

# NEW PLAYS IN A NEW SITUATION

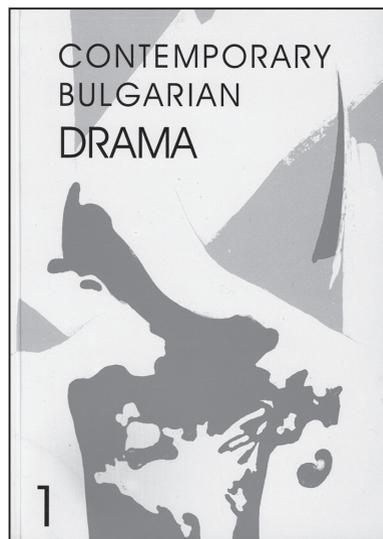
Veneta Doytcheva

Let's try to describe how new Bulgarian plays appear after 1989. The observation will involve comparison with the period before 1989. This is necessary because the analogy clarifies certain problematic areas and also helps critical thinking. The questions will not be aimed at their stage interpretation (from a director's, actor's and scenographic perspective), but at the ways, which make it possible for them to be discovered and made public knowledge. The mechanisms need to be described, the procedures and factors that make it possible or impossible for the new Bulgarian play to turn into an active component of the theatre practice. Agents, involved in these processes, also fall under observation.

We are tempted to use terminology from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose research has by far exceeded the narrow scientific field of sociology and philosophy, and has offered an essential toolkit and conceptual foundations for thought in areas of history, aesthetics and culture. The base we are going to step on is the comparison between the practices in the period "before" and the period "after" 1989.

The nature of the social and political life in Bulgaria during the socialism era has been commented on many a time. Even though this era was not homogenous in itself and had different manifestations in its separate inner-time sections, some of its basic characteristics remained valid for

the entire period. The most important thing is that in the social life the overly centralized state of a totalitarian type ruled categorically, in the political field there was a single-party regime, the official ideological doctrine was imposed and supported in all areas of public and private life, the guarding and controlling functions of the state were realized to the fullest. The economy was subordinate to the state monopoly, the country's interest dominated to an extent of liquidation and suppression of the private initiative. The totalitarian state used all its specific tools to keep its abso-



*Contemporary Bulgarian Drama. Kamen Donev, Anna Topaldjikova, Yuri Dachev, Elin Rahnev. Ina Bojidarova, Teodora Dimova. Ed. Cecilia Cominos, Michael Hawkins, Iskra Nikolova, Kamelia Nikolova. Sofia: Antrakt, 2002.*

lute control and to not let any discussion regarding the proclaimed as the only acceptable values by the communistic credo, and the official Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Art as well as humanitarian sciences in the field of culture as a whole represented an area of special interest for the socialist country. The state machine used art as an ideological tool with the only aim to reinforce the socialist values.

As we enlist these outlines of the socialist era, we try to reach that specific, yet elusive sensory matter of the social life at a certain moment in time, which, according to Bourdieu, could be revealed through the perception of the society as a multitude of "fields" (sometimes referred to as "worlds"). These are objective structures (the social fields are a result of the process of accelerating differentiation of human behaviour, which leads to separate worlds – each of them autonomous and with their own laws). The social field, economics field, art field – they are all different in their "fundamental law" and with different forms of interest. The logic of the inner-field special interests are different for each field according to Bourdieu, and in some cases they are complete antipodes. What is extremely important is that what seems to be universal logic of the economic interest is not the main law for all fields. In the thorough study *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*<sup>1</sup>, the path of the construction of the art field in the XIX century is described in detail, which set as its fundamental law the revocation of the economics law. Pure art, *l'art pour l'art*, appeared in accordance with the specific forms of the art field, rejecting the

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu, P. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford University Press, 1996.

commercial aims and reaching realization of a "flipped economy", which submits not to the compulsion of the economic interest, but to the authority of the symbolic wealth and capital.

This slight reference to some of Bourdieu's main concepts could help us describe, within the frame of his theory of fields, the place and the relative social value of theatre and the Bulgarian plays in particular in the system of the socialist era. In the framework of social space (the socialist state) theatre was closely related to the field of power and took a subordinate position. The political field was absolutely independent and self-sufficient (single-party system, ideological monopoly, mobilisation of the entire social field for the purposes of political reproduction). The state was the sole owner of economic capital, which allowed the cultural production in the theatre field. During the so-called long period "before" (1989) the socialist country stored a significant financial resource to invest in the theatre field (what is impressive for example is the government involvement in building new theatres, equipped with facilities to host large productions). The economic logic of this operation with economic capital was subject to an anti-economic interest. The state had no economic profit, economic income or economic benefit from these expenses. They were made under the pressure of the political logic for reinforcement and preservation of the political status quo. Theatre was totally dependent on the government interest to protect the monolith social and ideological system.

