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Artistic Interpretation of Amphitryon Story in Dramas By J. Giraudoux and P. Hacks

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The present article studies the peculiarities of artistic perception of the classical story of Amphitryon in plays by J. Giraudoux and P. Hacks. The myth of this Theban commander has been interpreted plenty of times (by Plautus, Molière, Dryden, Kleist, Giraudoux, Kaiser, Hacks) during the development of foreign literature. In different epochs, this motif attracted authors with more than just dynamic intrigue and the comic twins situation, but also with the opportunities it provides to raise some general philosophic and ontological issues. In the 20th century remarkable for the intensive technical development and powerful social and political cataclysms, the writers of the new generation turned to the old story again. The comparative analysis of dramas by Giraudoux and Hacks is a way to reveal similarities and differences in the perception of the mythological material explained both by the time when the dramas were written and by the peculiarities of the world outlook and aesthetical principles of the given authors.

Keywords: J. Giraudoux, P. Hacks, Amphitryon, perception, myth, interpretation.

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Research area: philology.

Introduction

Classical mythology takes an exceptional place in Western European literature. Both in the antiquity and in our times, one of the most loved Ancient Greek heroes is Heracles. The story of this divine hero appealed to authors of different epochs, and the deepest interest has always been expressed not to the well-known labours of Heracles, but the story of his birth from the union of mortal Alcmena and the Thunderer Zeus (or Jupiter).

The myth narrates the story of Zeus Brontios who fell in love with beautiful Alcmena. In the

guise of her husband Amphitryon, who was away at war, Zeus made love to her. Alcmena gave birth to twins, Heracles and Iphicles. Having found out his wife's unaware betrayal, Amphitryon accepted the authoritative will of gods with all humility and brought up the demigod Heracles as his own son.

The myth of the demigod birth was first reflected in tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, then in works by Pausanias, Apollodorus and in Plautus' play *Amphitryon*. In the new age the plot was interpreted in works by Jean Rotrou (*Les Deux Sosies*, 1638), Jean-

Baptiste Molière (*Amphitryon*, 1668), John Dryden (*Amphitryon: or, the two Socias*, 1690), Heinrich von Kleist (*Amphitryon*, 1807). In the 20th centuries this series was completed by Jean Giraudoux (*Amphitryon* 38, 1929), Georg Kaiser (*Zweimal Amphitryon*, 1944), and Peter Hacks (*Amphitryon*, 1968).

Until the 19th century, the writers aspired, first of all, to create a dynamic intrigue, staking on the exciting plot (Plautus, Molière, Dryden); but in the age of Romanticism and the developed interest to the inner world of the character, it was the relationships of the characters and psychological motives of their behaviour that happened to be in the centre of the author's attention. Thus, for example, Heinrich von Kleist emphasizes the spiritual torments of Alcmene, whose personality is presented within the Christian paradigm, as fairly remarked by J.W. von Goethe: "the 'new mystical Amphitryon' is a Christian version of the old story, similar to that where 'Mary had an encounter with the holy ghost'" (Conrady, 1987, 384).

This mythological plot was not unnoticed by the 20th century's writers. On the basis of the antique examples and their further interpretations, the men of letters created their original works within the main streams of their contemporary epochs and their own individual mindsets.

Theoretical grounds

The interest for the mythological heritage of the antiquity is truly global and universal. The myth appears in all spheres of science, art, and culture; it is subject to researches conducted by historians, archaeologists, linguists, philosophers, art experts. The interest for myth in literature never wanes.

Reference to myth is a many centuries' tradition. "Mythology has 'survived' through the ages due to its enormous artistic, aesthetic and conceptual profusion and made an extremely

strong impact on the cultural development of all European nations" (Sharypina, 1995, 3-4). Mythological motives and images have been interpreted and conceived in many ways throughout the whole history of literature. In the oral culture of the 20th century, mythologism has reached its peak, having become more than just an artistic technique but also a way of cognition.

The tradition of "mythologization" embodies the idea of the "eternal cyclic repetition of the familiar and mythological prototypes under different "masks", a kind of substitution of literary and mythological heroes" (Meletinskii, 1976, 8). The writers of the 20th century saw in myth a paradigm of universal human being that synthesizes the experience of previous generations and the continuing relevance at all times. Representatives of different literary schools turned to the classical material reinterpreting well-known stories in accordance with their own artistic goals.

