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Review

Chinghiz Aitmatov's Mythopoetic Picture of the World through the Context of Modern Stage Interpretations



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Keywords: theater festival, cultural dialogue, Chinghiz Aitmatov, mythopoetic picture, metaphor, interpretation, archetypes.

Abstract. The theatrical process in Central Asia is characterized by a common history of formation and development, basic principles and at the same time the originality and artistic heterogeneity of national theaters. A theater festival that is currently acquiring important significance as a space for dialogue between cultures serves as an indicator of its transformation in the region. Using the example of the winning performances of the VI International Theater Festival "Aitmatov and Theater" (2023), the mythopoetic picture of the world of Chinghiz Aitmatov is studied in the context of modern stage interpretations.

The festival featured productions of prose rather than drama. This determined the features of the aesthetic structure of performances created within logocentric oriental cultures. The article analyzes the performances of Ulanmyrzha Karypbayev, one of the leading young directors in Central Asia. His productions such as "Borandy becket" (*Station under Storm*) and "Ak keme" (*White Steamship*) were among the best. They reveal the most characteristic features of U. Karypbayev as a director: a rich metaphorical system, theatrical polyphony, ritualization, grotesque, complex mise-en-scène. A large-scale play "Zhan pida" (*Scaffold*) directed by Nurkanat Zhakypbai current open the topics of historical memory, national identity and essential issues of existence. His stage interpretation is characterized by multi-layered visuals, exquisite plastic solutions, picturesque crowd scenes, a complex musical score, and a monologue principle in the acting performance. The directors Bair Badmayev and Gafur Mardanov created the story of Mother's life path in the context of the national picture of the world in the stage versions of *Mother Earth*.

The festival demonstrated a modern theatrical interpretation of Aitmatov's works in Central Asia, characterized by leaving a usual path of words on stage and turning to more deeper interpretations. It is obvious that compositionally complex stage works are created with all components existing on an equal basis: words, stage action, scenography, rich plastic score, authentic musical sequence with performers on stage. Directors raise current issues, artistically comprehend reality and embody it in ideas, images, stage solutions that reflect the richness and diversity of the theatrical art in Central Asia.

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Өнертану кандидаты, Темірбек Жүргенов атындағы Қазақ ұлттық өнер академиясының театр өнерінің тарихы мен теориясы кафедрасының профессоры, Қазақстанның еңбек сіңірген қайраткері (Алматы, Қазақстан)

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Ревью

Шыңғыс Айтматовтың заманауи сахналық интерпретациялар контекстіндегі мифопоэтикалық бейнесі

Тірек сөздер: театр фестивалі, Шыңғыс Айтматов, мифопоэтикалық сурет, метафора, интерпретация, архетиптер.

Аңдатпа. Орталық Азиядағы театр үдерісі қалыптасу және даму тарихының ортақтығымен, негізгі қағидаларымен және сонымен бірге ұлттық театрлардың өзіндік ерекшелігімен және көркемдік әркелкілігімен сипатталады. Оның аймақтағы трансформациясының көрсеткіші – қазіргі таңда мәдениеттер арасындағы диалог алаңы ретінде маңызды мәнге ие болып отырған театр фестивалі. VI Халықаралық «Айтматов және театр» театр фестивалінің (2023) жеңімпаз спектакльдерінің мысалын пайдалана отырып, Шыңғыс Айтматов әлемінің мифопоэтикалық суреті заманауи сахналық интерпретациялар контекстінде қарастырылады.

Фестивальде драмалық шығармалардан гөрі прозалық шығармалар ұсынылды. Бұл логоцентристік шығыс мәдениеттері аясында жасалған спектакльдердің эстетикалық құрылымының ерекшеліктерін анықтады. Мақалада «Боранды бекет» және «Ақ кеме» қойылымдары үздіктер қатарында болған Орталық Азияның жетекші жас режиссёрлерінің бірі Ұланмырза Қарыпбаевтың спектакльдері талданады. Бұл қойылымдар Ұ. Қарыпбаевтың режиссурасының ең сипатты белгілерін көрсетті: бай метафоралық жүйе, театрлық полифония, ритуализация, гротеск, күрделі мизансцена.

