



**“Swiss world” in
modern drama.**

“SWISS WORLD” IN MODERN DRAMA

EL “MUNDO SUIZO” EN EL DRAMA MODERNO

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to reveal the peculiarities of “Swiss world” – its specific realities, peculiarities of mentality, national character, traditions in the new Swiss drama, i.e., Swiss dramaturgy of the late 20th - early 21st centuries (based on the work by Lucas Barfuss, Miriam Neidhart, Handl Klaus, Leo Tuor, etc.). In the modern globalized world, the borders of the national are gradually blurring, the originality and uniqueness of traditions are lost. Swiss dramatists describe this process with special keenness of observation and subtlety, because the conflict between hermeticism and openness was inherent in Switzerland throughout the history of the country. But today Switzerland as a historically “hermetic” and “neutral” country has been retaining its special status in the European world. The plays analyzed in this article speak, on the one hand, of strengthening the all-European tendencies, the similar nature of the problems facing the whole of Western society and the contradiction between reality and the national myth that represents the country as a paradise on earth, evidence, on the other hand, in favor of “the Swiss world. The article considers both tendencies – centrifugal and centripetal that characterize the current situation in Switzerland.

KEYWORDS: Swiss literature, drama, national identity, mentality, globalization, national realities

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RESUMEN

El objetivo del artículo es revelar las peculiaridades del “mundo suizo”: sus realidades específicas, peculiaridades de mentalidad, carácter nacional, tradiciones en el nuevo drama suizo, es decir, la dramaturgia suiza de finales del siglo XX y principios del siglo XXI (basada en el trabajo de Lucas Barfuss, Miriam Neidhart, Handl Klaus, Leo Tuor, etc.). En el mundo globalizado moderno, las fronteras de lo nacional se están borrando gradualmente, la originalidad y la singularidad de las tradiciones se pierden. Los dramaturgos suizos describen este proceso con especial interés en la observación y la sutileza, porque el conflicto entre el hermetismo y la apertura fue inherente a Suiza a lo largo de la historia del país. Pero hoy Suiza, como país históricamente “hermético” y “neutral”, ha mantenido su estatus especial en el mundo europeo. Las obras analizadas en este artículo hablan, por un lado, de fortalecer las tendencias de toda Europa, la naturaleza similar de los problemas que enfrenta la sociedad occidental y la contradicción entre la realidad y el mito nacional que representa al país como un paraíso en el mundo. Tierra, evidencia, por otra parte, a favor del “mundo suizo”. El artículo considera ambas tendencias: centrífuga y centrípeta que caracterizan la situación actual en Suiza.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura suiza, drama, identidad nacional, mentalidad, globalización, realidades nacionales.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of national identity, the specifics of the national character and mentality, the question of national cultural codes and myths are in the focus of modern literary criticism [1, p. 472; 2 s. 77]. In this respect, our research fits into the extensive scientific literature covering the corresponding range of issues. The second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century have been marked by the ever increasing spread of the globalization process, which has sparked a new round of interest in the problems of the national [3, p. 767; 4, p. 79]. Alongside the increase in the economic and cultural homogeneity of the world, the anti-globalization movement is gaining momentum, the importance of the category of national identity is growing. These processes embrace the sphere of artistic consciousness, there emerge various forms of representation of the national in fiction. The phenomenon of Switzerland in this regard is of particular interest. On the one hand, the country that combines four cultural and linguistic traditions – German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic – is a successful example of multiculturalism. On the other hand, it has always occupied a special position among other European states, carefully safeguarding its independence and identity [5, p. 55]. However, globalization could not but affect this “neutral” state. A number of acute political, social and cultural issues are becoming a common problem of the Western world. In this case, Switzerland, and in these conditions, it is possible to maintain its “separate identity”. Becoming an arena of activity of opposite forces, it is a vivid example of global processes taking place in the world. This disposition is reflected in Swiss literature, including drama. Recently, it is the drama that has been moving to the forefront of the literary process, and it is the drama that has been reacting particularly sharply to the challenges of today. Therefore, in this article the authors have set themselves the task of revealing the

specific features of “Swiss world” in the plays of contemporary authors.

