THE THEORY OF DRAMA AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE HUMAN IMAGE IN UZBEK DRAMATURGY: FROM ARISTOTLE TO CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

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Abstract. This article examines the historical development of dramatic theory and considers how European and Russian theoretical thought bears on the study of the human image in Uzbek dramaturgy. Drawing on the views of Aristotle, Horace, Diderot, Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, Hugo, Bakhtin, Brecht, Bentley and Frolov, as well as on the work of Uzbek scholars such as Izzat Sulton, Abdurahim Soliyev and Ibrohim Ganiyev, the study traces how the concepts of character, conflict, plot and genre have changed from antiquity to the present. It argues that Aristotle's *Poetics*, although foundational, is no longer sufficient for the analysis of modern drama, including the plays of Fitrat and later Uzbek playwrights and the newer radio, cinema and television forms of dramaturgy. Particular attention is paid to the debate over the canonical stability of dramatic genres, to the emergence of the "intermediate" genre of drama, and to psychoanalytic and non-Aristotelian approaches. The article concludes that Uzbek dramaturgy, formed at the meeting point of local performance traditions and European dramatic theory, requires a flexible and historically informed poetics.

Keywords: Uzbek dramaturgy; theory of drama; poetics; dramatic genre; conflict; tragedy; comedy; melodrama; tragicomedy; dramatic character; plot; interpretation of the human being

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in step with radical changes in social life, new genres began to enter Uzbek literature and art. Dramaturgy was one of them. The Uzbek people had long possessed rich traditions of folk theatre, including the performances of buffoons, puppeteers and storytellers, but literary drama written for the stage of a professional theatre took shape only during the Jadid (reformist) movement of the 1910s, when plays such as Mahmudxo'ja Behbudiy's *Padarkush* ("The Patricide", 1911) appeared. The enlightenment context of this period and the character of Jadid drama have been described by Karimov (1991) and Rizayev (1997).

Every literary genus interprets its hero in a distinctive way. In the dramatic genus the author cannot intervene in the events or comment on them, as an epic narrator can; the personality of the character has to be revealed through speech and action alone. Izzat Sulton, discussing the nature of dramatic heroes, observes that the depiction of characters in the dramatic genus is, unlike in other literary genera and genres, heightened to an unusual degree (Sulton, 2005, p. 272). This concentration and intensity make the question of how a human being is portrayed on the stage especially important for the poetics of drama.

The purpose of this article is not to review the whole history of dramatic theory or to comment exhaustively on the works of the thinkers mentioned. Its aim is narrower: to take a selective excursion into the history and theory of the genre in order to establish the theoretical background against which the interpretation of the human being in Uzbek dramaturgy can be studied. The methods used are historical-comparative and poetological analysis, together with a critical reading of the relevant theoretical sources.

2. The Human Being at the Centre of Dramatic Poetics

Ideas about how the human being should be depicted in drama are among the oldest subjects of dispute among dramatists, and they have never left the agenda of

literary scholarship. Aristotle records that Sophocles considered the first task of art to be the portrayal of people as they ought to be, whereas Euripides insisted that they should be shown as they are (Aristotle, 1980, p. 123; cf. *Poetics*, ch. 25). Anikst (1967, p. 11) notes that in Sophocles' tragedies the truth of life and artistic truth do not always coincide, while Euripides moves closer to everyday reality and to the experience of the spectators themselves. Already at the origins of the genre, then, two attitudes to the human image confront each other: the idealizing and the realistic.

Belinsky formulated the difference between epic and drama in a famous phrase: in an epic the event rules, in a drama the human being rules; the hero of an epic is the event, while the hero of a drama is the human personality (Belinskiy, 1955, p. 143). In every event, fable and plot of a drama the dominance of the personality should be felt. At first sight this idea seems remote from Greek drama, in which the event clearly prevailed. This is understandable, for in the early stages of dramaturgy, which had not yet broken free from epic patterns, the primacy of the event is obvious. The chorus, which played the leading role in Greek drama, embodied the author's views and lyrical experiences and in a certain sense filled the place that the individual personality was later to occupy in the drama.

Aristotle's own theory reflects this situation. In the *Poetics* the plot is described as the "soul" of tragedy and the characters take second place (Aristotle, 1996). Only over the centuries did the balance shift, until the individual with his or her psychology, contradictions and inner life became the centre of dramatic attention.

3. Antiquity: Aristotle and Horace

The *Poetics* is recognized as the first source in the history of literary scholarship. Before Aristotle, scientific and theoretical opinions about drama had already been formulated to a certain extent and questions of genre poetics had been studied, but information about them has not reached us in full (Soliyev, 2012, p. 19). In later centuries, as dramatic works were created and continue to be renewed, it has

become insufficient to seek the answer to every question in Aristotle. Radio, cinema and television have produced genres and forms of dramaturgy that did not exist in his time, and their study demands new investigation (Soliyev, 2012, p. 19).

