

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF RUFAT AHMADZADE'S DRAMA IN AZERBAIJANI THEATRE

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The purpose of this article is to explore the dramatic legacy of the outstanding Azerbaijani poet and playwright Rufat Ahmadzade and his contribution to the formation and development of Azerbaijani theater, particularly in the genres of comedy and satire. The article analyzes how his works bridged the gap between literary creativity and theatrical expression, and how his unique narrative style and socially sensitive humor enriched the national theatrical aesthetic.

Methods: The study is based on qualitative literary and cultural analysis. Key methodological approaches include historical-contextual analysis, intertextual study of individual plays, and critical interpretation of biographical information and theater reviews. The study utilizes both primary sources (scripts and television works by Rufat Ahmadzade) and secondary sources (interviews, memoirs, and critical essays). Comparative analysis is also applied to assess thematic and structural patterns in his dramaturgy and its reception in different media (television and theater).

Research Innovation: This study presents a new academic perspective on the dramatic contribution of Rufat Ahmadzade, which has been largely understudied in both Azerbaijani and international theater scholarship. Its novelty lies in the fact that his dramaturgy is viewed not simply as popular entertainment, but as an integral part of the national theatrical canon, combining poetic language, humor, and moral criticism.

Conclusions: It is noted that the dramaturgy of Rufat Ahmadzade occupies a significant place in the history of Azerbaijani theater. His works combined poetic sensibility with social satire, creating texts that resonated deeply with both the general public and theater professionals. It is emphasized that although he did not call himself a professional playwright, the popularity, social significance, and expressiveness of his dramatic texts confirm his influence on theatrical life in Azerbaijan. His ability to integrate humor, criticism, and everyday speech into coherent dramatic structures contributed to the democratization and modernization of Azerbaijani performing arts. It is noted that it is crucial to continue the academic study of R. Ahmadzade's legacy and promote his work in both the national and international theater arenas.

Key words: *Rufat Ahmadzadeh, dramaturgy, televised play, sketch, Azerbaijani theatre, national culture, satire.*

МІСЦЕ І РОЛЬ ДРАМАТУРГІЇ РУФАТУ АХМАДЗАДЕ В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСЬКОМУ ТЕАТРИ

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Мета у цій статті дослідити драматургічну спадщину видатного азербайджанського поета та драматурга Руфата Ахмадзаде, та його внесок у формування та розвиток азербайджанського театру, зокрема, у жанрах комедії та сатири. У статті аналізується, як його твори долали розрив між літературною творчістю та театральним виразом, і як його унікальний оповідальний стиль та соціально-чутливий гумор збагатили національну сценічну естетику.

Методи: Дослідження ґрунтується на якісному літературно-культурному аналізі. Ключові методологічні підходи включають історико-контекстуальний аналіз, інтертекстуальне вивчення окремих п'єс та критичну інтерпретацію біографічних відомостей та театральних рецензій. У дослідженні використовуються як первинні джерела (сценарії та телевізійні роботи Р. Ахмадзаде), так і вторинні джерела (інтерв'ю, мемуари та критичні есе). Також застосовується порівняльний аналіз для оцінки тематичних та структурних закономірностей у його драматургії та її сприйняття у різних засобах масової інформації (телебачення та театр).

Наукова інновація: Це дослідження представляє новий академічний погляд на драматургічний внесок Руфата Ахмадзаде, який значною мірою недостатньо вивчений як в азербайджанській, так і міжнародній театральній науці. Новизна полягає в тому, що його драматургія розглядається не просто як популярна розвага, а як невід'ємна частина національного театального канону, що поєднує поетичну мову, гумор та моральну критику.

Висновки: Зазначається, що драматургія Руфата Ахмадзаде займає важливе місце в історії азербайджанського театру. Його твори поєднували поетичну чутливість із соціальною сатирою, створюючи тексти, які глибоко відгукувалися як у широкої публіки, і у театральних професіоналів. Наголошується, що хоча він і не називав себе професійним драматургом, популярність, соціальна значимість та виразність його драматичних текстів підтверджують його вплив на театральне життя Азербайджану. Його вміння інтегрувати гумор, критику та повсякденне мовлення в цілісні драматичні структури сприяло демократизації та модернізації азербайджанського сценічного мистецтва. Зазначається, що надалі вкрай важливо продовжити академічне вивчення спадщини Р. Ахмадзаде та просувати його роботи як на національному, так і міжнародному театральному просторі.

