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The Founders of Albanian Comedy: Language, Irony, and the Horizon of Expectation

Jonela Spaho * , Eris Rusi , Ilir Shyta 

Department of Language and Literature, Faculty of Education and Philology, University "Fan S. Noli" Korçë, Korçë, Albania

ABSTRACT

This study examines the contributions of authors who laid the foundation for Albanian comedy, such as Kristo Floqi, Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, and Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, emphasizing their significant role in early 20th-century Albanian literature. It also investigates their linguistic contributions, focusing on the language structures, stylistic choices, and rhetorical strategies employed in their works, and how these elements reflect the socio-political and cultural contexts of their time. By applying literary and linguistic theoretical criteria, the study seeks to establish the place of these authors in the history of Albanian literature and to analyze the reception of their works over time, highlighting their impact on the currents of national literary development. In the field of Albanological studies, these foundational comedic works have been largely overlooked. By addressing this gap, the paper not only contributes to the understanding of Albania's literary heritage but also sheds light on the linguistic dimensions of these authors' works, enriching the study of Albanian literature as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon. These writers must be analyzed within the broader historical, artistic, and linguistic frameworks that shaped their roles in the complex process of literary development. Furthermore, this research represents an important step in preserving and re-evaluating our cultural and literary legacy, providing valuable insights into the interplay between language, literature, and cultural history.

Keywords: Linguistic Frameworks; Comedy; Irony; Literary Historiography; Albanian Literature; Literary Process; Reception

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Jonela Spaho, Department of Language and Literature, Faculty of Education and Philology, University "Fan S. Noli" Korçë, Korçë, Albania;
Email: jspaho@unkorce.edu.al

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1. Introduction

The history of Albanian literature indicates that dramaturgy developed later than other literary genres. Only at the beginning of the 20th century did drama emerge in Albania as an independent literary genre. Unlike other literary genres, drama has a more communicative character with the audience, creating a direct connection. This large mass of individuals, united by the contemporary art of perceiving the performance, leads drama to value the emotional transmission of human relationships as essential and existential, clearly related to the current states of society and easily understood by it. The comparative literature scholar Fernan Baldensperger believed that comparative studies should move away from positivism, which was based on the principle that literature consists solely of great writers and their literary works. According to Baldensperger, comparativists should also focus on writers and works of a lower rank, shedding light on their characteristic details in contrast to positivism, which concentrates only on the peaks of literature^[1]. A history of the development of Albanian dramaturgy, specifically comedy, cannot be written without considering the works of some minor authors who are regarded as pioneers of this literary genre in Albania. The creations of these authors, such as Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, Dhori Koti, and Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, who mark the beginnings of Albanian comedy—excluding Kristo Floqi—have not been excluded from the history of Albanian literature. Unlike other genre-initial authors who have been excluded for non-literary reasons, these pioneers have often been overlooked and not given due consideration. Given that dramaturgy, at the time these authors were creating, was the least developed genre in Albanian literature, and comedy even more so, the role they played with their works is not only historical but also emancipatory.

Robert Elsie, in *History of Albanian Literature*, writes: “In Albania, which has always had a rural population without large urban centers, dramaturgy never developed to the extent that poetry and prose did, nor did it have any significant appeal for the Albanian public. Therefore, there is little left to say about Albanian dramaturgy for the period before the second half of the 19th century, and also little about professional theater before the second half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 20th century, drama emerged in Albania, at least as an independent literary

genre”^[2]. The development of dramaturgy during this period bore fruit in the comic genre as well. If we refer to the development of comedy in our literature, its beginnings can be traced back to the late Renaissance period. It is well-known that the development of comedy, especially its critical character that ridicules the negative phenomena of society, can only occur when there is some degree of freedom for critical thought. Aristotle, in his work *Poetics*, writes that comedy is the imitation of everything worse than it is in reality and imitates those vices that are laughable^[3]. From its beginnings, comedy has emerged not only as entertainment but also as a transmitter of values for the audience and the society in which it exists. Additionally, during the same period, people from different social classes did not laugh at the same phenomena, due to their social affiliations and worldviews. It is understood that the comedic element is found in the customs, ideas, and prejudices of society, making comedy closer to real life compared to drama. This fact might be explained by several advantages that this type of dramatic genre has. In fact, comedy is considered both a philosophical and psychological compensation. Whenever we become aware that this is not the best of all possible worlds, we need the help of comedians to cope with the “defects” of reality that are insurmountable. The comic vision of life is humor, which is an achievement of humanity as a human being. This is what Meredith had in mind when he said that comedy is our ultimate civilizer^[4].

Based on these considerations, we may say that the development of comedy in the first half of the 20th century is inextricably linked to the conditions and demands of Albanian society at the time. These conditions and demands emerge precisely in that phase of development when this type of dramatic genre begins to be explored. During this period, three comedies were written: *14-Year-Old Groom* and *After Death by Çajupi*, and *The Curse of the Albanian Language* by Mihal Grameno. These comedies, in terms of time, belong to the beginning of the 20th century, when, alongside significant political issues, social problems also became evident in the tumultuous life of Albania.

