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## METADRAMATIC ASPECT OF THE PLAYS BY PLAYWRIGHT A. MARDAN

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*The present research is dedicated to the issue of the metadramatic aspect implementation in the plays «Anshlag» and «Antract» by Odessan playwright A. Mardan. There are a noticeable metadramatic aspects both in the plays plot and in the variety of allusions, analogies. The metadramatic aspects of the plays we deal with 'Anshlag' and 'Antract' adopt both the classical and modernistic approaches to present this literary device. In A. Mardan's plays, the concept of modern times is conveyed through the literary and cultural heritage. The usage of Chekhov's motives employed in both Mardan's plays seems, on the one hand, to resemble the form used in the mass culture, whereas on the other hand, the presence of canonical texts implemented with the goal of stylization and reinterpretation of the classic represent the innovative approach applied through the use of modern literary devices which ensure the interpretation of canonical drama. The comparison of the world of reality and illusion in the character's behavior is clearly observed; moreover, the plays also contain an example the influence of the theatre, theatricalism and fiction on the human's worldview and destiny. The author also analyses the theme of the impossibility of «abandoning» the world of Chekhov's plays interwoven into the characters' consciousness. Thus, the influence of Chekhov's text deprives Mardan's characters of making their own decisions. Another metadramatic aspect of this literary device — the «theatre in the theatre» — involves Mardan's use of all existing metadramatic elements, which are said to be incarnated with the metatheatre, for instance, the acted out play in play, allusion to other classical plays, and theatre issues discourses. In the both plays there is the mystification of the world's reality created by the author, the reality is ruined by the utopia symbolized here by Chekhov's text. It seems, that all concepts about Chekhov's plays are transformed into the mass culture phenomenon with its characteristics, such as cliché, gestures and phrases. The combination of these components in the plays «Anshlag» and «Antract» provides an excellent opportunity to illustrate a variety of both the properties of the theatrical art in general and metatheatrical features in particular.*

**Key words:** metatheatricality, «theatre in the theatre» concept, metadramatical devices, canonical drama, precedent texts

The goal of presenting the works of a little-known, but already recognized Odessan playwright Alexander Mardan is to address the issue of the attitude to the classical tradition and its specific influence, which in many ways is overcome by modern drama theatre. As far as one can observe, A. Mardan's plays contain a combination of metatheatrical techniques, such as the «theatre in the theatre», the usage of precedent texts of the classic works of literature and drama, and their scenic interpretation in A. Mar-

dan's plays, which are basically a formation of mass popular culture. An attempt of distinguishing how his work fits into the contemporary trend of the existence of the mass of the popular drama is also to be made.

Metadrama as theatrical device has a long history; however, it cannot be considered as accidental activation of existence and development of a variety of new types of metadrama in the XX century, when the question of the relationship between the reality and the art of the great myths and everyday life was raised. It is particularly true of the postmodern ? poque, where the view refracted through the prism of literary and cultural heritage of the past was posed [10]. The literary device of the 'theatre in the theatre' has already brought the attention of drama researchers. This device has been studied and described in the material reception of drama by W. Shakespeare, J. B. Moliere, A. Chekhov, as well as contemporary playwrights. One of the commonly known examples of metadrama is «Hamlet» by W. Shakespeare, in which the literary device of the 'theatre in the theatre' is used as a plug-in component of the play. The plays by B. Brecht can be considered as an example of the implementation of metadramatical techniques in the twentieth century, which demonstrates the actor's direct appeal to the audience. According to E. Sokolova, the device 'theatre in the theatre' is a dramaturgic approach which makes one able to reveal the nature of the theatre, transforming it to the content of a dramaturgic text and theatrical presentation [7].

Metadrama has become one of the main tools of the theatrical self-reflection, converting the structure of a theatrical performance into the protagonist. The term «metadrama» first appeared in one of J. I. Abel's articles in 1963. The new term characterized the drama and the theatre, the debatable issues of which were dedicated to the theatre itself. The term «metatheatre» introduced by Abel, has become used by the literary surroundings, however it has not awarded a single universally recognized concept yet; furthermore, the dramatic ways of presenting metatheatre as a way of perceiving the world and the theatre itself have not been fully described. The formula of the «theatre in the theatre» has at all times has been filled with a specific meaning. V. Chupasov considers two main types of metadramatical plays — the classical and the modern. The traditional version of the «theatre in the theatre» is an elaborated metaphor, the ground for which is the comparison of the world to the theatre. The external drama (the life) is opposed to the inner drama (the theatre), but the whole text presents its metaphorical comparison [5].