After Aristotle, Horace raised the theory of drama to a new stage by paying special attention to the correspondence of artistic depiction with reality. In the *Ars Poetica* he insists on the fitting behaviour of each character and, in a well-known passage, distinguishes in temperament and manner the child, the youth, the mature man and the old man (Horace, 1926). Horace also holds that the action should develop through internal causes: a god should not be brought in to resolve the plot unless the knot is worthy of such intervention. The idea that external forces should not be allowed to interfere with the development of conflict anticipates later requirements for the psychological motivation of dramatic action.

4. From the Renaissance to Romanticism

Research on the art of drama entered a new period in the literary scholarship of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. Lope de Vega, Corneille, Diderot, Schiller, Goethe and Lessing all made major contributions to the field. We do not intend to comment on their works or to write the history of dramatic theory; we consider them only insofar as they touch on the interpretation of the human being in drama.

Until the eighteenth century, the tragic and the comic were the dominant modes in which people were portrayed. Thereafter dramatists and theorists began to advance the idea of an "intermediate" genre, that is, drama proper. Diderot, who developed this idea in his writings on dramatic poetry of 1757–1758, wrote that in every moral situation there is a middle ground and two opposed poles: comedy and tragedy exist, but a person is not always cheerful or sorrowful, so that a certain intermediate distance must lie between the comic and the tragic genres (cited in Anikst, 1967, p. 316). According to Diderot's conception, this distance had to be

filled by a new serious genre. The wish to understand the reasons for the emergence of the drama and its distinctive features is connected with the names of Diderot and Schiller, and after them the principle of interpreting the real human being in all his or her complexity, as the bearer of a definite idea, grew stronger.

The mythological forces, divine images, gods, demigods and heroes performing superhuman feats of the earlier drama were gradually replaced by the human being. When the orientation of genres changes in a given period, it is determined by the attitude of the people of that period to reality. This idea underlies the correspondence of Schiller and Goethe about the reconstruction of modern drama and their joint essay on epic and dramatic poetry of 1797. In one of his letters Schiller wrote to Goethe that some kind of epic force, transmitted through Goethe's interpretation, seemed to be helping him, and that this force, he thought, would not interfere with the dramatic process (Schiller, 1957, p. 482). Hugo, in his preface to *Cromwell*, gave the concept of drama a still wider meaning: in his view the literature of the new age, whatever genre it belongs to, has a dramatic character (Hugo, 1827).

We are far from claiming that these theoretical views directly shaped the formation of Uzbek dramaturgy or the interpretation of the human being in it. However, if we take into account that the Tatar, Azerbaijani and Russian theatres influenced the formation of the national drama and theatre, it is reasonable to suppose that the first Uzbek playwrights were aware of the theoretical rules of the genre.

5. The Debate on the Canon: Bakhtin and His Critics

Although the history of views on the theory of drama spans more than two thousand years, disputes about it continue today. The reflections of M. Bakhtin on dramatic works are a case in point. In his view, throughout their classical development the established genres preserved their strict rules and canonical features; currents and trends of different periods could not change the core of the

genre, its legitimized composition, which had been forming from Aristotle to the present day (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 482). In the essay "Epic and Novel" he goes further and portrays the novel as the only genre born of the new age, while the others appear as "hardened" genres (Bakhtin, 1981).

These judgements do not fully correspond to the practice of dramatic art and to its theory. The ancient examples of the dramatic genres do indeed have canonical features, but the genres have been changing continuously. The problems of genre, plot, composition, hero and the interpretation of the human being in the dramas of Pushkin, Chekhov, Fitrat, A. Ibrohimov and Sh. Boshbekov cannot be studied on the basis of Aristotle's *Poetics* alone. If the novel is a "universal" genre, this does not, in our view, reduce the value of drama as a genre that has fallen behind its time.

At the same time, Bakhtin's ideas on the role of the chronotope in the structure of the novel can be productively applied to dramaturgy and can deepen analytical study. An example is the chapter that Ganiyev (1998, p. 21) devotes to this question in his doctoral dissertation on the poetics of Fitrat's dramas. That debates on dramatic genres have not ended, that research continues and that monographs are still being published shows that there remain problems awaiting investigation (Soliyev, 2012, p. 29).

6. Twentieth-Century Approaches: Bentley, Brecht and Frolov

A major contribution to the study of dramatic genres is Eric Bentley's *The Life of the Drama*. According to Bentley, five genres of drama are capable of survival: melodrama, farce, tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy, and each is given a separate chapter. In the first part of the book he examines the categories that give rise to a genre, namely action, plot, dialogue, character, type, typicality and individuality, and the relation of drama to prose, rhetorical verse, lyric, fantasy and philosophy. In this way he substantiates the formation and development of the genre (Bentley, 1978).