Режиссёр Нұрқанат Жақыпбай «Жан пида» көлемді пьесасында тарихи жадының, ұлттық болмыстың өзекті мәселелерін қозғады. Оның сахналық интерпретациясы көпқабатты көрнекіліктермен, талғампаз пластикалық шешімдермен, көркем топтама көріністермен, күрделі музыкалық партитурамен, актерлік қойылымдағы монологтық принциппен ерекшеленеді. «Ана – Жер-ана» спектаклінің сахналық нұсқаларының режиссёрлері Баир Бадмаев пен Гафур Марданов Ананың өмір жолын дүниенің ұлттық суреті контекстінде жасады.

Фестиваль Орталық Азиядағы Ш. Айтматов шығармашылығын сахнада тек сөзбен жүрудің әдеттегі жолынан тереңірек түсіндіруге бет бұрумен сипатталатын заманауи театрландырылған интерпретациясын көрсетті. Композициялық жағынан күрделі сахналық шығармалар барлық құрамдас бөліктер: сөз, сахналық іс-әрекет, сценография, бай пластикалық партитура, сахнадағы орындаушылардың шынайы музыкалық дәйектілігі тең болатындай жасалатыны анық. Режиссёрлер өзекті мәселелерді көтеріп, шындықты көркемдікпен ұғынып, оны идеяларда, бейнелерде, сахналық шешімдерде Орталық Азия театр өнерінің байлығы мен жан-жақтылығын бейнелейді.

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Ревью

Мифопоэтическая картина мира Чингиза Айтматова в контексте современных сценических интерпретаций

Ключевые слова: театральный фестиваль, диалог культур, Чингиз Айтматов, мифопоэтическая картина, метафора, интерпретация, архетипы.

Аннотация. Театральный процесс в Центральной Азии характеризуется общностью истории становления и развития, базовых принципов и в то же время своеобразием и художественной неоднородностью национальных театров. Индикатором его трансформации в регионе становится театральный фестиваль, который в настоящее время приобретает важное значение пространства диалога культур. На примере спектаклей-лауреатов VI Международного театрального фестиваля «Айтматов и театр» (2023) рассматривается мифопоэтическая картина мира Чингиза Айтматова в контексте современных сценических интерпретаций.

На фестивале были представлены постановки не драматургии, а прозы. Это определило особенности эстетической структуры спектаклей, созданных внутри логоцентричных ориентальных культур. В статье анализируются спектакли одного из ведущих молодых режиссеров Центральной Азии Уланмырзы Карыпбаева, постановки которого «Боранды бекет» («Буранный полустанок») и «Ақ кеме» («Белый пароход») вошли в число лучших. В этих спектаклях проявились наиболее характерные черты режиссуры У. Карыпбаева: насыщенная метафорическая система, театральная полифония, ритуализация, гротеск, сложносочиненные мизансцены. В спектакле большой формы «Жан пида» («Плаха») режиссер Нурканат Жакыпбай обратился к актуальным темам исторической памяти, национальной идентичности, сущностным вопросам бытия. Его сценическому прочтению присущи многослойный визуальный ряд, изысканное пластическое решение, живописные массовые сцены, сложная музыкальная партитура, монологический принцип в актерском исполнении. Режиссерами сценических версий «Материнского поля» Баиrom Бадмаевым и Гафуром Мардановым была создана история жизненного пути Матери в контексте национальной картины мира.