A trend to modernize an ancient story, to psychologize the images plays an important role in literature of the 20th century. According to E.M. Meletinskii, "the popularity of mythological themes in modern dramaturgy is fueled by the proliferation of ritualistic concepts interpreting myth as narrativization of a ritual and dogmatic action, but modern dramas, in fact, turn not to the poetics of mythologization, but to a modernist redesign and reinterpretation of works of the ancient theater" (Meletinskii, 1976 360).

A researcher Zsuzsa Hetényi notes that "the search methods for hidden mystery of texts goes back to the different code keys" (Hetényi, 2011, 41). In this article we consider the interpretation of a mythological plot in dramas written by Giraudoux and Hacks in terms of the receptive method. It is the reception of antiquity, according to T.A. Sharypina, that is a "way of self-expression of thinkers, artists and even historical eras, which is not always conscious" (Sharypina, 2014, 189).

When addressing poetics of mythologization, the writers create works, in which they express the current philosopho-aesthetic or socio-political ideas, the myths are comprehended ironically, the characters of ancient mythology are endowed with consciousness of a modern man; the realities of the modern world are introduced, etc. Literary works of Jean Giraudoux and P. Hacks, who created a number of original literary interpretations of famous scenes, develop in line with this tradition of transformation of the mythological material.

**Modernization of an ancient myth
in the play “Amphitryon-38” written
by Jean Giraudoux**

A French playwright Jean Giraudoux considers a classic story in a non-trivial context. According to the calculations of the author, his “Amphitryon 38” (“Amphitryon 38”, 1929) is the thirty-eighth interpretation of the Amphitryon story. Analyzing the comedy by Jean Giraudoux, A.A. Gozenpud notes that “it is the most unique and original implementation of the myth of Jupiter” (Gozenpud, 1967, 192). The French playwright creates a topical play, in which deep philosophical questions are combined with a caustic comedic nature and lyricism in the development of a love theme.

Originality of the comedy by Jean Giraudoux is in a new interpretation of characters. Firstly, Jupiter does not just take shape of the Theban commander Amphitryon, as it was in the works of Molière, Dryden and Kleist, but totally turns into Amphitryon leaving his divine origin, reincarnating externally and internally in an earthly man. Secondly, mutual feelings of Amphitryon and Alcmene endow the characters with inner strength and ability to resist God.

The play takes place in Ancient Greece, but the plot is largely modernized, saturated with modern ideas and problems. Borrowing only names from the heroes of the myth, the

French playwright endows them with human consciousness of the 20th century. Here is how A.D. Mikhailov describes the main heroine of the Giraudoux’s play in his article: “This young beautiful Greek woman has grace, elegance and inimitable brilliance of a genuine Frenchwoman” (Mikhailov, 1981, 17). One of the ancient techniques of modernization is the use of anachronisms. Such words as fixture, uniform, petrol and umbrella consistently destroy the picture of antiquity drawing us to modern reality.

For Giraudoux, like many writers of the 20th century, one of the main themes is the theme of war. In antiquity war was the meaning of life of heroes, however for the writers of the new era love becomes the main value, and war gets deheroized and deprived of greatness. In the comedy by Giraudoux the theme of war is represented ironically and quite modestly. Unscrupulous politicians celebrate the impending war and convince people that war “c’est l’égalité, c’est la liberté, la fraternité” (Giraudoux, 1929). The author parodies both abstract statements of inactive pacifists and false quasi-patriotic appeals of militarists. Pseudo-heroics of war is revealed in the scene of parting of spouses. Seeing Amphitryon off to the war, Alcmene learns that her husband, a great military leader, has won only once in his lifetime – he killed only one enemy and he turned out to be an uncelebrated soldier.

Jean Giraudoux gives his comedy the title of “Amphitryon 38”, but the main focus of the play is moved from the image of the Greek commander to the relationship of antagonistic characters – Jupiter and Alcmene, which gives plenty of opportunities for raising both philosophical and ethical issues. The main conflict of the play is confrontation of the divine and the human. Alcmene is a nonconformist, a typical heroine of Giraudoux, like Siegfried or Electra. Her deep maximalism is opposed to cynicism of the

Thunderer. Jupiter speaks of Alcmene, that she is the first truly living creature he met. She is alien to arguing about the universe, the gods and immortality. Alcmene prefers everyday life with simple everyday pleasures. When Jupiter offers her to become immortal, she says: “Je déteste les aventures; c’est une aventure, l’immortalité!” (Giraudoux, 1929). Thanks to her trickiness the heroine avoids Jupiter’s gimmicks by sending lascivious and vain Leda to a marriage bed who is eager to experience the love of God again. The Thunderer resorting to deception unwittingly becomes its victim. Alcmene forces him to abandon his dogmatic and cynical notions about people. Jupiter admits that it was humanity that attracted him in Alcmene: “Elle n’a pas d’imagination, et peut-être pas beaucoup plus d’intelligence. Mais il y a justement en elle quelque chose d’inattaquable et de borné qui doit être l’infini humain. Sa vie est un prisme où le patrimoine commun aux dieux et aux hommes, courage, amour, passion, se mue en qualités proprement humaines, constance, douceur, dévouement, sur les quelles meurt notre pouvoir” (Giraudoux, 1929).

