

IMPROVISATIONAL COMEDY IN THE DISCOURSE
OF GERMAN AESTHETIC THOUGHT

Abstract

The article considers the views of German theorists (from G. E. Lessing to P. Sloterdijk) on comic characters of improvised folk street performances. It is noted that German enlighteners, who defended their position in a struggle with supporters of French classicism, paid attention for the fruitfulness of the folk tradition and its role in the development of the national theatre. The active debate about the comic character that erupted in Germany in the XVIII century revealed more fundamental issues related to the boundaries of beauty in aesthetics. The article highrises not only the theoretical experience of G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe regarding the need of preserving the living branch of the folk tradition, but also its use directly in their artistic practice. The point of view of the German enlighteners on the creative potential of farcical improvisations has not lost its relevance in subsequent times. The question of the comic type and the concept of “comic” as a whole became the scientific interest of German scientists of the XIX–XXI centuries. The study of their works expanded the horizons of the problem by proposing its consideration in the philosophical, aesthetic, historical, sociological and art criticism aspects.

Keywords: folk tradition, Arlekin, improvised performances, clownish characters, street theatre, comic.

Introduction

Current studies in the field of the humanities are increasingly proceeding to update the achievements of the theoretical heritage of previous centuries. Firstly, this is due to the need to understand the positions that have already become classical from a new angle. Secondly, and most importantly, to consider those aspects which have not been previously studied or have been studied sporadically. In this regard, the study of texts concerning humour perception in dramatic art becomes more relevant. Humour is a paradoxical phenomenon that has concentrated

all the diversity and contradictions of human culture. Humour theory is examined in philosophical, aesthetic, sociological and art criticism dimensions. Cross-cultural humour commonalities and differences influenced the development of comedy. The concept of “catharsis”, introduced by Aristotle in his doctrine of tragedy, meant emotional purification of the viewer through the process of immersion in theatrical history. Later this term began to denote not only tragic experiences but also a comic catharsis, which is arousing from self-irony, provoking the viewer to laugh and, thereby, to change the attitude towards himself and the world.

German enlighteners, who defended their position in a struggle with supporters of French classicism, paid attention for the first time to the fruitfulness of the comic folk tradition and its role in the development of the national theatre. Despite the extensive array of studies on the theoretical and artistic heritage of G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe, their views on the value of comic folk theatre culture remain insufficiently studied today, which greatly stimulates further researching.

This seems especially important since it was the enlighteners who stood at the origins of the formation of modern German literature and theatre. Thanks to their efforts, German drama and stage art begin to focus on displaying the true feelings and relationships of the characters. In search of the development vector of the German theatre, G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe turn, in particular, to the lively tradition of street improvised spectacles, seeing in it significant creative potential. The high appreciation of the educators of the lower theatrical culture and the creative reserves laid down in it later find support in the research of German theorists of the XIX-XXI centuries, which gives grounds for considering the issue in a wider aesthetic and art criticism aspect.

It should be noted that some references to G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe's interest in the folk theatre tradition, although not often, are found in the works of some researchers of their theoretical heritage. However, we could not find any notable works dedicated to understanding the significance of this aspect in the formation of the artistic and scientific priorities of the German enlightenment; at the very least, in Eastern European scientific research.

The theoretical legacy of the German Enlightenment does not contain special opuses in

which their thoughts on this issue would be systematized. Nevertheless, at the same time, their views on folk street shows are widespread in different sources. Hence, the interest of G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe in the creative potential of folk street shows, and the possibility of its use in the national theatre building in Germany is an obvious idea. G. E. Lessing's position is outlined in his famous seventeen "Letters of Literature", as well as in several articles of the "Hamburg Dramaturgy". J. W. Goethe's attitude is shown in his memoirs "From My Life: Poetry and Truth" and travel notes "Italian Journey".

Based on this, the purpose of this article was not only the analysis and generalization of the views of G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe on folk street art but mainly the accentuation of their position on the creative potential of comic folk characters for the formation of a new dramaturgy and theatre stage.