Фестиваль продемонстрировал современное театральное прочтение творчества Ч. Айтматова в Центральной Азии, характеризующееся поворотом от привычного пути следования на сцене только за словом к более глубоким интерпретациям. Очевидно, что создаются композиционно сложные сценические произведения, в которых все компоненты существуют на равных правах: слово, сценическое действие, сценография, насыщенная пластическая партитура, аутентичный музыкальный ряд с исполнителями на сцене. Режиссеры поднимают актуальные проблемы, художественно осмысляют реальную действительность и воплощают ее в идеях, образах, сценических решениях, отражающих богатство и разнообразие театрального искусства Центральной Азии.

There is so much in common in the genesis of the Central Asian national theaters, in the models of their establishment and in the trajectory of the historical path. This was especially evident at festivals that reflected the process of dialogue between the performing arts. Initially, the most significant festival was Nauryz that was held alternately since 1989 in each capital of the regional republic.

During the hard times at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the interaction of theatrical cultures had been suspended. The first decade of the 21st century gave a start to restore international contacts, thus festival theater activities intensified in the 2020s.

Kazakhstan regularly hosts the annual Republican Theater Festival, the International Theater Festival of Central Asian Countries (every two years), the Republican Festival of National (Ethnic) Theaters, thematic festivals, local and international festivals in regional theaters.

The theatrical process in Central Asia has also become more intense. In the 2023–24 season each republic hosted international festivals inviting theaters of neighboring countries. This made it possible to determine the trends in progress of modern performing arts in the region. In addition, in November 2023 the TURKSOY International Theater Festival was held for the first time in Baku, and is planned to be held annually. Due to such forums, it was possible to restore the interaction of national theaters, to identify the dramatic art features of the participating countries, to determine the uniqueness of new young directors and their development trends, to discuss current problems and prospects of modern theatrical vocabulary. The festival is back on track and once again gets an important space for dialogue between theaters in Central Asia.

In December 2023 the VI International Theater Festival "Aitmatov and Theater" that was dedicated to the 95th anniversary of the outstanding writer took place in Bishkek. National theaters from six countries showed a variety of new stage readings of his works. The history of theatrical embodiments of Ch. Aitmatov's works goes back several decades. Productions based on his works have always been in the repertoire of CIS, Kyrgyz and Kazakh theaters as well as England, France, USA, Sweden, India and Japan.

With the prevailing majority of dramatic stage decisions within the program of the festival a one-man show, a puppet production, and an opera were performed. An audience saw the theatrical interpretations of Ch. Aitmatov's works that can be lyrical and philosophical, grotesque and futuristic, multi-figured and chamber, plastic and musical. The specifics of national acting art and corresponding approaches to the literary source influenced the interaction of the author's text and stage action as well as the formation of modern theatrical language.

Ulanmyrza Karypbayev, a young Kyrgyz director, made himself known with his performances. He is a recent graduate of the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts (RGISI, St. Petersburg) and Director in Chief of Azerbaijan Mambetov Kazakh State Drama and Comedy Theater (Astana). His productions of "Borandy becket" (*Station under Storm*, 2022) on the stage of above mentioned theater and "Ak keme" (*White*

Steamship, 2023) of Kassymaly Zhantoshev Issyk-Kul Regional Music and Drama Theater¹ were the best at the festival.

1 With the participation of U. Karypbayev's students – O. Mukhamedzhan and Zh. Makhambetiyar (Kazakh National University of Arts (Astana).

Let's review the play *Station under Storm* as an example of connection with the mythological features of national culture and at the same time the search for new theatrical forms.

The *Station under Storm* is a large theatrical canvas that U. Karypbayev builds in the multidimensional space of the stage. He stepped away from the canon of "literary" theater and stage illustrations. Rejecting the consistency of linear presentation and novelistic detail, he interweaves the events of the plot in his own way. The historical context is introduced into the performance with the stage part of a new character named Gasyr who is a copy Stalin and personifies the totalitarian twentieth century. By U. Karypbayev's definition, he removed a "cosmological" line, not overloading the event series of the production. He actively uses cinematic editing of episodes with the concentrated dramatic clashes between characters.