Professor Kudret Velça, in *The History of Albanian Theater*, emphasizes that the treatment of contemporary issues and the realistic tendency in their depiction is one of the main ideological and artistic achievements of the comedy of this period. This is something we do not notice in the dramas

of the time, and even less in the tragedies with historical themes that were also explored during this period^[5]. Thus, the comedy *The Curse of the Albanian Language* (1905) addresses the work and efforts of Albanian patriots for the promotion of language and education during the National Renaissance period, while the themes that Çajupi explored capture the social sphere, which he addressed in *14-Year-Old Groom* and the comedy *After Death*, where he intertwines social themes with patriotic ones. *14-Year-Old Groom* is a comedy of customs that does not contain any deep conflict but addresses the issue of marriages with age differences through various comic situations.

The comedy of the late Renaissance created a tradition that later developed in the period from 1912 to 1939. Professor K. Velça emphasizes that the development of comedy during this period goes through two phases: the first phase, covering the period from 1912 to 1924, focused on the critique of the negative phenomena of reality in comedies, while the second phase, covering the years 1925 to 1939, shows a tendency towards the entertaining effect of this genre. This is evident in Aleko Vançi's comedies *Buncheek Talkative* (1928) and *Llazoja and Llazovica*, which have a more entertaining character and comic situations, and do not stand out for carrying any strong social conflict. The comedy *Luloja*, written by Dhori Koti in 1922, also has an entertaining character while addressing moral issues related to parasitism, lying, and hypocrisy.

The comedy *Dhaskal Gjoka* by Ilo Mitkë Qafzezi, written in 1936, has a pedagogical-didactic background and raises an important issue regarding the use of outdated pedagogical methods in Albanian schools. From this period is *The Lawyer's Marriage* by Foqion Postoli, which stands between comedy and farce. This comedic work, which unfolds its subject through a small group of characters, still holds significance today, firstly for the themes it addresses, which are new to Albanian literature, and secondly for the ideological and artistic values it contains. During this period were written also several comedies and farces, which, although not published, became part of the repertoire of amateur theaters. Their purpose was entertainment, and they did not emphasize the important contradictions and issues existing in society at the time.

One of the most prolific authors of Albanian comedy during this period is Kristo Floqi. For many years, he has

been absent from the narrative of Albanian literature and has been excluded from any kind of critical-literary and historical assessment due to extraliterary reasons related to his political life. Thus, during the years 1912–1927, he wrote a considerable number of comedies such as *Brotherhood and Benefit* (1920), *The Candidate Minister* (1921), *The Dowry Opponents* (1922), *The Banker's Daughter* (1922), *Groom by Force* (1922), *Let's Get It!* (1922), *Black and Blacker* (1923), *Regrets, Lessons* (1923), *The Clerks' Salaries* (1923), *Sick Friendship* (1925), *The Provincial's Granddaughter* (1926), *The Bluff Advertisement* (1926), and *Doctoralities* (1927). He is primarily the most productive author of the period in the field of comedy. His works were widely received by audiences through performances by amateur theater troupes. Kristo Floqi also offered a variety of engaging forms for constructing intrigue and comic contradiction, creating several distinctive characters, structuring captivating subjects, and enriching our literature with a range of comic expressive tools^[6]. Despite the modest development of Albanian comedy in its early stages, it is important that it gradually evolved and enriched itself not only in terms of quantity but also in quality. Above all, it is significant that it managed to achieve the purpose for which dramatic works are created, which is to be performed on stage. A large number of amateur theaters established during this period and the many comedies preferred for staging, especially the wide audience that followed them, testify that Albanian society at the time was seeking its paths toward emancipation and change. The comedic authors of the time played an important role in this process of change and emancipation.

2. Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining historical, literary, and cultural analyses to evaluate the contribution of early 20th-century Albanian comedy to the development of national literature. The methodology is structured to encompass several key aspects aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

A historical and contextual analysis situates the emergence of Albanian comedy within the broader socio-political and cultural landscape of the early 20th century. This involves examining primary and secondary historical sources to understand the societal and political dynamics of the time.

By analyzing how these dynamics influenced the themes, styles, and purposes of comedies written by authors such as Kristo Floqi, Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, and Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, the study uncovers the intrinsic link between literature and its historical context.

The study performs a detailed textual and literary analysis of selected comedic works, focusing on their thematic and stylistic elements. This involves close readings of key texts to identify recurring motifs, comedic techniques, and ideological underpinnings. The analysis examines how these works address social and cultural issues, utilizing theoretical frameworks such as Aristotle's *Poetics* for comedy and modern theories of dramaturgy. Additionally, the study compares Albanian comedic elements with broader trends in European literature to highlight unique national features and the originality of these works.

A comparative framework places Albanian comedic works within the context of global comedic traditions to assess their originality. By utilizing principles of comparative literature as advocated by Fernan Baldensperger, the study evaluates these works alongside similar genres in other national literatures. This approach examines how Albanian comedic authors addressed universal themes while adapting them to local realities, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their place in world literature.

Reception studies evaluate how the works of these comedic authors were received at different points in Albanian literary history. This involves analyzing archival materials, including reviews, performance records, and audience reactions, to gauge the immediate impact of these works. The study also investigates how literary historiography has treated these authors over time, identifying gaps and biases in earlier scholarship. By doing so, it seeks to understand the evolving perception of these authors and their works within the national literary discourse.