In the German scientific thought of the next generations of scientists, the study of the enlightenment's heritage developed and contributed to the further development of the theory of comics in general. Therefore, we have a particular interest in studying this issue. The works of German theorists "Introduction to Aesthetics" by Jean-Paul, "Aesthetics of ugliness" by K. Rosencranz, "About the basics of morality" by A. Schopenhauer, "Criticism of the cynical reason" by P. Sloterdijk made it possible to comprehend the position of enlighteners newly and consider the issue of the "comic character", as well as the "comic" as a category of art in an aesthetic manner.

Discussion

It is necessary to turn to the state of the German theatre in general terms, in which the en-

lighteners found it in order to understand the significance of G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe's appeal to German folk drama and evaluate their commitment to the comic characters of improvisational comedy.

The theatrical life of Germany at the turn of the XVII-XVIII centuries, unlike other European countries, was limited to performances by court theatres, staged large-scale "heroic acts", improvised spectacles of folk troupes, as well as performances of Italian, French and English guest performers. However, despite the official status of "heroic acting" and the extreme popularity of booth performances, the need for professionalization of the German scene was obvious.

One of the first who energetically took up the "arrangement" of the German scene was professor J. C. Gottsched of the Leipzig University. Fascinated by the idea of professionalizing stage art as a role model, he chose the theatre of French classicism, which determined the vector of his reformist activity. So, J. C. Gottsched began the struggle against existing official plays and traditional forms of German folk theatre. The creation of images of noble heroes and moral maxims, according to J. C. Gottsched, should have become a rule for the German scene, and any signs of an improvisational buffoonery and clownish images were categorically excluded as "clumsy", "rude" and "vulgar". The buffoonery and comic improvisations of two jesters – Hanswurst (a traditional German character) and Italian Harlequin, – which organically "fit" into the German street performances, were a shame of the German scene, according to the Leipzig reformer. However, the simple characters of street improvisations found protection, in the face of G. E. Lessing, from the zealous attacks of the fighter for the "right" theatre, who tried to expel Harlequin from the "decent" German scene. In this

context, it is necessary to clarify that the figure of Harlequin in theatrical discussions of the 18th century codified the image of every buffoon character, including a purely German one – Hanswurst.

The real literary and critical struggle between German enlighteners unfolded around the figure of Harlequin, who was a constant participant in all theatrical shows, even the most serious ones.

The Italian Harlequin took a prominent place in folk theatre improvisations but did not supplant the theatre aborigine of Germany's street stage – Hanswurst. They both appeared in comic performances of German troupes, depending on the preferences of the directors. After analysing many notifications and announcements about the performances of German troupes (Zhirmunsky, 1978, pp. 120-138), it is difficult to find the difference between the semantic load of these images. Their functional task was to accompany the main character and "twist" his words in his way, to spin the intrigue and actively untie it unites these two buffoon characters. Over time, important for the fate of the German theatre the discussion about the boundaries of vulgarity admissible in the theatre will be defined as "a struggle against Harlequin". In this regard, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that it was not only about Harlequin, but equally about the purely German buffoon character Hanswurst.

Defending the image of Harlequin, G. E. Lessing essentially becomes his personal attorney. He criticizes J. C. Gottsched as a pedantic adherent of French classicism, who spoke out not only against traditional German improvisations but also the "wrong" drama of Shakespeare. Lessing's sharp pen defined both a strongly negative attitude to J. C. Gottsched by his younger con-

temporaries, in particular J. W. Goethe, and an assessment of his position by later historians of German literature and theatre.

According to M. Bakhtin (1990), “behind the narrow question about Harlequin, there was a wider and more fundamental problem of assuming art phenomena that did not meet the requirements of the aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime...” (p. 43). The Russian scientist refers to the work of Justus Möser “Harlequin: Or, A Defence of Grotesque Comic Performances” (1761), which emphasizes that Harlequin is “a particle of a special world, which includes Colombina, and the Captain, and the Doctor, and others, who is the world of *Commedia dell’arte*. This world has integrity, a remarkable aesthetic regularity, and its special criterion of perfection, which does not obey the classic aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 43). G. E. Lessing highly appreciated the article of J. Möser, in which he thoroughly defended Harlequin’s rights in the face of criticism. G. E. Lessing supported the author’s appeal renew the role of Harlequin as a carrier of the comedic-grotesque element of comedy. However, he did not share Möser’s intention to provide to grotesque images only the side room “in the temple of art”.

