

## AN OVERVIEW OF DRAMA CHARACTERS

**Gëzim Puka**

University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkoder, Albania

Email: gpuka2003@yahoo.com

### Abstract

New social changes in Albanian mentality provoked a shock and a new era of Albanian literature. Modern and postmodern Albanian playwrights have begun to doubt the traditional character starting from ignoring his name as one of the means of individual determining. The character is no longer necessarily a name that gives an identity. They generally have lost their names because they have lost themselves or their human side. We present below how five distinguished authors of modern drama name their characters in some of the major dramatic texts. An absurd approach and sensation had begun even earlier (as in the case of Kasem Trebeshina dramatic texts) but it appeared more intense after the 90s in opposition with the traditional dramatic text. The new drama and theater of the new cited authors in this paper have shared innovation but do not constitute a movement structured as literary school. However it can be said that it is possible to find some common features to these authors' copyrights strategies such as consideration of traditional drama, declaration of the sense of absurdity and the assurance for the impossibility of communication between characters, the lack of a significant discourse. Renouncing realism these authors refuse to consider theater as a mirror of routine mentality just for the sake of developing characters and describing their social behaviour. In some texts that have become part of the study it is noted that a metaphysical type of theater which stages charactersis proposed whose symbolic value proves the human status in the universe. In order to achieve this goal the action of the traditional theater is transformed and is replaced with a discursive performance. Incoherence and the absurdity of human life begins with the absence of the name of the character which is dramaturgically expressed through discourse that replaces the action. Therefore it can be said that the new theatrical form of these authors is mainly a theater - text which highlights the human inability to understand himself and the other.

**Keywords:** *Drama, character, theater, modern, postmodern.*

### Introduction

Anyone who has somehow read or followed the modern Albanian drama must have found without difficulty that a dramatic character is somehow in crisis. As soon as he takes in hand the published or unpublished texts of these dramas some kind of change, secession or division in a larger number of discourse performers can't escape even from the eye of the untrained critic, which in the classical drama ends to the character.

Aristotle in his "Poetics", listing the main elements that constitute a tragedy, sets characters according to their importance after the fable because they are the ones that link the action. *"The first element and as it were the soul of tragedy is the plot; the character comes the second. For tragedy is an imitation of an action and because of this action it is also the imitation of people acting"*. While addressing the same argument he writes: *"People act not to present certain characters but they take these characters for the sake of their actions; so*

*action and plot is the goal of the tragedy and the purpose, as it is known, has the greatest significance in everything".*

According to Aristotelian thought the characters arise from action and intrigue, they are not the source of their dramatic work. Most importantly is that Aristotle says with conviction that tragedy is not the presentation of people but of their actions. It should be noted that at the time of Aristotle the authors of the plays were divided according to aesthetic education in which two categories belonged; the first assessed characters more while the latter gave priority to the action in drama.

This division of writers puts even more in hesitance the scholars of drama who are careful to include in their analysis not only the actantial structures, namely actions, but also to evaluate their actants and motives more than their actions.

Since drama appears directly through the scenes, which are based on the actions and interactions of people, it can be said that the characters play a key role in this genre and for this they deserve great attention. In the opinion of many literary traditionalist scholars, drama characters can be divided in general into main and secondary characters, depending on the importance they have to the content. A good indication whether a character is primary or secondary is time, words and his presence on stage.

As a rule, the main characters usually have a lot to say and appear often throughout the drama, while secondary characters appear less. Thus, for example, Hamlet is without a doubt the main character or the protagonist of Shakespeare's famous tragedy for the fact that it appears in most scenes, it is associated with a large number of discourses and what is more the tragedy is named after him.

It happens that characters never presented in the scene are important but this is a special type of dramatic text. For example "Waiting for Godot" of Beckett, the action is aimed toward the mysterious arrival of Godot, whose name is also the title of the drama, though he never appears on stage.

Much of the drama researchers when addressing the main characters make an interesting classification. Some of the main characters are often multidimensional and dynamic while in other cases the characters remain unidimensional and static (flat character). Multidimensional characters show different character traits and therefore are quite complex. They also tend to develop during the play but this is not a permanent case. Hamlet, for example, is characterized by a large intellectual and rhetorical power but he also has the defect of being indecisive and passive. Reader-spectators learn more about his internal moral conflict, his vacillation between taking revenge or not, and we see him in different roles featuring different qualities: as a leader and statesman, as a son, as an adorer of Ophelia etc.