The story is about the main character Yedigey (N. Saudanbekuly) who goes on a long journey to bury his deceased friend Kazangap (A. Shakirzhanov) in the distant Ana-Beyit cemetery. The play grows into a work that is polyphonic in sound and complex in structure with woven cross-cutting storylines. For example, Mankurt (N. Muslimov), his mother Naiman-Ana (G. Zhakilina) and the camel Karanar (Ye. Akan) pass through different historical eras and spaces (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1. N. Muslimov as Mankurt and G. Zhakilina as Naiman-Ana. "Borandy beket" (*Station under Storm*). Director U. Karypbayev. A. Mambetov State Drama and Comedy Theater (Astana, Kazakhstan). 2022. Photo by N. Rossinova.

The set design of Alan Saimin is organized according to semiotic meanings. The rails on the platform from time to time transport the characters from the back of the stage to the ramp in the center. A road appears as a life path, and leads the cast into the space of performance, into the authoritarian world. Later, along this railway, they are steadily taken back behind a large opening in the wall that illuminates like a locomotive furnace. That image transforms into the metaphor of the "history furnace".

Through the entire performance, on the right side of the stage a musician, the *Voice of the Steppe* (B. Ussen), is playing the Kazakh musical instrument *sybyzgy*.

Its sounds evoke associations with the wide steppe and wildlife. Corpulent Gasyr (E. Yessendosov), the embodiment of the Ruler with the external attributes of totalitarian power is on the left. He wears a red Stalin-style jacket, red cockade cap, breeches and boots. This spatial solution is a kind of replica of the ancient European theatrical tradition where the negative characters reside on the left side of the stage, and the positive ones are on the right.

The very first scene shows the visual confrontation between Mother Deer (A. Makezhanova) and Gasyr, a conflict of nature and the authoritarian power that suppresses everything alive. From the depths of the stage a Mother Deer appears followed by graceful girls and lingering sounds of *sybyzgy*. They personify the sublime beauty and harmony of the national cultural heritage. The Mother Deer's head is covered with *kimeshek* (headdress of a married women) as a symbol of motherhood. The dramatic clash is supported by the sound score and scenographic design. The harmony of the steppe melody played by *sybyzgy* intertwined with a woman's folk singing, is disrupted by the cacophony of shouts and revolutionary slogans of a loud marching crowd.

In the composition of the production U. Karypbayev applies a cinematic technique. He uses wide, medium and close-up plans simultaneously, that gives the performance an additional spatial volume. An audience sees everything what's happening on stage in general plan. Close-up stands Gasyr like a conductor and controls the crowd of young boys and girls who are shouting proletarian poems. In the middle ground of the stage, people with knapsacks and suitcases are stomping around, singing "Internationale" and chanting worker-peasant cheers. Like a snowstorm, they sweep away everything, just as the bloody revolution destroy all living things around.

In the play, the grotesque coexists with psychological feelings, stage tropes with the symbolism of *mise-en-scène*. When Naiman-Ana turns to her son Mankurt to help him remember the past, he pushes his mother away, mechanically and indifferently marching further with a red banner in his hands. The heroine's monologue is full of mental pain and suffering. The role of actress G. Zhaquilina is built on a detailed internal analysis of the image. And in parallel, the eccentric Gasyr acts on the stage, controlling the crowd, directing Mankurt's actions and singing the song "Wide is My Native Country", shouting with sarcasm: 'I don't know another country like this, where a person breathes so freely'!

The director's vivid interpretation of Ch. Aitmatov's prose with a large number of theatrical characters, combined with a variety of sound solutions and the psychological content of the acting works, leads to a new level of expressiveness. Metaphors seem to grow through the stage action. During Kazangap's last monologue before his death, women slowly unwrap the long white fabric of *kimeshek* that Mankurt's mother wears. This fabric becomes a shroud for Kazangap during the mourning ceremony. The scene connects different times and draws analogies between historical eras. Such force lines create a special artistic space of the performance, reflecting the director's worldview.

