LANGUAGE MEANS IN POSTMODERN DRAMA AND SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA: COMPARATIVE ASPECT

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Abstract. The article is focused on the similarities and differences in language means in postmodern drama and Shakespearean drama. It deals with the development of drama in the sixteenth century till the twentieth century. The aim of this article is to investigate characters and language means in the drama world and to compare them to those of the contemporary drama and the drama of the Renaissance.

Keywords: drama, postmodern drama, Shakespearean drama, comparative aspect, a postmodern character, a Shakespearean character, language means.

Introduction

In the history of literature theatre played a very significant role in human life, ensuring access to the greatest dramas of worldwide literature. Originally the term 'drama' was derived from the Greek language and it meant 'action'.

Since its beginnings drama as a literary genre it was divided into *tragedy* and *comedy*. It is also connected with the two masks showing this traditional generic separation. In addition to this, those masks became symbols of Greek goddesses, Melpomene and Thalia. Melpomene has the weeping face, and as a result she is the Muse of tragedy. Thalia is the Muse of comedy because of the laughing face.

All linguistic aspects that are discussed here present the main peculiarities of the Shakespearean drama as well as the postmodern drama. In this article we put special attention to the distinction between postmodern and Shakespearean characters and language means.

At all stages of its development drama has always been deeply connected with social and historical changes as well as intellectual movements. Those factors had a strong influence on art and literature. Without any doubt they contributed to the growth of drama both in the sixteenth century and in the twentieth century. As a consequence, the substantial status of drama is greatly highlighted, especially when we focus on issues like postmodern drama and Shakespeare's drama in comparison.

Being pre-eminent representative of knowing and interpreting Shakespeare's works, S. Greenblatt attaches the remarkable significance to William's role for the development of drama:

"Shakespeare's plays, it seemed, had precipitated out of a sublime confrontation between a total artist and a totalizing society. By a total artist I mean one who, through training, resourcefulness, and talent, is at the moment of creation complete unto himself; (…)

The result of this confrontation between total artist and totalizing society was a set of unique, inexhaustible, and supremely powerful works of art" (Greenblatt, 1988:2).

With reference to postmodern drama another critic M. Esslin accentuates the important role of postmodern playwrights. He states that: "(…) these plays have *worked*, they have had an effect, they have exercised a fascination of their own in the theatre. At first it was said that this fascination was merely a *succès de scandale*, that people flocked to see Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or Ionesco's *Bald Primadonna* merely because it had become fashionable to express outrage and astonishment about them at parties. But this explanation clearly could not apply to more than one or two plays of this kind. And the success of a whole row of similarly unconventional works became more and more manifest. If the critical touchstones of conventional drama did not apply to these plays, this must surely have been due to a difference in objective, the use of different artistic means, to the fact, in short, that these plays were both creating and applying a different *convention* of drama" *(Esslin, 1965:1)*. As mentioned above, the similarities and differences between postmodern and Shakespearean dramas will be highlighted in this article.

Postmodern Drama Versus Shakespearean Drama

Generally, the English writers have always been fascinated by Italian Renaissance that refers to the ancient Greek and Roman tradition *(Pitcher, 2001: 93-95)*.

The English playwright, William Shakespeare is especially inspired by Italian pattern that has an enormous influence on his works. His renewed interest in ancient culture contributes to the growth of a new drama that rejects the medieval plays. Consequently, the author draws special attention and interest to Aristotle, Plato and Cicero, because the Renaissance mainly means the revival of classical sources that can be observed in philosophy, art and literature *(Bernacki, Pawlus, 1999: 217-218)*.

As already noted, the Renaissance literature in England is primarily characterized by the development of drama. It commences in the second part of the sixteenth century *(Sikorska, 2002: 98)*. William Shakespeare contributed to the growth of professional drama and theatre in England that were additionally supported by Queen Elizabeth I as well as her Privy Council *(Edwards, 2001: 112)*. During her long reign, the theatre was successful with the troupes of actors who ensured amusement and joy. In 1576, *The Theatre* and *The Curtain* were built as London's first playhouses *(Sikorska, 2002: 100)*. Next, a theatrical company that is known as *the Lord Chamberlain's Men* was created. William Shakespeare, as a member of that group, helped to direct it. He acted for it as well as wrote plays for the company that achieved success *(Womack, 2006: 119)*. *The Globe Theatre*, which was built in 1599, was the theatre that can be said to have been the most associated with W. Shakespeare. Obviously, his dramas including history plays, tragedies and comedies were presented on the stage of the *Globe Theatre (Sikorska, 2002: 100)*.