Fending off the attacks on Harlequin J. C. Gottsched and his supporters, G. E. Lessing resorts to a purely professional substantiation of the rights of the buffoon character and transfers the solution of the discussion issue to the field of drama theory. According to his argument, “We should not consider him [Harlequin] to be an individual, but rather a type” (Lessing, n.d., 18.8). G. E. Lessing illustrated his position with examples of French comedies (“The False Confessions” by Pier Marivaux, “Timon” and “The Falcon” by Jacques Delille), there Harlequin was given the most brilliant roles (Lessing, n.d.,

18.8). He emphasized that in the figure of this comic jester, the authors mentioned above embodied significantly different characters. Confirming the validity of his position, G. E. Lessing also finds an obvious parallel in the history of the ancient theatre, believing that the “parasite” in the comedies of “Romans and Greeks” was the same Harlequin. In “The Hamburg Dramaturgy”, he wrote: “Why should we be more contemptuous, pickier about our amusements, and more susceptible to hollow nitpicking – I will not say, than the French and Italians are, but rather – than the Romans and Greeks were themselves?” Besides, he asked: “Was their Parasite something other than a Harlequin? Didn’t he also have his own special costume in which he passed from one play to another? Did he not have his special costume, in which he appeared in play after play? Didn’t the Greeks have a special drama, into which Satyrs had to be woven, whether or not they belonged in the story of the play?” (Lessing, n.d., 18.9-10). The last argument of the supporters of J. C. Gottsched was Harlequin’s recognition as a “foreign creature”, to which G. E. Lessing wittily replied: “So what? I wish all the fools among us were foreigners!” (Lessing, n.d., 18.8).

Exploring the problem of the transition from comic in drama to comic in lyrics, Jean-Paul (1981) in 1804 noted that G. E. Lessing in the “Hamburg dramaturgy” suggested that “the parasite of ancient comedy is Harlequin” (p. 179). The figures of the Jester and Hanswurst determined the best beginning of the stage action and lyrics. In the treatise “Introduction to Aesthetics”, Jean-Paul substantiates his views with the functional significance of the buffoon character which, in ancient comedy, following the tradition, performed the mission of the Choir. Thus, according to Jean-Paul (1981), as the Chorus

“ascended over the characters, because he was not the character”, so Harlequin, who “was not a character in itself”; he should seem to represent a comic mood and, “without interfering in anything and without blazing passions, should only play like a real god of laughter, as personified humour” (p. 179).

The fact that “over the stage ticket” was taken away from “this chorist”, Jean-Paul explains not with the immutability of his jokes, but with the specifics of rude street humour, “ignoble origin and poor Harlequin upbringing”. Devoid of honour even among the Romans, like a common parasite, which “endured jokes on itself, ... if only they gave him to eat,” continues Jean-Paul, the buffoon continued to be “a target, not a shooter” (Jean-Paul, 1981, p. 179).

However, according to Jean-Paul, Harlequin should change along with the “development of culture” and “at least a little ennobled morally”, which will allow him to return his rights. So, on the one hand, understanding the potential of the historical and dramatic vitality of a national character, Jean-Paul does not want Harlequin’s lost for the theatre, on the other hand, he wants to see him free, selfless, wild and cynical – in a word: “Diogenes of Sinope, come back to us as Hanswurst, and we will leave you on our stage” (Jean-Paul, 1981, p. 180).

Calling on Hanswurst to return to the German scene, Jean-Paul (1981) demands that both Hanswurst and other jesters “obligatory” part with their “simple, primitive kitchen nicknames”, so that Hanswurst, Pickelhering, Casper, Lipperle “appear before us in the image of a man of respectable in the name of an unknown Spanish – Cosme, Grazioso ...” (p. 180). Jean-Paul hopes that someday an author will appear in Germany who will create an excellent comedy and to complete the “day of creation”, will create a “judi-

cious Adam – Harlequin” (p. 179), which demonstrates a certain one-sidedness of his view on the figure of a traditional comic character.

