

CHOREOGRAPHY IN THEATER

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Abstract

Choreography is an essential component of the theater. During the history of the Albanian theater, the choreography, in different cases, was distant from stage performances (tragedy, drama, comedy, etc...). With the increasing of the professional and aesthetic level in the late '50s and early '60s, when the traditional classical form and semi amateur theater was hit, was noticed a more active presence of choreographic element. The structure of the play experienced intense entrance of elements, components coming from other arts, where the choreography was among the first and most productive, significantly increasing the expressive power of theater itself. There was created a good experience, which was reflected in its processes and developments before '90-s. After the years '90 and in the current situation of the Albanian theater, the choreographic concept presence in the play is not just something useful and necessary, but concurrently the accompaniment of the messages conveyed by the stage work, decoder of its figurative system, carrier and expresser of its metaphors, as builder of image and growth of stage plasticity. The choreographic approach in several theatrical performances there are not seen as simple presence or as parasitic and speculative element, but as an artistic concept association, more over as the premium for creativity, broadening of expressive means, as formal confirmation and accomplishment. In both periods, before and after 1990, the presence of choreography influenced positively in theater, even during the period of deprivation, restrictions and its formal and stylistic infertility, not to miss the chance of a modest modernity. While, after 1990 it has enabled and continues to enable in many plays the application of new theater-artistic codes. According to the analyzed samples, there is emphasized the fact that choreographers have given valuable contribution to the enrichment of theater with beautiful choreographic solutions, in context of increasing the scenic expressiveness, visual prosperity of the general movement in mise-en-scène, in view of the benefit of plastic characterization of the characters, their spiritual situation, gesture, perpetuating the scenic effect and its movement in relation to others, as well in the utility function of meaning diffraction arising from the author's work or director's concept. The paper analyses aspects, choreographic qualities and values, mostly those in the interpretative level, both in terms of scenic plastics, regarding the roles of specific actors needing an interpretation on choreographic parameters, as well as the establishment of respective dance, especially choreographic etudes.

Keywords: *choreography, theater, Albanian, concept, dance, plays*

Introduction:

Choreography is an essential component of the theater. Since the invention of theater by the ancient Greeks, choreography - the dance, as well as text and music, was an important part of the conception of tragedy and comedy in the structure of the ancient theater. In the course of centuries, although at times the choreography in various cases was left out the scene of a dramatic part (tragedy, drama, comedy, farce, etc..), especially in the twentieth century when traditional form of classic theater was hit strongly and when in its structure entered vigorously elements, components or raw material coming from other arts, choreography was among the first and most productive one, which increased expressive power of theater.

Aim of study/research

Raise awareness on some of the achievements of the Albanian theater during the years in the application of choreographic element during the show as a better opportunity to express ideas, insights, form, style, its scenic expressiveness.

Research topics

In the current situation of the Albanian theater in all our ethnic area, choreography is not just doing something useful and necessary, but at the same time:

- a) a companion of the message delivered by the stage plays,
- b) a decoder of its visual system,
- c) a carrier and expressive of its metaphors,
- d) a builder of image and improvement of stage plasticity.

These are the thorny topics that affect choreographic element in Albanian theater recently, hence our study objectives.

Research questions

There are two questions raised for solutions, as well as for aesthetic interpretation, to which has been given an answer in developing of our study: a) the situation of theater yesterday (before 1990); b) and that of theater today (after 1990)

1. Choreographic approach in several theatrical performances, which claimed the rejuvenation of art language in theater before 1990, it is seen not as a simple presence or parasitic and speculative element, it has been valued as an artistic association, often as a symbolic
2. And even further as the premium for creativity, for broadening of expressive means, as a formal confirmation and sign of prosperity. All these contributed positively to the theater at the time of deprivation, and infertility stops so that not to miss the chance of modernity, however its essentiality and omnipresent.