METHODS

The complex descriptive analysis of the text is the main method of investigation. The author’s viewpoint is revealed in the course of analysis of the problem-thematic, plot-compositional level of plays and means of artistic imagery. Also productive is the interdisciplinary approach used by the authors, due to the situation of drama at the junction of the two types of art – literature and theater.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is known that Switzerland has its own historical and political path, its status in the European world, its own specific national mentality. The main components of the Swiss national sphere of concepts are “neutrality”, “border”, “isolation”, “sovereignty”, “narrowness” [6, p. 35]. This is reflected in the literature. In the twentieth century, up to the 1920s, literature of Switzerland was a phenomenon that was quite hermetic, kept to the specific realities of its country. The literary tradition of Switzerland was at variance with the European literary process. While in Europe there was an active search, naturalism, symbolism, impressionism, jugendstil, etc. replaced each other, in Switzerland realistic works were primarily created. After the years 1920s, literature in Switzerland was trying to integrate into the mainstream of European literature. Writers saw conservatism as the reason for the dip in popularity of their works in Europe. However, mastering new literary styles, Swiss writers have retained their special approach. Thus, Switzerland responds with the so-called “spiritual defense” policy (in German Geistige Landesverteidigung) to the new cultural trends of the years 30s and 40s of the twentieth century in Germany and Italy. “Spiritual defense” had existed until about the years 60s of the twentieth century, reflecting first the National Socialist tendencies of the Third Reich, and then the communist influence in the sphere of ideology and culture.

Inside the Swiss literature during the 20th century and now the 21st century there have been existing two camps:

- some artists insist on a special Swiss way, embodying in their work the above national concepts. They render the realities of the

"Swiss world" in their works, idealize its values, glorify the beauty of nature, traditions, way of life.

- the other artists, on the contrary, seek to explode the borders separating cozy, prosperous Switzerland from the big world, overcome narrowness and narrow-mindedness, and make Swiss literature a full-fledged part of the European and world literary process. It must be said that the most serious literary achievements were connected with this second trend. So, Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Max Frisch have become the most significant German writers of the second half of the twentieth century. Their message goes far beyond the scope of national consciousness and is aimed at understanding the global issues of human existence in the twentieth century. The most famous and significant Swiss writers play in this field. They are Peter Bichsel, Thomas Hurlimann, Christian Kracht, Hugo Letcher, Adolf Muschg, Urs Widmer and others.

The divide inside Swiss literature is also based on the language principle. It is known that the literature of Switzerland is distinguished according to the four official languages into German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic [7, p. 16]. At the same time, many writers who write in these languages are the members of the Swiss Union of Authors, with the goal of uniting all literati on a national scale.

Thus, we observe the action of both centripetal and centrifugal forces in the cultural life of the country. But due to the powerful processes of globalization, the gradual creation of a all-European world, the problems raised by Western literature and art are becoming ever more universal. And modern Swiss dramaturgy clearly demonstrates this trend.

When studying this issue, we relied primarily on two volumes of "Anthology of Modern Swiss Drama", appeared in 2013 [8] and 2017 [9] in the publishing house of the UFO, which included 19 plays of contemporary playwrights, and the plays included in 5 issues of the famous Anthology of the newest German drama "Step", published by the Goethe Institute in Moscow [10, 11, 12, 13]. They introduce a rather representative section of modern Swiss drama. This includes the plays written in all four official languages of the Confederation. These are the texts to be very different in con-

tent and artistic form. However, it is conspicuous that the problems raised by the authors are for the most part not strictly Swiss. Thus, the documentary play by Miriam Neidhart covers the birth-rate crisis in today's Europe. In the center of the drama by Lucas Barfuss "Bus" there is the issue of the crisis of faith under the conditions of modern Western civilization; in another play – "The Journey of Alice to Switzerland" – Barfuss discusses the problem of euthanasia; the playwrights focus their attention on the issues of women's equality of rights (the plays by Marel Pensar "Like Knives" and by Christina Castrillo "Splashes of Dew"), the threat of a worldwide economic crisis ("End of Money" by Urs Widmer), the problems of teenagers suffering from computer addiction ("Yoko-Ni" by Eugene) or obesity ("The hard Fate of Karl Klotz" by Lucas Linder), football turns and twists ("Kick and Run" by Andri Beyeler), etc. Accordingly, the literary form varies from the classical format to the verbatim, from the detective to imitation of virtual reality and so on.