The theatre field crosses with the literature one in a complex segment, charged with crisis potential, and this is the subfield of genres. On one hand there is drama – a

theatre play which belongs to the literature field (following its classic division into epos, lyric poetry and drama). On the other hand we have the play, realized into a theatre performance, which belongs to the field of the art industry and thus is included in the field of trade and public market success. The dual life of the theatre play gives it a much more important and specific place in the social field of the socialist country. Being literary in its foundation and structure, the play has a strong, independent artistic charge with accentuated possibilities for conceptualization and ideological messages. It is exactly for this reason that the theatre play was subject to special attention. Its resources to formulate direct or metaphoric theses in a complete verbal form made it potentially dangerous for the social field of the socialist era, which did not allow discussion and disagreement.

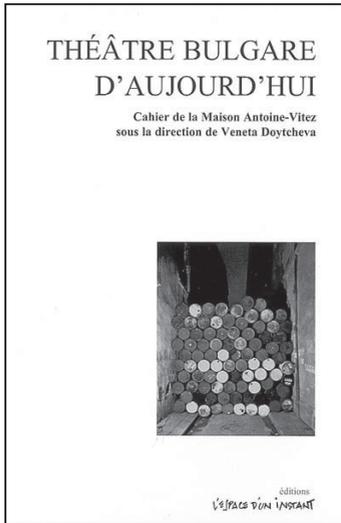
Through its government structures the socialist country established full control over the approved, "correct" plays. The new plays appeared only after undergoing some hierarchical filtering systems. The agents who executed the selection were placed on all levels of the play production. For now we are going to skip the author of the play, as an absolute necessity for its creation, in order to check what the objective situation in the field was and to suggest what their position was in this unbiased structure. The first control system was the personal perception for acceptance. It was done by the theatre directors, literature consultants (dramaturges in theatres) and editors in specialized publishers (periodicals, book-publishing institutions, radio and television). At this level the field had reliable agents of the state interest (the enlisted positions were entrusted to

the "right" people) and every possible wrong step was severely penalized. The second system of play approval was the bureaucratic field of the socialist state, which filtered the plays that had passed the first filters (by directors, publishers, editors) through the sanction of the supreme authority of the bureaucratic field. At this level we have the state institutions (specialized expert units, part of the government body of the country – ministry departments or directorates – the name is different in each inner-time period). They gave rights to public life by allowing the play to turn into a public fact. According to the above mentioned dual status of the theatre play, it could pass into the theatre field (through staging) and get in close contact with and evaluation by the audience. The play could also pass into the theatre field (through publication) and reach the audience of readers with the help of the book market or libraries.

Alongside this mechanism of control over the creation of new plays, the field of power established itself through control variations over the already publicised (via staging) theatre texts. The state invented and implemented accompanying filters, which enhanced or to the contrary – reduced and eliminated the potential response of the public encounter of the text with the audience. The vast mechanism of the so-called National Panorama of the Bulgarian Drama and Theatre turned out to be the most effective one. It was first held in 1952 in Sofia and since 1959, when the edition celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9 September 1944<sup>2</sup>, it took place thereafter every five years, being dedicated to

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<sup>2</sup> The 9 September 1944 coup d'état was the beginning of the political turn in Bulgaria towards a communist rule. (Editor's note.)



*Théâtre bulgare d'aujourd'hui. Konstantin Iliev, Boyan Papazov, Margarit Minkov, Yuri Dachev, Elin Rahnev, Kamen Donev. Ed. by Veneta Doytcheva. Cahier de la Maison Antoine-Vitez. Paris: L'Espace d'un instant, 2007.*

the respective anniversaries. The organisers were centralised government institutions in the field of power (The Culture Committee) and sector organisations in the art field (the Union of Bulgarian Actors and the Union of Bulgarian writers). The initiative was extremely far-reaching – it was obligatory for all Bulgarian theatres to take part with a stage production of a new Bulgarian play. The Panorama had a competitive nature and a pyramid structure of organisation. The described mechanism of filtering the new plays operated in full power. After the first selection phases the plays that had been granted the chance for stage realisation competed in a few hierarchical levels within the field. The territorial space was literally divided into zones in which a few theatres from the same geographic-administrative region contested and were being assessed by a regional jury. Those which were approved

for the next level were presented to the national jury in Sofia, which granted awards in all professional categories. The social field, art field (theatre and literature field) and the government field met in close integration with one main aim – a systematic incentive and control of the production of new Bulgarian plays. The ideological stake was high and the resources invested in its acquisition indirectly proved the importance of the theatre and the text in the vast social field. Through obligation and compulsion the state shaped the art field.

