

O P I N I O N

Of Prof. Nikolay Iordanov, DSc

Concerning: presented materials for participation in the competition for the academic position Associate Professor by Dr. Roumyana Nikolova

After acquainting myself with Dr. Roumyana Nikolova's book *Model of Functioning of the Bulgarian Theater in the Period 1944-1989*, presented as a habilitation work in connection with the competition of the Institute for Art Studies for the position of Associate Professor, as well as with the rest of her materials in accordance with Art. 70, par. 2, connected with her other publications and participations in conferences, lecturing and expert activities and having in mind all of her professional biography, I came to the following conclusion:

Dr. R. Nikolova is a conscientious researcher of important aspects of theater history and theory. Her main interests are related to the functioning of the theater system in Bulgaria, the theory and practice of socialist realism in the theater, the various acting methods and techniques inherited from the twentieth century. To this I can add the knowledge that she has built and continues to build in the field of the history of the Bulgarian theater, the history of the Russian theater, the contemporary stage practices.

The book *Model of Functioning of the Bulgarian Theater in the Period 1944–1989* (Sofia: P. Venedikov, 2020) examines the processes related to the restructuring of the theatrical network in the country and of the state institutions in charge of cultural management during the considered historical period, and tracing the ideological aspects of dramatic and stage practices, as well as the changes in the basic public attitudes. It can be said that this is a study that clearly outlines the institutional, ideological and artistic framework in which the development of the Bulgarian theater has been introduced and maintained during all the decades of the existence of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

The book has five chapters, accompanied by preliminary and concluding notes, appendices and a bibliography. The order of the chapters follows the historical chronology of the sub-periods imposed by the historical changes in the character of the communist regime: from the end of World War II to 1956, the years between 1956 and 1968, and the time thereafter until the fall of the regime in 1989. The breakthroughs in the normative aesthetics of theatrical practice, as well as the ideas of changes that periodically flare up with each partial liberalization of the regime are not omitted either.

Chapter one of the book thoroughly traces and analyzes the transformation of the model of functioning of the Bulgarian theater approved by the end of the Second

World War and its replacement with a new system of laws and administrative systems serving the idea of over-centralized and over-ideological system for its management and control. At the same time, the mechanisms for the imposition of socialist realism as the only possible method for writing drama and staging practice are considered. In just a few years (the most active were locked between 1948 and 1954), the entire Bulgarian theater was subordinated to the Soviet cultural model, and communist ideology completely began to dominate "the repertoire elections, the new Bulgarian drama, and the finished spectacle" (p. 140). Let us underline the fact that this chapter is also the first documentary study of a process, which goes on throughout the year of Stalinist type of communism and which imposes its normative aesthetics on the Bulgarian theater. It is exactly during these years that the theatrical model, dominant for the whole period was created although from time to time subject of attempts for changes on behalf of those in power who followed the opportunist policy of the party's decisions as well as by authors who tried to slip through the limitations of this policy.

In the following chapters R. Nikolova looks precisely at these subsequent processes in the Bulgarian theater until 1989, which go through hesitations, changes, oppositions and conflicts. She consistently looks at major dramatic works and iconic performances that are breakthroughs in normative aesthetics, pointing to their difficult, sometimes impossible publicity in the face of existing censorship and ostracism by ideologically orthodox critics. The fate of Georgi Markov's plays, the contradictory attitude of the authorities towards the Satirical Theater, towards the so-called Bourgas Group of directors from the end of the 50s (L. Daniel, J. Ognyanova, V. Tsankov, M. Andonov) are presented in more detail. Some of the most interesting situations in various Bulgarian theaters in the 60s, "symptoms of dissident manifestations" (p. 228) in the 70s, the debates on the need for reforms in the 80s are examined. At the same time, she shows with documentary facts the changes in the management policies of the theater, the expansion of the concept of "socialist realism", the development of the theater network in the country.

It could be noted that the book *Model of Functioning of the Bulgarian Theater in the Period 1944–1989*, if viewed as a whole, is a contribution study of a still insufficiently researched and highly contradictory period in the history of the Bulgarian theater. This study would be interesting for students of theater, as well as for a wider range of humanists dealing with Bulgarian history from the second half of the twentieth century, as well as with art practices labeled as "socialist realism". Its greatest merit is that the historical narrative and the summaries made are based entirely on documentary material, most of which has not been studied so far.

R. Nikolova's other publications follow the directions outlined by the book. They are published in academic journals of the Institute of Art Studies and the NATFA "Kr. Sarafov ". The author's strong interest in the period under study is highlighted,

placing different emphasis on bureaucratic themes and the positive character in dramaturgy, the use of Stanislavsky's system in stage practice, the role of theater criticism in imposing normative aesthetics, etc. In these studies, and articles the author shows the same discipline of the research approach, adhering entirely to the documents of the era, as well as the desire to simultaneously reconstruct and deconstruct the discourses and instruments of cultural (equivalent to party one) policy to the theater.

R. Nikolova's participation in conferences, seminars and discussions, as well as her publications in the specialized media show her desire to connect the rethinking of the history of Bulgarian theater with contemporary theatrical processes, as well as to contribute to the formation of cultural policies in line with the lessons of the close past and current challenges.

The teaching activity of R. Nikolova has taken place at NATFA "Kr. Sarafov", where she is currently a part-time lecturer. Among her professional engagements I would also like to emphasize the fact that she is Chairman of the Guild of Theater Critics and Dramaturgs at the Union of Bulgaria Artists and Chairman of the *Homo Ludens Foundation*, publisher of the homonymous specialized magazine for theater, of which she is a member. Her professional participations in important theater forums and projects in which she has a significant role are numerous.

All this reveals Nikolova as a conscientious and consistent researcher, as a sought-after lecturer and expert, as an author of publications, as a participant in conferences, seminars and public debates.

The evidence presented by R. Nikolova under Art. 70, para. 2 is convincing. My personal impressions of the professional qualities of the candidate complement the persuasiveness of the evidence presented in connection with this competition. I have worked with her in many joint projects, as a fellow lecturer at NATFA "Kr. Sarafov", I was also a reviewer of her doctoral dissertation *Acting Training in the Twentieth Century. Changes in the position of the actor in the performance in the twentieth century*.

These arguments give me reason to strongly recommend that the esteemed jury award her the academic position of "Associate Professor".

27.05.2020 Nikolai Iordanov