Ключові слова: *Руфат Ахмадзаде, драматургія, телевізійна п'єса, сценка, азербайджанський театр, національна культура, сатира.*

Introduction. In the context of preserving cultural memory and strengthening national identity, theatre plays a fundamental role in transmitting social consciousness, moral codes, and collective experience. In Azerbaijan, a country with deep literary and performance traditions, theatrical art has evolved not only through classical playwrights but also through modern voices who merged poetry with stagecraft. Among these contributors, Rufat Ahmadzadeh occupies a special place. Though best known as a poet and satirist, his dramatic works—originating from short television sketches—developed into full-fledged stage comedies that drew massive public attention and redefined popular theatre in the late 20th century.

Why is it important to re-evaluate R. Ahmadzadeh's contribution to Azerbaijani dramaturgy today? While the mainstream theatre history often highlights classical playwrights, it tends to overlook figures like R. Ahmadzadeh, who used mass media (television) as a launching point for impactful theatrical works. His success demonstrates that literary and theatrical progress does not always originate from institutional theatre circles, but can emerge from hybrid spaces where literature, humor, and popular culture intersect. His approach reflected the realities of everyday life, infused with wit and social commentary—a style that resonated with a wide spectrum of society.

This study aims to situate R. Ahmadzadeh's dramaturgy within the broader framework of Azerbaijani theatre and highlight how his works contributed to the modernization and popularization of theatrical forms. His plays—such as “92 deqiqe gulus” (92 Minutes of Laughter), “Bildirchinin beyliyi” (The Quail's Wedding), “Sizin ile, gule-gule” (With You, Laughing), “Helelik” (Farewell for Now); “Sonuncu mehebbet” (The Last Love), “Gulus sanatoriyasi” (The Sanatorium of Laughter), and “Shirbalanin mehebbeti” (Shirbala's Love)—offer valuable insights into post-Soviet cultural transformation and public engagement with performance art.

Methods. The main theoretical and methodological principle of this research is the interdisciplinary approach, combining theatre studies, cultural history, and media analysis. The research draws upon:

- Historical-contextual analysis to trace the evolution of R. Ahmadzadeh's work from literary satire to stage performance.
- Comparative methods, evaluating how his dramaturgy aligns or departs from classical Azerbaijani theatre traditions.
- Qualitative content analysis of selected plays and television scripts.
- Interviews and memoirs from family members, collaborators (e.g., actors like Hacıbaba Bağirov), and theatre practitioners.
- Critical reviews from contemporary media to assess audience perception and cultural impact.
- This multi-faceted approach allows a holistic understanding of R. Ahmadzadeh's contribution as both a poet and a dramatist who influenced Azerbaijani popular culture and theatre.

Scientific innovation. This study provides a novel scholarly framework for examining Rufat Ahmadzadeh's dramatic legacy, filling a gap in Azerbaijani theatre

historiography. While his poetry has been sporadically analyzed, his role as a dramatist—particularly one who used television as a theatrical platform—remains largely unexplored in academic discourse. The innovation of this article lies in identifying R. Ahmadzadeh not only as a transitional figure in post-Soviet theatre but as a pioneer of accessible, mass-audience-oriented satire that transcended the boundaries of conventional dramaturgy.

Moreover, this research reframes R. Ahmadzadeh's dramatic texts as part of a hybrid cultural model, where satire, realism, and everyday language converge. By doing so, it challenges dominant narratives that prioritize highbrow theatrical forms and excludes media-born dramaturgy from serious academic consideration.

Practical significance. This article holds practical significance for both theatre scholars and cultural policymakers. Firstly, it encourages the inclusion of R. Ahmadzadeh's works in academic curricula related to Azerbaijani theatre and media studies. Secondly, it supports efforts to archive and digitize television sketches and televised comedies that have historically been marginalized or forgotten.

For theatre practitioners, R. Ahmadzadeh's plays offer a blueprint for audience-centered dramaturgy, demonstrating how humor, moral critique, and local cultural references can coexist on stage to provoke both laughter and reflection. His method of adapting short media content into full-length plays is particularly relevant today, in an age where short-form digital storytelling dominates public attention. R. Ahmadzadeh's dramaturgy thus serves as a model for future innovation in theatre communication strategies.

Level of Research on the Topic. The topic of Azerbaijani theatre has been studied extensively by scholars investigating its historical development, social functions, and aesthetic features. Research has addressed the evolution of professional theatre from its roots in folklore and ritual performances to modern stage practices, highlighting the role of theatre in shaping national identity, preserving cultural memory, and reflecting social realities.