The director of the play visualizes the novel image of Mankurt as an archetype of eternal slave. An audience sees different faces of Mankurt. He is a slave of the *zhuanzhuans*, a GULAG victim, a representative of the punitive security forces of Stalin's times and a soldier guarding a cemetery to be eliminated. Mankurt appears

on the stage from the very beginning of the performance. Gasyr ritually dips his white headband in red paint, as if converting him to the new revolutionary government. And throughout the entire performance, he carries out all the instructions of Gasyr blindly, being a slave to the dictatorial system and authoritarian ideology. In the finale, in modern reality, Mankurt takes off his cap and passes it like a baton to a boy of new, future generation.

In the production itself, the audience sees "a metaphor for a person's life journey, and universal archetypal features that are formed from composed images, recognizable to society as a whole and each character individually" (Vogler 66). According to this principle Naiman-Ana, Gasyr, Karanar present themselves as archetypes of Mother, Ruler, Charon respectively.

The performance is characterized by diversity of images semantics and techniques. It is full of memorable signs and symbols, combination of leitmotifs, rhythms and their plastic expression, action ritualization. For example, at the start, actor Ye. Akan as a camel Karanar plays the scene of the baby camel birth, its first steps. He accurately and subtly translates the actor's observation and perception into the psychophysics of the image, into the process of sensory cognition of the world. And then, as the play progresses, throughout the entire action, Karanar becomes like Charon. He regularly appears to take away deceased characters from the stage, transporting them to afterlife on a construction wheelbarrow instead of *kimbi* boat. Even an animal turns out to be a chain link of the repressive system under a totalitarian regime.

During Kazangap's funeral procession, men appear on the stage, carrying *tabyt* (ritual bier) with the deceased. Then the ritual is repeated several times and accelerates further, its meaning is desacralized, just as life itself is devalued in a regulated society.

The historical milestones of a huge country such as revolution, collectivization, Stalinist repressions, war, the post-war right up to space exploration years, reach the station lost in steppes like waves, taking away people and hope of the remained ones. The life of Yedigey reflects the fate of millions of people. He himself is a microcosm of the Universe. Such seemingly inconspicuous people, living in harmony with their conscience, are the basis of society. Showing compassion to Yedigey, the audience get a sense of belonging to the historical past of its loved ones, its country. And U. Karypbayev, preserving the main ideas of the author, reveals modern meanings in a work written almost half a century ago.

The *White Steamship* staged by Kassymaly Zhantoshev Issyk-Kul Regional Music and Drama Theater is a completely different story. It reveals the world of the main character, the Boy, whose dream is to meet his father on a white ship in Issyk-Kul.

From the very first scenes, actress A. Tazhybekova makes an indelible impression with the organic nature of her stage existence, naturalness and spontaneity. Introducing the characters, the Boy writes their names on the lined-up doors. There is a separate life outside the door. "Everyone has their own entrance and exit."

Two worlds coexist on stage. The real everyday world and the fictional spiritual one (set design by S. Niyazkhunov). The real one is just three yards in the reserve at the cordon, where the Boy sees only the pragmatism and cruelty of the forester Orozkul (K. Shabdaliyev), the tears and crying of his wife Bekey (S. Abdykadyrova), the non-stop

discontent and grumbling of the old woman Kempir (K. Akmatova). The only person a child can talk to is his grandfather Momun (T. Boronbayev). The Boy's salvation is a world of dreams and fantasies. And this world director U. Karypbayev shows on stage as light, bright and cheerful. It brings to life the protagonist's charming stone friends with whom he talks and plays. Representatives of spiritualized nature, they wear bright clothes just like fairies, present gifts to good people and punish bad ones with their toy batons.

The director's artistic and imaginative vision shows how the Boy's loneliness is replaced by a rich inner life. How rational, regulated adult world collides with ingenuous child's world of imagination and dreams. It is there, in fantasies, the Boy's friends punish Orozkul, beating him for his viciousness and ruthlessness. Such scenes are filled with carefree laughter and joyful performance. These two worlds also have a contrast in their rhythmic structure: light, fast-paced in fantasy scenes and clear, hard in everyday life.