The play shows the spiritual growth of Jupiter who is defeated by a mortal woman, and after spending the night with her, finds a wrinkle on his face. According to Jean Giraudoux, the wrinkle is not a sign of old age; it is a symbol of life, knowledge and pleasure inherent only in a human being. Jupiter has to succumb to the purity, sincerity and innocence of the heroine. Alcmene discovers the life for him that is incomprehensible to the gods. He experiences not only sensuality, but also respect and love.

**Reception of a mythological story
in the play “Amphitryon” written
by Peter Hacks**

If Jean Giraudoux quite accurately reproduces the fable outline of the ancient myth, the “Amphitryon” (“Amphitryon”, 1968) of Peter

Hacks is a comedy that skilfully plays up not only the ancient myth, but also the works of previous authors acting as a reminiscential source. For example, Molière and Dryden introduce a character of Night into their plays, and Night is engaged into a comic dialogue with Mercury. Kleist’s Night is not the main character, but Jupiter needs its assistance to implement his plans.

Jetzt muß ich eilen und die Nacht erinnern,
Daß uns der Weltkreis nicht aus aller
Ordnung kommt.
Die gute Göttin Kupplerin verweilte
Uns siebzehn Stunden über Theben heut
(Kleist, 1807)

Night in the comedy by P. Hacks is in a form of blue curtain. It does not say a word, but using its actions expresses attitude to the orders of God. The figure of Sosius gets a new interpretation. Hacks’ Sosius no longer plays the role of a jester that the God of trickery Mercury laughs at. Now it is a clever philosopher expertly wielding a technique of the Sophists whose main credo “Der Weisheit Krone ist die Seelenruhe” does not bring adequate reassurance to anyone except himself (Hacks, 1969, 41). He has much in common with the character of Molière’s comedy, but takes a more important place in the play. In the dialogue between Sosius and Mercury the German playwright gives victory to the servant of Amphitryon. He sets God in hysterics with his unscrupulous conformism, while in other literary interpretations Mercury forced Sosius to admit defeat. Along with that, Hacks introduces into his play one of the attributes of the ancient theatre – a mask. When putting on masks, Jupiter and Mercury turn into Amphitryon and Sosius or become invisible, thus confusing all other characters of the play.

In the comedy by P. Hacks, just like in the Jean Giraudoux’s play, there is an anti-war

pathos, although it is not so clearly pronounced. All boastful speeches of the main character reveal inhumanity and repulsive nature of war.

The modern German writer does not build his play based on the clash of the divine and the human. He opposes the union of Jupiter and Alcmena to the onslaught of a dogmatic careerist Amphitryon. In the "Poetic Theatre of Peter Hacks" E.V. Vengerova notes that "his (P. Hacks) emancipated Jupiter and Alcmena were derived from the mentally healthy, complete and powerful characters of French classicism, and not from romantic figures tormented by resignation or feelings of remorse" (Vengerova, 1979, 468). Like Giraudoux, the German playwright does not put Amphitryon in the foreground. The play should have been called "Jupiter", because it is he who becomes the main hero of the comedy.

A master of the Olympus is represented not as a mysterious deity, but a simple, earthly man. He has vain attempts to memorize the speeches of Amphitryon that he always says when he returns home. No matter how Mercury tries to force God to follow the script, Jupiter still gives vent to his feelings. The Thunderer is shown as a skilful poet and a sensitive romantic. In a dialogue with Alcmena it is clearly seen:

Warum, zu Recht getretener Staub, nicht
lässest
Du Rosen blühn, was kauert, Winde, ihr
In eurer Höhle, statt, vom schwarzen
Libyen
Bis zu dem weißen Pol umfegend, die
Des süßen Wohllauts mächtigsten der
Vögel
Auf diesen Platz zu werfen? Trübe Sterne,
Reißt die gesunkenen Lider auf, erstrahlt,
Girlanden gleich, in fackelnd wildem
Brand.
Alkmene gilts, die Einzige, zu feiern
(Hacks, 1969, 17).

