THE STAGE DIRECTION (*REMARKA*) IN DRAMA AND ITS ARTISTIC AND AESTHETIC FUNCTION: EVIDENCE FROM SHAROF BOSHBEKOV'S COMEDY *TEMIR XOTIN* ("THE IRON WOMAN")

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Abstract. This article discusses the types of stage directions (*remarka*) in drama and their artistic and aesthetic function. It clarifies the significance of the stage direction in dramatic works, its place in the structure of a work of art and its relation to the specific character of the dramatic hero. Drawing on the theoretical statements of Uzbek and Russian scholarship, and on international concepts such as the "secondary text" and "didascalia", the study examines four types of stage direction, namely those of place, action, state (situation) and psychological direction, using examples from Sharof Boshbekov's serious comedy *Temir xotin*. The analysis shows that the stage direction introduces the hero to the reader and the director before the character has appeared on stage, records the actions that the author cannot comment upon, and reveals the psychological state of the character. It is concluded that stage directions perform an artistic and aesthetic function that helps to secure the artistic integrity of the dramatic work. The attitude to the existing scholarly sources is expressed and theoretical conclusions are drawn.

Keywords: dramatic genus; specificity of drama; stage direction (*remarka*); scene; genre; verbal art; work of art; remark of place; remark of state; remark of action; psychological remark; Sharof Boshbekov

1. Introduction

The object of literary study is the human being, and it is not without reason that literature has been called the study of man. In an artistic work the image of the human

being takes part as the principal hero. Accordingly, in dramaturgy, the "crown" of the literary genera, the image of the human being also stands in the first place.

A literary hero is the image of a human being in a literary work; persons and characters taking part in an artistic work can be regarded as heroes (*Literaturnyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, 1987). In the same way the Russian-Uzbek dictionary of literary terms rightly defines the hero of an artistic work as the persons taking part in it (Hotamov & Sarimsoqov, 1979, pp. 335–336). The images participating in a dramatic work are therefore persons who serve the general idea of that work. In each of the literary genera the hero is interpreted in a distinctive way, which follows from the methods and possibilities that the genera have for the artistic mastering of reality.

Examining research and textbooks devoted to the dramatic genus, one finds that a series of features is indicated as the specificity of drama. Academician Izzat Sulton, for example, writes about the characteristics of dramatic heroes that the depiction of characters in the dramatic genus is, unlike in other literary genera and genres, very much heightened (Sulton, 1986, p. 269). Agreeing with this view, we would add that the specific feature of the hero of any genus follows from the genre possibilities of that genus. Observation shows that the distinctive character of the dramatic hero has not been widely studied in Uzbek literary scholarship, and we consider it necessary to study the specificity of the hero in drama on the basis of the features of the dramatic genus. The subject of this article is one of the most important of these features, the author's stage direction, and its artistic and aesthetic function.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Stage Direction and the Specificity of the Dramatic Hero

In his *Theory of Literature*, Sulton, as noted above, dwells mainly on the specific features of the dramatic genus and singles out its "collective perception", that is, the fact that a drama is received by an audience gathered together (Sulton, 1986). This means that the role of the stage direction is very great in reading the

drama as a complete work. The author's stage direction is of great importance for studying the distinctive character of the dramatic hero.

In the 1980s a problem of theatre and audience arose in Uzbek dramaturgy. It seemed to be resolved by the creation of Sharof Boshbekov's serious comedy *Temir xotin*. Every dramatic work is created for the stage, but at first it is an example of the art of the word, a literary work. If the drama does not meet the demands of the audience, and the audience stops coming to the theatre to see it, then the work falls away of itself. Taking this into consideration, we can say that the first specific feature of the dramatic hero is that he or she continues his or her second life on the stage. The dramatic hero is distinguished by showing his or her life on the stage and acts with a relative independence. The distinctive feature of the drama is the presence of the author's stage direction.

The stage direction is the system of authorial indications in which the external appearance and behaviour of the participants, their inner experiences, the intonation of their speech, and also the conditions, time and place in which the events occur are indicated (Jalilov, 1984, p. 32). This phenomenon has been described in international scholarship under several names. Roman Ingarden distinguished the "main text" (the speeches of the characters) from the "side text" (the author's indications) of a play (Ingarden, 1973); Pfister (1988) speaks of the "secondary text", which includes the title, the list of characters and stage directions; and Ubersfeld (1999) introduces the term "didascalia" for the whole body of indications about the conditions of performance. Although these theories differ in emphasis, they agree that the stage direction is the only place in which the author directly addresses the reader and the director, and it is in this that its particular importance for the interpretation of the hero lies.

