

UDC 821.112.2

## MECHANIZATION OF INDIVIDUALITY IN GEORG KAISER'S DRAMAS "GAS I" AND "GAS II"

ELIZAVETA ZAMYTSKAYA, LIUDMILA SIAMCHONAK

Polotsk State University, Belarus

*This article is devoted to the social and moral issues of George Kaiser's dramas "Gas I" and "Gas II". The article highlights such important topics as the topic of person's inability to resist harmful effects of mechanization on consciousness, their passivity and inaction in the face of loss of personality.*

Georg Kaiser's dramaturgy is quite a contradictory phenomenon, although it is connected with the best achievements of expressionism in social consciousness. G. Kaiser wrote about eighty plays for fifty years of his work [1, p. 366]. G. Kaiser's trilogy, which includes such plays as "Coral", "Gas I" and "Gas II", is one of the most striking examples of expressionistic drama. The workers and managers of the factory where gas is produced are in the center of the plays. The main motive of the plays is a harsh criticism of the obsolete capitalist world order.

The consciousness of a little man, an inalienable mechanism of the capitalist world order is one of the Kaiser's trilogy conflict sources, which determines the development of the plot. The main problem of the factory workers and employees is not about dangerous industrial welfare; their main problem is that they see themselves only as a set of certain skills which are common among people of their profession. The bourgeois society turns people into a grey, faceless mass. All of them become robots, who forget who they really are – people who are capable of something more, who are capable to transform the society in which wisdom, happiness and brotherhood will thrive. The only thing they can do is to work and sacrifice their health to work.

The drama "Gas I" begins with a tragic incident – the gas, which formula is developed by Engineer at the factory, suddenly explodes. As a result of the technogenic catastrophe, the people die, the gas production stops for seventeen days, and the rest of the survived factory stuff become unemployed. This entails even more serious consequences, because the gas is the universal source of energy which the society needs. Clerk makes it clear how important gas is for the whole world. His words may seem exaggerated, but Clerk himself, like other characters of the play, sincerely believes that the lack of gas will lead the world to ruins.

G. Kaiser's choice of the gas as a trigger for a man-made disaster is not accidental, especially taking into account the fact that the play was written at the end of the First World War. The use of toxic gases in the field was the main military innovation. This motif is used differently in the play: it is not about using gas as weapon of mass destruction yet, but its explosion has already caused numerous losses among workers. The gas is the personification of death and destruction, a dangerous path chosen by mankind. The gas produced by the enterprise acts as one of the most typical for Kaiser's dramaturgy humans' creations, which turn people into "Sklaven, Vollstrecker und Opfer ihrer Erfindungen" [2] (slaves, performers and victims of their inventions).

The people are interested only in material wealth and earnings. Each of them is ready to kill a man inside themselves for this purpose and become a soulless machine whose life goal is accumulation. The people do not attach importance to spiritual life, they forget about their personal qualities.

Clerk proudly declares, "I'm a clerk". This is the only thing that is important for him. Realizing that there will be no more work for him, Clerk is ready to leave, which proves that work is the main thing for him.

Almost all the characters in the play do not feel that they are individuals; they realize only their social function fulfillment of which will replace their whole life. This is indicated by the fact that the author, in full accordance with the aesthetic artistic principles of expressionists, prefers naming the characters according to their activity rather than indicating their names.

The workers' demonstration is significant to reveal this theme. The characters named Girl, Woman and Mother rise to the rostrum to speak on behalf of the whole people. The nameless characters represent all the girls, women and mothers who work in the factory and whose relatives and beloveds died in the explosion. These three female characters tell about what work has done with their relatives.

For example, the young man was absorbed in his work so much that Girl did not seem to know that she had a brother. She grew up and did not see him, because he appeared at home only at nights, and devoted the rest of the time to work. He was not an individual, he was not a human being, but he was a machine which did not stop even at nights. His whole being was reduced to one hand – the only thing that was important to cope with work successfully. The man is completely lost. He cannot think on his own, make his own decisions. But the

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most terrible thing is that people are not even able to realize that they are only cogs in a huge system, which needs them only as workforce, rather than as self-sufficient individuals. And even if they realize it, they are quite happy with it. It is much easier and more convenient to follow someone, than to make your own serious decisions.