On the other hand unidimensional characters can be summarized by a single sentence, they have only a few character features. Usually these characters are consistent, do not develop or change during the drama. Laertes, the brother of Ophelia, for example, is not as complex as Hamlet. He can be described as a young passionate and headstrong character who does not hesitate to take revenge when hearing about the death of his father and sister. As a character, he conforms to the traditional vengeful type and one of the reasons why he does not appear as a complex figure is that we know him with difficulty.

## **Drama Characters**

Sometimes, the quality of the characters may depend on drama intertype, since the types usually follow some certain agreements which disturb the dramatis personae, the dramatic troupe. According to the "Poetics" of Aristotle the characters in the tragedy should be of a high rank so that their downfall in the end can be most tragic (the higher they are, the lower they fall), while comedies usually work with "low" characters who need not be taken very

seriously and so they can be mocked easily. As tragedies deal with difficult conflicts and the topic matters, the heroes of the tragedies are generally complex. According to Aristotle, they are assumed to be neither very good nor very bad but somewhere "in between" which allows them to have some tragic "flaws" which cause their downfall in the end. Given that the heroes of the tragedies have almost "average" features and internal conflicts, reader-spectators can be identified more easily in them and this is a prerequisite for what Aristotle calls "catharsis effect" (literally: a cleaning of feelings), namely the fact that someone can suffer along with the hero, feel pity and fear and through this powerful emotion purify his mental state and possibly become a better person. On the other hand, comedies deal with problems in an easier way and so do not necessarily require complex figures. Furthermore, the types are more suitable for comedies, because their special qualities can easily be exaggerated and turned into comic actions and behaviors.

*"The characters in the drama are characterized using different characterization techniques. In general we can distinguish between the characterization made by the author in the second text of the play (copyright) or that done by the characters in the drama (visual) and if these characterizations are made directly (explicitly) or indirectly. Another distinction can be made between self-characterization and characterization by others. Certainly the characterization of the figures usually works on different levels and consists of a combination of these techniques. The physical appearance of the characters is often used as an indirect way of characterization. Melodramas, for example, generally show "the good" as fair and handsome while the "the bad" with dark complexion, mustache, etc."*

Dramatic language is another way of indirect characterization in drama. Characters appear to spectators through what they say and the way they say it, through their verbal interactions with others and discrepancies between discourse and action. In a theatrical show the voice and tone of an actor plays a major role on how the audience will perceive the character of the play. This can be seen in dramas where special dialects and sociolects are used.

*"Sometimes, character features can be predicted also through a character's name. Names like: Wisdom, Beauty, Vice, etc. (used in medieval morality plays) show directly the quality of a character or refer to the typical behavior of the character".*

The characters represent one of the most important categories for the analysis of a traditional drama, for they carry in them the event. According to the researchers of classical drama there can be no drama without characters. Interactions of the characters cause and move the story and their connections with each other form the basis of the conflicts and dynamic processes. Many of the terms used for the characterization techniques in narrative texts are also applicable in drama but we must be aware of the fundamental changes associated with the different medium. When we read a novel, for example, the narrator often describes the characters who we imagine and bring to life through the eye of the mind. The same can be traced back to the drama when we find instructions or entry comments in the authorial text but the characters on the show are always prepared interpretations brought by filmmakers and actors. Our opinion on the characters of the plays is undoubtedly influenced by the appearance of the actor, the way he speaks, how he acts out of his role etc. Other influencing factors may be the costumes and the makeup, the means by which a character is presented, but in this study we are referring only the dramatic text.

Modern contemporary drama violates traditional writing laws which are naturally embedded in the reader-spectator encyclopedia. When we talk about drama crisis we consider also the discrepancy of the expectation horizons of these texts with the expectation horizons of the readers. In the post-dictatorship period people are frustrated and have questioned ideologies, values and monuments of the past. Humanity has become more wary in its approach to the chaotic reality. Even today's dramatic text is consistent with this chaos of shared

understanding which is showed with the unbundling of the four most important elements of classical drama: action, conflict, plot and character.

