

OPINION

By Prof. DSc ROMEO POPILIEV – Institute of Art Studies – BAS

romeo_popiliev@abv.bg

On the materials presented by

Chief Assistant Dr. ROUMYANA NIKOLOVA

Competition for the academic position ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

In Theater Studies and Theater Art (history of the Bulgarian theater)

Professional direction 8.4 Theater and Film Art

Chief Assistant Dr. Roumyana Nikolova is an established already name in Bulgarian theater studies, author of two monographs, as well as many articles, reports and reviews, studying events and processes in the field of theater art, in the history and theory of theater, participant in a number academic conferences, as well as in the organization of theater festivals, meetings and events, guest lecturer at NATFA "Kr. Sarafov ", winner of the Icarus National Award in 2008 for critical text, chairman of the UBA Guild of Theater Scholars and Playwrights.

Roumyana Nikolova's new publication, which is also her habilitation work "Model of Functioning of the Bulgarian Theater in the Period 1944-1989" is the result of the successful individual efforts of the author, but it is also part of the work of the Theater Department at the Institute of Art Studies, related to the analysis and study of theater during communism (socialism). This model of functioning is based mainly on official documents of the period, which usually follow specific party and political events. A significant amount of articles, books and archival materials were used. The most characteristic features of the model of the Bulgarian theater for the period 1944-1956 are defined as ideological subordination, centralization of management, control over the repertoire, new artistic method, planning principle, expansion of the theatrical network and Sovietization of the theater: from the repertoire and stage practices to methods of administration and management. Stanislavski's system was first mentioned as mandatory in 1949. From the presentation of the documentary material and its analysis it becomes crystal clear that the theatrical reforms imposed by the second half of the 1940s were entirely based on pressure over the creative process, and theater and culture were inextricably linked with socialist propaganda.

Nikolova rightly notes the overrated significance of the April 1956 plenum and the illusions of reforming the system. From then on, short periods of liberalization began to alternate, followed by stagnation, and these reversals were dictated by Moscow and depended largely on international events. The widespread proclamation of reformist initiatives, such as the one for the public-state principle, announced by the

Party as early as 1963, through which public councils should be established for the various art sectors, remained a formal intention. Roumyana Nikolova uses a wide range of articles, materials and documents in her work; published or still in the archives: reports of T. Zhivkov at party forums and his speeches at meetings with artists, materials from the forums of creative unions and writers' discussions; documents of the Ministry of Culture, the Politburo and the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, etc.

In spite constant political pressure, the new creative energies in the Bulgarian theater after 1956 bear fruit. Although they do not openly challenge socialist realism or communist ideas, they bring a certain animation, revitalization and set new directions. Usually the breakthroughs in the normative aesthetics of socialist realism in the theater in the period 1956-1968 were due to the creation of informal groups of young artists in the theaters - most often around a director. These are usually short bursts and, as the author notes, they turn out to be "victims of the belief in de-Stalinization and freedom of speech". The stabilization of the regime in the 1970s and the indefinite postponement of the achievement of the general goal - the realization of communist society - led both to a reduction of direct ideological pressure on artists and to a certain willingness to compromise and comply with them. The party on one hand, was again dissatisfied that the theater was not achieving its political goals, but on the other hand it expressed concerns about its professional condition and aesthetic potential, the shortage of staff and, of course, the state of theater criticism. Awareness of this painful gap between expediency and opportunity, however, could not be remedied; it was like pouring new wine into the old skins of ideological postulates. The eternal anxiety that the positive character, unlike the negative one, remained schematic continued. In any case, socialist realism was beginning to be understood a little more freely in its variety of styles, genres and forms.

In the 1980s, intentions continued to be launched, mostly on paper, to expand the aesthetic horizon of theatrical art and the creation of new theatrical forms, studios for young playwrights, etc. Another ideological tightening after the death of L. Zhivkova and the looming economic crisis of the mid-1980s, as well as the "perestroika" changed another seemingly large-scale vision.

In 1988, in the spirit of "glasnost and perestroika", but also as an inevitable part of the process of "coming down", a new project of the Politburo was launched: "Basic guidelines and tasks for reconstruction in the field of art culture", as part of the so-called July Concept, according to which the theaters should become "non-profit organizations" and with a new economic mechanism, receive the right to free repertoire choice, decentralization should take place, etc. But it's too late. And as R. Nikolova concludes: "The desire and the need to reform the theatrical system continues to be part of the talk about it almost 30 years after the social changes of 1989." This conclusion sounds sad, but true. Roumyana Nikolova's book is a definite

contribution and a necessary starting point for the further study of the theater from the socialist period. But her articles about the art of the actor and about various processes and events in the Bulgarian theater definitely impress with their analyses, argumentation and academic precision.

Last but not least, it should be noted that Dr. Roumyana Nikolova not only covers but also exceeds the minimum required points by groups of indicators from A to E. In view of the academic achievements and qualities of Ch. Assistant, Dr. Roumyana Nikolova, I am fully convinced that she has every reason to receive the position of "Associate Professor" at the Institute of Art Studies and I vote "yes".

Prof. DSc Romeo Popiliev