A critical reassessment offers a revised evaluation of the contribution of early Albanian comedic authors to national literature. By synthesizing findings from the historical, textual, and reception analyses, the study reevaluates the artistic and ideological significance of these authors, challenging their historical marginalization. This reassessment highlights the importance of their contributions to the literary movements and directions in Albanian literature, acknowledging their role in shaping the national literary identity. The study

positions itself as a significant contribution to Albanological studies and the preservation of cultural heritage. By demonstrating how the findings enrich our understanding of Albanian dramaturgy, the research emphasizes the importance of preserving and promoting these early works as part of Albania's cultural legacy. It advocates for the inclusion of these authors in the broader narrative of literary history, recognizing their influence on the literary process as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Data sources for this study include primary texts such as the comedic works of Kristo Floqi, Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, and others. Historical documents, including archival materials, theater records, and cultural periodicals, provide additional context and evidence. Secondary literature comprises previous studies on Albanian literature, dramaturgy, and comedy, offering critical perspectives and scholarly interpretations that inform the analysis.

2.1. Kristo Floqi's Comedies and Their Impact Among Readers

Kristo Floqi is one of the most prolific authors of early Albanian comedy who, for non-literary reasons, has not been adequately included in the history of Albanian literature and has been excluded from critical or historical evaluations. Floqi is a well-known political, legal, journalistic, and especially literary figure of the first half of the 20th century. He occupies an important place in the literature of the period 1912–1939, but little has been written about him by critics and scholars, and his works have remained largely unknown and almost forgotten for a long time. He sharpened his pen for satire and humor, producing a considerable number of works in the comic genre. He wrote most of his comedies during a time of significant social and political change in Albania. While addressing important socio-political issues and satirizing misguided policies, he was in a position of influence. As a keen observer of Albanian reality, he closely witnessed the problems, backroom dealings, and failures of various governments, boldly satirizing the negative cliques and figures leading the country toward chaos.

The range of issues Floqi tackled in his comedies is broad, addressing significant problems related to the state of education in Albania, the judicial system, finances, and the country's infrastructure. His works feature a gallery of characters, from those at the heights of power to ordinary

people embodying moral vices and distortions. Scholars emphasize that Floqi has the skill to uncover comedy in life's phenomena and is well-versed in the experiences of distinguished satirists. Kristo Floqi found his calling primarily in the comic genre, endowing it with artistic individuality and responding to the demand of Albanian society, which sought to embark on a path of change. He brought rich artistic experience to Albanian literature in structuring the comedy genre. Once provoked by an issue, he has a clear grasp of the subject's structure, allowing him to weave his comedies quickly, aiming to provoke laughter. He provided a variety of engaging forms for constructing intrigue and creating rapidly changing comedic situations. His subjects are lively, but he did not always achieve truly comic characters; instead, he created clever characters who get into trouble and resolve the issues of other characters, highlighting their comedic aspects. The comedies *The Candidate Minister*, *Sick Friendships*, *The Dowry Opponents*, *Brotherhood and Benefit*, and *The Clerk's Salaries* are typical examples of the harmonious realization of the unity between character and action. Floqi's comedies that address socio-political issues, although few in number, hold special value and significance, as they highlight and satirize the negative phenomena and types of their time. The range of issues addressed is broad, spanning from the upper echelons of the state to its lower links, giving his works both artistic and universal generalizing power, as the problems tackled in these comedies are evident in any era. From an artistic standpoint, Floqi skillfully utilizes all effective stylistic tools of satire and humor, depending on the topic addressed and aiming to unmask, critique, and directly strike at the comedic phenomenon or type, thus creating the comedy in his works. By thoroughly understanding the structure of this genre, Floqi sometimes employs spontaneity, skill, and surprise, while at other times using expertly crafted techniques to create unique comic situations that give originality to each work. In most of his comedies, the climax occurs when both the comedy of the situation and the comedy of the character reach their peak. Generally, Floqi possesses the art of crafting specific situations in alignment with the issues he addresses, the nature of the characters, and the ideas or subtexts he imparts to the work. The situations are generally enjoyable, change rapidly, and possess vibrant humor, making his comedies widely appreciated and well-received by the audience of the time.

Floqi employs a variety of artistic tools to create humor in his works: illogic and paradox, anthroponymy, exaggeration, and more. His mastery in utilizing the full arsenal of satire and humor, along with his ability to transition within the same work from irony to the grotesque, enriches the comic structure of his comedies, providing them not only with pleasant humor but also with strong demystifying power, especially when addressing negative phenomena and types in reality. However, it should be noted that a more frequent use of subtle irony—better pinpointing the problems and negative phenomena of the time—conveyed through the subtext suggested by this comedic expression tool, would have added greater value to these comedies, broadened the thematic depth of the works, and made the comic characters more interesting. Additionally, the use of the grotesque could be introduced gradually in the comedies, rather than being applied right at the beginning, as occurs in some of the works.