Mother almost began to consider her son dead since the first time he went to work. This shows once again how destructive the capitalist society is for a man. He forgets himself, forgets his family. Mother remembers about the time when her son was a child. At that time the system did not have such a destructive effect on him. But as far as time went, an innocent child turned into a workaholic who does not think about anything. The son himself seems to appeal to his mother, asking why she did not save him from work. But even though he realizes deeply inside that his personality is completely destroyed, he cannot do anything about it.

Woman cries about her husband, saying that she saw him only once – at her wedding. This event was the only day of the year when she managed to spend time with her beloved. The rest of days he devoted to his work. And what has happened to him? His whole being shrank to one leg – the only thing that was important in a person so that he could perform his work productively. But why, then, the whole husband was burned in the blast, and not just his leg?

To realize that pursuing prosperity a person loses himself, a terrible catastrophe has to take a place. Only it makes a person think about the fact that he wastes his life for nothing, forgetting about himself and his relatives. And now other brothers, husbands, sons ask themselves the question, what for all this was, what kind of capital they earned and whether the money compensate the loss of their own human essence.

The playwright "reflects the process of transformation of the generation consciousness that survived the second industrial revolution" through numerous images of workers [3, p. 70]. The catastrophe makes the workers finally think about the meaning of the eternal rush for their own wealth. They live with the only desire to improve their own financial situation maximally, but their life is depreciating. It is squandered in vain, because a man who is cut off from the family, who forgets about their feelings and desires, cannot be happy. Living their whole life in the modern society, wasting their energy by doing meaningless work, having the only goal that is accumulation of material values, the people completely forget about what is really important. Cities, factories absorb people, turning them into machines which cannot think, but only work for the benefit of a system for which humans' lives are not important at all.

Gentlemen in black, appearing in the play, represents the directors of other factories. They do not think about people at all, about that little man whose work creates their financial empires. Human beings are nothing for them, human victims are absolutely not important. They are so frightened with the thought of a possible collapse of the established social relation system, that they are ready to sacrifice the most expensive thing – life. Knowing that the formula calculated by Engineer is absolutely correct, nevertheless they want to fire him, and leave the old formula, because both the engineer and the workers of the factory are not important. One cog may be replaced with another one, the main thing is that the system continues functioning.

The theme of the human being mechanization continues to unfold in the drama "Gas II". However, if people are still able to work in the previous play, now the problem of destroying a person comes to its logical conclusion – the work poisons the consciousness of the workers so badly that they are no longer able to produce the gas. The people do not even want to accumulate material values. They, like thoughtless robots, work only for the sake of work – "movement for the sake of movement":

Gas production decreases every hour, despite the fact that all shifts work. Even the children work full time. However, all the workers lose their strength, because they work without a goal, without enthusiasm. Their consciousness is so enslaved that even the possibility of earning does not attract them now.

The saddest thing about this system is that the people have never been of the main value and priority for the authorities. The gas is running low, and this can lead to the system collapse and terrible consequences for the factory managers, and Man in Blue offers a terrible decision to get people work round the clock, without the right to rest, until they die from exhaustion.

This episode demonstrates how easily the authorities can dispose of someone else's life. None of the workers could bear even the previous shift, as Billionaire-Worker mentions, but Human in Blue has got a more terrible idea that is to make people want to die from work. The people should work so obsessively, as if trying to lose all their vitality. The main thing is not to stop gas production.

Thus, in the dramas "Gas I" and "Gas II" Kaiser raises such a vital theme for expressionists as destructive impact of society and technology on a person's consciousness, unpreparedness, the inability of a modern person to resist the ugliness of the surrounding reality, his passivity and inaction in the face of loss of his own personali-

ty. The existing social system directs a person to unthinkingly improve their own well-being. In his plays Kaiser creates vivid images of the workers who have turned into insensitive robots.

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