Scientific methods

The pursued scientific method consists in:

- Material research in the archives of Albanian National Theatre and the National Theatre in Pristina.
- Visioning of theatrical performances which embrace choreographic choice and the selection of the most significant examples.
- Reviewing and analyzing the choreographic element in close relation to the contents of the drama and the directorial concept.
- Realizing of synthesis and reaching some conclusions

Data analysis

Skënder Selimi's choreography is one of the few, who has provided valuable assistance to the enrichment of some popular theater shows in the National Theatre before the '90s with his choreographic solutions in the utility function of scenic expressiveness growth, mise-en-scène visual prosperity and movement in general, in view of plastic characterization of characters, their spiritual situation, gesture, implementation of the scenic effects and movement in relation to others. The National Theatre as the most important theater institution in Albania certainly created greater opportunities to the choreographer for the realization of his interesting choreographic conceptions. Skënder Selimi, as a pioneer of the choreography in theatre appears quite active as far as scenic plastics is concerned, regarding actors in specific roles where it is needed a plastic interpretation of the choreographic parameters, as well as with regard to establishing appropriate dances, especially etude dances which took already much more open and essential functions.

The *Mistress of the Inn* (*Mirandolina*) was the show that had no dance in the background. With the advent of the ballet master as artistic assistant, the show got the real classic coloration. This happened because he overlaid all characters images with special plastic elements, with references to the character role. He compressed the scenes in short 'dances', for the versatile *Mirandolina*, the Inn servants and especially in their idyllic relationship. *Mirandolina* was characterized by dancing actions rather tempting. A special dance was conducted with anti-woman character, *Ripa Frata*, who was like a dead wood. But, when he falls in love with *Mirandolina* becomes a stooge or a funny puppy exhilarated as a circus dog. At the end there was a joyful conclusion, which raised the spectacle at its climax, where all the characters danced different unrelated motives but very funny.

The theatrical performances, where the choreographer Skënder Selimi has helped in carrying out the play, are numerous. Among the performances where the choreographic element has been successful and active, can be mentioned: *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The Lost Letter*, *Oportunesku*, *The Star of the Alps*, *Much ado about nothing*, *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*, *Two penny Opera*, *King Lear*, *Titanic Waltz*, *The General of the Dead Army*, etc... Meanwhile, the same choreographer has been present in other theatrical performances in the districts of Korca, Vlora, Shkodra and Durres. All these successful theatrical performances, for that time, bear the choreographic elements contributions as well.

It is worth mentioning especially the dramatization by Pirro Mani of the novel "The General of the Dead Army" of Ismail Kadare. There are two moments that choreographic component not only becomes part of the corporate expression of the show, but has also fulfilled its conception. The wedding dance, even though the choreography is kept in a calm and elegant

movement through the wedding partygoers caught hand in hand, in fact it creates a sharp contrast with the old lady Nice feelings, full of anger, providing proofs with her monologue about monstrous crime committed by Colonel Z in his punitive expedition.

The second moment more expressive than the wedding is the General's image, surrounded by coffins, tombs and remains of Italian soldiers fallen in battle. Here, with his vigorous imagination, the choreographer creates an expressionist ballet scene in the graveyard, where the General had just arrived seeking the remains of Colonel Zampa. The General astounded and frightened so much lost feelings and fall on the ground half dead. The Bones Troops hit him with the crosses in their hands and after that return to their graves. This scene was completely new. Expressive tools that were used were not classical and the folk dance was unique and very original for the time. Many people congratulated the artists and the choreographer, for his finding. The great Albanian world famous artist, Bekim Fehmiu, was among others. He heartily congratulated the ballet master claiming: "I didn't believe that in Albania there exists a ballet of such a high level and modern."

The scene, where there are joint in one - the great idea of the writer, the directorial vision of Pirro Mani and the plastic treatment of the threatening movement of the killed people, is regarded by scholars as one of the most remarkable achievements of the choreographic element in a theatrical performance, where germinates an impressive imagination and fantasy. It should be noted that, despite the sensational success and the enthusiastic reception by the public, the official critics of the time showed doubts about the ballet, as it harmed the character of the show, the realistic spirit, as such being considered a deviation from our revolutionary art. After several interferences by some party militant's pseudo-critics, the dream scene of the General was removed from the show.

