

Dilemma and Theatre

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Abstract: Starting from the way in which director Andrei Șerban works closely with the actor, during rehearsals, taking him out of his often superficial dilemmatic states, the present paper analyzes the concept of dilemma from several perspectives, including Sophocle's and William Shakespeare's perspectives in *Antigone* and *Hamlet*. The dilemma, if it is seen as a vague concept, carrying vague meanings, can easily mislead the one who experiences it, especially in the theatre. But the dilemma as justified reasoning can only be understood as a clarification of what seems to be uncertain. Discerning what needs to be done when balancing utility and morality defines dilemma as a tool for establishing the limits within which an action can take place. Thus dilemma understood as a dramatic state seems to be proper to theatricality. At the same time, the paper focuses on the analysis of the moral dilemma through the juxtaposition of utilitarian and moral paradigms.

Keywords: dilemma, righteousness, rationality, role, pride

1. The director's work

A recurrence often appears in director Andrei Șerban's interviews. He admits that in the world of theatre, you will always be confronted with novelty and therefore you have to acquire a set of knowledge you have no knowledge about. One way to stir novelty might be *to avoid boring others while avoiding your own boredom*, but without paying the unacceptable price of losing your personal imprint, your way of imagining. In his terms, the director's work is not merely about being different, even if you are equal to the other, but about existing in a constant movement towards yourself. In fact, he once confessed that his biggest fear is "The fear of stagnation, that I will not be capable of having the energy, the courage and the determination to

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become the person I could be”¹. This concern, this restlessness helps Andrei Şerban fit into the trends of the epoch he moves through and even, often, to position himself at the forefront of these trends. Actually, it makes him capable of walking the unclear paths of theatricality. And his condition of conscience that seeks its purpose in the artistic act inevitably makes him found, with precision, the artistic act. An act that is needed today, here, in the course of our lives.

The work with director Andrei Şerban appears to be at the same time constraining and liberating, instinctive and technical. The way in which he behaves as a *master of the stage*, creator of contexts, guide of the actor’s work with himself, has the efficiency of putting into practice a scientific knowledge of the actor’s inner world. Probably Andrei Şerban, like Peter Brook, thinks that “The actor’s truly scientific tool is an unusual emotional faculty with which he intuits certain truths and with which he discerns between truth and falsehood”². In fact, at each phase of work with the team of actors, Andrei Şerban puts himself in the actor’s shoes encouraging actors to ask him questions about their characters’ internal situations at any stage of their role building process. The director’s response is suggested or explicitly formulated always at the right time. For him, this way of building relationships with the actors seems to be a priority, a rejuvenation of the mind, heart and body of the actor who engages in the act of exposing himself in front of the eyes of the spectator. Andrei Şerban observes that the actor lives a dilemma during his creative process. The actor’s dilemmas can erode his talent and destroy him as an actor. The actor’s dilemma actually stems from his incapacity to create the character’s behaviour. Not because he does not know how to deal with his character, but because he has too many options. Which one should be the right one? This is where the director comes in. This is his usefulness in the stage work. Something often forgotten by directors.

There are not many directors who positively appreciate working with the actor on the role. Even fewer are those who engage in this work with pleasure. Probably because of communication obstacles or, rather, because of the psychological aspects that such interferences imply. Directors are hard to understand. However, Andrei

¹ Adriana Bantaş, Andrei Şerban, *Avem nevoie de doi îngeri, unul nu e de ajuns...*, published: 12.01.2024, accessed: 31.01.2026 at <https://atelier.liternet.ro/articol/45115/Adina-Bardas-Andrei-Serban/Avem-nevoie-de-doi-ingeri-unul-nu-e-de-ajuns.html>

² Peter Brook, “Viaţa sunetului” in theatre programme for *O trilogie antică – stagiunea 1990-1991*, trad. Adriana Popescu, published: 09.28.1990, accessed: 31.01.2026 at <https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/reviste/TNB/Caiete-program/O-trilogie-antica-28-septembrie-1980.pdf>

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Șerban makes himself understood from a few explanations. As a matter of fact, “... Andrei Șerban is known for his extraordinary capacity of communicating with the actors...”³ - explanations he offers with such ease that they seem to spring to mind on the spot, born of the energy of the moment, and in this way they appear to possess a raw authenticity that allows the actor to embrace them without resistance. His indications seem to reveal “... the paradox that the heart, the head and the instinct are not separate, but linked together. The whole body is a complex and mysterious instrument that must be tuned if you want to use it”⁴. At the same time, the actor’s acceptance of the indication, the recognition of its validity, and its use in the composition of the role occur organically. Both from the perspective of the actor’s body and that of the character’s corporeality. “Undoubtedly, one of the fundamental issues of the twenty-first century theatre seems to be related to experiments with the actor’s corporeality in the relationship established with the character he prepares to play.”⁵ Because of this double responsibility, an actor’s acceptance of a director’s indication cannot be a superficial, perfunctory one. As a director, Andrei Șerban not only knows how to formulate his indications in terms the actor can understand, but he does so in a way that genuinely helps the actor in the construction of the role. Unlike most directors, in Andrei Șerban’s case, we are no longer dealing with a feigned *love for the director on the part of the actors*, but a genuine one. With most directors, actors feign affection, merely to escape the nagging of the clumsy director who awkwardly launches into reading aloud from the outdated *director’s notebook*.

Andrei Șerban’s directing style is an extremely pragmatic blend of intellect and instinct. The atmosphere he created during rehearsals has been described as follows: “Recognized as one of those directors who captivates the actors he works with – in many of the productions I attended rehearsals for, allowed me to experience them firsthand - Andrei Șerban creates a safe space for creation, rigorous yet free,

³ Alexa Visarion, „Andrei Șerban sau nobila mândrie a învingătorului” in *Viața românească*, no. 10/2024, published: 11.12.2024, accessed: 02.13.2026 at

<https://www.viataromaneasca.eu/revista/2024/11/andrei-serban-sau-nobila-mandrie-a-invingatorului/>

⁴ Andrei Șerban, „Viața sunetului” in *caiet program la O trilogie antică – stagiunea 1990-1991*, trad. Sanda Râpeanu, published: 09.28.1990, accessed: 01.31.3036 at <https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/reviste/TNB/Caiete-program/O-trilogie-antica-28-septembrie-1980.pdf>

⁵ Diana Cozma, „Actor and Character from the Perspective of Uta Hagen’s Method”, *Theatrical Colloquia, Iași*, vol. 15, no. 2/2025, pp. 17-25, p. 18

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with moments touched by the fleeting grace of the muses; it could also be called a space for research, a laboratory, a place for training where thoughts, emotions, and dreams are all put into practice”⁶. This skill of the director alligns with his directorial vision. For example, in his production of *Mary Stuart*, Andrei Șerban clearly projects his own vision of the play. At its core, it appears to be about a political conflict, one that has defined human history. In essence, “... the production is not limited to an analysis of the queens and their political decisions, but also addresses universal themes such as isolation, personal sacrifice for power, and the conflict between duty to the state and personal desires”⁷. Consequently, the director did not conceive the performance exclusively and strictly as political theatre.