Almost simultaneously with the publication of the treatise of Jean-Paul, J. W. Goethe also spoke on the side of the “unchanged” areal characters. In “The First Journey to Italy”, in contrast to the position expressed by Jean-Paul, he emphasizes the productivity of preserving a lively clownish tradition in the figurative system of modern literary comedy. In particular, J. W. Goethe’s enthusiastic response to the Venetian play by C. Gozzi confirms his confidence in the possibility of using comedic characters of impromptu folk performances in the drama of the XVII century without turning them into “solid” heroes. “These masks ... succeed here only too well as the creation of the national taste. Here the most distinguished characters, persons of every age and condition, and as for the greater part of the year they are accustomed to wandering about in masks...” (Goethe, 1849, p. 320). Moreover, Goethe was not embarrassed by the “bizarre costumes” of the heroes, who were also a characteristic feature of the folk characters of the *Comedia dell’arte*, since they traditionally denoted their age, character and estate.

J. W. Goethe no less enthusiastically conveys his impressions from watching “*Le Baruffe Chiozzotte*” (“Brawling in Chioggia”) by K. Goldoni. In Goethe’s opinion, he created a great comedy using the hand of a great master from a real trinket (Goethe, 1849, pp. 318-20). K. Goldoni’s contribution to the development of the Italian national theatre was the creation of literary comedy with the creative transformation of the techniques and principles of areal comedy masks and the transformation of buffoon characters into full-fledged characters. Thus, Goethe discovered the other side of the vitality of local

jesters and their stage rights, to which Jean-Paul had shown them. They, without changing their colourful clothes and characteristics, sovereignly and organically continued their lives in K. Goldoni's and C. Gozzi's comedies.

In the book "From My Life: Poetry and Truth", Goethe's overt interest in German folk theatre is also evident. He wrote, "I had, in imitation of an old German puppet play, invented a wild extravaganza, which was to bear the title of Hanswurst's Hochzeit (Jack Pudding's Wedding)" (Goethe, 1849, p. 106). Preliminary sketching the dramatic plan of this play, he determines its scenography solution. According to Goethe's plan, the main thing was to become not only a famously twisted plot but first of all, the recreation of the tomfoolery atmosphere of an improvisational comedy and the type of carnival characters that create the soul of a folk street spectacle. At the same time, he attached great importance to the choice of character names, since in the improvisational carnival tradition, the personalization of the hero showed his typical essence. It is no coincidence that Goethe explained the appearance of comic types like them: "The principal joke which was carried out, even to an absurd length, arose from the fact that the whole dramatis personæ consisted of mere traditional German nicknames, which at once brought out the characters of the individuals, and determined their relations to one another" (Goethe, 1849, p. 107).

The comic hero of street interludes attracted Goethe since student days. For his friends at the University of Leipzig, he creates an impromptu plot in which "appears Harlequin with two large bags" as a comic entertainment. This was written by him as a comic prologue to Clodius' play "Medon", in which "wisdom, magnanimity and virtue" (Goethe, 2016, p. 258) seemed ridiculous

to him and his friends. According to the plot, Goethe's Harlequin "steps out with two great sacks, places them on each side of the proscenium, and after various preliminary jokes, tells the spectators in confidence, that in the two sacks moral esthetic dust is to be found, which the actors will very frequently throw into their eyes. One, to wit, was filled with good deeds, that cost nothing, and the other with splendidly expressed opinions, that had no meaning behind them" (Goethe, 2016, p. 258). But the allegory of the "virtues" of Claudeus's play itself became an object of allegorical reflection since both "good deeds" and "beliefs" became "moral and aesthetic sand", which the actors had to throw at the audience. Such a double "turning over" of the usual meaning of real things was in line with educational ideology. Therefore, it was no coincidence that before watching Medon, the most useful advice for the health of the audience was the message "shut their eyes" so that the "moral and aesthetic sand" would not harm them. Harlequin proclaimed this warning with "serious tone", emphasizing that he was a "friend" of the audience and "wished them well" (Goethe, 2016, p. 258).

