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DRAMATIC CONFLICT AND COLLISION: SHAKESPEARE'S *OTHELLO* AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONFLICT STRUCTURE IN UZBEK DRAMA

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Abstract. This article analyses dramatic conflict and the related category of collision in the works of William Shakespeare, taking the tragedy *Othello* as its main example, and relates the findings to the development of conflict structure in Uzbek drama of the second half of the twentieth century. On the basis of Russian and Uzbek theoretical sources, the study considers conflict as an aesthetic category rooted in the contradictions of social life, discusses the classification of conflict into struggles between feelings, between characters and between opposing forces, and defines collision as the struggle of the inner feelings of the dramatis personae. The analysis of *Othello* shows a multi-layered system of conflicts in which the decisive opposition between Iago and Othello is at first hidden behind a series of secondary conflicts. The article further argues that from the 1980s Uzbek playwrights made increasing use of collision-type conflict, which opened the way to an artistic interpretation of the hero's "stream of consciousness".

Keywords: dramaturgy; conflict; collision; Shakespeare; *Othello*; Iago; dramatic character; typology of conflict; Uzbek drama; stream of consciousness

1. Introduction

The analysis of dramatic works resembles in many respects the analysis of epic and lyric works. However, because dramatic works are written not only to be read but chiefly to be shown, the features of the theatre have to be taken into account: the transformation of the text into a performance is already anticipated at the time of creation (Jalilov, 1984). The analysis of drama therefore demands particular care.

Drama is a fusion of the art of the word and the art of the theatre, and to read, comprehend and analyse it a certain amount of additional knowledge is required. In the absence of an authorial characterization of the heroes, their feelings and human qualities, reaching conclusions about the condition, psychology and personality of the characters demands considerable intellectual effort.

Every literary genus interprets its hero in a distinctive way. In the dramatic genus the author cannot interfere in the events. Izzat Sulton, discussing the characteristics of dramatic heroes, notes that in the dramatic genus the depiction of characters is, unlike in other genera and genres, highly heightened (Sulton, 2005). The role of conflict in revealing the psychological state of the characters is therefore very great. The purpose of this article is to examine how dramatic conflict is organized in Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, to clarify the relation between the concepts of conflict and collision, and to show how these categories developed in Uzbek dramaturgy.

2. Conflict as an Aesthetic Category

Contradictions in life are a social phenomenon and are directly connected with the problems of society. Each period has its own problems and sore points. Since artistic conflict is taken directly from life, changes and problems in life are reflected in the conflict of a work of art. For this reason what was very topical and problematic in one period can lose its value as time passes. Conflict is thus a life-aesthetic category and the most important, fundamental component of artistic creation.

Many scientific opinions have been expressed on the problem of conflict. The concept of "collision" (from the Latin *collisio*, "clash") has a long history in aesthetics: in Hegel's *Aesthetics* it denotes a situation in which a harmonious state of the world is disturbed and opposing claims confront each other (Hegel, 1975). The Russian literary scholar V. Kozhinov proposed that the contradictions of life be called collisions. In Uzbek scholarship A. Rahimov, in his doctoral dissertation, distinguishes three varieties of conflict: (1) the struggle between feelings; (2) the

struggle between characters; and (3) the struggle between opposing forces. Disagreeing with Kozhinov's proposal but supporting Rahimov's view, we would note that these three should be called three *forms* of conflict rather than three *types*, since the term "type" is properly applied to things that differ sharply from one another and possess substantial grounds and characteristics of their own. In actual dramatic works, the three forms often coexist and pass into one another.

3. Shakespeare and the Conflict-Based Structure of His Drama

The creative work of William Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, is distinguished by its keen observation, its powerful speech and its perfect construction. In the accepted canon he is the author of some thirty-eight plays, which are divided, with variations from edition to edition, into comedies, histories and tragedies, as well as of a cycle of 154 sonnets and several narrative poems. *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* became known throughout the world. The principal reason is the mastery with which artistic elements are used in the composition of these plays.

Shakespeare was himself a man of the theatre. He was an actor and a shareholder in the company of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men), one of the leading troupes of England, wrote plays for it, and according to early tradition took smaller roles in his own productions. His understanding of what works on the stage explains the special role of conflict in his dramaturgy: it is impossible to imagine Shakespeare's work without conflicts.

4. The System of Conflicts in *Othello*

4.1. Secondary conflicts and the hidden main conflict

Sometimes the main conflict of a work does not appear at once but is preceded by a system of other conflicts. Shakespeare's *Othello* is full of contradictions. There is, first, the conflict between Desdemona's father Brabantio and Othello, provoked by the secret marriage of the general with Brabantio's daughter. There is the conflict between Roderigo, Desdemona's rejected suitor, and his more fortunate rival

Othello. Roderigo is also drawn into a quarrel with the lieutenant Cassio, and it is this quarrel, which Iago engineers in order to have Cassio dismissed, that leads to a major dispute among the military men on Cyprus. The conflict between Othello and Desdemona does not arise until late in the tragedy and ends with Desdemona's death. Finally, there is the conflict that is the true main collision of the play: that between Iago, the bearer of envy, duplicity, ambition and egoism, and Othello, an honest and straightforward man, but a person of passionate and wrathful character.