3. Typology of Stage Directions

On the basis of what the stage direction indicates, its varieties can be grouped as follows: the remark of place (setting), the remark of action, the remark of state

(situation) and the psychological remark. This classification is not absolute, for in practice the types frequently merge: a remark that indicates a gesture may at the same time reveal a state of mind. It is nevertheless useful as an analytical tool, since it makes it possible to see the different functions that the stage direction performs in the characterization of the hero. In the next section each type is examined on the basis of Boshbekov's *Temir xotin* and the play's edition in the volume *Eshik qoqqan kim bo'ldi?* (Boshbekov, 1989). The translations of the passages are ours.

4. Analysis of the Stage Directions in *Temir xotin*

4.1. The remark of place

The play opens with a description of the setting:

An ordinary, modest yard in a village. Upstage a veranda with several pillars; to the right a low veranda and the street gate; downstage a wooden bed. In every piece of furniture on the stage, in every object, something is missing: half of the door and window frames are painted, the rest has faded; the wooden bed lacks one leg. (Boshbekov, 1989, p. 163)

From this stage direction we learn of the living conditions of the main hero, the shabbiness of the household furnishings, and the fact that although he works day and night he does not live well. Qo'chqor has not yet appeared on the stage, but the reader and the director are given initial information about him. With the help of the given stage direction, on the basis of the skill of the director, the spectator recognizes the main hero from the scenery of the stage. From the unfinished painting of the door and window frames he understands the hero's slackness, from the patched bowls and chipped teapots his poverty, and from the brick placed under the leg of the wooden bed his helplessness.

In the remark of place the hero receives his initial characterization. In addition, in comparison with a prose work, the recognition of the main hero is accelerated for the reader: he is recognized before he takes part in the plot. In prose works the description given in the stage direction is in many cases realized through the author's

speech. However, the stage direction in drama differs from the author's speech in prose. Only what is necessary and precise is given in the remark, and it is relatively free of ornamental artistry. Nevertheless, as the quoted passage shows, a sparing description can carry a large semantic load: not only the place but also facets of the main hero's character, his taste and his level can be discerned from it. It is natural for a remark of place to be given in any dramatic work, and this kind of remark is given more often at the beginning of the drama.

4.2. The remark of action

In the remark of *the description of action*, attitude to the activity of the dramatic hero is expressed and instructions are given. The importance of the remark of action in drama is great, since in drama action comes first. Because the author cannot interfere in the course of the hero's action, each of the actions is given in the remark. For example:

Qo'chqor is bound with a rope to a post of the veranda; his clothes and his face are in a sorry state. He seems to have fallen asleep like that; at first he stirs slowly, then he looks in bewilderment at his arms and legs, which will not obey him. (Boshbekov, 1989, p. 121)

The individual features of Qo'chqor become still clearer in this remark of action. The situation into which the hero has fallen, and the comic combination of helplessness and self-importance in his first movements, are shown by the author without a single word of commentary. The action of the character, which in a novel would be narrated and explained, is here "written for the body" of the actor, who must play it.

4.3. The remark of state (situation)

In the following remark the state of Saltanat is revealed, and in the reply of Alomat the actions of both participants are given at once:

Saltanat (pressing herself against the wall). Oh, I'd rather die!.. Oh, poor me, Qo'chqor dear, couldn't you have told me that my guest has fits? Oh, do pull it away!.. Oh, what a disgrace!..

Alomat (thrusting his fist almost into Saltanat's nose). If I hear so much as a peep out of you, you'll wish you were dead, you shrew! Not a sound out of you at all, understood?! From now on speak only in a whisper!

Saltanat. All right, I said all right, didn't I! If we miss one word, are we going to die?

(Boshbekov, 1989, p. 190; abridged)

The actions and states of all the participants in the drama are seen more clearly in the remarks of action and state given by the author. It is observed that the two remarks are given at the same time. The parenthetical directions "pressing herself against the wall" and "thrusting his fist almost into Saltanat's nose" communicate the relations of power between the two figures: the fear of one and the aggression of the other. The same effect would require several sentences of narrative description in prose; in a play it is achieved in a few words that the actor immediately translates into movement.