The classical version of metadrama is a representation of the world as a large theatre, according to Shakespeare's proposition, «All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players». In everyday life, people perform their roles sometimes not even recognizing that. Attending a theatre, they have an opportunity to observe what is happening on the stage, perceiving it as an alternative reality. At the same time, modern drama containing the device of 'the scene on the stage' is applied to show that there are no clear boundaries between the art and reality. Modern theatre does not demonstrate the reality but is rather an integral part of it. The theatre is not a representation of life, but its element [9]. According to E. Polityko, metadrama is a type of drama that uses the principles of self-reflection, the repeatability and the game of doubling reality. Metadrama combines all the cases where a play is shown as the idea of the transformation of life into theatre, and contrariwise. The aspect of metadrama can manifest itself in various forms — from the individual statements of the character and storyline (P. Calderon, L. Tick) to a dramatic structure, creating the image of the «global theatre» (L. Pirandello, M. de Gelderod, T. Stoppard) [8]. According to E. Shilova, metadrama, is a genre of drama that involves emphasised theatricality, the doubling of artistic reality, blurring of the boundaries between the world of reality and the world of art. The techniques implemented are supposed to emphasize the lack of self-identity among characters [10]. The set of a commonly known play may be transferred into different realities with the change of time; for instance, a classical Shakespeare's play can be performed transforming the plot into modern reality. Replicas of the characters can be modified and contain allusions or reminiscences from other plays.

The widespread use of meta-textual methods in the literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century suggests the development of the phenomenon of metaliterature. Nevertheless, metadrama as a phenomenon that belongs to a special kind of literature has its own specific characteristics. The features of metadrama of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. self-reflexion, a complex hierarchy of levels of theatrical reality, and repeatability are largely determined by L. Pirandello's and B. Brecht's creative discoveries. Postmodernism increases the degree of metadramatic reflexivity through the approbation of precedent literary works and their new interpretation [10].

Classical works are considered as a reference point, or precedent text, which organizes the text of the play. A. Chekhov is the undisputed leader in the frequency of inclusion in modern Russian theatrical play [6]. Many contemporary plays are created on the basis of precedent texts; moreover,

entirely new texts may appear on the basis of the classical ones. Researchers of modern drama deal with the issue of the reception of works of classical theatre in plays by contemporary authors. O. Zhurcheva in her research «The Receptive Strategies in the Recent Drama» draws attention to the phenomenon of creative reception in modern drama. In postmodern metadrama, doubling of reality, which implies metadramatical comments in the course of the story, contrasting roles (those performed without taking into account the age and sex of the actors, and the mismatch of the number of characters and the number of actors), composite repetitions or parallel scenarios presentation on stage may be observed [2].

Metadrama may also be implemented in the form of «a play in a play» and «a play about a play», as well as in the plays about a theatre. Theatre in literary works which are characterized by metadramatical and theatrical space is exceptionally scenic and beyond its scope, and therefore, it competes with «real» life in terms of adequacy of perception of events. It also contains «conditionally nominative» replicas and comments, leading to the understanding of the abstract nature of language.

Another element is the use of metatheatrical scenery that emphasizes the theatrical conditionality of action. Contemporary art chooses the repetition of old motives instead of using innovative themes increasingly. Nowadays, various musical covers, remakes of films, films where the story represents the plot drawn from classical literature and retold as a new modern idea grows popularity. Similar trends characterize also metadramatical texts. Metadrama typically exploits a story retrieved from classics in a new play. This theatrical technique is often manifested in its modernist version. The exploited sources, which are interwoven in contemporary plays, are mainly literature and drama which is known to the public, due to the reason that their authors' literary works often form the lists of literature included into school programmes. Therefore, they become a canon of literature and drama in mass consciousness. Without a doubt, A. Chekhov is one of the authors whose drama is considered to be canonical. His texts are perceived as «an example of an «archetype» of aesthetic (...) ideology that is an inalienable constituent both in the mind of mass audience and that of new playwrights» [2]. This gave rise to the beginning of a dialogue of contemporary playwrights with A. Chekhov by transforming his ideas and works, which form a modern person's representation of the world and art.