In Kristo Floqi's comedies, the language of the characters aligns with their essence and serves as an important tool in realizing the comic structure of the works. The author skillfully employs linguistic tools for satirical purposes, adapting them to the demands and structure of the comedic piece. The variety of linguistic devices and the artistic utilization of the possibilities offered by language give his comedies distinct artistic value. He carefully selects, intertwines, and combines grammatical construction tools, utilizes specific speech styles for the characters, and meticulously seeks and chooses idiomatic expressions and proverbs, adjusting them to fit the specifics of the conflict and character, thereby typifying characters and criticizing phenomena through his comedic works. This wealth of linguistic tools for creating comic pieces provides a unique experience regarding the structuring and realization of this genre.

In general, in Floqi's comedies, just like in all comedies created during that period, the scenes are fast-paced but crafted in a way that allows the characters to express their thoughts, monologue, and even self-reveal in some cases. Typically, the number of scenes in his comedies ranges from 7 to 27, while the number of characters involved ranges from 4 to 8. It is understood that such comedies, with a limited number of characters, cannot realize long plots or complicated comic intrigues. Through a small number of characters, Kristo Floqi has managed to create short subjects that stand out for their liveliness and variety, where the comedy arises

naturally from the situations and comic characters established in the work. By being well-acquainted with classic French comedy and some of its most prominent representatives, one can observe their influence in Kristo Floqi's comedies. Almost all of his works develop events in the same location and within a few hours, adhering to the unity of time and place, thereby reinforcing the unity of action and ensuring a cohesive narrative flow.

It is a fact worth stating that the expectations surrounding the dramatic works of Kristo Floqi were more attuned to their stage performances than to their literary texts. Therefore, the comedies dating from 1912–1939 dominated the stages of amateur theaters, precisely because of their straightforward construction, while also highlighting the defects, mistakes, and absurdities of Albanian life and mentality. These comedies carried a range of vices and moral distortions, conveyed sometimes through lighthearted humor, other times through irony and satire, and occasionally through sarcasm and the grotesque. Thus, Kristo Floqi's comedies began to be received on stage as early as 1918, when the theater group from Elbasan performed *Groom by Force* and *The Banker's Daughter*. The same comedies were staged again in 1925 by the "Union" society in Drenovë, by the girls and women of Gjirokastra city in 1930, and in 1938 by the theater group of the "Ismail Qemali" club in Vlorë, along with the comedy *Brotherhood and Benefit*. Additionally, the comedy *Regrets, Lesson* was first staged in 1920 by the "Shoqëria e Arteve të Bukura" in Korçë. In the magazine *The Dawn*, dated April 10, 1920, regarding the performance of the comedy *The Banker's Daughter*, it is stated that: "There is no need to praise the content of this comedy or its compilation, as no work from our author can emerge that requires criticism"^[7].

In an article published in the newspaper *Korça's Voice* in February 1926, it was noted: "The comedy 'Let's Get It' by K. Floqi was performed this week for two consecutive nights by the 'Korça's young fellows' society and had a gratifying success. At the end of each act, applause from the audience continued, proving that a sense of pleasure and sympathy was felt in their hearts"^[8]. In the same newspaper, from October 1927, we read the announcement about the staging of another of his comedies: "... they also performed the comedy 'Groom by Force' very well. This made a good impression on the audience, who burst into laughter"^[9].

Regarding the writings about his life and literary work,

it should be noted that the name of Kristo Floqi, is mentioned in the book *Albanian Writers II* (1941), which states that: "Kristo Floqi is one of the most prolific writers in Albania; his literary output in prose and poetry is abundant and diverse: he has written four dramas, eighteen comedies, six volumes of poetry and satire, as well as numerous legal and literary works and articles in various journals and periodicals. The language of his works is fluent Tosk Albanian, and their style is popular"^[10].

Additionally, Gaetano Petrotta wrote about Kristo Floqi as an Albanian author in his work *History of Albanian Literature*, where he describes him as one of the writers who has secured his name for the future^[11]. The name of Kristo Floqi is mentioned only once in the *History of Albanian Literature* (1983), in the context of dramaturgy. In contrast, Robert Elsie discusses his life and work more extensively in this work, particularly in the chapter covering the development of Albanian dramaturgy. He describes Floqi as "the most popular Albanian playwright in the first half of the 20th century"^[12].

During the years when Kristo Floqi's name was not mentioned and was largely unknown in our literary studies, the scholar Hilmi Thaçi in Kosovo published three of Floqi's comedies, accompanied by a preface discussing his life and comedic work. However, the information provided was quite limited. During the communist regime in Albania, from 1945 to 1990, Floqi's work was only referenced and analyzed in *The History of Albanian Theater* by Kudret Velça. After the 1990s, there was only one article published about Kristo Floqi and his comedies, written by Jakup Mato, titled "About Some Kristo Floqi's Comedies," which analyzes specific features of this author's comedic creations. The same author frequently mentions Floqi in his work *The Paradoxes of Satire and Humor*. Additionally, Professor Ali Xhiku discusses Floqi's dramas and tragedies in his book *Albanian Literature as a Polyphony*, particularly in the chapter focusing on traditional Albanian drama. The scholar Josif Papagjoni also notes Kristo Floqi's name as a playwright of the 1912–1939 period and references the works he staged during that time in the encyclopedia *Albanian Theatre and Cinematography*. Recently, Kristo Floqi has also been included in the *Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary* (2008), published by the Academy of Sciences of Albania, where he is listed among the authors of Albanian literature from the period

1912–1939.