The most prominent representative of the postmodern literature and the *Theatre of the Absurd* is, undoubtedly, Samuel Beckett, who is glorified by J. P. Sartre and T. W. Adorno for his manifestation of nonsense *(Adorno, 1961: 119-150)*. His works refer to the ancient as well as Renaissance traditions. This is especially accentuated by M. Esslin:

"The ancient traditions combined in a new form in the Theatre of the Absurd are: the tradition of miming and clowning that goes back to the *mimus* of Greece and Rome, the *commedia dell' arte* of Renaissance Italy" *(Esslin, 1965: 1)*.

Originally the name 'postmodern' was adopted in the 1880s when J. W. Chapman implied that "a Postmodern style of painting" was a way to reject the French Impressionism *(Hassan, 1987: 12)*. In 1926, B. I. Bell publishing *Postmodernism and Other Essays* used as the first the term 'postmodern' as the historical epoch succeeding Modernism *(Madsen, 1995)*. Postmodernism is a response against Modernism and the events connected with the Second World War, like the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or Japanese-American internment *(Geyh, Leebron, Levy, 1997: 510)*.

Samuel Beckett is categorized as the most important contributor to the postmodern aesthetic. The four playwrights Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco and Jean Genet are associated with the postmodern movement as well as the *Theatre of the Absurd*. Each of them has unusual features that even go beyond the phrase 'absurd' *(Esslin, 1961)*. What is more, the major production *Waiting for Godot*, written by Samuel Beckett was performed on 5 January 1953 at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris *(Federman, Graver, 1997: 88)*.

This comparison proves that, both Shakespearean and postmodern drama are similar due to rejection of the old tradition and the previous order. Moreover, the intellectual representatives have a large influence on the development of drama and theatre in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

Character and Language Means in the Shakespearean and Postmodern Drama

Thinking about literature in Renaissance it must be said that William Shakespeare appears as the most important playwright, who produced plays in different genres such as comedies, tragedies or histories *(Sikorska, 2002: 110)*. In order to compare and best reflect the differences between Shakespearean and postmodern literature, we focus our attention on William's comedies, their characters and language.

The Shakespearean comedy in the Elizabethan age is characterized by happy ending of the story as well as uniting the single characters in a marriage. Shakespeare's comedies contain the internal and external arguments of the characters *(Denton, 1877)* as well as the struggle between Dionysian and Apollonian principles. Dionysian values refer to instincts and feelings, and Apollonian values are associated with logic, rationality and reasonable thinking *(Szent-Györgyi, 1972: 966)*. Shakespeare's comedies have a tendency to emphasize the situation, especially the problems of young lovers that are introduced by elders. What is more, the lovers are usually isolated, and then re-united. Mistaken identity of characters is also presented *(Sikorska, 2002: 113-116)*. The individuals are involved in a muddled and confused situation that is beyond the consciousness of the characters. These circumstances can comprise the whole comedy, and they can excite the attention of the audience *(Denton, 1877)*. Following Sikorska, *Taming of the Shrew* belongs to one of the earliest comedies of Shakespeare that are characterized by the element of farce and happy ending. In his comedy *As You Like It* the whole story concentrates on the conflict between brothers. The story finds its happy end because love is a more important feeling than other ones. Besides, to his most popular comedies are included such great works like *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice (Sikorska, 2002: 113-116)*.

According to Sikorska, it has to be emphasized that the characters communicate in an elevated language. It is due to the fact that Rhetoric as a subject plays a significant role in Renaissance universities. The language itself in the Elizabethan drama is of great value, and that is why the writer emphasizes the use of impressively beautiful verse. Additionally, the

lines are filled with sophisticated words, subtle metaphors or epithets. What is more, the Aristotelian unities of place and time are disregarded. However, a classical category of comedy and tragedy is maintained *(Sikorska, 2002: 101)*. Following Zbierski, the comic effect in William's plays is the result of brilliant dialogues as well as clashes between different social classes *(Zbierski, 1988: 102)*. Furthermore, realism in his comedies is less important than rhetoric. The beauty of the language is the great value of his works.

In conclusion, his works are a form of therapy for people through the use of laughter and entertainment *(Edwards, 2001: 120)*, as is confirmed by the following words:

"Laughter alone is not enough to make the healing power of comedy work; the laughter has to be generated within an action that moves the characters from discord, separation, and unhappiness to peace, unity, and concord" *(Edwards, 2001: 121)*.