Andrei Șerban’s vision focuses, in his own words, on “... The struggle, the relationship between two queens, a seemingly historical play, yet one that takes place almost right up to the present day [...] these queens face off in a fierce battle for power...”⁸. He observes a way in which history itself, as memory, testimony and truth about the political struggles of real people from the past, is undermined. His scrutinizing gaze delves deeper into this issue, noting that rewriting history does nothing but crush any history. What remains for posterity is not a false, embellished, falsified history written by the victors. Their truth does not remain. The present cannot be articulated on a history constructed for propaganda. History becomes corrupted, dissipates, no longer matters, no longer supports the present. And the present no longer rests on solid ground. It floats in a vacuum of hypotheses about justice.

This leads to “a divided nation, when history loses its meaning and everything seems to be governed by chance, a truth of all times, as well as of the moment we are currently living through”⁹. And for this reason, the decontextualization of *history* can

⁶ Crenguța Manea, „Despre putere, acum, cu Andrei Șerban” în *Forbes România*, published: 02.17.2025, accessed: 02.06.2026 at <https://www.forbes.ro/despre-putere-acum-cu-andrei-serban-431817>

⁷ Alexandra Ares, „Andrei Șerban electrizează scena TNB cu premiera națională a piesei *Mary Stuart* de Robert Icke – cu Nicoleta Lefter și Raluca Aprodu” in *Rinocerul*, published: 12.15.2024, accessed: 02.15.2026 at <https://revistarinocerul.ro/andrei-serban-electrizeaza-scena-tnb-cu-premiera-nationala-a-pieseii-maria-stuart-de-robert-icke/>

⁸ TVR Cultural „Regizorul Andrei Șerban, după 32 de ani, din nou la TNB | Un interviu de Nadine Vlădescu”, published: 10.01.2024, accessed: 02.14.2026, min: 3:32 – 3:55 at <https://www.facebook.com/TVRCultural/videos/interviu-cu-andrei-serban/524520646996938/>

⁹ Horia Ghibuțiu, „Interviu Andrei Șerban: Aș prefera să nu mai votez niciodată, dar avem o obligație civică” in *newmoney.ro*, published: 10.11.2024. accessed: 02.14.2026 at

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serve as an apt metaphor not only for war games, but also for political games, for the struggle for power. For it is true that “Politics, moreover, is the womb in which war develops...”¹⁰, then war without politics is impossible. We might even say that *playing outside the rules* is not merely a metaphor for politics degenerating into war, but could be conceived as a way to transcend politics. A way to escape the narrow confines of the politics or of the theatres of war.

For Andrei Şerban, politics is not made on stage. The stage demands more. Following in the footsteps of Peter Brook, Andrei Şerban “... is convinced that theatre cannot change humanity or save the world; therefore, there is no place for politics in it. Influenced by political stereotypes, he only intensifies the chaos in people’s minds. Any performance staged according to political slogans, Şerban sees as a camouflage for the directors’ egos. He aspires to a different kind of theatre: one deeper than politics and the obvious aspects of life, which would be a reflection of indisputable human values, of the spiritual side of existence”¹¹. The play can also be interpreted as an endeavour deeper than politics, mirroring human values at the heart of a conflict, perhaps even reflecting on these values that can be lost if we sacrifice them in the name of a momentary victory taking place here and now.

At the same time, it seems that, from the point of view of theatrical techniques, the need for greater knowledge and experience never ceases, not only from the director’s point of view, but also from the actor’s. And where can actors seek knowledge and experience more profitably than in the company of directors like Andrei Şerban? Directors who can offer you, as an actor, the opportunity to find answers to the questions you have asked yourself throughout your career. In fact, it is a matter of paying *attention* to the details that surround you and being *mindful* of the new information that emerges in the moment. It is an exposure to what you do not yet know, in order to bring into the realm of your own understanding what has long been impenetrable to you. It is not a skill you can simply acquire, but rather a discernment that carries you from the marshes to the meadows and then propels you,

<https://newmoney.ro/interviu-andrei-serban-as-prefera-sa-nu-mai-votez-niciodata-dar-avem-o-obligatie-civica/>

¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Introductory Essays By Peter Paret, Michael Howaed, Bernard Brodie, Commentary by Bernard Brodie, Index by Rosalie West, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 149

¹¹ Irina Catereva, „Teatrul transcendenal al lui Andrei Şerban”, *Studiul artelor și culturologie: istorie, teorie, practică*, no. 32, 2018, pp. 110-116, p. 112

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without any guarantee of safety, into the heights. “Working with Andrei Şerban is a double-edged sword for an actor. Only by embracing the convention can you embark on the long journey toward excellence. Only those willing to go the extra mile reach their destination aboard the ship anchored in the harbour of the new world. Regardless of age, working with Andrei Şerban is a lesson in discipline and trust for any actor. You must let go of what you know you know.”¹² Paradoxically, this letting go brings with it a new understanding that penetrates the actor’s senses and mind like an explosion. It seems to be a definitive understanding of the role. But this *definitive* serves as a relative benchmark, a milestone. Once one aspect of the role is clarified, a new issue regarding the role arises. Thus, the actor ends up raising a new, long series of questions. What truly defines our times? What is natural? Where does the unnatural come from? Where does the sense of artificiality stem from? Are the opposites of natural and unnatural similar to other opposites? Can the opposition of rational and irrational be equated with that of natural and unnatural? What about lucidity and confusion? Could the merging of the natural into the unnatural be the cause of suffering? Andrei Şerban responds to the actors’ anxieties by urging them to approach the questions diachronically, providing them with information about the evolution of the stage actions as they unfold in a crescendo. He provides this information gradually and only when he senses that it is truly needed.

At the same time, Andrei Şerban treats the actors’ roles with equal attention in the development of the narrative. After all, each role contributes to the creation of the dramatic moment. The director must treat every role equally in terms of its construction. By doing so, he manages to avoid antagonizing the actors. His communication technique involves suggesting stage directions as a solution to problems that arise from the simple transposition of dramatic dialogue onto the stage. The actor perceives this as the director’s endorsement of the choices he makes in constructing his role. Even if there might be a considerable gap between the context and the stage actions conceived by the director and the playwright’s text, there is no longer a direct confrontation between them. The text, which is enhanced, emphasized, and brought to the fore, seems to have been written alongside the staging. In fact, “Andrei Şerban conducts his rehearsals with such confidence, precision, energy, and creativity that he inspires a contagious confidence - in himself, in the performance, and in you. The structure he has conceived and the style of acting he proposes leave

¹² Alina Epingeac, „Andrei Şerban. O Întâlnire”, published: 07.05.2016, accessed: 02.07.2026 at <https://yorick.ro/andrei-serban-o-intalnire/>

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no room for half-measures”¹³. In this sense, from the actor’s perspective, the actions on stage almost string themselves together naturally along the thread that is the director’s vision.