Goethe's interest in areal theatre culture prompts us to turn to P. Sloterdijk's monograph "Critique of a Cynical Reason". Studying the problem of impudence, the German philosopher of the 21st century concludes that three social places play an essential role in "the spread of cheekiness: the carnival, the universities, and the Bohemians", which function "as safety valves through which needs that otherwise are not given their due in social life can achieve a limited release" (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 117). As well as J. W. Goethe and M. Bakhtin, P. Sloterdijk (1987) gives the carnival the significance of a kind of concussion in human social life, calling the carnival of ancient times "substitute revolution for

the poor” (p. 117). In his characterization, he turns to the traditional algorithm of holding folk festivals in Ancient Rome, where the principle of “turning over” was generated in the depths of the spirit and thinking of the Romans, when slaves acquired the right to turn into masters and vice versa, and the chosen “A kingly fool was elected who reigned over a thoroughly inverted world for a day and a night” (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 117).

P. Sloterdijk explains the social aspect of carnival insolence by the fact that “in this inverted world, the poor and the decent brought their dreams to life, as costumed oafs and bacchanals, forgetting themselves to the point of truth, cheeky, lewd, turbulent, and disgraceful. One was allowed to lie and to tell the truth, to be obscene and honest, drunken and irrational” (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 117). Referring to M. Bakhtin, the German philosopher notes that the satirical moment of the medieval carnival was borrowed by art, and its parody spirit inspired “macabre and satirical traditions and makes fools and harlequins, buffoons and Punches into standard figures of a great comical tradition that fulfils its task in the life of society even when it is not Shrove Tuesday” (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 117). In his conclusions, Sloterdijk (1987) argues that class society “can scarcely survive without the institution of the inverted world and the crazy day” (p. 106).

An explanation of the popularity of folk characters can also be found in the studies of K. Rosencranz, who establishes a connection between the ugliness and the comedic in the monograph “Aesthetics of Ugliness” by referring to such definitions as “rude”, “uncouth”, “ordinary”, etc. German philosopher of the nineteenth century considers it to be a big mistake to identify rudeness with the concept of a “hillbilly”, explaining this by the fact that in his genesis the peasant is equal to the rural aristocrat, for the free

peasant in his habits and manners manifests himself powerfully, like a force of nature, but in no way rude – on the contrary, aware of their strength, their wealth, full of natural nobility. However, at the steps of the social hierarchy, “an aristocracy of any level will consider the manners of the social strata subordinate to them rude and clumsy” (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 118).

“Uncouthness” is a disregard for manners, K. Rosencranz emphasizes, and, in contrast to the city dweller “with his resourceful flexibility”, a peasant can be called a “hillbilly, rude”. According to K. Rosencranz, from an aesthetic point of view, his image began to be perceived as repulsive only when the feudal aristocracy subjected him to extreme exploitation (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 118). In turn, this formed “stubbornness” among the peasant, which was ridiculed as the “narrow-mindedness and awkwardness” of the redneck, the German scientist concludes.

These reflections of K. Rosencranz raise the deep layer of the patrimonial consciousness of man, and in the context of explaining the popularity of folk ideas give invaluable material. An appeal to the history of the urban theatre culture of squares and streets, including German, demonstrates that its features were largely caused by the massive replenishment of the urban population by the impoverished peasantry, hiding from the brutal exploitation of the feudal lords. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the former representatives of the village formed not only the basis of vagrant acting troupes but also that street crowd of spectators surrounding the impromptu stage.

The historical and social announcement by K. Rosencranz of the specifics of the sources of popular rudeness, in our opinion, explains the interest in traditional farcical characters as being really truthful and unfairly humiliated. That is,

the street crowd, watching the ups and downs of buffoon heroes, at some unconscious level felt their roots, supported them, such as they unjustly suffer from insults, and rejoiced with them in case of victory, since this victory was perceived as deserved and fair.