The plays by Alexander Mardan are a vivid example of the representation of the «new way» classical pieces or the usage the canonical themes

in metatheatrical space. His play «Antract» includes a clearly noticeable, almost haunting reminiscence from A. Chekhov's «Three Sisters». The similarity is observed in the names of the characters and in the play which is being staged in «Antract». All the events of the play are theatricalized: the life of actors who continue acting in real life (transfer life on stage to reality), and on the contrary, the specificity of the profession of an actor shown from the 'behind the stage' and the tendencies in modern drama and stage directing. These are the clash of traditional approaches to drama and theatre with innovative views on the nature of theatrical art. The text of the play quotes a large number of separate phrases retrieved from Chekhov's plays, which are commonly known and easily recognized by the viewers, however, they also convey the world of Mardan's characters. In his letter (dated October 1895) Chekhov identified his play «Seagull» as a comedy «in which there are the three women roles, six men roles, four acts, many conversations about literature, little setting, and a lot of love». The same can be stated about A. Mardan's play «Anshlag», for which Chekhov's «Seagull» is a starting point for the creation of the picture of the world and the poetic atmosphere of the play.

While the classical version of metatheatre points at the similarity of the world and the theatre, and contemporary perception of the «theatre in the theatre» breaks the boundaries between theatre and life, in A. Mardan's plays one can observe a combination of these approaches. The reality of the characters' perception has no clear meaning. The theatre also acquires importance not only as an art but also as an integral part of life.

Unlike many plays where the motto is represented relatively clearly but has little or no significant meaning, the whole concept of the play «Anshlag» is scurrying on the idea of the theatre. The scheme in accordance with which the theatre works is presented to the viewer from the beginning to the end of the setting. Here, acting is not an element of life but life itself. At the same time, we can see that the play is based on staging of the play «The Performance», which can also be considered as life. Therefore, A. Mardan's play can be interpreted both from the classical perception of the 'theatre in the theatre' and its modernist concept. The story conveyed in the play «Anshlag» is a proof of the presence of theatre in our lives. The characters of the play are actors, representatives of the world-theatre ideas, those who live playing.

At the same time, a problem of the possibility of realizing of the boundaries between reality and acting, and the ability to influence life through illu-

sion is delivered in the play. In the play «Anshlag», the characters' behaviour recalls the doings of characters in Chekhov's plays (the motive of suicide of Chekhov's character because of the woman he was in love with); however, they take place having contemporary events at the background. Apparently, the emphasized seemingly evident similarities of the character with that of Treplev in fact show an absurd imitation of the classical protagonist.

Both plays exploit precedent texts in the form of quotations, allusions and puns. Influence of the classics in A. Mardan's plays often resembles a form used in mass pop culture, where texts are presented on purpose stressing the diversity of interpretation of classic texts. Styling, metatextualisation, deconstruction, and rethinking of the remake are the processes by which both the classics and A. Mardan can be interpreted. The plays «Anshlag» and «Antract» contain allusions to various interpretations of the canonical innovative theatrical dramaturgy, primarily plays by A. Chekhov.

Undoubtedly, the entire drama by A. Mardan is clearly influenced A. Chekhov. Researchers distinguish the strategy used by the author to create the impression of repetition and analogy with the case text. It is done by using quibbles, character names, borrowed replica of the characters, and language game [3]. Considering the nature of intertextuality in A. Mardan's plays, V. Makarova draws attention to Chekhov's text inclusion not only to the core but also the side text, which enables the reader to discover the names of the «Three Sisters» characters in the play «Antract». She suggests that A. Mardan borrows a popular postmodern concept of creation of a text in a text. Chekhov's used histrionism of the «scene on the stage», «theatre in the theatre» starts and ends A. Mardan's drama «Antract».

In A. Mardan's play «Anshlag», the device of the «theatre in the theatre» is also used — «The Performance», in which the main character, a wealthy businessman Konstantin acts, attracts most the public and leads to the full house success. According to the director of the theatre, «people come to the theatre to communicate with a person», i.e. monitoring of what is happening on the stage turns into a psychotherapy session. The success of the 'The Performance' may be explained by an inherent human desire to watch the feelings of others in order to analyze their own state of mind. «The Performance» as a metadramatical technique does not reveal the principles of the classic theatre, the main content of which is setting but rather of the modern one, which shows the process of creating a theatrical illusion. We can detect it in the features of the performance, which is common in modern interpretations of both classical and new plays. Mean-

while, it is necessary to consider the reasons for the presence of Chekhov's motives in A. Mardan's plays.