In 1959, in the People's Theatre stage was played the comedy 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' of Shakespeare. Although not organized in a holistic view, the choreographic elements were present, which were designed not much as dance rather than movements and gestures of actors. These motions on stage, mixed to accompanying gestures, were the result of a choreographic thought and idea to give to the show something more than the word. The critic Ismail Hoxha in his article 'Shakespeare smiled us cordially', written in 1959, states: "as soon as the spectator enters the hall, realizes that something new will sound in the play 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' of Shakespeare, and, in fact that happens. Yellow curtains flare up instead of the red curtains. On the right in the forestage, there is the door of Mr. Page's house, while on the left Mr. Ford's. The show begins with the coming out of two directorial characters (clowns) in the role of servants, who will perform an important function throughout the process of the show development. They throw a look on the hall, as if preparing the spectator 'the show is starting', and they raise the yellow curtains. Little deeper in the open sky is noticed 'the old marry England'. Around a table there are set drinking Sir John Falstaff and his fellows singing altogether a song written by the director of the show ... In this scenic findings, K. Spahivogli, introduces us since the beginning of the show to an atmosphere of joy. This is a bold solution, overly organic work that prepares the audience to see something interesting ..."¹

In fact the two clowns, occasionally, make scenic movements of a choreographic nature, but the choreographic layers become particularly active in the women's movements and dances, where walking is processed as per the brooding style of their time and also stylized. This has increased the dose of joy and upbeat atmosphere in the show.

¹ Hoxha Ismail. "From life to theatre, from theater to life", Publishing House "Naim Frasheri", Tirana, 1972, p. 43-44.

In Shakespeare's comedy 'Twelfth Night', staged by director Pirro Mani in 1982, the dance component, the actors' choreographic movement in some scenes, is striking among others. This component has given a new dimension to the show supporting the stage director's idea to gain even more artistic expressiveness. The director has introduced many songs and dancing. He has even treated all Shakespeare's text as a musical comedy, by intervening, in this case, in the classical form of the work itself. This issue was something new and a nice surprise for the time, paving the way to the solution of the conception and realization of the classic works in general (as a methodology, as stylish, as the genre, but also in the field of semiotics). When we consider how Shakespeare mixed elements the tragic to the comic ones, lyrical and poetical to the dramatic elements, Pirro Mani's directorial idea, in fact, has been useful for the understanding and enjoyment of the comedy 'Twelfth Night', which may be considered as "pure genre", as many of Shakespeare's comedies, after he refused solid clichés and rules by "mixing" elements of one genre to another. The theater director treated many of comedy's elements as vaudeville. As a vaudeville or musical comedy, as noted by critics of the time, "it has influenced to better highlight key features of the work, as glorification of love, joy and enjoyment in antithesis to the medieval ideas and bourgeois Puritanism"². Such treatment has given more optimism to the famous work of Shakespeare, at the same time it brought innovations in the Albanian theater itself. The public greatly appreciated especially the choreographic etude with Malvolio, joy, songs and dances of Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Maria and Feste (the Fool) with the nice mise-en-scène around the well, in the late evening, when they played a joke to the servant. Skilful movements, joy, spins, as well as all movements through the scenic square, enrich even more the visual aspect of the show.

The second thing we should point out is that the choreographic etude is a function of the basic tone of directorial treatment and comedy itself: the joy, exhilaration, epicurean enthusiasm to enjoy life, to create playful atmosphere with games, tricks, and ridicule to all those who are an obstacle with rigid rules on freedom of speech, behavior, life, imprisoning man in the severe ethical norm of morality.

A surprising finding is the choreographic etude in 'The Miser' of Moliere, staged by director Hervin Çuli at the National Theatre in 2002. The critic Josif Papagjoni is expressed about this show in his book 'Dialogue with the world theater': "A retinue of actors, invited by a fine pencil mustached 'Molier', played by a fragile girl, young actress Inida Gjata, filling the stage with spoken feedback in the form of rituals, with joyful cries, with confusion, with dances, while exemplified a situation of pre-show joy, type of 'Comedia dell' Arte' (at the time commonly called 'intermezzo'). Such 'Intermezzo' would be repeated afterwards.