In the dramatic space of the play, the director contrasts good and evil as a binary opposition, as two poles of human life. He views the causes of everyday aggression and anger of adult characters, the family degradation and damage of traditional lifestyle. Even in such a secluded place, where a human feels himself as part of nature, and seemingly should be aware of his roots, the forester Orozkul constantly abuses his wife. Losing himself, in a drunken rage, he screams and blames her for the infertility. Kempir confronts Momun, who blames himself for the death of his son. And only the Boy dreams about peace and harmony for everyone (see Fig. 2).

The audience looks at events and adults not through author's or the director's but through the Boy's eyes, his perception of the world, and is immersed in the playful elements of the performance. The Boy lives a full life in a game, this is his way of natural existence. In noisy, colorful and at the same time heartwarming and tender scenes of the Boy's fantasy, the actress delicately conveys the child's ability to openly enjoy life and be curious about the world.

Orozkul's destructive behavior is a sign of the family breakdown, the destruction of a stable lifestyle associated with the traditional system of moral values and principles.



Figure 2. A. Tazhybekova as the Boy. "Ak keme" (*White Steamship*). Director U. Karypbayev. K. Zhantoshev Issyk-Kul Regional Music and Drama Theater (Karakol, Kyrgyzstan). 2023. Photo from the archives of the Theater.

The young director seems to guide an audience to the roots, to worldview traits of the national culture and shows the ability to “combine the sermon of ingenuous kindness with the image of a cruel and dehumanized world” (Rudnev 88).

In the finale, the Boy saw the murdered Mother Deer and falls ill. He decides to board a white steamship, hoping to meet his father. The boy goes under water. His imaginary friends and deceased relatives are supporting him. In Ch. Aitmatov's story, one of the characters says that “no one would look for him and grieve about him”, but in U. Karypbayev's play, adults come to the forefront with a burning white steamship, as if warming up by its fire. The director means that they did not realize it, but the Boy warmed them with his love and illuminated their lives. A huge white sail fills the stage. With this dream the Boy sailed away from the imperfect world (see Fig. 3).



Figure 3. The scene from “Ak keme” (*White Steamship*). Director U. Karypbayev. K. Zhantoshev Issyk-Kul Regional Music and Drama Theater (Karakol, Kyrgyzstan). 2023. Photo from the archives of the Theater.

The *Scaffold* play staged by Zhastar Theater (Youth Theater) in Astana, that received the Grand Prix for “Large Form Performance”, has a different aesthetic. Director Nurkanat Zhakyypbai periodically addresses to the works of Ch. Aitmatov, including the *Scaffold* novel as one of the components of the dramatic basis. He combined several works, Ch. Aitmatov's novel and the stories of Kazakh writers, the *Orphaned Baby Camel* by O. Bokei and the *Angel with the Face of a Demon* by R. Mukanova. That symbiosis created a great epic performance about the fundamental issues of human existence. N. Zhakyypbai brought to the stage the heroes of author's different novels. The leading roles were played by the actors of the director's first group of graduates, together they'd become the founders of the Zhastar Theater. They are D. Sergazin, A. Akhmetov, A. Rakhipova, Zh. Batai, B. Khadzhibayev and others.

In broad dialogues and monologues of Jesus Christ and Pontius Pilate, Naiman-Ana and Mankurt, Yedigey and the Boy from the *White Steamship*, essential questions of existence are raised. N. Zhakyypbai arranges the acts in such a way that “the thematic progress, but not the development of the plot and not the intrigue, plays a leading role in the formation of the stage structure” (Maltseva 106). These scenes are filled with the energy

of sound, and the rhythm of the artistic word turns into one of the defining techniques for organizing stage action. Two different models of worldview collide. The one party is a traditional model rooted in national moral postulates. The second one is contemporary based on the destruction of the key principles of spiritual heritage.