In 2004, in *Metropol* newspaper, there was an announcement about the staging of the comedy *Brotherhood and Benefit* by the “Bylis” Theater of Fier: “The Albanian Molière, as referred to by Albanian critics, Kristo Floqi, appeared on the stage in Fier last night with *Brotherhood and Benefit* under the wonderful interpretation of actors Luftëtar Paja, Fatmir Xheli, and the entire troupe of Fier theater. After a long period of censorship of his work, Kristo Floqi’s comedy was seen on the Fier stage, sparking particular interest”^[13].

To conclude, most of Kristo Floqi’s comedies carry contemporary values. Their staging by prestigious theaters and actors provokes reactions and attracts wide audiences with their characters, types, comic situations, and the natural laughter they evoke. This author certainly draws attention with a rich body of work that was well-received and welcomed by readers and audiences of his time. Not only his literary work but also his life, viewed from its most important aspects, and the contribution he made to the national cause, continually attract the attention of scholars. In the near future, time will undoubtedly highlight the values and merits of this personality, who contributed greatly to the history and literature of Albania with his culture, energies, and abilities.

2.2. The Works of Mihal Grameno and Foqion Postoli and Their Reception

The merit of Mihal Grameno and Foqion Postoli lies not only in their initiation of long-form prose in Albanian literature but also in their cultivation of the dramatic genre, particularly comedy. Grameno wrote the comedy *The Curse of the Albanian Language* in 1905 and the tragedy *The Death of Pirro* in 1906, making him one of the pioneers of this genre in Albanian literature. Meanwhile, Postoli wrote the drama *The Mother’s Duty* in 1919 and the comedy *The Marriage of a Lawyer* in 1927.

The Curse of the Albanian Language centers on the conflict between Albanian patriots and the Greek clergy over the issue of spreading the Albanian language. Scholars consider it a political comedy, unlike Çajupi’s comedies, which focus on traditions. The theme of the struggle to spread Albanian-language schools is intertwined with the theme of introducing religious services in Albanian. This comedy closely follows Çajupi’s works and is significant for studying the history of

Albanian dramaturgy. As Th. Gjika points out, Grameno entered the field of literature in this genre as an independent creator, driven by patriotic ideas and his innate satirical talent, which he later developed through satirical feuilletons, sketches, and pamphlets. Even the motivation to write this comedy, as well as his novels, must have stemmed from Grameno’s self-education, likely influenced by reading such works in Romanian^[14]. In the first publication, the author did not label it as a comedy, and in fact, the first two acts do not exhibit comedic elements. The comedic aspect only emerges in the third act. The necessity for dramatic works among Albanian readers and audiences is explained by the success with which both his comedy and tragedy were staged several times by amateur theater troupes, playing a significant role as some of the first in the development of Albanian theater. Grameno is adept at creating comic situations and characters, realized through the contradiction between essence and appearance. This contradiction becomes a source of humor and generates comic situations in the play.

His anti-clerical stance, especially towards the Greek clergy in Albania, would have tragic consequences in *The Grave of Baptism*, but in this comedy, he unmasks the Greek clergy through grotesque humor, expressing his anger against these tools of Greek chauvinist objectives in Korçë. The epicenter of the comedy is the figure of Bishop Sofroni, portrayed as a tool of anti-Albanian politics. Unmasking a figure that carried divine grace was a rare act of courage for the time, especially for Grameno, a believer himself, making it both a patriotic and an emancipatory gesture. With this comedy, he managed to create characters as products of social circumstances, something he was unable to achieve later with his novels. The influence of the comic works he read is also evident in the creation of Molière-like characters, such as Thana, the bishop’s servant—an influence seen in all the early cultivators of the comic genre in Albanian literature. Scholars believe that, in terms of creative method, with this comedy, Grameno marked his highest achievement. The characters of Thana, the bishop, and Priest Siso are the most well-realized in his entire body of work, despite being depicted with spontaneous realism.

Of course, the three acts of the comedy do not allow for a broad unfolding of the comic conflict, psychological analysis in the development of characters, or rich language. These limitations were influenced by the lack of experience in this

genre in Albanian literature and the author's inexperience in writing comic works. As for the language, his efforts to bring the dialects closer together toward the unification of a literary norm, using the infinitive, should be noted. However, the use of the 12-syllable meter is inappropriate for comedy, as comic satire requires concise and agile verse, and his verse is also unrefined. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, Grameno and Çajupi should be credited for marking the beginnings of Albanian comedy and, above all, the beginnings of realistic comedy. Despite the artistic aspects that leave something to be desired, Grameno's comedy and his tragedy *The Death of Pirro* are significant because they played an important role in the development of Albanian dramaturgy, especially comedy, with which Grameno, alongside Çajupi, becomes a pioneer of this genre. The widespread staging of these works also contributed to the development of amateur theater at that time.

