



American University of Armenia

Հայաստանի Ամերիկյան Համադարան

The Phenomenon of *Mea Culpa* and Its Impact On The Modern Armenian Spectator

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Mea Culpa — Short introduction

A tragicomedy written by playwright Vahram Sahakyan and staged by Artur Sahakyan, the play premiered in 2002 and has been on stage for over fifteen years, attracting hundreds of spectators at every performance both in Armenia and abroad.

Author of original idea and executive producer:
Armen Hambardzumyan

Plot summary

The play is set in year 2015, which marks the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The protagonist of the play prepares a speech in order to deliver it in front of entities such as EU and UN and to demand that the international community restores justice and returns the territories — also known as Western Armenia — that have been taken away from Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during the Genocide committed against Armenians.

Plot summary

However, throughout the night of his preparation, the protagonist gets distracted by different events such as activities of his neighbors and visits from a mysterious character Tiger that tells him his speech is a useless collection of clichés and overused pathetic statements that the Armenian nation has been presenting to the international community for many years. Later on, the protagonist is visited by different historical figures, such as Nostradamus, Napoleon, Churchill, Hitler, Tigran the Great and others, both comic and serious dialogues with whom cause him to re-evaluate his perception of his identity, his nation's history, as well as think about the present and the future of the Armenian nation.

Research questions

RQ1: What made Mea Culpa so appealing to the Armenian public?

RQ2: Did Mea Culpa have any impact on the way Armenian audience perceives themselves, their history, and national identity?

Methodology

Interviews with the creative team
(Creative Team's intentions)

Interviews with theatre critics

Surveys conducted among the audience (239 responses)
(The audience's perception)

Theoretical framework

Memory reevaluation and reconstruction (Marvin Carlson, Lidija Kapushevska-Drakulevska)

Self-criticism (Gene A. Plunka, Robert Skloot)

Trauma and rehabilitation, overcoming complexes (Nandita Dinesh, Chantal Kalisa)

Self-reflexivity (Jurgita Staniskyte)

Epic theatre, alienation, theatre for pleasure and instruction (Bertolt Brecht)

Results

Audience liked:

Acting, humor, topic/theme, ideas, and dialogues(text).

Why is it popular?:

Main theme, cast, humor, and relevance.

Main ideas/issues touched upon in the play:

Armenian identity, self-criticism, politics, social issues, and Armenian history.

Emotions after watching the play:

sadness, joy/fun, excitement, regret, shame, and guilt

Feelings on being Armenian after watching the play:

concern, hope, pride, shame, guilt and patriotism

Results

Influence on perception of Armenian reality?:

The audience was familiar with the presented problems before seeing the play, so it did not influence their view on Armenian reality.

Influence on perception of Armenian identity?:

Not so much, but it has made people think about some issues and reevaluate their approach towards their identity and their nation.

Conclusion

The play has clearly made some people think about the presented issues but it is not clear whether it has influenced their perception of their Armenian identity the way the creators hoped it would.

People mostly view the play as a work of art that is both entertaining and informative

MEA CULPA

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