An actor overwhelmed by the anxiety that grips him before beginning to build a character will always experience not just unease, but an overwhelming, paralyzing *fear of the role*. Andrei Șerban manages, in a way known only to him, to quell these counterproductive fears. He even convinces him that his emotions are no different from those of any other person. And the emotions he experiences are like uninvited guests who catch him completely off guard. “It is as if you have discovered a nuclear bomb inside yourself, when you realize you have always had something inside you that you did not know about. The problem is that tomorrow, if you do not make the same effort, you forget what you discovered today. You lose everything. It is a kind of madness because you have to do something new all the time.”¹⁴ Thus, anxiety becomes a resource for role-building.

The director who dares to defy conventional thinking or automatic ways of thinking operates beyond dialogue or stage movement. There are uncharted territories just waiting to be explored. One of these insufficiently explored realms is silence, and more than that, “...the text [which] is not separate from the silence within the text...”¹⁵, and they lead us to accept that the actor’s score is not limited to textuality. The written text appears to us as a continuum. As we read it, we are in an uninterrupted flow. We see the punctuation marks, but we perceive them coldly, rationally. In fact, we do not experience the pause, the silence, and what is often called the *written text* is actually *the scenic speech*. It contains the pause. It is orality. On stage, the text becomes voice. And if “... a theatre, particularly an indoor theatre, is like an image of the human brain [...] and within this brain there are not only thoughts, there are also feelings, there are

¹³ Ibidem

¹⁴ Cristina Bazavan, „Andrei Șerban: Încercarea de a ne deschide cat mai mult, de a fi mai sensibili, de a fi mai puțin nesimțiți decât suntem, trebuie să continue toată viața. (un reportaj din 2006, în premieră în online)” in *Tabu*, published: 09.20.2017, accessed: 07.02.2026 at <https://bazavan.ro/2017/09/andrei-serban-interviu-2006/>

¹⁵ Radu Teampău, *Carena în cer – narațiunea actorului din perspectiva regizorală*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon & Școala Ardeleană, 2015, p. 185

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also actions, there are also silences”¹⁶, then silence holds the same value as action, feeling, and thought. Sometimes they exist separately, and other times they overlap. Silence, which is not a mere suppression or absence, allows a glimpse of thought, feeling, and even action. Speech is not limited to the audible. Speech cannot be separated from its physiological dimension. This automatically raises the question of whether, at times, we should treat “... silence as the actualization of the act...”¹⁷. Silence is thus inevitably accompanied by a gesture. A subtle, almost imperceptible gesture related to the actor’s breathing process, or a deliberate gesture - a secondary gesture - which, in turn, is based on the three phases of breathing: inhalation, pause, exhalation. Thus, the gesture associated with silence distinguishes between deliberate and spontaneous acting. It is a process that is both rational and intuitive.

The patience, absolutely essential for an actor, to allow himself the space to remain ignorant of the role and to engage in the exhausting search for it will eventually bear fruit, and the actor will realize that the character is not a two-dimensional construct. He must be seen in space. But before creating the character’s appearance, the actor must penetrate its depths. He cannot do this alone. The character only reveals itself to the actor if the director captures the character’s genesis within the actor. Andrei Șerban “likes to get close to the characters’ souls and probe them deeply, to talk about the things that make them happy or that they long for most. It is as if he were constantly performing open-heart surgery”¹⁸. Andrei Șerban seems to take on the role of the actor’s companion during the *hunt* for the character. For the actor, every role building affects, somehow, the way he perceives reality. Even the way he sees himself does not remain unchanged. Little by little, he begins to act without pretending. He begins to live differently, somehow influenced by the virtual experience of the characters he embodies. And the character can offer the actor genuine experiences if it is constructed using a technique that emulates maieutics. By applying this maieutic technique in his work with the actor, Andrei Șerban intervenes in the actor’s state of dilemma. By imposing a mental discipline. In this way, he helps the actor formulate his questions. Whenever the actor encounters an obstacle, the

¹⁶ Officine Teatrali, „Peter Brook – Video messaggio al Teatro Valle Occupato”, min. 11:47 – 12:33, published: 04.15.2021, accessed: 02.13.2026 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR-PWimZSoM>

¹⁷ Radu Teampău, op. cit., p. 211

¹⁸ Mirela Sandu, „Andrei Șerban, teatrul pe cord deschis” in *Orizont*, published: 12. 2012, accessed: 02,07.2026 at <https://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/24444/Mirela-Sandu/Andrei-Serban-teatrul-pe-cord-deschis.html>

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director initiates a dialogue with the actor until the answer has nowhere left to hide and becomes evident to the actor. This approach to stage work seems to be a continuous negotiation between *protasis* and *apodosis*. The protasis is broken down into its constituent elements, and only those necessary to the conflict for achieving its resolution are retained. At the same time, before becoming aware of the elements that form the apodosis, the audience senses what it will look like. However, this process cannot take place if the actor is not aware of the character, of the character's cognitive mechanisms, and of the goals that drive them. Considering that "Theatre is everywhere—on the street, on TV—we are all actors, but we do not know what role we are playing. The subject is important for everyone, not just for me. We all play roles, whether we like it or not, both in theatre and in life [...] It is a theme that should make us all think about how we play our roles... On stage, the question is whether the actor knows what he plays and whether he is aware of why he plays it"¹⁹, we can say that the actor who knows what he plays, where he plays, and when he plays, engages himself in an act of self-awareness. The actor's score is a practical exercise in lucidity. At one point, Andrei Șerban confesses: "Every director should know what an actor goes through on stage so that he can truly help him overcome his obstacles"²⁰. This type of dialogue between director and actor becomes a critical instance of the character's sensations, judgements, actions, and silences.

This direct style of expression, which is characteristic of him, has brought about a sort of renewal in theatrical discourse in Romania since the 1990s. His way of speaking to others mysteriously weaves its way into the fabric of his productions. In fact, during his time as director of the National Theatre in Bucharest, Andrei Șerban affirms that he intended to bring about a shift in perspective both in the theatrical imagination and in the public consciousness. At one point, he confesses, "... when I came to Romania in 1990, at the invitation of Andrei Pleșu to take over the National Theatre - which was an institution like a dying elephant, with some 500 employees - I saw a challenge and told myself that I wanted to try to make the impossible possible.