The Marriage of a Lawyer by Foqion Postoli is a comedic work that stands between comedy and farce. This is also the last work that concludes Postoli's creative output. While Grameno began his career with comedy, Postoli, after working in long-form prose, returned to the dramatic genre. At the center of the comedy is the figure of an Albanian lawyer who, despite being successful, has not forgotten the customs and virtues of his nation and opposes the morality of a society that has begun to degenerate and the mindset that everything can be bought and sold with money. Having lived in America for a long time, the author could not avoid taking a stance on certain social phenomena there. One of these is the media's speculation on the private lives of people considered successful. The comedy raises contemporary issues and is still enjoyable to read today, but it does not fully succeed in being shaped as a true comedic work. The female American characters are drawn with grotesque exaggeration, but here the grotesque serves more to create humor and laughter rather than to convey a deeper idea. However, the theme of this comedy was innovative in Albanian comedy and literature. This comedic work, which unfolds its plot through a small group of characters, still retains its importance today, primarily for the theme it addresses, which was something new in Albanian literature, and secondly for the ideological and artistic values it contains. In this comedy, we find ideas related to the author's progressive views on the emancipation of women, the judicial system of the time, and the unmasking

of media speculation—all issues that remain relevant today. It is a pleasant farce with lively dialogue, humor, and concrete details. The simple and linear plot would require more strength and skill in handling situations and characters to create sharper social contrasts, but it remains a contribution to Albanian literature. Although scholars consider this to be Postoli's least successful work, it is an attempt in which the author showed that if he had lived longer and continued to create, he would have achieved significant results in this genre. He wrote this comedy during the second phase of the development of Albanian comedy, when the genre had begun to establish its profile with the comedies of Çajupi, Grameno, Kristo Floqi, and others.

As pointed out, a history of the birth of comedy in Albanian literature cannot be complete without including M. Grameno and F. Postoli, for whom all literary researchers and historiographers unanimously agree that they represent the genesis of prose in our literature, as well as the dramaturgical genre. Regarding what has been discussed, the classification of these authors according to the genre criterion and the literary direction criterion is more accurate.

Referring to the histories of literature written and published in different periods, by Albanian or foreign researchers, it is observed that Mihal Grameno has always been part of the texts of literary history, while Foqion Postoli was not always included.

In the *History of Albanian Literature*, published by the Academy of Sciences in 1983, both authors are included. Grameno is treated here in a broader format than in previous texts. Very little consideration is given to his poetry and dramaturgical creativity, with attention focused primarily on his novels. This edition recognizes many shortcomings of the novels from an artistic point of view, including style and language, but highlights the merits of these novels, their messages, ideas, and democratic spirit. In the end, it is emphasized that: "Grameno remains in the history of Albanian literature in the first place with his publicism"^[15].

The creation of a scientific monograph on Grameno finally lends itself to an accurate scientific assessment of his creativity. The author of this monograph believes that Grameno should be placed in a prominent position within the classification of Albanian authors of the first quarter of the 20th century and, in this context, can be considered an important writer because he paved the way for dramaturgy

and long Albanian prose.

2.3. Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi and Albanian National Identity

Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi is a valuable personality in Albanian culture, contributing significantly to several important areas, especially those related to national identity. His published works, as well as manuscripts still under study and publication, are of primary importance for historians, linguists, and writers, shedding light on aspects of national history and culture that have not yet been sufficiently studied. Despite being self-taught, Qafëzezi has produced a voluminous body of work, making an outstanding contribution to many fields of literary and scientific activity. He was endowed with a wide-ranging culture, and his library was exceptionally rich. In the complexity of I.M. Qafëzezi's cultural personality, one cannot overlook his literary artistic creativity. His artistic creation encompasses three aspects: that of a comedian, a folklorist, and a children's writer.

Through these aspects, I.M. Qafëzezi deserves attention in literary studies of these genres, which were scarcely explored at the time he wrote them. Given the current context, his creations may not offer extensive quantity and have controversial points. However, considering the cultural and literary climate of the time when they were written and published, they provided considerable assistance. Thus, referring to his literary creativity, he is undoubtedly first appreciated as a comedian, particularly for his most important literary work—not only for the material he brings but also for cultivating one of the rare but very popular genres. Welcomed and desired by the public of the time and the stages of amateur theaters, *Dhaskal Gjoka, or the Old Times Korça School* was published in Korçë in 1936, with a very touching dedication in its preface: “It is dedicated to the beloved shadow of my later teacher, who inspired me a lot of love for Albanians and Albania”^[16]. This comedy, in its time and literary context, belongs to the second half of the 20th century and the second phase of the development of comedy in our country.

The second phase of comedy development during this period, in which the mentioned work is included, was largely driven by the entertaining effect of the genre, according to scholars, rather than focusing on raising issues. However, it is true that alongside some purely entertaining comedies, such as those by Aleko Vançi or Dhori Koti, there were also

comedies that addressed important issues. *Dhaskal Gjoka* is precisely one such comedy, which, beyond its expressive elements of humor and laughter, also has a strong pedagogical-didactic character, addressing an important issue like the use of outdated teaching methods in elementary schools. This comedy, through humor that ranges from subtle irony to satire and sarcasm, even reaching the grotesque, tackles other issues as well, such as the necessity of teaching the Albanian language in addition to Greek, the affirmation of patriotic ideals, and even issues related to ethics and morality. The informative range of the comedy in this regard deserves attention.