Nowadays, there is a tendency of remaking the classics applying a new modern twist or reinterpretations of famous works. Remaking is exploited in order to attract the largest possible number of viewers for the effect of mass popularity. Apparently, A. Mardan's strategy can be interpreted similarly, and we may assume that all «Chekhov's motives» in his plays are a way of attracting the public's attention and also to express his own ideas. V. Markarova distinguishes two strategies of usage of Chekhov's intertextuality — the one derived from postmodern game with the reader and the characters, as well as the other, which is a specific tool emphasizing the essence of the characters of the play, which the researcher finds more successful [4]. In «Antract», attention is drawn to the loss of the initial meaning of Chekhov's characters' phrases due to the frequent repetition during rehearsals. Thus, the world of Chekhov's classic becomes as colourless in their performance as worn out costumes. At the end of the play, Chekhov's text brings actresses together, the phrases from «The Three Sisters», which are delivered while performing on the stage, become their own, and their acting — inspiring for the first time in many years. Thus, we can observe the inner change of the characters through Chekhov's text. Perhaps the setting of A. Mardan's plays is focused on the process of influence of Chekhov's text on people's, actors' and directors' consciousness. The essence plays concentrated on one problem: it is impossible to escape from the influence of the authority of Chekhov's theatre.

In the play «Antract», such «victims of Chekhov's influence» are the provincial actresses, who express their own emotions through replicas of Chekhov's heroines. In «Anshlag», Constantine falls under the influence of Chekhov's theatre, being absorbed by the space of Chekhov's «The Seagull». Perhaps this is what leads him to death [4]. The play «Anshlag» by A. Mardan, similarly to Chekhov's «The Seagull» is based on the conversation of a life and theatre; the main similarity to «The Seagull» arises from the character of Constantine, who tries repeat the behaviour of Constantine Treplev, who tends to express himself by means of theatrical art, often in an unconventional way. Similarly to how Nina's confession brings Treplev to death in «The Seagull», A. Mardan's character Nadezhda is the reason for Constantine to disappear. The open ending enables the viewer to interpret the play in a variety of ways. Analogies to Chekhov's plays are rather a parody of imitation. The author's irony is focused on repeatability and exhaus-

tion of the original motives and the impossibility of ordinary interpretations of Chekhov's texts. Making an attempt of extracting new ideas from the frequently interpreted text and constant striving to show innovation in art — all that is the crisis of the director-led theatre, which has been researched thoroughly [1].

Summing up, it can be stated that metadramatism in Mardan's plays is clearly noticeable through the plot, in various allusions and analogies, taking the features of both classical and modernist concepts of this method. a comparison of the world of reality to the illusion of the characters' behaviour can be clearly distinguished, which is also an instance of the influence of the theatre and fiction on human destiny and worldview. Influence of Chekhov's precedent texts on the plays by A. Mardan is definitely not a repetition of the commonly known ideas, the same story with the submission of an alternative ending, or Chekhov's plays in modern reality. The use of Chekhov's motives is partly a desire to attract the audience to the theatre and the desire for popularity, but at the same time also the author's rethinking of how theatre can influence a modern person and of the assumption that infinite attempts to interpret classics have reached their limit. The plays «Antract» and «Anshlag» convey the author's opinion about modernist plays with no new ideas brought to the contemporary art. At the same time, the author addresses the theme of the impossibility to leave the world of Chekhov's characters' inherent consciousness, showing that the influence of Chekhov's text often deprives Mardan's characters from the opportunity to take their own decisions.

The uniqueness of the concept «theatre in the theatre» in A. Mardan's plays comprises in his use of all existing metadramatic elements, which are incarnated with metatheatre, for instance, the acted out play in play, allusion to other classical plays, and theatre issues discourses. The combination of these components in the plays «Anshlag» and «Antract» provides an excellent opportunity to illustrate the variety of properties both of the art of theatre in general and metatheatrical features in particular.