Alongside this large-scale activity, new Bulgarian plays appeared also upon commissions (contracts with writers); through the contest system (usually related to marking important facts for the field of power, anniversary of historical events or personalities); through incentivising some specific for the art field subfields (children's and youth topics, puppet art, television theatre, radio theatre, etc.). It is obvious that the social field of the socialist country guaranteed its model for the literature and theatre field, investing in their realisation significant public capital.

In this aspect the field showed an important feature, in line with Bourdieu's observation of the relative autonomy of the art field, which "makes a place for an inverse economy whose particular logic is based on the very nature of symbolic goods – realities with two aspects, merchandise and signification, with the specifically symbolic values and the market values remaining relatively independent of each other."<sup>3</sup> The point is about the regulating effect of the internal for the art field rivalry between two principles of hierar-

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 141.

chization<sup>4</sup> – the heteronomous principle (which benefited those who rule in the field economically and politically: for example the officially affirmed and established in canon rank ideologically “correct” texts) and the autonomous principle (which encouraged the ones that fell out of the canon not to accept rejection as marginalisation but as a type of evidence for the soundness of its “correct” author’s position in autonomy-art aspect). The beneficiaries of political and economic capital (the authors who were chosen, had their plays put on stage, published, awarded, praised) competed within the field with the beneficiaries of symbolic capital (authors who were banned, censored, penalised, rejected). The autonomous logic of the positions within the art field transformed the objective relationships and changed perceptions of “success” and “failure”. In this flipped logic the official acknowledgement of artistic primacy was read by the audience as political, not aesthetic recognition. On one hand we have a real nomenclature (in the original sense of the term) – names of authors and plays, acknowledged as truthful to the official literature canon, successful from the point of view of the government field. The political success is obvious, but the artistic is with a doubtful, or at least debatable, status. This nomenclature was publicly announced via the system of hierarchy in the field and the new productions (plays) gained an easier and more direct access to the audience. On the other hand we have the tangible presence of the diversified group of unapproved authors and plays, who were rejected, penalised, disadvantaged. Their political disallowance put them in a position of figures and facts

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<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 216.

which stood the chance of symbolic recognition in the art field and expansion of this assessment with the perspective of a symbolic success in the social field. The ratio between these two subfields within the theatre field was variable. The migration of authors into one or the other groups was also possible sometimes as a personal, conscious act, sometimes as an effect and rehearsal by the audience. There was a tendency for growing autonomy of the field compared to the field of power. This led to the increasing symbolic importance of the unacknowledged artist and clear differentiation by the audience between an official and an alternative author, which automatically turned the messages conveyed by them into coded and decoded worlds, related to the position of the artist in the art space.

The characteristics of the theatre field were dominated by the political argument, which deformed the processes within the field, transforming the autonomous artists’ voice into a politically loaded statement. Political indifference was practically impossible due to the context of reading. The symbolic capitals, possessed by forbidden authors and plays, were read with emphasis on their political disruption, and the autonomous artistic qualities they had (or were attributed to) took second place and were either exaggerated, or unappreciated. This way the internal assessment logic of the autonomous theatre field created a new, autonomous configuration of values.

The borderline year 1989 set some drastically new features of the social field. The single-party system and the state economic monopoly disappeared, restitution and privatisation brought in new owners of economic capital, the private initiative gained strength in all sectors of the social

field. The competition of political ideas ruled out the opportunity for establishing the validity of one political ideology with all the tools of the state apparatus. The use of art for political purposes and the total subordination of the art field to the state one subsided under the pressure of their natural separation and they began to function according to their own, inner-law logic.

How did the authors' and plays' positions transform in the new reality, what intermediate agents came into action in the new quality of the social field, and what characteristics did the theatre field acquire? Through which basic filters of selection and rejection do new Bulgarian plays appear within this twenty-year period?

The principal position of submission of the art field in the structure of the social field remained valid in the new situation too. The change that took place was in the regulatory procedures, through which the social and the political fields form a nexus in the world of art. The first and most significant change is withdrawal of the state monopoly from the economic capital, which is invested in the art field. New agents received the opportunity to be a financial source for theatre enterprise (local authorities – regions and municipalities, private capital, co-operatives or mixed according to way of financing). During this twenty-year period this new perspective has remained mainly a potential opportunity. In the cases it actually happened it showed categorically that economic logic could be the main argument in the art field only if it has been clearly identified as autonomous and begins to set its own patterns. State financing continues to play a major part in keeping the theatre field alive. In this area the new

situation did not revoke the relative importance of the state, instead, it maintained it as a main agent of economic capital to be invested in the field.