The short piece of 7 pages "Worstward Ho" of Samuel Beckett, as of his drama and poetry elements it is followed by the style of original choreographic element. This theater piece, in the form of an action, refers to a "drama" of the modern human condition synthesizing universal social being. At its core is the idea of human inertness pressure from many factors: social, political, economic, and existential. There are only two people, who run and run indefinitely, and they continue running short of breath again. But, where? They, themselves, do not know. Elvis Pupa and Ema Andrea are the actors. The director Altin Basha sees this crazy run as the run of human existence, deciphered as unsinkable anxiety turns to some disease. Man runs everywhere, ways of organizing society, the high pace and unrestrainedness can't help him but hurry, anywhere, anytime, at work, in life, in family, between cars, roads, and airplanes. This hectic pace only stupefies man. A clock hanged somewhere is reminiscent of late, too late, and runs back to the

² Sina Fisnik. "The 12th Night on the stage of People's Theatre", Drita, 1 January 1983, p. 6.

running up to the end, even to death. The choreographic etude, although fixed between two objects, conveys a clear idea of universal nature. A pot of fresh water, which is hanged above, symbolizes life. The actors Ema Andrea and Erjona Kukeli imitate the man, who attempts to catch that pot, but it slips away, attempts to drink from its water, but the pot slips away. So man cannot get enough from life and the life itself is a torture. Second choreographic opinion relates to antipodal of life to death. Death is symbolized as scissors. The scissors to cut menacingly the thread of human life and the man is constantly terrified. Third choreographic etude is played by the talented actor Elvis Pupa. He speaks about man who becomes a burden to himself, the others and circumstances where he lives confuse him more and he is never finding peace, liberation, harmony. The actor has on all the time a sweater, which neither he can wear nor can take it away from the body. The sweater is like a second skin, torturing him. This is a really philosophical thought, when life, the existence, transformed into captivity, pain, fatality. The repeated action of dressing-undressing the sweater is the significance of the lack of harmony and identity, reaching figurative and metaphorical substratum of the choreographic action. "I've been really impressed by the directorial vision, - writes Josif Papagjoni - as well as by the squirming silhouettes of two bodies in two bags that crawled all over the stage, introducing us, through a sincere language, the semantics of our efforts for survival. Well, this kind of theater, although using "nonsense" words, becomes very meaningful, profound, thrilling, as it conveys a philosophy, philosophy of existence fatality, tragic philosophy, our alienation and the absurd situation, calling for clarity human communication, for the expression of ideas, freedom, moral mission and spiritual coherence..."³ And further critic continues: "A renowned Egyptian critic accompanied the play "Worstward Ho" by the theater company "Oasis" with a warm and valuable article in the daily "The Experimental". He praised among others, the holistic directorial idea of the quest for the self, for the lost identity, where the exterior becomes interior, mental becomes physical; where the situations, light and darkness alternate between each other, sleeping, and waking prolonged pause of anxious cycle that begins in darkness and ends in a dream and being in darkness as in a dream."⁴

Theater troupe "Skampa" Elbasan, interesting idea thanks to director Philip Adonis, brought in a picture of a grotesque anti-drama Joneskos comedy "*The future lies in the eggs*" (2004). This burlesque comedy short of the many ritual chastises, among others, the idea of genetic racism and separatism, though camouflaged, which takes place in civilized nations, countries such as France. The fear of French population reduction and aging encourages in certain social and political segments the necessity of possession. And it can be reached through fertility. Here begins the comedy. Through a burlesque form is underlined the idea of fertility, which becomes the nest and fortress of racism itself, with allegory of ownership. Choreographic image constructed in the form of a ritual movement, once for sexual act and another time for that of birth, a little further a marriage ceremony, family joy, unity. At the beginning of the show the cast seems to come on stage with a pantomimic and choreographic action, one after the other hold by the waist as in a dance, and they get on stage through the spectators hall. This choreographic action was repeated later, in the case of family stimulation toward the young couple to perform the sexual act in order to achieve fertility, namely the renewal of the race and the idea of domination over others. The movement looks like a joyous procession or parade immediately identifiable with the parade of characters, where each one of them ritually repeating the same gesture, the same movement, the same grimace on his face. Since the uniqueness of short text Joneskos no events and a proper subject, nor fable and "characters" real speech and outlined through written text as dialogue,

³ Papagjoni, Josif. "Dialogue with world theatre", Science Academy, 2002, p.178.