We find in K. Rosencranz's texts a "social explanation" of the aristocrats' disregard for street improvisations, the rude and clumsy buffoonery of which offended their refined taste. If we turn back to the aesthetic views of J. C. Gottsched, based on the conclusions of K. Rosencranz, we can find not only his social but also personal and psychological need to be involved in the aristocracy, above all – the aristocracy of the spirit. In this case, it becomes clear why French classicism, with its levelling of everything related to the ordinary life of a commoner, was chosen by professor J. C. Gottsched as a model for the professionalization of the German scene. Moreover, why an impromptu street farce, with its clumsy and rude characters, became the main object of his criticism.

K. Rosencranz also explains the "maturation" of the purely structural elements of comic spectacles. Exploring the problem of the meaning of form in various forms of art, in particular, its "becoming as turning into another", the philosopher notes that "any movement – even disappearance and cessation – is beautiful" (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 64). K. Rosencranz (2015) develops his thought to the comic effect, leads to "a continuous repetition of the same change", and in addition to a continuous desire "to change the image and a constant return to the past form, it plays the role of comic power" (p. 66). This technique the philosopher discovers in the art of an acrobat, clown, circus rider. Confirmation of this, in fact, is the farce, a folk theatre spectacle, saturated with repetitions of the same reprise, unex-

pected movements and replicas, all kinds of "turning over" and changing clothes, as well as the inconsistency of exquisite speech and rude jokes.

The instinctive intention of art for diversity contains the danger of creating a "funny mish-mash", which can even become the "ugly" (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 67). And the resulting asymmetry is not a simple absence of form – it is a manifestation of deformation, which, according to the German philosopher, is an important means of the comic. At the same time, K. Rosencranz (2015) emphasizes that in the absence of symmetry, there is still nothing comic, but in confusion and fusion, it becomes tangible (p. 67).

The philosopher reveals the semantic meaning of jargon and dialects in street performances, which was a specific comic method of folk lovers. Rosencranz draws attention to the fact that such language takes us outside civilization and "refined bourgeois society" (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 67).

K. Rosencranz also refers to the basic plots that were primarily used by street comedians. The philosopher notes that since every type of art turns around in a certain sphere, he "will be limited by the ability to invent". Nevertheless, the philosopher continues, this cannot be a reproach concerning art, because thanks to "individualization, the permanent foundations are presented in a new form", confirming that "some themes and plots remain unchanged among different peoples, in different eras and different languages" (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 139). Among German national traditional plots, K. Rosencranz points to the legend of Faust. Examining the classic "master-servant" relationship, the philosopher emphasizes that although such relationship exhausts most of the modern plots of antique comedy, it remains basic in Western European literature and later art. K. Rosencranz argues that in this diver-

sity, only the similarity of the premises that follow from the general nature of the situation remains constant. Therefore, gentlemen, like their servants, have a certain similarity, but in this similarity, their personality will constantly differ, and this will be the originality of the creative imagination (Rosencranz, 2015, p. 67).

Indeed, information about folk dramatizations of the plot about Dr Faust in Germany dates back to the Middle Ages. An interesting fact is that starting from 1738, as the constant companion of Faust, the figure of the clumsy simpleton Gansvurst is included in the play of this plot, and from 1749 – Harlequin (Zhirmunsky, 1978, pp. 125-132). At the same time, the presence of Hanswurst was not just a comic component of stage shows. This character was chosen by the spontaneous imagination of the organizers of theatrical performances as the “understudy” of Faust’s magic acts: he repeated all the actions of the wizard. Here it is appropriate to refer to the statement of A. Schopenhauer, who, comparing the “system of moral teaching” by J. G. Fichte with the philosophy of I. Kant, remarked that “In the old German Marionettes a fool always accompanied the emperor, or hero, so that he might afterwards give in his own way a highly coloured version of what had been said or done. In like manner behind the great Kant there stands the author of the *Wissenschaftslehre* [ed. Note – scientific doctrine], a true *Wissenschaftsleere* [ed. Note – scientific misinstruction]” (Schopenhauer, 2014, pp. 124-125). The most important in the functional significance of the image of Gansvurst-Harlequin remained that this comic character deftly used the services of Mephistopheles. However, unlike Faust, he did not “mortgage” his soul for this. As a result of this arrangement of characters, “evil spirits” is losing

its power over common sense.