Bentley interprets the plot as a life conflict, a dispute, an anecdote, a reality to which something has been added and from which something has been left out. He approaches the genre through Freud's psychological analysis. In his reading, the "triangle" of husband, wife and lover in modern drama is only a mask behind which stand the husband, the wife and the murderer (Bentley, 1978, p. 211). In American drama, the interpretation of the human being takes a distinctive form: frightening and absurd dreams, an arduous life and masochism become genre-forming factors, and the psychological purification that Aristotle spoke of is being replaced by pathology, neurosis and obsession (Soliyev, 2012, p. 19). Bentley regards melodrama as a basic genre and as the quintessence, the synthesis, of dramaturgy, since in it the individual's conception of the world is peculiar: everything seems to pursue us, everything in the world seems thirsty for our blood (Bentley, 1978, p. 188). He also rates farce very highly, considering it a "universal genre" and a synthesized model of theatrical art.

Following Bentley, we have tried to apply the psychoanalytic method in analysing some modern dramas, since psychologism is strong in the plays created in the last twenty or thirty years. As Brecht observed, methods in circulation lose their relevance with time, new problems appear, life changes, and new methods of analysis are needed to understand it (Brecht, 1965, p. 169). Brecht understood that the old theatre and classical dramaturgy required change. In 1955 he wrote that although he had every possibility, he could not claim that his non-Aristotelian plays would solve all the problems that arise, but he was sure that modern people believe in the drama only if they see in it the changes taking place in their own lives (Brecht, 1965, p. 201). In any discussion of modern theatre, Brecht's views must be taken into account.

V. Frolov, in *The Fates of the Genres of Dramaturgy*, draws up a table of dramatic genres up to the 1980s. He names tragedy, comedy, drama and melodrama as the pure genres of drama and then turns to their internal forms. For melodrama he

lists six varieties: detective melodrama, domestic melodrama ("inner monologue"), melodrama-tragedy, melodrama-comedy, melodrama-vaudeville and heroic melodrama (Frolov, 1979, pp. 407–410). He then systematizes the genres and forms in which literary genera merge with the art of the theatre: from the epic, the "novel-play" and "play with a narrator"; from the lyric, "lyrical drama", "lyrical comedy" and "lyrical monologue"; and, in addition, numerous genres connected with music, pantomime, cinema, radio and television theatre.

7. Implications for the Study of Uzbek Dramaturgy

What follows from this survey for the study of the Uzbek drama? First, the poetics of Uzbek drama cannot be reduced to a single theoretical model. The categories of plot and character inherited from Aristotle remain indispensable for describing dramatic structure, but they must be supplemented by later concepts: Diderot's serious "intermediate" genre for plays that are neither purely tragic nor purely comic, Bakhtin's chronotope for the organization of dramatic time and space, Bentley's psychoanalytic categories for the inner life of characters, and Brecht's non-Aristotelian model for plays that address the spectator's critical consciousness.

Second, the development of Uzbek drama during the twentieth century shows an evolution in the understanding of the human being that closely parallels the European trajectory. In early Jadid drama the hero is often a bearer of an enlightening idea, a type through whom social vices such as ignorance and backwardness are exposed. In Fitrat's plays, such as *Abulfayzxon* (1924), historical and symbolic material is used to raise questions of national destiny, and characters become more complex. Later playwrights, including Sh. Boshbekov, depict the ordinary contemporary person in the situations of everyday life, in which the psychological detail and the comic and the serious mingle, and this again demands a wider set of analytical tools than a strictly classical poetics can provide.

Third, the relations of Uzbek dramaturgy with world dramaturgy should be understood as dialogue and not as one-way influence. Uzbek dramatists drew on Russian, Tatar and Azerbaijani theatrical practice, and through them on the European tradition, but they applied it to the material of their own history and social experience. A study of the interpretation of the human being in Uzbek drama therefore has to take account both of the general laws of the genre and of the specific national and historical context.

8. Conclusion

The history of dramatic theory shows that the image of the human being has been the central problem of dramatic poetics from its earliest stages. From the opposition of Sophocles and Euripides, through Aristotle's primacy of plot and Horace's concern for decorum, Diderot's intermediate genre, the Romantic broadening of the concept of drama, and the twentieth-century psychoanalytic and non-Aristotelian approaches of Bentley and Brecht, the understanding of the dramatic hero has moved from the idealized or the typical figure toward the complex, contradictory personality.

The article has argued that the *Poetics* is a necessary but insufficient basis for analysing modern drama; that the canonical features of dramatic genres coexist with continuous change, so that Bakhtin's view of the "hardened" genres cannot be accepted without qualification; and that the theoretical achievements of world dramaturgy should be applied to Uzbek drama critically and in a way sensitive to its own historical development. Further research is needed on individual Uzbek playwrights and on the newer radio, cinema and television forms of dramaturgy, in which the interpretation of the human being is being renewed once again.

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