4.4. The remark of situation in comic dialogue

The artistic situation in the conversation between Olimjon, Alomat and Qo'chqor is also precisely shown with the help of the remark:

Olimjon. This gentleman is Qo'chqor-aka.

Qo'chqor (smiling with difficulty). That's right, that's right...

Alomat. Qo'chqor-aka.

Qo'chqor. Yes?..

Alomat. No offence, but why did they give you the name of an animal, Qo'chqor?

Qo'chqor. Eh?..

Alomat. Qo'chqor is the male of the sheep.

Qo‘chqor. Well... what do you call it... Well, we are the male of the human, Alomat-khan...

(Boshbekov, 1989, p. 174; abridged)

The name *qo ‘chqor* means “ram”, and the comic potential of the situation arises from this play on the hero’s name. The single parenthetical direction “smiling with difficulty” reveals the hero’s embarrassment and his effort to preserve his dignity and thus turns a verbal joke into a scenic one: the actor has to combine the forced smile with the words, and the audience laughs at the discrepancy between the two. The remark is here not an addition to the dialogue but a condition of its comic effect.

4.5. The psychological remark

In the dialogue between Qumri and Qo‘chqor, the psychological remark predominates, and it discloses Qumri’s psychophysiological state:

Qumri (on the verge of tears from humiliation). You’ve said what you had to say...

Qo‘chqor. What was it we had to say?

Qumri. When people come, they will explain it. (*With a full heart.*) I have taken my children and gone to my mother’s. They will go straight there from school.

Qo‘chqor. Eh, are you mad, woman? So we had a bit of fun, so what, all sorts of things happen in one’s young days.

Qumri (almost weeping). These jokes of yours have been coming up to here (*pointing to her throat*) for sixteen years...

(Boshbekov, 1989, p. 167; abridged)

The author uses the remarks of state and action to describe the tension in the character’s psyche and succeeds in fully revealing the mental state of the image. The gesture toward the throat is particularly telling: the sixteen years of accumulated humiliation are made physical and visible. The contrast between Qumri’s controlled desperation and Qo‘chqor’s obtuse reassurance is established by the stage directions almost as much as by the speeches, and here the stage direction gives the dramatic conflict its psychological depth.

5. Discussion: The Artistic and Aesthetic Functions of the Stage Direction

The examples analysed allow the artistic and aesthetic functions of the stage direction to be summarized as follows. First, the stage direction gives the hero an initial characterization before his or her entry, as in the remark of place that presents the household of Qo‘chqor. Second, it supplies what the author, who is not permitted to intervene, cannot say in his own voice: the action, the state and the tone of the participants. In this respect it substitutes for the narrator of prose, though in a more concise and function-oriented manner. Third, it guides the director and the actors, so that the literary text becomes a stage text; the stage direction is thus the point at which the first and second lives of the drama meet. Fourth, it contributes to the emotional and comic effect of the dialogue, as the examples of “smiling with difficulty” and “pointing to her throat” show.

It should be added that stage directions are historically variable and that other traditions provide a different picture: the long, almost novelistic directions of Shaw, or the exact and rigorous prescriptions of Beckett, show that in different periods the secondary text may expand toward narrative or contract to a technical minimum. The stage directions of *Temir xotin* belong to a middle path: they are concise and yet expressive, and always subordinated to the requirements of the performance. This is in accordance with the observation that the theatre and audience problem of the 1980s was solved by the play itself: the stage directions serve the audience’s perception, since the whole system of remarks translates the situation into a visible and audible form.

6. Conclusion

In dramatic works stage directions are of great importance, and they perform an artistic and aesthetic function in securing the artistic integrity of the work. The analysis of Sh. Boshbekov’s *Temir xotin* has shown that the remark of place provides the initial characterization of the hero and anticipates the plot; that the remark of action records the hero’s conduct which the author cannot describe; that the remark

of state and situation reveals the relations between characters and produces the comic effect; and that the psychological remark discloses the inner condition of the character. The author uses the remarks of state and action to depict the tension in the psyche of the personages, thereby achieving a complete disclosure of the mental state of the image.

Further research on this subject might trace the changes in the function of stage directions in Uzbek drama from the Jadid plays of the early twentieth century to the contemporary stage and compare them with the practice of other national dramatic traditions.

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