G. E. Lessing, who actively advocated folk characters and ridiculed J. C. Gottsched’s appeal to “French” the German theatre, believed that folk stories about Dr Faust contained many scenes “that could only be possible for Shakespeare’s genius” (Lessing, 1978, p. 246). In his opinion, this old German story has much living and natural, in contrast to the cold rationalism of the French drama of classicism. Moreover, G. E. Lessing himself began work on the play “Faust”, from which, unfortunately, left only a prologue and part of the first act. Nevertheless, G. E. Lessing introduced this legend into German classical drama, interpreting it, like Goethe, as the knowledge tragedy.

The creative potential of buffoonery remained one of the priorities for J. W. Goethe though his whole life. He went through a youthful fascination with the street comedian Hans Sachs, the result of which was his so-called “Hans-Sachs” works: puppet-show “Plundersweilern Fair”, “Hanswurst’s Wedding” (“Hanswursts Hochzeit oder der Lauf der Welt”) and “A Carnival Game of Pater Bray, the False Prophet” (“Ein Fastnachtspiel vom Pater Brey, dem falschen Propheten”). J. W. Goethe returned to the carnival characters of the improvisational comedy later, reproducing them in “Journey to Italy”, “From My Life: Poetry and Truth”. When he headed the courtier theatre in Weimar, he studied traditional folk theatre forms with deep interest, trying to delve into the content and meaning of masks and symbols, which will be partially used by him in the masquerade scene of the second part of “Faust”. Inspired by improvised productions of a folk legend, J. W. Goethe also conceived the creation of his interpretation of the “Legend of the Warlock”.

Research Results

Appeal to the views of G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe on art made it possible to identify and generalize their positions regarding the productivity of farcical folk improvisations for the formation of the German theatre in one theoretical space. The merit of the enlighteners in the formation of a realistic direction in the development of German dramaturgy was revealed, which they defend in sharp controversy with professor J. C. Gottsched. The interest of the German titans of the Enlightenment in the German farcical tradition, their numerous theoretical statements and dramatic practices were empirical evidence of the erroneous assertion of J. C. Gottsched that the only way to become a professional theatre in Germany was to focus on the aesthetics of French Classicism. As further development path of the German theatre, showed, an attempt to build it according to the strict canons of "Poetics" N. Boileau was unable to supplant the images created by folk fantasy and real life. The national tradition, as a reflection of the specific features of the people's worldview, absorbed the mental and spiritual orientations of the German people to the fullest extent possible, and the attempt to rationally arrange the German scene and break with tradition demonstrated their non-viability.

Conclusion

Thus, the national tradition as a reflection of the peculiarities of the people's worldview, having absorbed the mental and spiritual orientations of the German people as much as possible, revealed its creative potential in artistic creation, aesthetics and art criticism of the XVII–XXI centuries. Even though G. E. Lessing and J. W. Goethe

the did not leave special studies devoted to this problem, their extreme interest in the experience of impromptu performances indicates the productivity of their use in literature, dramaturgy in particular, and theatre.

German enlighteners explained the "constant success" of folk shows by their "indivisibility with life", proximity to a life-affirming popular worldview. Therefore, Lessing and Goethe's statement to preserve the national tradition was not just a manifesto of enlighteners in the struggle for the "stage rights" of Hanswurst-Harlequin but encouraged for the creation of dramatic images filled with the vibrating spirit of real life.

Involvement of the studies of Jean-Paul, K. Rosencranz, A. Schopenhauer and P. Sloterdijk in development this theme not only demonstrated the place and importance of comedy types in the theatrical practice of the Enlightenment but also revealed the underlying essence of the problem and its conceptual guidelines.

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