¹⁹ Andrei Șerban, *Interviu Andrei Șerban, regizor: Toți suntem actori*, published: 11.01.2011, accessed: 02.14.2026 at <https://adevarul.ro/stil-de-viata/cultura/andrei-serban-regizor-toti-suntem-actori-1311509.html>

²⁰ Andrei Șerban, în Mălina Gîndu „Interviu Andrei Șerban, regizor: Cei care vorbesc în numele corectitudinii politice vor doar să obțină puterea și îi disprețuiesc pe marginalizați” in *adevărul.ro*, published: 03.12.2022, accessed: 02.14.2026 at <https://adevarul.ro/stil-de-viata/cultura/andrei-serban-regizor-cei-care-vorbesc-in-2155016.html>

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I started with the *Ancient Trilogy* - perhaps still considered the signature production of my career, perhaps the most radical and most-watched in the entire world - and I did well; the production thawed all sorts of *frozen relics* left over in the theatre from communism. If at first I felt I was welcomed with open arms, later I felt it was not working anymore, and I realized I had made a huge mistake in trying, because the impossible had no way of becoming possible”²¹. Here, we are essentially told that the performances were too rational, lacking that emotional spark. The director notices: “... seeing this hall where I staged the *Greek Trilogy*, I look around and, even though it has been completely renovated, I feel that the walls... even the walls have a memory. Because the resonance of this production, which was performed in ancient Greek... in unknown languages, still exists today, not just in people - in those who saw the performance - but I believe something has remained in the walls as well”²². We can thus say that he succeeded in making a breach in the *steel horizon* of the so-called social progress during the dark decades of the last century, a breach through which we were able to step toward something else, toward a different kind of theatre. Perhaps his reluctance to acknowledge the success of his own effort stems from the bitterness of realizing that fate has played a trick on him and that he has fallen prey to the *social monstrosity* he had deluded himself into believing he had vanquished forever. The communist ideology and habits he had tried to defeat through the power of theatre came back not only to haunt him, but to exact their revenge precisely where he least expected it. “Andrei Șerban believes that the phrase *politically correct* has become a *yellow fever of America*, and the experience he went through at one point led him to believe that he was, once again, living under *communism*.”²³ What was obsolete, from the perspective of social-theatrical ideology in the last decade of the last century,

²¹ Andrei Șerban, în Melania Cincea „Andrei Șerban: Dacă nu simți în interiorul tău vibrația forței de deasupra, nu poți crea!” in *Puterea a cincea*, published: 02.25.2022, accessed: 02.15.2026, at <https://putereaacincea.ro/37772-2/>

²² TVR Cultural „Regizorul Andrei Șerban, după 32 de ani, din nou la TNB | Un interviu de Nadine Vlădescu”, published: 01.10.2024, accessed: 02.14.2026, min: 1:38 – 2:02 at <https://www.facebook.com/TVRCultural/videos/interviu-cu-andrei-serban/524520646996938/>

²³ Adrian Nicolae, „Cum a fost regizorul Andrei Șerban *alungat* din S.U.A. + motivul demisiei de la Universitatea Columbia: *Corectitudinea politică este un fel de icter galben al Americii*” in *Gândul*, published: 07.07.2022, accessed: 02.15.2026 at <https://www.gandul.ro/cu-gandul-la-romania/atitudine-cum-a-fost-regizorul-andrei-serban-alungat-din-sua-motivul-demisiei-de-la-universitatea-columbia-corectitudinea-politica-este-un-fel-de-icter-galben-al-americi-19465135>

comes back into fashion in the third decade of our century. But “Everything is fleeting, including woke-ism”²⁴. We are left with only a sort of reverberation of the living that sometimes makes even the insensitive walls vibrate. Perhaps that is why, with Andrei Șerban, the banal cannot exist. With him, the ephemeral theatrical construct will never plunge into any extreme.

2. The dilemmatic state

From a definitional standpoint, the dilemma seems to be an ambiguous concept that gives rise to uncertainty. Yet at the opposite end of the spectrum from the dilemma lies certainty. The actor should, in principle, position himself as the opposite of boredom, appearing to us, by definition, as the embodiment of uncertainty. A series of ambiguities, doubts, anxieties, hesitations, and insecurities are, in a way, woven into the actor’s performance. They are milestones along the path on which the actor guides the character toward achieving their ultimate goal. It is certain that what is uncertain, what is unclear, will seem captivating to us and will draw our attention. On stage, the only certainty should be that of exposing uncertainties. And if uncertainties are absent, should they at least be mimicked? We might automatically say that we do not have an answer, but rather a comment: namely, if uncertainty is an action, it could be imitated on stage, and if it is not, then it could not be imitated. At the same time, we should bear in mind that the character’s uncertainties are not and should never be those of the actor and the actor’s those of the character. The actor, as an interesting individual, the opposite of a dull, boring one, seems to live, due to his work on his characters, in a subliminal state of dilemma. The dilemma, presented as a flaw meant to evoke pity or amusement, appears to be a way of enduring, a way of being. But the dilemma, with its uncertainties, twists and turns, hesitations, suspicions, and even confusion, dissipates in the light of discernment and awareness. Once what seemed obscure has been clarified, the character achieves his stage objective and, at the end of the performance, the actor loses the character and becomes himself again. Certainty and boredom settle once more in the actor’s mind and body. He comes to his senses and becomes ordinary and uninteresting.

Thus, the actor does not remain interesting every day, throughout the day, but only as long as he is engaged in the dilemma that precedes certainty. At the same time,

²⁴ Horia Ghibuțiu, op. cit.

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prolonging the dilemmatic state as a stable condition of existence is likely nonsensical. Dilemmatic instability cannot provide a foundation for the existence of living beings indefinitely, nor even for a longer period of time. Even within the theatrical paradigm, the dilemma remains a fleeting state, an interval of turmoil that insinuates itself as an internal conflict among the cognitive mechanisms of the self. It is a necessary interval for analysis, evaluation, and assessment, but one that should be meticulously guided toward the adoption of a decision. It should be an acute, short-lived, dramatic, unsettling, profound, yet re-establishing process. The dilemma makes no sense unless it manifests in a situation of utmost emotional turmoil, as a mechanism of last resort, ensuring the preservation of the constant values of an individual's inner world. If it manifests itself in other situations, we should no longer call them dilemmas, but merely cheap Bovaryisms. At the same time, if the values of the internal constants change, the individual can survive. He changes, but he does not become someone else. Becoming someone else implies adopting a different self. From the actor's perspective, the dilemma should not lead to a change in the self, but dilemmatic abuse can cause it. At the same time, adopting another self could not only involve different values for the internal constants, but even radically different constants. It may have a greater or lesser number of constants. The dilemma appears as the self's final instrument of self-defense, intended to ensure its survival. Finding oneself in a dilemma leads to an exhausting journey. The dilemma is a state of transition. A prolonged transition ensures your disengagement from reality. You are always on the verge of becoming, but you never arrive.

Facing a dilemma does not mean leading a life of constant conflict, but rather positioning oneself in search of meaning. The dilemma is precisely the process through which meaning presents itself to us, and we identify it. However, seeking out a dilemma at any cost, presenting oneself to the world as a person without certainties, seems to be nothing more than assuming the status of an *irrational being*. And yet, what exactly should we understand by a dilemma? Might the true dilemma not be the one in which we do not know which definition of the dilemma would be the most appropriate? The problem with these definitions lies in the fact that most of them refer to *false dilemmas*. Often, a dilemma seems to be defined, first, as *the reasoning from which two solutions derive that seem equally justified and lead to the same conclusion, but from which only one must be chosen*, and, second, as *the obligation of an almost impossible choice*. Defined in this way, the term *dilemma* is inoperative. These seem to be entirely mistaken definitions. In fact, we deal with two parallel definitions. One refers to overcoming an obstacle by choosing between two possible solutions, while

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the other definition focuses on the idea of obligation. However, to point out that the definitions in Romanian do not align with the concept under discussion, we should consider that in other languages, English, for example, the definition is not limited to choosing between just two options. The choice can be made between two or more options that do not lead to the same result.