Nevertheless, the link between state financing and political (ideological) expedience was categorically abandoned. The state removed its controlling and censoring function from all levels in the hierarchy, it also discarded its previous control organs (specific government institutions disappeared), it withdrew targeted subsidy (National Panorama of Bulgarian Drama and Theatre), it stopped centralised incentivising related to certain politically important facts (commissions of plays, contests dedicated to a particular topic or historical event). Practically, the state stepped down from the initiative to award, commission and control the process of writing and realisation of new Bulgarian plays. With this act the art field remained fully autonomous. This twenty-year period demonstrates that if left to its own devices, the field starts to realise the logic of its own interest.

Political interest, as an ultra-regulator of the processes, gave way completely to the art field's own specific interests. What is typical for this process is the fact that a number of authors and plays, who had a central and privileged position in the recent past, dropped out of the theatre interest. What came as an initial, spontaneous reaction of emancipation in the field was the mechanism of rehabilitation, compensation and transformation of the positions' arrangements which were in place in the previous system. The theatre field turned to the symbolic capital of the authors who until recently were officially unapproved or rejected, and introduced their work in the logic of a new autonomous

process. Authors like Ivan Radoev, Konstantin Pavlov, Georgi Markov, Radoy Ralin, Stefan Gechev, Tsvetan Marangozov, Konstantin Iliev, Boyan Papazov gained free access to the stage or to publications of their texts which had been banned or remained in the periphery of the theatre field. Prestigious theatre institutions and directors confirmed, through their own symbolic capital, the specific importance of these new-to-the-theatre plays, some of which – banned (*Miracle* by Ivan Radoev), others – burdened with the former political condemnation and deprived from staging (*Image and Similarity* by Yordan Radichkov)<sup>5</sup>, or completed as a result of the active interest by the theatre (*Persifedron* by K. Pavlov). The only puppet theatre play by Konstantin Iliev *The Mousy King* was “taken out of the drawer” and published for the first time in 1991.<sup>6</sup>

For some authors the rehabilitation has a more global nature of a particular new introduction and positioning. The plays of Georgi Markov, due to whose emigration (1990), were totally banned of public life for two decades, were re-published<sup>7</sup> and integrated in the contemporary theatre field through different stagings. Stefan Gechev, publicly known more as a translator and a poet, banished from the theatre field for political reasons was later rediscovered as a playwright through a production by the National Theatre and publica-

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<sup>5</sup> Радичков, Йордан. Образ и подобие. – Съвременник, 1986 [Radichkov, Yordan. *Image and Similarity*. – *Savremennik*, 1986.]

<sup>6</sup> Илиев, Константин. Цар Шушумига. – Театър, 1991/бр.2. [Iliev, Konstantin. *The Mousy King*. – *Theatre*, 1991/No. 2.]

<sup>7</sup> Пиесите на Георги Марков (състав. З. Янкова), С., 2001. [*The Plays of Georgi Markov*. Ed. Z. Yankova. Sofia, 2001.]

tion of all his plays.<sup>8</sup> Radoy Ralin, with his versatile creative realisation, reclaimed his public position in the theatre field (publication and staging). Tsvetan Marangozov re-joined the theatre field after returning to the country as the political ban over his work was lifted. With these moves the theatre field took a new position excluding personalities and texts that were not part of its autonomous interest, and implemented either new values, as per its own criteria, or phenomena which had remained outside the field or on its periphery. In all these cases the motive of choice is purely artistic but the burden of the previous time inevitably adds a nuance of rehabilitation of new political nature. In its initial phase of defining the autonomy of the theatre field after the changes in 1989 the main focus is on the symbolic rehabilitation and transformation.

It is not until the next two decades that the controversy of the theatre field would start to expand to its full potential as a conflict territory of economical and artistic interests. With a changed view of the state towards the theatre and the loss of its ideological propagandist meaning for the political power, the theatre begins to bear the true consequences of the continuously decreasing public financial support. This is another complex topic, which cannot be commented on here, but it needs mentioning that the efforts by the state to decentralise subsidy (through engaging local authorities) via transferring the economic weight to the theatre institutions (through linking funding with self-financing) – speed up the processes of the inner differentiation and unravel the expression of logics

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<sup>8</sup> Гечев, Стефан. Пиеси. С., “Захари Стоянов”, 1999. [Gechev, Stefan. *Plays*. Sofia: Zahari Stoyanov, 1999.]

new to the field. In comparison with other forms of art, theatre requires a relatively high economic investment (but with a real chance for return), relatively weak cultural investment (practically there are no cultural restrictions for the potential audience) and an average-length production cycle (a month or two) with an immediate, direct income from the realisation and unpredictable duration of the period for gaining profit.