The author acknowledges this in the foreword of the work: “I can say that these pieces bring more benefit than books or even conferences. The dramatic theatrical piece, especially comedy, is both pleasant and instructive, for both the literate and those without knowledge,”^[17] a statement that demonstrates the intention of a work written for all and widely accessible. To achieve such a comedy, the author has sought to focus on the comic character, which is built through contradictions and comic situations, during which the actions and reasoning of Dhaskal Gjoka highlight his grotesque essence. Comic phenomena arise from various causes. Some outdated practices that try to present themselves as modern are often the primary cause of the comic. But comedy also arises when representatives of certain social classes think they play an important social role, while their role is regressive and laughable. These individuals, who follow their fate automatically without considering their connection to others, are often the source of comedy. The same attributes to Dhaskal Gjoka, who believes that his right to teach is irreplaceable and his role is undeniable, while in reality, his mission has ended, and his methods have become outdated. Built on this contradiction between his outdated pedagogical methods and the fanaticism with which he defends them, this character is fully realized within the comic framework, through a combination of laughter but also pity for Dhaskal Gjoka's fate.

Dhaskal Gjoka is the type of pedantic and violent teacher who strictly applies outdated methods and becomes resistant to suggestions for change. He exposes himself by generating comedy through his thoughts and actions in particular situations, such as vulgar labeling of students for mispronounced words, Victorian punishments of children,

seeking to profit materially from parents who send children to school, and the humorous way he reacts to rumors circulating about him. The subject of the comedy is not characterized by a long action and a match of characters, but to make the work interesting, the author increases the comedy gradually, which reaches its peak at the end of the comedy, when Dhaskal's interests are discussed. Since the subjects of comic works can resemble material drawn from life, we conclude that the author attempted to choose a subject that, even though it was not very timely for when it was written, still brings to life scenes that are directly tied to lifestyle mentalities, especially in the city of Korça. The play presents amusing scenes that make you laugh out loud but also make you think because remnants of Dhaskal Gjoka can be found in any era. In comedy, we laugh at vices, but we also fear our doubts about things that might never happen. In this way, comedy, as a sign of social development and emancipation, achieves the important "catharsis" that makes it both enjoyable and widely appreciated, as is the case with this comedy.

3. Results

The research reveals that early 20th-century Albanian comedy, pioneered by authors such as Kristo Floqi, Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, and Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, offered a spectrum of thematic and stylistic innovations. A key discovery is how these writers strategically employed language to reflect social realities and engage diverse audiences. Comedic works during this period often featured idiomatic expressions, dialectal variations, and inventive wordplay, all of which served both to entertain the public and to highlight the evolving nature of Albanian linguistic identity.

Kristo Floqi emerged as the most prolific among these authors, writing a substantial number of comedies that tackled political and social issues through satire, irony, exaggeration, and occasionally the grotesque. Despite non-literary circumstances leading to his marginalization in literary scholarship, Floqi's works remain crucial in shaping Albanian dramaturgy. By consciously selecting grammatical constructions, proverbs, and specific speech styles for his characters, he managed to lampoon vices across different strata of society. The linguistic color in his dialogue, including local idioms and varied registers, resonated with audiences in amateur theater productions, making performances both relatable

and thought-provoking.

Mihal Grameno and Foqion Postoli also contributed significantly to the linguistic and rhetorical range of early Albanian comedy. The *Curse of the Albanian Language* by Grameno showcased political undertones and satirical accents, integrating archaic terms and allusions to ecclesiastical language. In contrast, Postoli's *The Marriage of a Lawyer* utilized near-farcical dialogue to critique moral decline, media speculation, and modern Western influences creeping into Albanian life. Although occasionally uneven, these works expanded comedic discourse by shedding light on topical linguistic shifts and cultural adaptations in interwar Albania.

Finally, Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi's emphasis on outdated pedagogical methods in Dhaskal Gjoka demonstrated how linguistic nuance could generate both humor and reflection. By dramatizing an aging teacher's rigid teaching style—evident in archaic vocabulary and his insistence on rote pronunciation—Qafëzezi revealed how language and education intersected with social progress. Overall, these authors' deliberate integration of language-based humor, whether through dialect shifts, proverbial speech, or morphological inventiveness, confirm their integral role in both reflecting and shaping Albanian cultural and linguistic identity in the early 20th century.

4. Discussion

The findings illustrate that early 20th-century Albanian comedy served not merely as lighthearted entertainment but as a lens through which authors engaged pressing social, cultural, and linguistic questions. By juxtaposing humor with socio-political critique, these playwrights—particularly Kristo Floqi, Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, and Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi—demonstrated how comedic devices could resonate with audiences facing rapid changes in Albanian society. Comedy, thus, emerged not only as a literary form but also as a tool for reflecting and shaping cultural identity. The linguistic and stylistic elements in these comedies reveal a strong intent to connect with diverse audiences. Floqi's infusion of proverbs and idiomatic expressions, Grameno's satirical stance against ecclesiastical dominance, and Postoli's near-farcical critique of evolving social norms all highlight the fusion of everyday language with stage humor. These choices underscore an important dynamic: com-

edy is most effective when it animates lived experiences, making social issues more approachable. This observation aligns with broader European theatrical developments, where comedic structures—often less rigid than tragedy—allowed playwrights to experiment with directness and parody.