In contrast to Renaissance literature, absurdity may be defined as "the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" *(Esslin, 1961: 24)*. It is the result of the urban development, the prevalence of information technology as well as the growth of virtual environment (Albert, Babelyuk, Koliasa). All these factors have a large influence on the reification of the character who feels "very uncomfortable in the cold Universe" *(Babelyuk, 2016:15; Mankovskaya, 2009: 495)*. Moreover, E. Ionesco determines what absurd is and defines the condition of a person in postmodern time:

"Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" *(Esslin, 1961: 23)*.

In addition to that, the world seems to be chaotic, self-contradictory and disordered *(Babelyuk, 2016: 20)*. As a consequence, the character goes through a mental crisis and becomes aware that he lives in a world full of threats and violence *(Babelyuk, 2015)*.

It is worth noting that the protagonist in the postmodern drama is lost in the unintelligible universe. He rejects rational thinking *(Sikorska, 2002: 432-434)*. He uses banalities and functions like a robot pushed into a routine, for example Eugène Ionesco takes in *The Chairs* the word "uber-marrionettes" in order to describe the Old Man and the Old Woman *(Lamont, 1993: 72)*. The character type is often flat, stereotyped and archetypal *(Cronin, 1999: 424)*. The protagonist is in crisis as he lives in a world that is inexplicable for him. O. Babelyuk accentuates the role of the contemporary character:

"*Postmodern character* generates the sense of absurdity and nonsense, because the border line between fiction and reality, metaphorical and literal meaning is very fragile. He also deprives the reader of all possible stable points of reference and cancels his own messages by total contradictions. As the result, a postmodern character possesses various mental disorders, and schizophrenia among them" *(Babelyuk, 2018: 9)*.

What is more, the plot of many postmodern dramas presents major figures in interdependent couples, for instance two males or a male and a female. Becket's critics describe it as "pseudocouples" *(Astro, 1990: 116)*. The two protagonists are equal or interdependent like for example Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot (Bradby, 1991: 59)*; the passive character can be dominated over even tortured by the other figure like Pozzo and Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* or Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*; the relationship of the protagonists can be changed suddenly throughout the play as in Eugène Ionesco's *The Lesson (Hinden, 1986: 401)*.

In contrast to Shakespearean language, the dialogues in Absurdist dramas are mostly naturalistic. The protagonists use the nonsense language or cliché, and it makes the Theatre of the Absurd outstanding *(Lewis, 1966: 260)*. The language is often characterized by phonetic,

musical and rhythmical features *(Albee, Kolin, 1988: 189)*. It includes nonsensical stereotypes, burlesque entertainment as well as meaningless nonsense *(Hinden, 1986: 401)*. Additionally, in Beckett's plays the dialogues show incapability to create a connection and the nonsensical language manifests this separation *(Kane, 1984: 159-160)*. It causes ridiculous effects as in Lucky's long speech in Becet's *Waiting for Godot*. In Pinter's *The Birthday Party* absurd and nonsense are used extremely offensively, especially when McCann and Goldberg torment Stanley with evidently senseless questions. Hence, nonsense in the Theatre of the Absurd indicates the limitation of the language while showing an interest in getting to know the truth *(Silverstein, 1993: 33-34)*. Moreover, in the postmodern drama there are used a pastiche of various textualities and media forms as well as total experimentation in style and ideas. What is noteworthy is the fact that "Postmodern literary texts combine, transform, and subvert the conventions of several narrative subgenres, go beyond the boundaries of fiction, and integrate various text-types" *(Babelyuk, 2017: 25)*.

Considering the above, the characters and language in the postmodern and Shakespearean drama are quite different. This contributes to the fact that Shakespeare's Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd are remarkable achievements in world history.

Conclusions and suggestions

In conclusion, this article focuses on the comparison of postmodern drama and Shakespearean drama. It shows both similarities and differences between them. The development of the drama in the sixteenth century and in the twentieth century is also presented.

It should be stressed that postmodern drama and Shakespearean drama have many features in common. This is mainly a reference to the classical model, which has its origins in ancient Greece and Rome. The common features are also the rejection of the old order and its replacement by a new one. The main differences are based on the creation of the hero as well as the language used in the dramas.

The protagonists of Shakespeare's comedies are entangled in difficult and often funny situations, which end happily. Beautiful metaphors or epithets are a characteristic feature of Shakespeare's works. The language is also characterized by brilliant dialogues.

On the other hand, the protagonists of the postmodern drama live in the absurd. Their existence is connected with senselessness. They are lost in a chaotic world. Dialogues are characterized by naturalistic elements.

The main point of interest in this article is a comparison of Shakespeare's and postmodern works. However, regardless of the similarities and differences shown, it should be stressed that both William's works and the authors of postmodernism are undoubtedly an achievement of the world's literature.

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