⁴ The experimental 2001, Albanian's "Worsword Ho", p.5.

monologue, dance director component widely uses in the show, because only this way can be understood given the most to the most in-depth Joneskos style. In order to give to the word visibility, and to the affection situations, the dominant thought itself more plasticity and visibility, the presence of choreographic approach was considered as the most active and appropriate to manage itself injection to text, speech and ancillary structures of logos by complementing what was missing; more exactly what was needed internally to the visual side of the subject, that is the visioning of movement, the accompanying of text with gesture that corresponded best to its meaning, pantomimic ritual, expressiveness of action. These were implemented in particular through choreographic component with stage movement, dance, ritual gesture etc., which naturally became clear aesthetic signs full of expressiveness, in an interesting poetic way corresponding to the poetry of theater of the absurd, that is to say anti-realistic theater, anti-Aristotelian, anti-drama, where the anti-narrative effects become visible, seeing that these are characteristic and defining qualities of Ionesco's theatre pieces or farces. With humorous effects and nice choreographic moves was the scene of bringing eggs. All actors carried small baskets full of huge eggs. With ritualistic gestures they threw them on the couple's marital bed. The meaning was clear: the nation should be reproduced, number of births, children should be increased, as the nation was dying. The choreographic act was accompanied by the aria of Don Bazilios in opera "Barber of Seville". Everything takes on meaning, the stage looks like a carnival ritual, the style it is treated the scene resembles to a musical clown performance, and the audience manages to grasp the idea of the need for reproduction, as, on the other hand, the irony that germinates there from the way of the choreographic interpretation.

In 1993 during the National Theatre Festival held in Tirana, the theater "Dodona" Pristina brought on stage the famous novel "The Idiot" of Dostoyevsky. Despite that his ideas carry within themselves the dispositional universal space of the human being, as such, in fact, thanks to the emphasis of the artists from Kosovo; it indicated much of the political social reality in Kosovo, especially the suffering, persecution and oppression of honest man caused by evil and perpetrated segments. The 'Rogozhin' of Enver Petrovci was an indisputable achievement of that show and festival. Of course, this was due to the talent of the applauded actor, of the new modern way of his acting, and of the many new original elements. But, in this regard, it cannot be excluded the choreographic image of his physical movement, the pantomime which he did in order to ridicule Rogozhin's character whom embodied on stage, and all the ritual element, which, as a whole physical-choreographic realized an exquisite irony challenging the stupidity and the bravado of Rogozhin versus Myshkin, in particular versus Nastassya Filippovna, with his intent to win her heart and to possess her. Thanks to the plastic chorographical stratification, Enver Petrovci's acting role was filled with new subtleties and semantic nuances, making more active the pathetic and ridiculing strata, thereby satirizing and by irony his self-satisfaction of show-off, naivety, but also the bogus authority and nervousness. Petrovci on stage imitated the puppet acting, with quick intermittent gestures and movements, not only with, notable schemed articulation, but physical plastic action as well, advocating grotesque and physical ritual.

An interesting choreographic look transformed into significance and essence of directorial image itself, is found in the show "Voyage en Unmikistan ", by Dominique Dolmieu, French director and producer, put on stage with a cast of actors from several theaters. There was too little text, almost missing, mostly in the form of ritual, repetitions comebacks with short dialogues here and there. But the director made the text "speak" through very interesting findings of physical activities, meaningful details, significant mise-en-scène, etc. Of course, the choreographic concept accompanying almost all the theatrical performance was vital. Here's how the scholar Josif

Papagjoni critiqued the show as a whole and the choreographic aspect included and implied there: "I was in Gjilan in Kosovo, and when I saw on the poster of the show 'Voyage en Unmikistan' the name of Dominique Dolmieu, as creator and stage director, I was immediately curious ... In the early 90s he put on stage one of our anathematized dramas during the dictatorship, 'The dun spots' of Minush Jeros. This drama was strongly criticized at the time, as if it was a 'black stain' for the drama and theater, as a cultural blasphemy. The 'Optria' of Dolmieu, was rather quiet, free from human complexity, once scared or a "bad myth"... The Second etude, let's call it 'Immigrants or refugees', visually was more attractive. As an endless wandering ritual, with suitcases carried by travelers and lumpers, bearing in mind that Kosovo was an immigrants and lumpers' wandering through the countries of the world, a nightmarish abandonment in search of a job, a better life, and still unemployed, and still on the brink of torment and suffering. Walking and walking, endlessly, carrying their suitcases, goods and chattels packed, a mobile home, a mobile site, in search of hope, which usually turns into excruciation, disappointment and deception. "