Prominent scholars such as (Ahmedova, 2025), (Aliyeva, 2025), (Huseynova, 2025), (Mammedova, 2024). have contributed significantly to understanding the historical, structural, and socio-cultural aspects of Azerbaijani dramaturgy. They have analyzed the stages of development of Azerbaijani drama—from its emergence in the late 19th century, through Soviet-era transformations, to contemporary post-independence theatre—and the factors that shaped its thematic and performative evolution.

Although a large body of research exists on Azerbaijani theatre in general, the dramaturgy of modern figures like Rufat Ahmadzadeh, who bridged literary creativity with television and stage performance, remains relatively underexplored. This indicates a research gap and underscores the importance of investigating his contributions to the development of satirical and popular theatre in Azerbaijan.

Main part. Research conducted in recent years shows that Azerbaijani theater acts not only as an aesthetic and artistic phenomenon, but also as a social institution that plays an important role in the formation of national identity, the development of public consciousness, and the preservation of cultural memory. In modern theater studies,

the historical development stages of the national theater, the success factors, and the challenges it faces are comprehensively examined (Aliyeva, 2025)

Folklore traditions, ritual stage elements, and collective performance forms played an important role in the formation of Azerbaijani theater. Folk plays, ceremonial games, and performative structures based on oral culture formed the basis of later professional theater aesthetics (Ahmedova, 2025).

Historically, Azerbaijani theatre has been closely intertwined with communal celebrations such as festivals, wedding ceremonies, and religious and national festivities. The various stage performances, folkloric plays, and ritualistic acts presented during these events are regarded as the earliest forms of theatre (Azerbaijan.az editorial team, 2025).

Theorists studying Azerbaijani drama have classified the history of the development of our drama into several stages:

1. The emergence of Azerbaijani drama at the end of the 19th century;
2. The development of Azerbaijani drama at the beginning of the 20th century;
3. Soviet drama;
4. Drama of the years of independence.” (Mammedova, 2024)

The staging of Mirza Fatali Akhundov’s play “*Lenkeran xaninin veziri*” (“*The Vizier of the Lankaran Khan*”) at the Baku Real School in 1873 is regarded as the inception of professional Azerbaijani theatre. (Ismayilova, 2023)

The first theatre building constructed in 1883 by Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev gave a significant impetus to the development of national dramaturgy and theatrical culture in Azerbaijan (Fatullayev, 1961:25)

In the 1970s and 1980s, Rufat Ahmadzadeh contributed to the continuity of Azerbaijan’s rich theatrical tradition through his staged sketches and comedies. In his musical comedies and theatrical sketches, elements of music and literary text are harmoniously integrated, endowing the performances with both entertaining and thought-provoking qualities.

As reflected in the titles of his works—musical comedies such as “*92 deqiqe gulus*” (*92 Minutes of Laughter*), “*Bildirchinin beyliyi*” (*The Quail’s Wedding*), “*Sizin ile, gule-gule*” (*With You, Laughing*), and “*Helelik*” (*Farewell for Now*); as well as televised plays like “*Sonuncu mehebbet*” (*The Last Love*), “*Gulus sanatoriyasi*” (*The Sanatorium of Laughter*), and “*Shirbalanin mehebbeti*” (*Shirbala’s Love*)—R. Ahmadzadeh aimed to delve into the roots of societal issues through humor. (Baku-Art.com editorial team, 2022).

Satire and humor play an important role in the formation of public consciousness in Azerbaijani dramaturgy and increase the social significance of dramatic texts. (Sultanova, 2024).

His works are crafted to evoke both emotional and intellectual responses from the audience, using satire as a powerful tool for social reflection.

Among these works, “*Bildirchinin Beyliyi*” (*The Quail’s Wedding*) (*Azerbaijan dramaturgiyasi antologiyasi.*, 2007:164) is one of the musical comedies written by Rufat Ahmadzadeh and holds a distinctive place in Azerbaijani theatre. This piece

exemplifies the author's mastery in portraying national-cultural characters, the vernacular language, and everyday life motifs on stage. Written in the comedy genre, the performance illuminates socio-cultural issues through a style that is both entertaining and thought-provoking.

The success of these productions was not solely due to the author's engaging plotlines and linguistic mastery, but also to the performances of master actors such as Hacibaba Baghirov, Sayavush Aslan, and Lutfali Abdullayev, whose artistic interpretations played a vital role.