Among the pieces presented in the anthologies, only two poetic texts were discovered, the action of which occurs on the Alpine high point, i.e. against the background of the classical Swiss landscape. At first glance, they fall into the line of cultivation of the Swiss idyll. But in actual fact, here emerges the image of a lost paradise. Handl Klaus's play "I Dream of the Alps; Ices Feed the Lakes" (Ich ersehne die Alpen; So entstehen die Seen, 2001) consists of two monologues, female and male. Olivia is lying in a stuffy apartment under a red-hot roof, apparently in death-fever, and is dreaming of the Alps, of their "vast cold", of "majestic free peaks", of their "soft wavy lines". However, it becomes clear from the monologue that she has seen the Alps only in the photographs and knows about them from the stories of friends. That is, it comes to certain replicated image. In addition, she aspires to the Alps not to live, but to die beautifully, falling down into the abyss. The second monologue is the mountain forester Bruno's monologue. According to his activities, he is constantly in the Alps, about which Olivia dreams. But he does not feel happy. Bruno regularly meets with death in the form of the climbers frozen in glaciers. To bury the dead, he climbs with a heavy burden over the mountains, mourning the unhappy.

Tragic is the ending of another “alpine” play – the drama by Leo Tuor “Giacumbert Nau” (1994). Shepherd Giacumbert, who has tended the herds over the mountains all his life, whose life is merged with nature, dies without fulfilling his duty, - without having turned round the flock going to the glacier: “Giacumbert dies slowly, following his sheep with his sinking eyes, and by piling each other they are going up the wrong path” [8, p. 434]. This bitter final note sounds more like a requiem for lost harmony, for a world going into non-existence.

The very title of the play by L. Barfuss “The Journey of Alice to Switzerland” (Alices Reise in die Schweiz, 2005) already presents the Swiss theme. In the center there is a problem of euthanasia and a complex of moral and ethical, and legal problems connected with it. As it is known, Switzerland is the only European country in which euthanasia has been legalized. This is due to the fact that compared to other European countries, Switzerland has a very liberal legislation, which, in particular, allows for the possibility of the so-called assisted suicide. The corresponding services are offered by two non-profit organizations: “Dignitas” in the town of Forch in the canton of Zurich and “Exit” with a head office in Zurich and with branches in Bern, Basel and Geneva. The number of cases of euthanasia in Switzerland is growing every year. In 2014, 742 people died in this way, and 999 people – in 2015 [14, p. 80].

The play by Lucas Barfuss tells the story of the incurably sick German girl, Alisa, who, being tired of the torment and not seeing the meaning of further life, commits “a journey” to Switzerland, in order to depart this life with the help of Dr. Strom. The author is interested, first of all, in the ethical and psychological aspects of euthanasia. The drama by Barfuss is an attempt to understand and convey to the reader / the viewer what motivates the doctor, who takes the liberty of practicing euthanasia. Although the play is called “The Journey of Alice to Switzerland” and its main storyline is related to the story of Alice, the central figure is Gustav Strom himself, rendering the last service to the sick and the unhappy. In the play he is portrayed as an idealist, Don Quixote of medicine, a knight defending the dignity of man and his right to voluntary passing away. The play by Barfuss is static. This play is a kind of discussion, a drama of

ideas, representing different attitudes to euthanasia. Hence, there are extensive epic fragments and a minimized dramatic action. A number of important events – the expulsion of Gustav Strom from the Medical Chamber, his arrest and stay in the lock-up ward, Alisa’s mother’s intention after her daughter’s death to leave this life, her arrival and her death – do not unfold in front of the viewer, but are brought to him through the stories of the dramatic personages. The epic element is also the titles of the scenes that convey their content and represent the characters: “Gustav Strom, euthanasia specialist, consults Alice Gallo”, “Alice Gallo tries to talk with Lotte, her mother about her plans”, “Eva, a young woman, offers her support to Gustav”, “Walter, the landlord, makes an offer to Gustav Strom”, “John of Birmingham has visited the beautiful city of Zurich for the first time in his life”, etc. The titles of the scenes thus mark the main stages in the development of the plot.