Let's consider the first definition, in which two distinct paths lead to the same destination. Often cited as a classic illustration of a dilemma are the words that Caliph Omar is said to have spoken when, after the conquest of Egypt, General Amr ibn al-As asked him what to do with the books found in the Library of Alexandria. The phrase goes like this: "... these books either agree with the Koran, and so are of no use to them; indeed, they support the Koran; or they contain something contrary to it, and for that reason they should be completely abolished"²⁵. Information about this event which "many scholars consider the date of conquest to be 642 AD"²⁶, can also be found in the writings of Al-Qifti²⁷ (1172–1248), not just in those of Gregory Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286). As we can see, the information about these words was recorded in writing some six or seven hundred years after they were allegedly spoken. It is not our aim to determine whether this information is historically accurate or not. We are concerned only with the wording. Thus, in both cases, the decision would have been to burn the manuscripts found in that library. And so, for months on end, the public baths had a way to heat their water. Of course, in the early 600s AD, there were still a great many public baths in Alexandria, Egypt. Unfortunately, the example seems to have been chosen with great clumsiness to illustrate a dilemma. We see nothing here that is vague, equivocal, ambiguous, confusing, or unclear, but only certainty, confidence, and indisputability. The phrase denotes unshakable conviction. Nothing betrays any concern, anxiety, confusion, unease, or worsening of the situation. We are not dealing with a dilemma. It is not even a false dilemma, nor is it a failed dilemma.

²⁵ Edward Pococke bar Hebraeus, Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, Joseph White 1806 *Specimen historiae Arabum: Accessit Historia veterum Arabum ex Abulfeda*, Oxonii: E Typographeo Claredoniano, pp. 170-171, our translation, original text: „... libros istos vel cum Alcorano convenire, atque ita opus iis non esse; succidere siquidem Alcoranum: vel illi contrarium aliquid continere, atque eo nomine penitus tollendos.”

²⁶ Muhamad Nabeel Musharraf, Bashir Ahmed Dars 2016 „Who Burnt the Grand Library of Alexandria?” in *Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research*, vol. 2, issue 2, pp. 7-20, p. 13

²⁷ Roger Pearse, 2010, *Al-Qifti on the destruction of the library of Alexandria*, published: 09.24.2010, accessed: 04.03.2026 at <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/2010/09/24/al-qifti-on-the-destruction-of-the-library-of-alexandria/>

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It is not a dead end. It is simply certainty. And, in that case, why is this phrase considered an expression of a dilemma? Perhaps because some would like the dilemma to function as knowledge in the absence of truth? But can epistemic reflection stand on its own? Or must it unconditionally be derived from truth? In the world of theatre, the dilemma seems to function as an indispensable ingredient of dramatic variations. Is it connected to truth? It seems so, insofar as we can speak, not only from a Stanislavskian perspective, of the character's truth. Is it also related to the way an action is performed? It seems so, to the extent that the acting becomes convincing and to the extent that its parts, movement, speech, presentation, commitment, the development of the action, etc., are harmonized, corroborated, and aligned with a single sense.

In the case of the second definition, which may be considered unsatisfactory, another example is raised namely, the scenario in which two vehicles, be they boats, trains, or cars, are simultaneously in danger. Since it is clear that you can save only the passengers of one vehicle, the question arises as to which of them you will save. However, it is quite possible that this is not a dilemma at all, but rather a false dilemma. This conceptual experiment is not actually possible. Perceptions tend to link together in an always diachronic process. In fact, the human nervous system seems to favour a kind of sensory accuracy that transmits incoming signals one at a time, avoiding confusion and synchronicity. The nervous system seems to prioritize one signal over the others. Thus, strictly speaking, we cannot hear the cries for help from all the passengers at the same time. We naturally focus our efforts on rescuing those passengers whom we initially perceive to be in danger. And if we act quickly and efficiently enough, then we would have time to save the passengers in the second vehicle in danger as well. The choice we make must be split-second, almost instinctive. If we take the path of the dilemma, the passengers in both vehicles will end up in a dire situation. Thus, it seems obvious that this situation cannot be used as an example of a dilemma. However, it can help us highlight that this type of choice, almost independent of one's own will, has something in common with the choice we arrive at in the dilemmatic process. The choice may be clear and categorical, but it lacks certainty. We cannot know whether we will attain certainty once the choice is made. In any case, the dilemma has only a virtual dimension; it operates in the realm of the possible rather than the tangible, even if it attempts to resolve a concrete situation. Certainty seems to operate in the realm of the concrete and even that of the pragmatic and utilitarian.

So now we know more about the definition of a dilemma. We have understood

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so far that a dilemma is intertwined with a crisis, but a dilemma is not the crisis itself. A crisis can be a distorted judgement. A dilemma, like a crisis, cannot paralyze or suspend judgement; rather, it actually calls for active engagement in judgement. A crisis can go on forever if it is tied to a false dilemma, as opposed to a real one. A dilemma, if it is real, can be the way out of a crisis; it can lead to a choice, a path to follow. Making a choice means picking one option out of several and rejecting the others as counterproductive or harmful.

It is difficult to resolve a dilemma, and the losses incurred will be greater or lesser—not depending on the discernment of the person facing the dilemma, but on how briefly he remains in that state. In fact, the dilemma is often perceived not as a process of reasoning, but as a dilemmatic state, an emotional state. Viewed as a *hypothetical syllogism*, the dilemma seems to be structured according to a typology similar to that of prejudice. The dilemma with a prejudicial valence seems to always generate tragic situations. The dilemma will no longer offer solutions, but will confine itself to what causes the catastrophe. The prejudicial valence of the dilemma can halt the person's ontogenetic process, because preconception alters epistemic truth. In Elizabethan or Hellenic drama, this dilemma undermines accessible knowledge until the moment when tragic guilt sets in. If "tragic consciousness is rooted in epistemological dilemmas of great acuity, concerning the values that humanity is called upon to defend and perpetuate"²⁸ and has no grounding in the ontological, then these dilemmas remain mere instruments of knowledge. Existence is not truly endangered. We remain within the realm of establishing values. Yet it is precisely because existence is threatened that the epistemological effort required in the dilemma arises, rather than merely the simple designation of one value or another. It truly involves something more than the simple process of knowing. The dilemma seems unable to be reduced to a cognitive tool. In any case, the dilemma does not arise naturally in the course of ordinary meditation. It arises only when we are concerned with solving a problem. We know that there are "... three general heads the ethical problems which people are accustomed to consider and weigh: first, the question whether the matter in hand is morally right or morally wrong; second, whether it is expedient or inexpedient; third, how a decision ought to be reached, in case that which has the appearance of being morally right clashes with that which seems to be expedient"²⁹. Utility and morality should not be opposed. "... For it is most immoral