Alcmene falls for the charms of Jupiter who appeared in her eyes as not her husband, but a lover. She sees him as Amphitryon she once loved. She got tired of marital routine, while Jupiter awakens the feelings that she once had. "According to Hacks, the Jupiter's ability to give and receive sensual pleasure expresses undistorted humanity that is not limited to any social coercion" (Werner, 1982, 431). Amphitryon under social obligations and norms is opposed to the free and emotional Jupiter.

Amphitryon is a commander who, having forgotten about the matrimonial duty and feeling, preferred embrace of Thebes over the gentle embrace of the devoted Alcmena. Returning home from the battlefield, he always gives the same speech:

Dich, heiliger Herd, Glut unterm
Aschenschnee,
Dich, treue Hüterin des heiligen Herds,
Dich, steinern Haus, die Hüterin behütend,
Und, Wall von Theben, dich, des Hauses
Hut,
Dich ich durch Feindes Zorn und schlimme
Bosheit
Euch lassen muß, um fester euch zu
halten,
Ich grüß euch, Herd, Weib, Haus und
Heimat, wieder (Hacks, 1969, 46-47).

After this entry Amphitryon says to Alcmena only three short phrases. On wife's accusations the Theban commander replies that he is not a lover, but a husband. For him love is chaos, while marriage is an order and harmony, and the highest value is only military glory. Cruelty, inhumanity and antihumanity of Amphitryon's actions are disclosed in equally uncompromising tactics in battles.

One of the key moments of the work is a dispute of Amphitryon and Jupiter on a purpose

and role of a human in life and society. A human life, in the opinion of Amphitryon, is not only celebration and enjoyment, but also serious efforts and work. Jupiter agrees with him, while noting that only a bright and beautiful feeling called love is able to give humanity back to the hero.

The human, humanistic principle is manifested in Jupiter rather than in Amphitryon, whose behaviour only destroys family ties. Alcmene prefers Jupiter in the form of a spouse explaining that she chose the “best” Amphitryon:

Erkor ich den, der, wie du solltest, war:
Den, der aus deinem Liebe, was aus ihm,
Als nach dem angeerbten Muster möglich,
Du hättest machen können, hat gemacht.
Mann, ich verriet dich, denn nicht folgen
wollt
Ich dem Verrat, den du an dir begingst
(Hacks, 1969, 92).

Thus, Amphitryon suffers a complete defeat, but he is given a chance to revive his humanity and win back the love of Alcmene. And at the end of the play it is Jupiter who, sacrificing his feelings,

bestows a blessing to the spouses. However, at the very moment when the Thunderer is ready to explain to the heroes what they need to do next, Mercury recalls Jupiter back to the Olympus. According to Hacks, it is an important idea that a man needs to create his own destiny, despite different social obligations, crusted principles and intervention of the gods.

Conclusion

When creating their dramas, J. Giraudoux and P. Hack obviously referred to the experience of their predecessors, but largely reinterpreted the existing tradition. According to E.V. Vengerova, P. Hacks “rejected Hofmannsthal, he was a stranger to Giraudoux, Anouilh annoyed him” (Vengerova, 1979, 458). However, the analysis of the two same-name plays leads to the conclusion that the authors, despite belonging to different national traditions and literary schools, have the common interpretation of central topics – the meaning of life, human purpose, loyalty to his feelings, as well as humanistic ideas and the desire to modernize, psychologize, secularize the ancient tradition, fill it with a new content, while expressing their own philosopho-ethical and socio-political ideas.

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Художественная интерпретация сюжета об Амфитрионе в драмах Ж.Жироду и П. Хакса

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В статье рассматриваются особенности художественной рецепции классического сюжета об Амфитрионе в пьесах Ж. Жироду и П. Хакса. Миф о фиванском полководце получил огромное количество интерпретаций (Плавт, Мольер, Драйден, Клейст, Жироду, Кайзер, Хакс) на протяжении всего развития зарубежной литературы. В разные эпохи данный сюжет привлекал внимание авторов не только динамичной интригой и комической ситуацией с двойниками, но и возможностью для постановки общефилософских и бытийных проблем. В XX веке, ознаменованном интенсивным техническим развитием и мощными социально-политическими катаклизмами, новое поколение писателей вновь обращается к многовековому сюжету. Сопоставительный анализ драм Жироду и Хакса позволяет выявить сходство и различие в рецепции мифологического материала, обусловленные как временем создания произведений, так и своеобразием мировоззрения и эстетических принципов авторов.

Ключевые слова: Ж. Жироду, П. Хакс, Амфитрион, рецепция, миф, интерпретация.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.