Doctor Strom voices his views in lengthy monologues, in an interview which his assistant Eva reads, and which the landlord Walter quotes in conversations with his clients. Doctor Strom devoted himself unselfishly and selflessly to the work that seems to him humane and noble. He sees the meaning of his life in it and makes considerable sacrifices for the sake of it: his wife abandoned him; the public and the media declared war on him, having given him a terrible nickname – Doctor Death, as a result of which he had no patients; after each euthanasia, he was forced to spend twenty-four hours in the police station while an investigation was being carried out, and after his television appearance, he was kept half-stayed in the police cell for half a week; after expulsion from the medical association, not having the right to charge a fee, he still continued to serve his cause by rendering services to his patients free of charge. Although euthanasia in the country is officially authorized, the public consciousness of the Swiss is not ready to put up with “assisted suicide”, considering it to be “a legalized murder”. Strom’s opponents are the state, the public, associate doctors and common people. They are composite, additional characters, whose opinion is translated in the form of excerpts from newspaper articles read out by Eve, citations voiced by Strom himself, stories by Eve and Walter. Thus, we see here a discord between the official loyal policy of the authorities and the mass consciousness.

If Lucas Barfuss in many respects continues the tradition of epic drama, the next Swiss playwright and director, Miriam Neidhart, specializes in documentary theater. Neidhart is the author of a number of artistic and documentary projects related to serious all-European and exceptionally Swiss problems: "Zone 40" (Zone 40, 2006) – about migration and motherhood; "ILLEGAL. The Notes from the Underground" (ILLEGAL, Berichte aus dem Untergrund, 2007-2008); "Maggie Returns to the Congo" (Meggy geht zurück in den Kongo, 2009) – about the fate of a girl from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who asked for political asylum in Switzerland; "To be or not to be a humanoid" (2013) is a joint project with the Institute of Artificial Intelligence of the University of Zurich on the problems of consciousness and intellect, and others.

Let's turn to M. Neidhart's play "Neofobia" (Torschusspanik). The play, subtitled "Intimate Penetration into the Crisis of Reproduction (Intime Einsichten in die Reproduktionskrise, 2007), is about the birth rate crisis in modern Europe. It was written on the basis of interviews taken by the author from December 2005 to August 2006 for dozens of respondents in Germany and Switzerland (Germans, Swiss, Italians, Hungarians), and is a vivid example of verbatim drama – a kind of documentary drama, in which the statements of informants are reproduced verbatim.

"Neofobia" (from Greek *neos* 'new' and *phobos* 'I am afraid') means obsessive fear, fear of innovation. Many "information donors", interviewed by the playwright, were afraid to have a child and thus dramatically change their lives.

There is no action in M. Neidhart's play *per se*, but there are numerous utterances on the stated topic, being specially grouped. There are twenty characters. They represent a wide range of views on the problem of fertility today. These are also those who in principle do not want to have children that can interfere with their careers and their way of life, 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 testing, etc. Type, the generalized character of personages – an important feature of the verbatim-dramaturgy. Although there

are real prototypes behind the Miriam Neidhart's characters, they are not individualized, they are the types in full measure, the bearers of viewpoints on the problem of reproduction widely held in Europe. At the same time, a clear tendency emerges: 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, and the demographic situation is especially complicated there. The downside to a high standard of living is individualism, egocentrism, unwillingness to sacrifice one's comfort even for the sake of procreation.

SUMMARY

A representative set of plays by contemporary Swiss playwrights, studied by us in this article, makes it possible for us to draw the following conclusions. A number of texts contain the typically Swiss realities such as the picturesque peaks of the Alps, idyllic landscapes, glaciers and other natural beauties; a high standard of living, peace and prosperity, loyal legislation. True, the Swiss idyll often acquires a parodic character or takes on the features of a lost paradise (Hendl Klaus "I dream of the Alps, Ice Feeds the Lakes", Leo Tuor "Giacombert Nau"). Or this idealistic picture are beaten against the realities of modern Swiss reality (Lucas Barfuss "The Journey of Alice to Switzerland").

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it would be nice to add that most of the plays of modern Swiss playwrights, although based on Swiss material, however, they are about general European problems (Lucas Barfuss "The Journey of Alice to Switzerland", Miriam Neidhart "Neofobia", etc.). This entails the conclusion that modern Swiss dramas reflect "Swiss world", but modern reality has made it permeable, it has ceased to be hermetic, isolated and "neutral", as it was before, and increasingly becomes a part of one Western world.

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