²⁸ Ana-Daniela Bahrin, 2013 „Tragicul ca *funcție*-semn a condiției umane: o recuperare sintactică (2)” in *Sciences of Communication*, vol 6, no. 1, pp. , 79-97, p. 87

²⁹ Cicero, *De Officiis*, in English by Walter Miller, New York, C.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928, p. 277

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to think more highly of the apparently expedient than of the morally right, or even to set these over against each other and to hesitate to choose between them”³⁰. Thus, we might consider that the greatest danger into which this dilemma can project us is that of suspending not only the moral dimension, but even the ethical dimension of the individual’s social existence. If the utilitarian seems to be clearly distinct from the moral, the distinction between the utilitarian and the immoral becomes blurred. Which is an impossibility. We cannot separate the utilitarian from the moral and, at the same time, erase the distinction between the utilitarian and the immoral. Because, in that case, the utilitarian would become immoral in and of itself. Which is an absurdity. “Thus it is the error of men who are not strictly upright to seize upon something that seems to be expedient and straightway to dissociate that from the question of moral right”³¹. But what happens if we are dealing with at least two actions that are justified by the same moral force?

3. Equally justified?

Let’s examine the justifications for Creon’s and Antigone’s actions. “Creon, the King, had issued, as head of the state, the strict command that the son of Oedipus, who had risen against Thebes as an enemy of his country, was to be refused the honour of burial. This command contains an essential justification, provision for the welfare of the entire city. But Antigone is animated by an equally ethical power, her holy love for her brother, whom she cannot leave unburied, a prey of the birds. Not to fulfil the duty of burial would be against family piety, and therefore she transgresses Creon’s command.”³² From this perspective, we might argue that the dilemma is a tragic situation. And yet, even though the situation in which the two find themselves appears to us as a conflict between perfectly justified actions of equal importance, perhaps an analysis that goes beyond the human aspect alone would allow us to reinterpret the dilemma in question. If we are also dealing with the involvement of the divine in these actions, or at least in one of them, the dilemma becomes an effort to clarify not only one’s own will, but also the divine will and even destiny. In the city-states of ancient Greece, it seems that the deity played an important role. For example, we know that the Greek city-states, in ancient times, were dedicated to deities who, among other things, protected the cities from invasions. Athens is the name of both a city and a

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 285, 287

³¹ Ibidem, p. 303

³² G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Aesthetics – Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, Translated by T. M. Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 221

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goddess. At the same time, in Histria, “One of the temples was dedicated to the god Apollo Ietros, Apollo the Healer, the patron deity of the city, whom the Greek colonists had brought with them from their homeland, Miletus”³³. Therefore, the questions we should answer are as follows: Did Creon, the king of Thebes, act with the approval or at the urging of Poseidon, the deity who patronized Thebes? Or of another god? But what about Antigone? Or neither of them? Or both? Creon accuses Antigone of acting with the sanction of Hades. “There, where she can pray to Hades, the only god whom she reveres... ”³⁴. Can we identify tragic guilt here? We know that Creon acted from the perspective of social legitimacy. As king, the ruler of the state, his will seems to be imposed as law. In this regard, the chorus says: “No doubt you have the power to use any law in dealing with the dead or us the living”³⁵. In this case, it is not the ruler who is subject to the law, but the law that is subject to the ruler’s will. “Chorus: Son of Menoikeus, it pleases you to do as you wish to him”³⁶. The situation that triggers the conflict raises a number of questions. Can the king impose his will even on the dead? Without consequences? Once his will is publicly communicated, does it become a divine command? The citizens are his subjects and, therefore, in the name of the care he shows for them, they must obey him. The act of burial involves both the living and the dead. Imposing a command on the living person involved in this act has consequences for the dead as well. The living are compelled to obey authority. “Ismene: Will plead with those under the earth to feel for us and pardon us, because I’m forced // To act as I do, I’ll obey the rules”³⁷. This obedience shields her from any punishment. If obedience to the ruler appears to be challenged, as in the case of Antigone, and signs of disobedience seem to be detected, punishment is swiftly meted out.

Ismene states: “I don’t dishonor them! But to defy the citizens is beyond what I can do”³⁸. This proves that she, as an ordinary person, is unable to bear the consequences of defying worldly power. Someone capable of doing this is needed, and Antigone is such a person. To Creon, it seems as though his authority is being challenged by a young girl, the beloved of his son, Haemon. He believes that failing to comply with a demand from the authorities is an act of defiance. “Kreon: For grand

³³ Scarlat Lambrino, *Cetatea Histria – notiță istorică și descriptivă cu prilejul expoziției cetății Histria de la Academia Română, martie 1931*, București, Atelierele grafice Ed. Marvan, pp. 9-10

³⁴ Sophocles, *Antigone*, Translated by Reginald Gibbons and Charles Segal, Foreword by Peter Burian, Alan Shapiro, Preface by Charles Segal, Oxford, University Press, 2003, p. 88

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 63

³⁶ Ibidem

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 56

³⁸ Ibidem

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ideas are not allowed in someone who's the slave of others... First, this girl knew very well how to be insolent and break the laws that have been set. And then her second outrage was that she gloried in what she did."³⁹ But is what Creon considers to be good for the city truly good for the city? One can identify a gap between the good of the city and what Creon believes is good for the city, for himself, and for his family. Is the enemy that Creon identifies in Antigone the enemy of the city? "Antigone: For I would never have assumed this burden, defying the citizen"⁴⁰ yet "Nor did I think your proclamation so strong that you, a mortal, could overrule the laws of the gods"⁴¹. The king cannot legislate where divine law prevails. Or, to put it another way, the king cannot judge the dead. Or the king's authority ceases with the death of his subject, if *honoring the dead* - "I did well to honor you [Polyneikes]"⁴² - is considered part of death. Therefore, what is Antigone facing? Antigone perceives the king's decision as an authoritarian act of imposing his will beyond any argument. A despotic act can be defined as an act of illegitimate will: "Antigone: But one-man rule brings with it many blessings - especially that it can do and say whatever it wants"⁴³. Antigone believes that Creon is arrogant. Creon believes that arrogance can be attributed not only to Antigone, but also to Haemon. "Creon: Let him [Haemon] go and have grand thoughts too big for a man."⁴⁴ The chorus warns that pride goes hand in hand with recklessness. "Chorus: ... he [Licurg] had madly assaulted with his mocking words."⁴⁵ At the same time, the Chorus states that "For Zeus utterly hates the noise of an arrogant bragging tongue"⁴⁶. Creon appears to be justified by Zeus in his aversion to pride. Thus, we can identify at least three deities involved in the actions of Creon, Haemon, and Antigone. Consequently, the paradigm in which Creon finds himself is one in which he does not rebel against the gods, but rather fights alongside certain gods against the opposing side in the war that has just taken place, from which the Theban army emerged victorious.

