

*Comedy as an Aesthetic Response to Social Challenges:
Larry Thompson: A Tragedy of a Youth by Dušan Kovačević –
an Example of the Serbian Postmodern Black Comedy*

Summary

By examining the current theater repertoires in Serbia, the author has reached the conclusion that comedy is the most vital genre in the whole corpus of play-writing in Serbian. The comedies of Sterija, Nušić, Aleksandar Popović and Dušan Kovačević are continually included in the Serbian theaters' repertoires. The paper asks the questions why comedy is our most vital genre, what are the characteristics of the plays written by the last of the abovementioned Serbian comedy playwrights, and what is the connection between satire, black comedy and absurd in the Serbian contemporary comedy represented by Dušan Kovačević.

The paper is testing the offered tenets through a prism of numerous and diverse theoretical studies on comedy, starting from Aristotle to the latest research. We analyze Dušan Kovačević's approach to comedy writing on the example of the drama *Larry Thompson: A Tragedy of a Youth*, which was written at the midpoint of this playwright's career and combines the features of his early work, the comedies such as *The Marathon Family* and *Radovan, the Third*, and his late phase, the dramas like *A Dress Rehearsal for a Suicide*. Dušan Kovačević's work is examined in the historical context of the 1990s' political events in Serbia, in the theatrical and artistic context in which the work was created and performed as a theater play, in the context of the Serbian comedy writing from Sterija to Kovačević, with a brief note on the authors appearing in the 21st century. Apart from this, the work of this Serbian playwright is viewed in the context of theoretical studies in the spirit of postmodernism, relevant at the time of the play's creation, and very much visible, although insufficiently noted by contemporaries, and it is viewed through a prism of the most notable and latest research of humor, comedy, and laughter.

The paper reveals that this Kovačević's work is closest to Pirandello in its spirit – closest to Pirandello's idea of the theater within the theater, the testing of the borders between the reality and illusion, and the idea of the comic, which the Italian playwright defines using the term "humorism". A characteristic of the "humorism" is the compassion felt for the person we are laughing at, and starting from *Larry Thompson*, this increasingly becomes the feature of Dušan Kovačević's dramaturgy in his late phase, although he has not abandoned the black humor characterizing his work from the very beginning, i.e. from *The Marathon Family*.

At the end of the paper, the author observes that Dušan Kovačević does not have a successor and is still the main representative of the Serbian comedy writing. Considering the whole development of the Serbian comedy from Sterija to Kovačević, the author wonders in which direction and in what manner the comedy will further develop and if it will continue to exist, whether we are still capable of laughing to our own big and small flaws, or whether we will give up on comedy, and what will then be the pivot of the theater repertoires.

Keywords: comedy, black humor, Dušan Kovačević, absurd, theater, postmodernism