In R. Ahmadzadeh's stage works, dramatic conflict is primarily constructed through the interplay of internal psychological tension and external social circumstances. The use of humor in the structure of his plays does not merely serve an entertainment function; rather, it acts as a tool that brings the object of critique closer to the audience's perception and conveys the message through an emotionally resonant medium.

The staging of his works is marked by rhythmically structured dialogues, vivid character portrayals, and a natural progression of events—elements that together establish a psychological bridge between the audience and the stage. This demonstrates that R. Ahmadzadeh's theatrical texts were not intended solely as written literature but were inherently dynamic in structure, crafted specifically for performance.

According to the recollections of Rufat Ahmadzadeh's son, Zulfugar Rufatoghlu, his father's earliest stage works originated from short sketches created for weekend television programs broadcast on AzTV. These sketches were written at the initiative of the renowned actor Hacibaba Baghirov and specifically tailored for his performance. They quickly attracted significant attention from television audiences (Rufatoghlu, 2017).

Gradually, these short performances evolved into a television series titled "*Sonqulunun serguzeshleri*" (*The Adventures of Sonqulu*), which established a direct connection with viewers and became a highly anticipated artistic project for families during the weekends. This was not merely a television success; it was a vivid demonstration of dramaturgy's capacity to fulfill its social function in an effective and engaging format. The popularity of the series, the widespread affection for its characters, and the depiction of situations drawn from everyday life reflected R. Ahmadzadeh's remarkable ability to write in the language and spirit of the people.

Later, upon the recommendation of his close friend and renowned composer Emin Sabitoghlu, these sketches were adapted into more extensive and substantive theatrical productions. As a result, plays such as "*Gulus sanatoriyasi*" (*The Sanatorium of Laughter*) and "*Shirbalanin mehebbeti*" (*Shirbala's Love*) were created. These works were quickly incorporated into the repertoires of Azerbaijani theatres and enjoyed long-lasting popularity, frequently performed to sold-out audiences. The rapid sale of tickets and the consistent full-house performances clearly demonstrated that R. Ahmadzadeh's plays deeply resonated with the public's taste, worldview, and everyday experiences.

These successes, at times, caused a degree of unease among the professional playwrights of the era. However, this unease also signaled the emergence of a new phase: a type of dramaturgy that originated from the people themselves—written in plain language and infused with a strong satirical spirit—had begun to assert its

voice. R. Ahmadzadeh's plays not only elicited laughter but also conveyed powerful social messages. This combination of entertainment with educational and thought-provoking content stands as one of the defining features of his dramaturgy. (Rehimli, 2003: 5).

His son, Zulfugar Rufatoghlu, noted: "*Perhaps it was because of this unease that my father used to say, 'I am not a playwright, but the plays I write are watched, laughed at, and appreciated by many people. And to me, that is what matters most.'*" (Rufatoghlu, 2017).

This statement by Rufat Ahmadzadeh clearly reveals his perspective on art, as well as his understanding of its social and literary mission. It encapsulates two significant aspects: the artist's humility and honest relationship with his chosen medium of expression, and the emphasis placed on maintaining a strong connection between creative work and the people.

Through this remark, R. Ahmadzadeh does not oppose the classical notion of the "professional playwright." On the contrary, he acknowledges that he entered the field later in life, and emphasizes that his dramaturgical writing stems more from lived experience and emotional intuition than from theoretical or academic knowledge of theatre. For him, the true value of a work lies not in its formal structure or technical perfection, but in its capacity to affect society and individuals—its power to resonate with and elicit a response from the audience. This approach reflects the artist's self-identification not merely as an author, but as a representative of the people.

R. Ahmadzadeh's perspective also subtly alludes to an underlying tension within the literary and cultural environment of the time—a divide between official literary circles and artists who sought to bridge the gap between high culture and popular taste. The popularity of his plays among broad audiences may have provoked jealousy among certain members of the established literary elite. Nevertheless, this did not deter R. Ahmadzadeh from his artistic path. On the contrary, he recognized the strength of direct engagement with the public and viewed their support as the highest measure of creative success.

In an interview about his father, Rashad Ahmadzadeh, Director of the Abdulla Shaig Azerbaijan State Puppet Theatre, stated: "*My father did not consider himself a playwright. He used to say, 'I am a poet.'*" (Sharif, 2022).