If a person rebels against a god, he will find himself in the following situation: "Chorus: A moment will come when what is bad seems good to the man whom some god is driving toward ruin"⁴⁷. Creon's abuse leads him, without realizing it, to violate

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 74

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 95

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 73

⁴² Ibidem, p. 95

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 75

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 87

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 98

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 59

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 81

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both the laws of Hades and even those of Zeus, because he fails to take his own pride into account. He is blind to his own pride and sees pride in those close to him. Pride can be a sign that indicates the presence of tragic guilt. But whose pride causes the horror? Do all their pride, taken together, lead to tragedy? But are they all proud? As for Antigone, some consider that what Creon calls pride stems from her sisterly love. However, we cannot support this idea, which, taken to the extreme, suggests incest. Antigone is part of Oedipus's family. On the other hand, Antigone seems involved in a relationship with Haemon. A relationship almost identical to that between Romeo and Juliet. One might view the relationship between Haemon and Antigone as a source of inspiration, a proto-relationship that would later take shape between Romeo and Juliet. Antigone's attitude stems from nothing other than her desire to fulfill her duty. Not only her obligations and social customs, but also those toward the gods. Thus, she becomes an extraordinary person. "Chorus: Yet for a woman who has died it is a great thing even to be spoken of as having the same fate as those who are like gods, both when alive and then afterward, when dead."⁴⁸ Her need for balance thrusts her into an unbalanced world, for to Creon, the war continues even after victory over the enemies.

The relationship between Creon and Antigone cannot be viewed as a clash between two equal forces, simply because Antigone is punished with very little effort on Creon's part. If we were to discuss the legitimacy of their entitlements, we would need to take the following into account: "Chorus: My Lord's it's only fair, if he speaks to the point, that you learn from him – and Haimon, you likewise. Both sides speak well."⁴⁹ It seems we have a clash between two equally justified forces: Creon and Haemon. Father and son. Could we say that Haemon has fully adopted his beloved's point of view? If so, are they still two equally justified forces? "Chorus: You [Eros] that pull the reins of just minds toward injustice, disfiguring men's lives"⁵⁰. Creon sees selfish, greedy motives in the actions of everyone around him. Antigone is defiant. Haemon is driven by sexual desire. Tiresias was probably paid to oppose him, the great Creon. "Kreon: By unjust accusations of your father, you worst of men? // Haimon: Because I see you doing wrong to justice. // Kreon: So I'm doing wrong to show some reverence for my rule? // Haimon: You show no reverence trampling on the honors the gods deserve! // Kreon: A filthy way to think – submitting to a woman! // Haimon: At least you won't find me brought down by something shameful. // What you say is all on her behalf, though. // Haimon: And Yours! And mine! And that of the

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 91

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 85

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 88

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gods down below!”⁵¹ We see here that what appears to be right does not guarantee that righteous deeds will be done. We cannot determine whether an action is justified before it is carried out, but only afterward. A claimed justification must always be tested through direct experience. Only after it has been tested can we see whether the justification is true or false. Then we might say that Hemon, too, has a god who legitimizes him: Eros. But this does not fully account for his confrontation with his father. There is something else. The fact that Creon’s suspicions, which continue his martial behaviour, cause him to lose sight of immediate reality. “Haimon: Then she [Antigone] will die. And dying, she’ll destroy – someone else. // Kreon: Are you insolent as to attack me with threats? Haimon: What threat is to speak against such empty thinking?”⁵² The son is referring to the fact that he will follow Antigone into the realm of Hades. Creon believes that his son is threatening to take the life of the king, his father. These distorted perceptions of reality contribute to King Creon’s rash decisions. The core of this distorted judgment centers on the idea that the king views himself as an authority incapable of error, since he has just emerged victorious from battle. Does the victor deserve everything? To emerge victorious, he likely had to alter his mindset. To become alert, suspicious, reactive, quick. But after victory, who are his enemies now? Does he still have enemies? Who are his enemies now? The dead, his loved ones, his family? Precisely those he tried to protect? Or has he become their enemy? Because it seems to him that he is not receiving the honour he deserves. But was his victory great enough? Have the rules of life and death been overturned? What more can Creon achieve than victory? He is warned: “Teiresias: Give way to the dead. Don’t keep stabbing at him who is destroyed. What prowess can there be in killing the dead yet again?”⁵³ Creon’s demands, however, are truly absurd. “Antigone: ... do you want something more than my death?”⁵⁴ So that later, when he realizes, too late, of course, the error in judgement he has committed, he may feel the same helplessness that his victims felt. “Kreon: Aiee! You have killed a destroyed man twice over!”⁵⁵ Boundaries cannot be crossed without consequences. In essence, Antigone can no longer endure Creon’s tyranny. She seeks freedom beyond the realm where the king’s power reigns—in the realm of the dead. Thus, Creon learns that his power has a limit that he cannot recklessly exceed. “Kreon: ... a useless man, who killed you, my child!

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 86

⁵² Ibidem

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 101

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 75

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 112

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– although not by my intent. And I killed you [Eurydike], also.”⁵⁶ Their loss is a consequence of the king’s lack of judgement. Although warned, he continues to mistake his emotions for reason and thus misjudges the situation he finds himself in. “Messenger: One corpse atop another corpse, he lies there now, desolate boy, who in the end has had his wedding ceremony – but in the house of Hades, having shown to all men that sheer folly is much the worst of all man’s evils.”⁵⁷ Failing to reflect, think, weigh things carefully, discern, and judge turns victory into defeat. It is not enough to have lofty, pure emotions. Reason is a gift from above. “Chorus: Good sense is the first principle of happiness. We must not act disrespectfully toward the gods, grand words of arrogant men, paid back with great blows, in old age teach good sense.”⁵⁸ Pride, conceit, and arrogance seem to be the emotional traps laid in the path of reason. It is a sure way to avoid wisdom, and the final destination of this journey will be unhappiness. Unhappiness is the consequence that Tiresias speaks of: “from your own gut, will give one corpse for other corpses, in exchange, because you thrust down there someone from here above, dishonorably compelling her, a human spirit, to live inside a tomb, while here you’re keeping someone who belongs below – a body with no share of the gods, no share of a tomb, no holiness – and this has nothing to do with you or the gods above, and yet by you, violence is done to them!”⁵⁹ We see, then, that Creon is not defying the gods, but rather the people. Therefore, it appears that Antigone and Creon do not confront each other with equally justified forces. Their forces only seem to be equally justified. But Creon is not justified at all because he acted without thinking, without seeking counsel, without foreseeing the consequences of his actions, acting as if he were positioned in an *eternal here and now*.

The dilemma cannot be reduced solely to its social aspect, because the choice involved in resolving the dilemma requires an exploration of one’s inner world. Regarding choice, Costreie reminds us that “In critical thinking, the problem of choice is crucial. It involves precisely a deliberative moment, as rational and analytical as possible, in which options are analyzed and the arguments in favour of each are reviewed. But is that how we choose? Is this not where we find the striking difference between the normative and the descriptive, between how things ought to be and how

⁵⁶ Ibidem, pp. 115-116

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 109

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 116

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 103

they actually are? Do we choose rationally? Do we choose emotionally?”⁶⁰ From the theatrical perspective, we can say that choice is always, as Jerzy Grotowski describes it, both emotional and rational. He considers the *rupture between thought and emotion* to be the very source of everything that is wrong in culture.