The performance demonstrates mythologically conscious vision of director N. Zhakypbai. He's got an extensive experience in parable performances. Their poetics lie in special expressive system that operates with symbols and signs of the artist. Within the surface of this production, N. Zhakypbai builds a world free of life-likeness and everyday human relationships. Devoid of illustrativeness and narrative links, scenography of Ye. Tuyakov steps into the field of play theater filled with metaphors. The huge vertical circular structure is a kind of reference to the "wheel of Samsara" with its non-stop cycle of life and death. The vertical red staircase like the "Jacob's ladder" connects heaven and earth, the spiritual and material worlds. Horizontally, the ladder is used as a ritual *tabyt*. Large balls of desert tumbleweeds (*qanbaq*) that are carried on the extras backs, symbolize a loss and absence of roots, therefore a loss of historical memory and own identity.

The spatial solution influenced the artistic image of the performance and the way the actors exist on the stage. They do not carry a specific story or plot from everyday life, their texts are based on philosophical discussions about good and bad, life and death, love and hatred, criminal acts and repentance, responsibility for one's actions, and the fact that everyone has their own scaffold. The director brings up important themes of national self-awareness such as historical memory, totalitarianism, political repression, sacrifice, problems of choice, responsibility and communication.

N. Zhakypbai creates visual images and metaphors of different structural and semantic meanings, contributing to the emergence of a new playing effect. The director's concept embodiment and the way of actors' existence gravitate towards the nature of ritual. This is facilitated by the rhythm, the plastic solution, and the figurative structure of the performance itself.

An appearance of graceful beautiful girls in long dresses, slowly floating to the stage led by the Mother Deer (A. Rakhipova), is rather expressive. The emerge looks like a slow meditative dance. Each girl holds antlers above her head as a memento of the World Tree, its vertical connects the worlds of heaven, earth and underworld. The semantic space increases by cosmic scale. In the image system of the performance, the spiritual vertical transforms into the horizontal line of unlimited human knowledge.

With the *Scaffold* play N. Zhakypbai seems to sum up a certain stage of his work. The director once again turns to works that he had already staged, but now interprets from the side of philosophy. He also uses the elements of previous performances scenography, such as mobile metal structures, but in a different way, in metaphorical system of the national picture of the world. In N. Zhakypbai's performances a large place is still occupied by spectacular mass plastic scenes with specific ritual-like body language but without psychological motivation. A special multi-layered visual range emerges and corresponds to the mythopoetic worldview.

In the last part of the performance, at the back of the stage, a large group of modern boys and girls are sitting on chairs, buried in smartphones and absolutely not reacting

to what is happening around. Against that background the heroes are engaged in debates about the essential questions of existence, about nuclear explosions and responsibility for their doings. The indifference of young people and lack of empathy rings the bell of upcoming spiritual catastrophe. That type of ending is in sync with the state of modern society and has a powerful emotional impact.

The two solo performances were shown at the festival, that were based on *Mother Earth* by Ch. Aitmatov. One is *Bi-Tolgonai* of Khots Namsarayev Buryat Academic Drama Theater directed by B. Badmayev. The second one is the same named chamber performance for two actors of the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theater directed by Gafur Mardanov.

The productions of both national theaters are united by the special skill of the actresses who played the role of Tolgonai, D. Tangatova and M. Ibrokhimova. Here the word dominates due to the logocentricity of Oriental cultures. In contrast to the usual monumental forms of traditional performances of national theaters, these productions are distinguished by their intimacy. The communication with an audience cuts the distance between performers and spectators, confessional intonations, and an atmosphere of deep empathy. The sound score of the performances creates the necessary emotional mood, enhancing sensory perception.

Most of the mise-en-scenes are determined by the features of circle as the sacred symbol of yurt and the world model, as the integrity of the inner world of Tolgonai. Moving in circles imparts dynamics to spatial layout. Every scene is like a metaphor. The texture of natural scenography materials and costumes, the color of the steppe creates a feeling of pristine and natural nature.