By addressing the character in the article with the same title, Anne Ubersfeld notes that all the traditional discussion is perseveringly held around the character in the novel and theater, the character understood as a substance, as spirit, as subject, as a universal character, as a vital man, as culture blossom, as an inevitable prototype of ruling ideology. Ibersfeld is in the opinion that the character in the textual space represents the point of intersection or more precisely the projection of the paradigm into syntagma. The character literally is rather poetic. *"For this reason we think that the meaning of the character (textual-scenic) in relation to the text and show is a meaning or a concept from which the semiology (semiotics) of the theater cannot be deprived even when it is not considered a substance (personality, spirit, character, unique individual) but rather a place. It is the locus of different structures with the dialectical function mediation. [ ... ] Character cannot be equated with units or other systems in which it can be present. For this reason the character cannot be equated with actants even though it has mostly an actantial role. The actant is an element of syntactic structure, the character is a complex plurality named unique"*.

According to the traditional critical thinking related to the dramatic Albanian genre, it happens that a dramatic character should have an over value and force to fabricate his discourse. Indeed, in our opinion, it is quite the opposite; the discourses of the character forge the character.

### **The crisis of the name for modern dramatis personae**

Modern and postmodern playwrights have begun to doubt the traditional character starting from ignoring his name as a means of determining an individual. The character is no longer necessarily a name that gives an identity. They generally have lost their names because they have lost themselves or their human side. Below we present how the five authors that are being analyzed name their characters in some of the major dramatic texts.

The characters in some of the dramas of Kasem Trebeshina:

#### **"The Last trial"**

THE ARCHANGEL

THE ANGEL

THE PREDICANT

THE MAN

THE WOMAN 1

THE WOMAN 2

THE EMPLOYEE 1

THE EMPLOYEE 2

THE EMPLOYEE 3

THE SIR

THE BLIND

THE OLD MAN

THE CRAZY

THE EMPLOYEE 4

THE NOBLE

AND OTHERS

#### **"Evandri and Nausika"**

[ ... ]

THE MAGICIAN  
THE SEAMAN 1  
THE SEAMAN 2  
THE SEAMAN 3  
THE GUARD 1  
THE GUARD 2  
THE GUARD 3  
KASNECI'S VOICE  
THE PEASANT  
THE PEASANT 1 WITH A STAKE  
THE PEASANT 2 WITH A STAKE  
VOICES

**"The Eternal Dream"**

THE OFFICER  
THE GUARD  
THE MAN  
THE DUKE  
THE DUCHESS  
4 MEN: THE FIRST  
          THE SECOND  
          THE THIRD  
          THE FOURTH  
THE GIRL 1  
THE GIRL 2  
THE GIRL 3

**"Fear and crime"**

THE BEARDED OLD WOMAN  
THE WOMAN  
THE KING  
THE FISHERMAN  
THE ANCIENT MAN  
THE MAN WITH FUR  
THE MAN IN PURPLE  
THE COURTIER  
THE WOMAN IN BLACK – THE MOTHER  
THE GIRL  
THE MAN 1 WITH TOGA  
THE MAN 2 WITH TOGA  
THE MAN WITH THE BELL  
THE FOUR MEN OF THE COFFIN  
THE MAN IN BLACK  
THE GUARD  
THE COLOURFUL CLOTHING GUARD

**"The Museum"**

THE MAN OF THE PICTURE  
THE WOMAN OF THE PICTURE  
THE STATUE

THE ARMURE  
THE ZOMBIE  
THE MAN  
THE GIRL  
THE PRIEST  
THE KING  
THE EARL DE FIC-PATOC  
THE MARCHAL DE FUT-COPAIN  
THE BOY

**"Çmurosjë" drama characters of Serafin Fanko:**

THE CHOIR  
CORIFEU  
THE BRAVE  
THE MOTHER  
THE BOY 1  
THE BOY 2  
THE BOY 3  
THE LITTLE GIRL  
VUKU

**The characters in some of the dramas of Ferdinand Hysi:**

**"Three minds at auction"**

THE FIRST	Was once an engineer
THE SECOND	Once a historian... the same now
THE THIRD	A physician before coming here
THE POPE	Insane, that doesn't talk ... so they call her the people
SHE	A foreign from charities "God loves psychiatry"
THE ORDERLY	Who thinks of himself as the most intelligent from those that he has under control

**"In front of the traffic light"**

HE	The newcomer with new ideas
THE KING	Beheaded, constantly keeps it in his hand
THE HERO	With many honors which he does not even know for himself
THE SICK ONE	With a sick brain that gradually dies
THE PRISONER	With the idea of escaping
THE PROSTITUTE	With an already lost sex
THE REVOLUTIONARY WOMAN	Has received what has never had
THE LAST	With the latest news from this world
WE obviously	Who in the end are like them

**"The Cart Horse"**

THE FIRST	The first image of a dead man, a wise, polite man with manners in life
THE SECOND	The second image of the dead man, an arrogant man with an irregular life



OTHER TRAVELERS ( a pair of lovers, a beggar, a family, two old men, some porters, two policemen, a handicap, some nuns, three musicians, a preacher, etc.)