The structure of the play is therefore not a simple linear opposition. The main conflict is hidden, since for most of the action Othello regards Iago as his most loyal friend, and the audience, to whom Iago reveals his real intentions in soliloquies, watches the hero being led step by step toward disaster. It is the discrepancy between what the audience knows and what the hero knows that turns each outwardly friendly scene between the two men into a scene of conflict.

4.2. Language as the expression of conflict

The confrontation of the first act is presented with great force in the words of Brabantio, who, on discovering that his daughter has gone, accuses Othello of witchcraft (quoted here from the English text; for the Uzbek translation see Shakespeare, 1981):

O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter?
Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, to incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight. (Othello, 1.2)

In these lines the father's personal anger is combined with a social prejudice against the outsider, so that the conflict is at once family, social and cultural. Othello, a Moorish general in the service of Venice, is respected as a soldier but never fully accepted as a person, and this position of the outsider forms the ground on which Iago's intrigue later grows. It is clear that the tragedy *Othello* is rich in conflicts: they can be seen in almost every line.

4.3. The antithesis of Iago and Othello

The central opposition is one of characters, and it is also an opposition of two ways of knowing the world. Iago, who declares to the audience in the first scene "I am not what I am" (1.1), is the embodiment of concealment: he acts through insinuation and manipulates other people's trust. Othello, by contrast, is open and direct, and judges others by his own honesty; this trait, which is his strength as a soldier, becomes his weakness when he confronts the calculated deceit of Iago. Iago's motives are variously presented in the text (the promotion of Cassio over him, the suspicion that Othello had been intimate with his wife), and critics have long debated whether they explain his behaviour at all (see Bradley, 1904). For our purposes it is important that the mainspring of the tragedy is not a chance event but the collision between two incompatible personalities, and that this collision is realized in the inner life of Othello, who moves from trust to jealousy, from love to murder. In his last speech he asks to be remembered as one who "lov'd not wisely, but too well" (5.2), which sums up the internal conflict between feeling and judgment at the heart of the play (Honigmann, 1997).

5. Collision as the Struggle of Inner Feelings

The concept of collision requires precise definition. The word comes from the meaning "clash, opposition" and in literary study it is understood as the mutual struggle of characters in an artistic work, or as the clash between circumstances and characters (Hotamov & Sarimsoqov, 1983). In our opinion, collision is the struggle between the inner feelings of the participants of the work, that is, the struggle of

feelings that a person approves or disapproves of and that are known only to himself or herself. When collision is thus understood as a struggle of inner feelings, further ideas can be found in the literature on the subject. In the tragedies of Shakespeare, for example, tragic collision predominates; in the dramas of Hamza and Komil Yashin, dramatic collision; and in the stories of A. Qahhor, comic collision.

If collision is a struggle between feelings, how should the term "comic collision", that is, a laughable struggle, be understood? In our opinion it is appropriate to speak of a *comic-satirical* collision, in which the contradiction is revealed through irony and the ridiculing of the negative. In *Othello* the tragic collision is expressed in the movement of the hero from faith to doubt and from doubt to destruction, and it is precisely this inner dimension that distinguishes it from a plain conflict of two opposing parties.

6. Collision in Uzbek Drama of the Late Twentieth Century

The development of the conflict in Uzbek dramaturgy shows a change of emphasis. In the drama of the 1960s and 1970s the conflict was mainly used in the form of an open struggle between opposing forces. In the 1980s and 1990s the use of collision-type conflict became more marked. This tendency is clearly visible in the plays of O'lmas Umarbekov (*Shoshma, quyosh!*, *Arizasiga ko'ra*, *Qiyomat qarz*, *Komissiya*), in A. Muxtor's *Samandar* and in M. Boboyev's *O'ttiz yoshlilar*, in which the moral choice of the protagonist and the inner struggle preceding it move to the centre of the action.

The emergence of collision-type conflict in Uzbek drama made it possible to give an artistic interpretation of the "stream of consciousness" in the psychology of the hero, and this is a definite achievement of Uzbek dramaturgy of that period. Just as Shakespeare, in the soliloquies of Iago and the confused speeches of Othello, allowed the audience to look into the consciousness of the characters, the Uzbek playwrights of this period attempted to show the contradictory movement of the hero's thought and feeling on the stage. It should be noted that the shift toward

collision does not mean the disappearance of external struggle; rather, the external social conflict is increasingly presented as reflected in the consciousness of the individual. In our opinion, the use of collision-type conflict is forming as a leading tendency in our dramaturgy.

7. Conclusion

The analysis carried out shows that conflict is the basis of Shakespeare's dramaturgy and that *Othello* demonstrates this in a particularly clear way. The tragedy contains a multi-layered system of conflicts, among which the main one, the collision between Iago and Othello, is initially hidden behind the secondary ones and is finally revealed as a collision of two characters and two attitudes to trust and truth. The article has also suggested that conflict is best understood as a life-aesthetic category, that the three varieties of conflict (between feelings, between characters, between opposing forces) are better described as three forms than as types, and that collision may be defined as the struggle of the inner feelings of the personages.

In Uzbek drama of the last decades of the twentieth century the use of collision-type conflict strengthened and enabled a deeper artistic presentation of the inner world of the hero. Further research might compare in detail the collision structures of individual Uzbek plays with those of Shakespeare and of other classics of world drama.

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