Euripides's famous tragedy "Medea," staged by director Mikel Kalemi, one of the pillars building the scenic image of actors' movement it was choreography. Since the start of the show, on the scenography platform resembling a cosmos galaxy, in the form of a huge wheel (the wheel of fortune, of life, life and death etc.), the spectator follows the movements of the women choir, set finely on this rounded half steep platform. They make gestures and sharp motions, lift up some jars and amphorae in shape of torches, and create ritual movement bringing us to a distant time. Other choreographic movements are performed when Medea proves the grave insult done to her by Jason, betraying her and marrying the daughter of the king of Corinth and later her terrible act of murder of her two children; the movements girls' choir are already very tough, sharp, expressive gestures, which accompany the mental state of Medea extremely heavy before and after the murder of her children, as one of the greatest criminal acts, if not the greatest.

Even tragedy 'Oedipus the King' of Sophocles, directed by Ilir Bokshi, the choreographic component underlines important ideas and creates an atmosphere of psychological tension. I would highlight here the moment when Oedipus is given evidences about the bad situation of the country, the plague widespread as a result of the curse of the gods and the process of confession of his life truth, the order to be killed since he was a baby, the rescue by a shepherd, the shelter found in the palace of Corinth, then the salvation of Thebes city from the Sphinx and the murder of his father and marrying his mother, Jocasta, having children with her, without knowing he was doing at the same time a crime and incest. Exactly this squirm, this Oedipus' psychic confusion is accomplished through a significant choreographic movement. Dozens of choir hands, tight to each other in a compact group, grabbed Oedipus lifting him up over their heads and push forward. This motion repeated several times, creates the image of a man between the waves of destiny, kidnapped by it, and stranded on the coast of the tragedy, as actually happens to Oedipus. The chorographical metaphor is not only significant and in help of better understanding of the tragedy's idea, but as well it enriches the directorial vision conveying energy, tension, visual beauty, vigor, mental confusion.

The same in the comedy 'A bridegroom at fourteen' of Çajupi, put on stage at theater 'Metropol', directed by Elma Doresi (2012), the young Gjino's wedding dance is all as a joke, not only creating funny and joyous atmosphere, but also the occasional insertion of mocking and humorous elements among different dancers, with their gestures and movements, especially the figure of the Priest.

Findings

It is important to emphasize that directors Kujtim Spahivogli, Pirro Mani before the '90-s and the directors Adonis Filipi, Mikel Kalemi, Ilir Bokshi, who have been brought as examples in this paper, have enabled and included widely the choreographic element. Such experience has served as a positive reference to enrich the theater language transforming this element in an artistic expressiveness tool, to increase the power of image and plastic form.

Conclusions:

- Choreographic solutions in various theatrical performances have been in the function and instrumentality of:
- the intensification of scenic expressiveness,
- the visual prosperity of the mise-en scène,
- the performers' movement in general,
- the plastic characterization of characters,
- their spiritual state,
- the gesture,
- the alienation of the scenic effect and its motions in relation to others,
- the fragmentation of connotations deriving from the dramatic part of the author or director's concept on it

First choreographers who applied in theater the choreographic elements, as Skënder Selimi etc., are actively presented with regard to stage plastics, actors regarding specific roles which needed parameters of a plastic choreographical interpretation, as well as in regards to the creation of respective dances, especially choreographic etude taking over more essential functions.

Recommendations

- Not every theatrical performance need to include the choreographic element.
- The inclusion of this element is dictated by three conditions: a) the directorial drama concept b) the need to intensify the scenic expressiveness, c) introducing a new language of modern and postmodern.
- The conception itself of the theater choreographic element should not necessarily be associated to the traditional dance and classical ballet forms. Additionally an important need takes the plastic treatment of the movement of actors or dancers involved in the show as performers of a certain psychological situation.

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