4. Rationality and justification

But is critical thinking, in and of itself, a dilemma? Obviously not. Because it involves only the rational aspect of processing information. At the same time, if we consider that “Critical thinking is first and foremost an act of thinking about thinking, of meta-thinking, in which we identify the errors in reasoning and the biases we all encounter throughout the day”⁶¹, then it seems to be precisely the process through which we escape the dilemma, and not the dilemma itself. A tool for solving a problem. The problem being the dilemma. Of course, we are left to wonder whether solving a problem is not part of the problem itself. Just like Hamlet. In a recent interpretation, “*To be or not to be* becomes [...] not a sophisticated philosophical dilemma, but a question of personal survival”⁶². But *to be or not to be* is not in itself a sophisticated dilemma. It is merely the premise of the dilemma. One might argue that Hamlet’s monologue has antinomic echoes in Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *Life Is a Dream*, for in Shakespeare we find “... sleep of death...”⁶³. How should we interpret this metaphor? Is *dreaming while dead* the equivalent of returning to the world of the living? But what if, in the world of the living, we find “that patient merit of the unworthy”⁶⁴? “A world where the worm of unhappiness reveals “the pangs of

⁶⁰ Sorin Costreie, *Despre alegeri*, published: 05.15.2025, accessed: 04.04.2026 at <https://www.dilema.ro/tema-saptaminii/despre-alegeri>

⁶¹ Sorin Costreie, „Gândirea critică” in *Dilema veche*, no. 756, published: 08.16.2018, accessed: 04.09.2026 at <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/gindirea-critica-625278.html>

⁶² Bogdan Bucur, 2026 „Între cinematografie (Hamnet) și dramaturgie (Hamlet): o lectură sociologică a unui recviem shakespearian”, published: 01.29.2026, accessed: 04.04.2026, at <https://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/intre-cinematografie-hamnet-si-dramaturgie-hamlet-o-lectura-sociologica-a-unui-recviem-shakesperian-23678467>

⁶³ William Shakespeare *Hamlet – Prince of Denmark*, bilingual edition, Translate in Romanian by Vladimir Streinu, Târgoviște, Pandora, 1999, p. 114

⁶⁴ Ibidem

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despised love, that law's delay"⁶⁵. A world inhabited by "the oppressor's wrong"⁶⁶, where "the proud man's contumely"⁶⁷ is rewarded. This world would no longer be a dream, but a nightmare. Beyond the fact that echoes of Sophocles' *Antigone* can be detected here, we are talking about a hellish world, where suffering may be deeper than in hell itself because it is the realm of "mortal coil"⁶⁸. A world where everything is for sale, and your destiny can be nothing other than that of a commodity. Yet to dwell in this world is existence itself. To wish to leave it is to vanish. In Shakespeare, it takes courage to detach yourself from it. To ponder remains a displeasure. But to choose to think, in *Hamlet*, seems to be an activity synonymous with imagination, awareness, and reverie. And so, according to Hamlet's truly important words, "conscience does make cowards of us all"⁶⁹. Hamlet's dilemma may be whether to choose courage or cowardice. Is this a real dilemma? Isn't his argument a sophism? Is courage the willingness to die? Or the willingness to live? Is cowardice life? Is courage death? From this perspective, one can detect a certain arrogance in Hamlet. He defines life as merely thought, and thought as merely cowardice rather than a tool for solving problems. Perhaps we are dealing with the perspective from which Hamlet encountered an unsolvable problem. What is clear is that, from a utilitarian standpoint, no solution can be found to Hamlet's dilemma in which balance is restored without loss.

One could begin an analysis of the utilitarianism of the Hamletian dilemma with the idea that "to resolve his doubts, Hamlet resorts to a scientific experiment"⁷⁰. Everything Hamlet says and does is shaped by the conduct of this experiment. In the end, "The successful experiment yields an unexpected result [...] It is no longer a matter of the simple question 'Who is the murderer?', but of the far more complicated question: 'Who has the right to judge and punish the crime, and how?' And the experiment cannot answer this question"⁷¹. Hamlet's dilemma has no answer in utilitarian terms. The dilemma can only be resolved within the moral paradigm. But

⁶⁵ Ibidem

⁶⁶ Ibidem

⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁶⁸ Ibidem

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 116

⁷⁰ Dana Jalobeanu, „Experimentalul lui Hamlet” in *Dilema veche*, no. 830, 2020, at https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/experimentalul-lui-hamlet-629333.html#google_vignette

⁷¹ Ibidem

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isn't the choice always between the utilitarian and the moral paradigm? Isn't that where the dilemma lies? Some believe that the dilemma can be reduced to a choice between utilitarian and moral considerations without the two overlapping. One might argue, however, that these choices cannot be dilemmatic because they do not involve crossing boundaries. The dilemma, by the very fact that it is recognized, articulated, and then resolved, implies crossing a boundary. The juxtaposition of several dissimilarities that create explosive tension through the ambiguities they entail appears to be a structural element of the dilemma. The dilemma always arises when the limits are unclear. Resolving the dilemma seems to mean that the location of the limits has been clearly established. "In this way, then, in certain doubtful cases moral rectitude is defended on the one side, while on the other side the case of expediency is so presented as to make it appear not only morally right to do what seems expedient, but even morally wrong not to do it. This is the contradiction that seems often to arise between the expedient and the morally right."⁷² From this perspective, the juxtaposition between the utilitarian and the moral seems to mirror the interplay between the rational and the sensuous, between idea and experience. But reasoning cannot justify itself, even though it constantly strives to do so. Sensation tends to do the same. That is why emotion and lucidity must work together. In the same way, utility aspires to justify itself. But morality does not have this possibility. Morality is the reasoning that applies not only to the sensible world or only to itself, but to what is still unknown. "Now collisions may be introduced in the most varied ways; but the necessity of the reaction must not be occasioned at all by something bizarre or repugnant, but by something rational and justified in itself."⁷³ Morality could thus be defined as something that is rational and justified. However, it would be moral for moral judgement not to be directed toward others. Morality can only help you improve your own shortcomings. Under these circumstances, the function of morality seems to be that of observing and defining the evil that you can suppress. For "Especially despicable is baseness, because it has its source in envy and hatred of what is noble, and it does not shrink from perverting something inherently justified into a means for its own bad or shameful passion"⁷⁴. In conclusion, the utilitarian perspective focuses solely on the idea of being able to act, to put things into practice, whereas the moral perspective values restraint, refraining from what one would have had the opportunity, the power, or the ability to do. The dilemma presents itself, in these terms, as a tension

⁷² Cicero, *op. cit.* p. 325

⁷³ G. W. F. Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 221

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 222

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between acting and refraining from doing what one could do. This perspective is essential in stage work. Exploring the dilemma as stage work can be extremely important for determining what must be done and what we can refrain from doing so that the performance can have an impact on the spectators. The dilemma thus has another application in theatre, not just the one derived from dramatic texts as dilemmatic texts.

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