture of hospitality (*Willkommenskultur*) a few years ago. It should be manifested in a tolerant attitude towards migrants, material and non-material assistance to refugees, in fact, they are critical of the mass of people who have replenished their cities and endangered the peaceful burgher life. The play takes place in a fashionable German apartment which is shared by 5 people – the representatives of the European middle class. The scene of action already hints at the conflict of the play: what the attitude of successful, wealthy inmates of this expensive apartment towards people differing from them (primarily in terms of material well-being) is. This material component has a great importance in the comedy: the remarks, as well as the speech of the characters, contain the symbols of successful life.

The characters of the drama are a photographer, an employee of the administrative apparatus, a student of the department of social pedagogy, a bank employee and a university assistant professor. A section of society, the representatives of different ages and professions are before us. At a joint dinner, which is arranged by the residents of the apartment once a month to solve common problems, Benny reports that he has received an annual grant to work at New York University and suggests settling the refugees in his room for the period of his absence. At first, Benny's suggestion is accepted positively. Everyone is very encouraged by the idea of helping unfortunate migrants who have lost their homes and are forced to live in a foreign country. However, after the first minutes of discussion of potential candidates for settling, the characters are faced with the fact that they cannot imagine what refugees can be invited. In this scene, the authors of the play use all the clichés associated with an average European's idea of immigrants. The situation gradually turns into a farce. One of the neighbors proposes to go to the temporary refugee place in order to look at them and choose the most appropriate ones. That is, to treat with them as if they chose a puppy. Thus, in this scene tolerance turns into intolerance, and later this impression is deepened, the racist dicta creep into the remarks. Later the inmates of the apartment associate the search for a new neighbor with the casting. Life for them is a show filled with outward signs of well-being, which is the purport of their existence. The opportunity to live together with them for some time is, in their opinion, the highest reward for any other person (Villalobos Antúnez and Bello, 2014).

All neighbors have different reasons why they want or do not want to lodge their emigrants. But they agree in one thing: emigrants for them are just the guests who will be living in their house only for a while, and then they will leave. The hosts are the same, the Germans. This is an allusion to the attitude of most of Germany's population to the problem of migrants: one must show tolerance, because it is accepted. The thought that one of them will stay here forever, probably, does not even occur to them. The characters of the play are not ready to change anything in their lives, they do not see the need for it. This is probably why Hübner and Nemitz appeal to this topic. Another viewpoint is expressed by Doro, an unmarried mother, no longer young, actively defending her interests as the European woman. She does not definitely approve of the migrants' staying at their place, since they will limit her freedom. „Weil ich hier zuhause bin, weil das meine Privatsphäre ist und diese Typen da draußen sind. She says that she wants to continue to feel free at least in her own house. She is deprived of this in the street, where the Arab men, who for some reason came to Europe, have an disapprobatory look at women, because they are not dressed in the same way as they are in the Arab countries, because they behave with men with ease. She does not feel safe in the streets of her native city, she is afraid for her daughter, at whom the emigrants from the East coast contemptuous glances from time to time. Impossibility to feel confident in the streets of one's native city is a serious problem of modern society.

Let us turn to the play (Lisenko and Shevchenko, 2016) by modern Swiss dramatist and stage director Miriam Neidhart (born in 1965) (Neidhart, 2013). is the author of a number of semidocumentary projects connected with serious general European and purely German and Swiss problems: (Takhtarova, 2013) – about migration and motherhood; *THE ILLEGALS*. The Notes from Underground (Zavyalova and Shamina, 2016); *Meggy Returns to* (Seebel, 2013) – about the life of a girl from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who applied for political asylum in Switzerland; *To be, or not to be humanoid*– a joint project with the Institute of Artificial Intelligence of the University of Zurich, that deals with the problems of consciousness and intelligence, and so on. Thus, she is in one line with other Swiss and European writers, whose works dwell on these topics, in particular. The play by Neidhart (2013), which has the subtitle *Intimate Penetration into the Crisis of Reproduction*, centers on the crisis of birth-rate in modern Europe. It is written on the basis of interviews, carried out by the author from December 2005 to August 2006 with dozens of respondents in Germany and Switzerland (Germans, Swiss, Italians, Hungarians), and is a vivid example of verbatim dramaturgy – a kind of documentary drama, in which the utterances of the informants are verbatim reproduced.

Neophobia (from the Greek *neos* new and *phobos* I am afraid) means obsessive fear, fear of the new. Many information donors, interviewed by the playwright, were afraid to have a child and thus to dramatically change their lives. Neidhart (2013) changed the names and professions of the informants but retained authentic speech, which is the main requirement of verbatim drama. There are twenty characters. They represent a wide range of views on the

problem of fertility today. These are also those who do not want in principle to have children that can interfere with their careers and their ways of lives, and those who dream about it, but cannot have a child because of any circumstances, and those who have lost a child and are not ready to new tests, and so on. The fragments of the interviews are connected through editing, hence several artificial couplings – the so-called compositional-speech seams being inherent in plays written via verbatim. Neidhart (2013) play presents no action as such, and it involves numerous opinions on the stated topic, specially grouped. The text consists of a prologue, sixteen scenes and an epilogue. At the same time, the monologue that is inherent in verbatim plays predominates: twelve scenes are monologues in a pure form, the rest are built on the principle of dialogues in which two to four characters participate, but these are false dialogues, because they do not comprehend communication between the characters, whose utterances are not addressed to each other, but to an invisible interviewer and, in fact, are the fragments of monologue speech. In other words, not the characters converse, but the very texts. The archetypal appearance, general character of the personages is an important feature of the verbatim drama. Although there are real prototypes behind Miriam (Neidhart, 2013) characters, they are not individualized, they are completely the types, the carriers of the typical points of view on the problem of reproduction in Europe. At the same time, a clear tendency is observed: the higher the standard of living is, the less the desire to have children. Switzerland is the richest and the most prosperous country in Europe, while the demographic situation is very disturbing there, which, however, is observed in most European countries (Akimzhanov et al., 2018).

4. Summary and Conclusions

Thus, the plays by Hübner and Nemitz (2017) and Neidhart (2013) reflect some of the most urgent problems of modern Western society. Neidhart (2013), assembling the interviews with her informants, creates a complex, multi-layered dramatic picture, revealing at the same time the social, legal, ethical and psychological aspects of the reproduction crisis in Europe, rightly associating this problem with the growth of individualism, egocentrism in modern Western society. The theme of egocentrism extends in the play Willkommen by Hübner and Nemitz (2017). Expressing their willingness to help the strangers, the characters of the play put their own interests above all. So, the hostess of the apartment, Sophie, who shows the greatest interest in consigning the room to the migrants, justifies it with big talk. However, in fact, her interest is purely mercantile. Being a photographer, a person of art, she does not have success in her work. And by having found lodging for the refugees in her apartment, she could make a project that would bring her popularity. That is, the good intentions, about which she spoke in her long monologues, turn out to be an absolutely selfish goal of gaining her importance. Perhaps, this is not so bad, because each form of charity is associated with very specific personal tasks. The only question is whether to mask one's selfish goals with the words about a high humanitarian idea. These are just a few examples of the response of contemporary German-speaking drama to the burning problems of modern society, but they clearly demonstrate the fundamental quality, such as topicality, the connection with reality, ability to meet the challenges of today.

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