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## ЕЛЕМЕНТИ МЕТАДРАМИ В П'ЄСАХ О. МАРДАНЯ

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*У статті розглянуто способи реалізації метатематичних прийомів у п'єсах сучасного одеського драматурга О. Марданя «Анилаг» і «Антракт». Актуальність теми пояснюється відсутністю наукових праць, присвячених дослідженню цих п'єс. Незважаючи на те, що п'єси О. Марданя віддавна та з успіхом ставлять на сценах театрів як на Заході, так і в Україні та Росії, до цього часу відсутні спеціальні дослідницькі статті, або монографії чи дисертації, присвячені*

драматургії О. Марданя взагалі або, зокрема, аспектам метадраматизму п'єс «Анилаг» і «Антракт». Елементи метадраматизму помітні в сюжеті п'єс, а також в різних алюзіях та аналогіях, набуваючи рис як класичної, так і модерністської концепції метадрами. Ми спостерігаємо співставлення світу реальності та ілюзії в поведінці героїв, подано також приклад впливу театру, театральності та фікції на світогляд та долю людини. Одним з принципів метадраматизму є вияв рецепції класичної драми, котра вважається канонічною у сучасних п'єсах. Погляд на сучасність у п'єсах О. Марданя переломлюється через призму літературної та культурної спадщини минулого. Наявність чеховських мотивів у обох розглянутих п'єсах часто набуває форми, притаманної масовій попкультурі. Стратегія, використана автором для створення аналогії з прецедентним текстом, — це імена героїв, запозичені репліки персонажів та мовна гра. Елементи чеховської драматургії проявляються тут як в розважальному, так і в «інтелектуально-снобістичному» аспекті. Однак стилізація та переосмислення класики ніяк не апрямовані на реінтерпретацію канонічної драматургії. Автор торкається теми неспроможності його героїв покинути «чеховський світ». Адже вплив чеховського тексту часом позбавляє персонажів п'єс О. Марданя здатності приймати власні рішення, а повернення героїв до прецедентного тексту відбувається внаслідок альтернативного, індивідуального бажання персонажів вплинути на своє життя. Використання в п'єсах О. Марданя чеховських мотивів — це авторське переосмислення того, як театральне мистецтво може впливати на сучасну людину і наскільки невечірні спроби інтерпретації класики. Проте іронія авторської думки свідчить про вичерпаність оригінальних мотивів у тексті та неможливість чергових інтерпретацій чеховських п'єс. Особливість іншого метадраматичного прийому «театр в театрі» полягає у застосуванні засобів метатеатральності, котрі прийнято уособлювати з метатеатром: в розігранні п'єси в п'єсі, алюзіях до класичних п'єс, міркуваннях щодо проблем, властивих театру. Отож в обох п'єсах реальність створеного автором світу містифікується, руйнується під владою утопії, символом якої є чеховський текст. Здається, що уявлення про тексти п'єс А. Чехова перетворюються на феномен масової свідомості, з властивими їй кліше, жестами, фразами. Поєднання усіх цих компонентів в п'єсах «Анилаг» і «Антракт» дає можливість проілюструвати різноманітні прийоми як метатеатру, так і мистецтва театру взагалі.

**Ключові слова:** метатеатральність, принцип «театру в театрі», метадраматичні прийоми, канонічна драма, прецедентні тексти.

## ЭЛЕМЕНТЫ МЕТАДРАМЫ В ПЬЕСАХ А. МАРДАНИЯ

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*В работе рассматриваются способы реализации метадраматических приемов в пьесах современного одесского драматурга А. Мардания «Анилаг» и «Антракт». Взгляд на современность преломляется в пьесах А. Мардания сквозь призму литературного и культурного наследия прошлого. Присутствие чеховских мотивов в обеих рассматриваемых пьесах у него часто приобретает формы, используемые*

*в массовой попкультуре. Стилизация и переосмысление классики не направлены на реинтерпретацию канонической драматургии. Мы наблюдаем смешение мира реальности и иллюзии в поведении героев. Проанализировано влияние театра, театральности и фантасмагоричности в человеческом мировоззрении и судьбу. Автор затрагивает тему невозможности покинуть «чеховский мир», присущую сознанию его героев, влияние чеховского текста зачастую лишает персонажей пьес А. Марданя возможности принимать собственные решения, а возвращение героев к прецедентному тексту происходит вследствие альтернативных, индивидуальных желаний персонажей повлиять на свою жизнь. Другой метадраматический прием «театр в театре» заключается в применении принципов метатеатральности, в разыгрывании пьесы в пьесе, аллюзиях к классическим пьесам, рассуждениях о проблемах, свойственных театру. Объединение всех этих компонентов в пьесах «Аншлаг» и «Антракт» дает прекрасную возможность проиллюстрировать различные свойства как метатеатра, так и искусства театра вообще.*

**Ключевые слова:** метатеатральность, принцип «театра в театре», мета-драматические приёмы, каноническая драма, прецедентные тексты.

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