For Rufat Ahmadzadeh, being a poet was not limited to writing within a specific literary genre. Rather, it reflected a poetic worldview—an acute sensitivity to the aesthetic weight of language and a belief in the power of words to shape thought. Although he wrote dramatic works, these texts consistently retained the sensibility of a poet, marked by lyricism and a keen observational capacity. The speech patterns of his characters, the rhythmic composition of dialogues, and the poetic tension embedded in his scenes all testify to the fact that his dramaturgy was, in essence, a product of poetic consciousness.

In modern national drama also, the reflection of socio-economic realities in artistic texts serves to present the current problems of society through the language of the stage. Playwrights use the social environment, everyday life, and social relations

as the main elements of dramatic conflict to form social thinking in the audience. (Huseynova, 2025).

Rufat Ahmadzadeh's sensitivity toward language stemmed, first and foremost, from his belief in the sanctity of the word. For him, language was not merely a tool for expression—it was a vessel for thought, emotion, and the inner world of the individual. Each word he wrote or allowed to be performed on stage was subject to careful scrutiny in terms of its accuracy, clarity, and resistance to distortion. This attentiveness reveals a profound sense of ethical responsibility that underpinned his literary worldview. (Kazimzade, 2022: 358).

His reverence for language also made him a demanding critic of his own work. Whether composing a poem or crafting a dramatic scene, he repeatedly revised his texts, meticulously refining any flaws and holding himself to high standards. This dedication reflects the presence of a strong internal censor and reveals an understanding of artistic creation not merely as a personal endeavor, but as a form of public duty and moral commitment.

As Hamida Rustamova notes in her article on R. Ahmadzadeh, *“When his works were staged, he was known to firmly reject directors’ requests to cut or alter lines. His response was often brief and unequivocal: ‘Either present it as is, or remove it entirely.’”* (Rustamova, 2020:22)

The concise yet expressive episode recalled by Hamida Rustamova regarding Rufat Ahmadzadeh's approach to the staging of his works vividly illustrates the author's principled stance toward art, his uncompromising respect for authorial rights, and his deep appreciation for aesthetic integrity. *“Either present it as it is, or remove it entirely”*—this resolute statement confirms R. Ahmadzadeh's unwavering artistic conviction and his steadfast loyalty to the authenticity of his creative work.

Literature and theatrical art—especially the staging process—frequently give rise to differences of opinion between playwrights and directors. Sometimes such tensions arise due to technical constraints, audience expectations, censorship, or sociocultural sensitivities. Yet R. Ahmadzadeh's firm rejection of any cuts to his work demonstrates how deeply he valued the inviolability of language, the coherence of content, and the originality of authorial expression.

Moreover, this principled stance reveals R. Ahmadzadeh's sensitivity toward creative freedom and the sanctity of authorial rights. He did not perceive his work as a commercial product, but rather as an extension of his identity. Any external interference in the text was, for him, akin to an intrusion upon the author's very spirit.

Indeed, such creative firmness is a quality frequently observed among artists who have left a significant legacy in the history of art. It stems not only from self-confidence, but from a profound respect for one's ideas and for the ideological and aesthetic weight borne by one's words.

Conclusions: The present study has established that Rufat Ahmadzadeh's dramaturgy occupies a distinctive and unique position within Azerbaijani theatre. His dramatic legacy is not only of literary and aesthetic value but also holds significant functional and social importance in the development of the national

theatre. By reflecting everyday life, social relations, and the national mentality on stage, R. Ahmadzadeh's works have served as an effective means of communication between the theatre and the people. In this regard, his dramaturgy both continues classical theatrical traditions and responds to the challenges of contemporary theatre.

One of the main characteristics of R. Ahmadzadeh's dramaturgy is his mastery of the comedy and satire genres, employing humor as a tool for sharp critique of social shortcomings. This approach ensured wide acceptance of his works among audiences and established a deep emotional connection with spectators. By skillfully utilizing the vernacular, dialects, and everyday speech, R. Ahmadzadeh created vivid and realistic characters on stage, thereby making a significant contribution to the development of a national dramaturgical model in Azerbaijani theatre.

Finally, the scientific-theoretical and practical significance of this study lies in bringing attention to R. Ahmadzadeh's dramaturgical legacy – a relatively understudied topic in Azerbaijani theatre history and literary criticism—and promoting his work at the international level. This research also offers a deeper understanding of the richness and contemporary developmental potential of national theatre.

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