The artistic image of the performances is supported by other components such as visuals, musical, light and plastic scores. *Bi-Tolgonai* is a monologue of Mother who tells, shows and acts out scenes of key events of youth and maturity, joy and loss, peace and war. Wheat heads, large hourglass that counts a life time, metal globe with large black holes in it, toy iron agricultural machinery, all this is the objective world of the performance that creates Tolgonai's environment (set design by Natalie-kate Pangilinan).

There is a screen at the performance. The visual dramatic tension expands the playing space. Tolgonai goes to the back of the stage, merging with the field of golden wheat heads on the screen, returning to the bosom of nature. That's the most beautiful part of the finale.

In the Uzbek stage version of the *Mother Earth* Tolgonai speaks to her grandson. In flashback scenes, actress M. Ibrokhimova shows the stages of life: youth, marriage, motherhood, wartime, and the post-war period. Moving around the circle of life, Tolgonai reveals the heroine's inner world, her thoughts and feelings, resilience and fortitude. The dynamics of the image progress is combined with detailed zones of stage silence. The performance is distinguished by concise expressive mise-en-scène. Playing with objects on stage is associated with the nature of the national open space theater (set design by F. Gaziziva). The image of Tolgonai is full of depth and volume of her personality, turning it to some kind of legend and synthesis.

The playful basis of stage action contributes to the fact that Tolgonai's ideas about the world and life are transformed into theatrical images. The finesse was solved in detail.

The actress works with objects precisely. All levels of the performance metaphor exist as undivided forms and carry a complex meaning. National ideas about the world around are reflected through them. The play shows the world at the moment of catastrophe, when a woman becomes the center of stability, the axis of the world.

In performances based on *Mother Earth*, the traditions of the open space and psychological theaters interact in the actor's way of existence, with the determining significance of narrative. Directors turn to "the gesture of *storytelling* as the main aesthetic core of the performance" (Yakubova 84). The versions presented are staged in accordance with the idea of "structuring the performance as a *reading*" (Yakubova 82).

The heroine changes through her life. The semantics of traditional female images is woven into the artistic text of the productions. The tragic worldview intensifies while comparing Tolgonai's storyline with the history of the country in the twentieth century, including her life into the general context of existence.

The shown performances revealed an important trend. One of the main repertoire lines in national theaters was previously classified as "historical themes". In such performances, the main characters were valiant heroes and outstanding figures of the past. An audience saw ceremonial portrait performances, dramaturgically based on biographical or historical events. At the same time, the historical and social environment, the relationships between people and the masses that rule the history, were missed on the stage. The festival showed that the perspective is gradually changing. History on stage is majorly viewed through the prism of "historical memory", entangled with national identity. It touched the blind spots of the history, and painful events of the past uncover destinies of ordinary people in the context of historical cataclysms.

In general, the festival "Aitmatov and Theater" showed an impressive mythopoetic picture of the world by Ch. Aitmatov. He demonstrated that Central Asian theaters are updating theatrical forms to reflect the changing world of the 21st century. On one hand, there are still many performances staged according to the principle: "Dramatic theater submits to the primacy of the text" (Lehmann 36). However, directors, while maintaining a connection with cultural roots, actively show a deep interest in the inner world of a person in the context of important social changes and historical events. On the other hand, the theaters of Central Asia are being updated as part of the world theatrical process. The dialogue between the stage cultures of Central Asia contributes to the formation of new ideas and modern figurative vocabulary.

The leading directors of the best performances at the festival do not illustrate works, do not aim to create an unusual stage interpretation and to amaze the viewer with shock and outrageousness. They try to comprehend ontological issues, global meanings of the prose of an outstanding writer and embody them with modern theatrical expressive means. They strive to immerse the viewer in the depths of spiritual heritage and national cultures, causing emotional and moral shock.

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