**"Balkan Express"**

THE MAN	A man in his fifties
THE WOLF	An old man in his seventies
THE GOAT	A woman in her thirties
THE CABBAGE	A girl in her twenties
A GHOST	

**"XXL TV"**

ACTOR 1	Mrs. Phaedra, TV chef, Mrs Antigoni, astrologer
ACTOR 2	Ismena, moderator of the morning show Ardita, a student of psychodrama
ACTOR 3	Mrs. Penelope , the wife of the TV owner, makeup artist and director. Mrs. Medea, a pediatrician
ACTOR 4	Mr. Socrates, receptionist, simulator, National Theatre actor
ACTOR 5	Mr. Menelaus, national wrestling Roman style champion
ACTOR 6	Edipus, winner of Big Brother, a hunger striker
ACTOR 7	Mr. Aristotle, operator, retired former officer, carpenter and electrician

**The characters in some of the dramas of Albri Brahusha:**

**"Toward the West"**

THE MAN	The woman's husband
THE WOMAN	The man's wife
THE HOTEL MAN	The hotel manager
THE OWNER	The owner of the hotel
THE PAINTER	A Painter
THE WOLF	The painter's work
THE BOGY	Astrologist, close friend of Eclipse

**"Last visit"**

H1	Woodwork hero
H2	Hero of the people
H3	War hero
H5	Paper-made hero
H7	Women heroine
THE HISTORY	A history
SOMEONE	Someone
A NURSE	The shadow of history

**Conclusions**

The new social changes in the Albanian mentality provoked a shock and a new era of Albanian literature. An absurd approach and sensation had begun even earlier (as in the case of dramatic texts of Kasem Trebeshina) but they appeared more intense after the 90s in opposition with the traditional dramatic text. The new drama and theater of the authors who are being cited frequently have shared innovation but do not constitute a structured movement as literary school. However, it can be said that it is possible to find some common features to these authors' copyrights strategies such as the consideration of traditional drama, declaring the sense of the absurdity and persuasion for the impossibility of communication between characters, the lack of a discourse that has sense. Renouncing realism, in order to embroider the characters and describe their social behaviors, these authors refuse to consider theater as a mirror of routine mentality. In some texts that have become part of the study it is noted that a metaphysical type of theater that stages characters is proposed, whose symbolic value proves the human condition in the universe. In order to achieve this goal the action of the traditional theater is transformed and replaced with a discursive game. Incoherence and the absurdity of human life begins with the absence of the character's name which is dramaturgically expressed through discourse that replaces the action. Therefore, it can be said that the new theatrical form of these authors is first and foremost a theater-text which highlights the inability of man to understand himself and the other.

## References

- Aristotle. (1998). *Poetics*. Kosovo: Gjon Buzuku.
- Eco. U, (2007). *For literature*. Tirana: Dituria.
- Gjini. M, (1975). *Theater and time*. Tirana: Naim Frasheri.
- Hamiti. S, (2005). *Topics*, Publication of the Academi of Arts and Sciences of Kosovo. Prishtina.
- Hysaj. F, (2006). *Theatre, dramaturgy, directing and acting - anthology of texts*. Prishtina: Sythi.
- Islami. N, (2003). *History of Albanian drama and poetry (1886-1996)*. Prishtina: University of Prishtina.
- Mato. J, (2005). *Poetics of dramaturgy and aesthetic thought (1901-1939)*. Tirana: Publication of the Academi of Sciences of Albania.
- Papagjoni. J, (1980). *Theatre and actor*. Tirana: Naim Frasheri.
- Papagjoni. Josif, (2009). *Encyklopedia of Albanian theatre and cinematography*. Tirana: Toena.
- Papagjoni. J, (2009). *Theater of Shkodra*. Shkodra: Gjergj Fishta.
- Szondi. P, (2012). *Teoria del dramma moderno 1880 - 1950*. Trento: Einaudi.