Furthermore, archival evidence of frequent stagings in amateur theaters speaks to the accessibility of such comedic works and their immediate reception by local communities. These performances, marked by audience applause and public commentary, show how comedic dramaturgy aligned with evolving public tastes. Indeed, this popularity may explain why these authors, though sometimes overshadowed by major literary figures, nonetheless left a discernible imprint on Albanian literary history. Their humor not only entertained but also functioned as an agent of social commentary, bridging gaps between different social classes and forging a shared sense of identity.

In considering how these works fit within Albanian literary critic, one finds a somewhat uneven recognition. Authors like Floqi, often absent from official accounts for extraliterary reasons, nonetheless emerge from archival sources and local periodicals as significant contributors to the comedic form. This reveals a potential gap in literary historiography, where political and social biases may have influenced which voices were preserved or celebrated. Addressing this gap requires a reevaluation of the comedic canon, taking into account both the thematic innovations and the linguistic experimentation exhibited in these texts.

Taken together, these insights confirm that early Albanian comedy operated as a platform for cultural reflection and critique. By weaving comedic tropes with linguistic nuance, these playwrights shaped a tradition that balanced audience engagement with deeper commentary on societal transitions. Their legacy, while not always forefronted in mainstream literary narratives, marks an essential step in understanding the broader evolution of Albanian theater and cultural identity in the early 20th century.

5. Conclusions

The inclusion and positioning of authors like Kristo Floqi, Mihal Grameno, Foqion Postoli, and Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi in Albanian literature raise important considerations for many other authors of this type. The primary chal-

lenge in interpreting and positioning their work lies in the relationship between the time when the work was written, the specifics of the historical literary process, and the reception of their work by readers of the time compared to today's perspectives.

In various texts on the history of literature, we find a series of receptions and interpretations of their work, depending on the times when they were written. Overcoming these aesthetic inconsistencies is a challenge for the history of new literature.

These authors represent a crucial link in the Albanian literary process that cannot be underestimated or ignored, even though, from the contemporary perspective of literary historians, the aesthetic values of their work may seem faded. However, as Gadamer suggests, a literary work should be interpreted as a dialogue between the past and the present, and in this context, the values of these authors should be assessed. Their writing style may be considered anachronistic, but it reflects the level of development these growing genres had reached. From a linguistic perspective, their works are a treasure trove of insights into the evolution of the Albanian language, particularly in how language was used to convey humor, satire, and social critique. Their rhetorical strategies, use of dialects, and stylistic features provide valuable data on the linguistic norms and variations of early 20th-century Albania. These linguistic elements not only enrich our understanding of the works themselves but also contribute to the broader study of the Albanian language and its interaction with literature. Thus, their contributions remain vital for both literary and linguistic scholarship, bridging gaps between historical, cultural, and linguistic studies in the Albanian context. Koliqi aptly expressed this when he said: "The literary wealth of a nation comprises both great and secondary writers, whose importance should not be denied. Often in the secondary writers, the hidden indigenous spirit emerges naturally and purely, revealing unknown traits of the national essence"^[18].

This was the Albanian dramaturgy of the time, which should be appreciated for both its strengths and shortcomings, with its progressive patriotic and social ideals, and its aspirations and dreams for a better life, aiming toward an ideal society based on virtue. This romanticism was a way of thinking and feeling shaped by the historical and social conditions of the time.

This issue, despite confrontations and the expression of various viewpoints, has not yet been resolved. This explains the specific case of these authors. Would we be moved today by reading Grameno, Postoli, Floqi, Qafëzezi, etc., if we approached their works purely aesthetically? Certainly not, but their works contributed to the flow of the Albanian literary process, and for their time, they became literary factors. However, from today's perspective and the evolution of aesthetic values in the art of language, their aesthetics would undoubtedly appear diminished. The practice of writing literary histories of different cultures has opened the possibility of applying various criteria for compiling the history of literature, such as the genre criterion, the criterion of organizing by literary movements, the monographic criterion, the comparative criterion, and the spatial criterion. All of these confirm that the historical study of literature can be conducted from different angles and perspectives. It would certainly not be wrong to apply these criteria or combine them in the inclusion and positioning of various authors. In relevance to what has been discussed, the classification of these authors according to the genre criterion is the most accurate. But while this study provides valuable insights into early 20th-century Albanian comedy and its socio-cultural implications, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research primarily relies on textual analysis, which, while revealing, may overlook the dynamic aspects of theatrical performance, such as stage direction, actor interpretation, and audience engagement, which are central to the comedic genre. A more integrated approach that includes performance studies would provide a fuller picture of how these comedies functioned in their historical and cultural contexts. Additionally, this study primarily contextualizes Albanian comedy within its national framework, without delving deeply into transnational or cross-cultural influences that may have shaped its evolution. Future research could explore how Albanian comedic traditions intersected with broader European trends in dramaturgy and satire, shedding light on shared themes, techniques, and cultural exchanges. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating interdisciplinary methods, archival studies, and comparative analyses, paving the way for a more holistic and inclusive understanding of Albanian comedy as both a cultural artifact and a medium of social critique. These expanded directions will deepen our appreciation of the genre's complexity and its enduring

relevance in the broader history of literature and theater.

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