In this coordinate system the appearance of new plays is left entirely to the processes of self-regulation. As the pyramid filtering system ceases to function, the field is brought literally to its flatness, to the interest of its horizons. A process of an internal argument between economic pressure (for more audience and income) and art pressure (for appearance and encouragement of risky art choices) gradually develops. In this new situation the main agents taking part in the process of appearance of new Bulgarian plays are theatres. The connection between authors and theatres becomes direct, dynamic and subject to the specifics of both parties' interests. The search for the so-called "good play" (whatever this means in theatre jargon) puts the new Bulgarian plays in direct competition with all plays in the world repertoire (classic and contemporary). The selection of titles and the logic behind it depend on the theatre management. The craving for repertoire compensation of previously banned plays, shown on numerous occasions, at the beginning of this twenty-year period, evokes a different type of repertoire compensation, aimed at the recovery of these losses. This increases the rivalry in the theatre field even more – the new Bulgarian plays compete not only with the corpus of the international reper-

toire, but also with the remains of the repertoire policy "before", which continue to influence the selection.

The initiative of theatres prevailed. Authors, who were present in the previous period continued to write intensely and to receive a natural, prompt access to theatre stages. To mention a few: Margarit Minkov, Ivan Radoev, Stefan Tsanev, Stanislav Stratiev, Konstantin Iliev, Boyan Papazov, Hristo Boychev, Nedyalko Yordanov, Petar Anastasov, Ivan Kulekov, Keva Apostolova. The names are only of authors and their new plays (that appeared after 1989) who were granted stage realisation. Some of the texts have been published in specialised editions or in separate books after their theatre premiere. A key moment is the mutual ties of authors with particular theatres (this is not a new phenomenon, similar connections existed in the "before" period). What is new is that former connections change or new ones are being formed.

Alongside new texts of established names in the theatre field, the theatres manage to expand this authors' circle and to introduce new ones into it. New authors appeared: Yana Dobрева, Teodora Dimova, Yuri Dachev, Elin Rahnev, Georgi Tenev, Plamen Doynov, Anna Topaldjikova, Ina Bojidarova, Kalin Iliev, Ivan Golev, Kamen Donev, Rumen Shopov, Boyan Ivanov, Orlin Dyakov, Georgi Gospodinov, Maria Stankova, Milena Fuchedzhieva, Rositsa Obreshkova, Elitsa Mateeva and Vesela Kazakova, Ana Vaseva, Zdrava Kamenova, Nedyalko Delchev, Nikolay Pavlov, Dimitar Zlatinov, Dimitar Kabakov, Andrey Filipov, Ilko Ilarionov, Emil Bonev, Anna Petrova, Alek Popov and Dilyana Maneva, Yana Borisova – this list is hardly exhaustive.

The listed authors have different theatre fates. Some of the new texts remain just as literature publications or within the circle of strictly professional information. Plays by part of the newly emerged authors have been staged in chamber or alternative spaces. The stages in Sofia show considerable interest in them, however, we can hardly talk about some tendency of movement (from the centre to the periphery of the theatre field or vice versa). The number of authors who sustain their interest in different theatres not just in Sofia but also outside of the city, is relatively small. The new plays are often left with just one staging. The new authors whose plays manage to stay in the playbill for longer than one season are not many, most new Bulgarian plays cannot stand the competition of other repertoire choices. All these phenomena demonstrate dynamic processes, far from a clear picture.

The arrival and permanent connection of so many new authors with the theatre means that the autonomous principle of the art field is gradually being established and disputes the absolutism of the market interest principle. The new authors and plays that are genuinely economically profitable for the theatres are too few, however this does not shift (though it obstructs) the interest of the theatre in new texts. At this point the symbolic authority of the Bulgarian author comes into competition not only with the foreign dramaturgy, but it also sparks a direct discussion on art issues, related to the aesthetic platform of the theatre – artistic, alternative, avant-garde, commercial. This aspect of the field is new in principle and the theatres, authors and the audience are still in the process of crystallising their own artistic profile, which they are offering or are in

search of. The inner aesthetic hierarchy continues to look for the coordinates which would express it most precisely.

As a continuation of the tendency of internal segregation and pursuit of the field's own interest, new forums of initiation start to appear, encouraging and releasing new Bulgarian plays. What this is all about is the contests organised by different agents in the field.

Foundation *Concept for Theatre* (founded in 1995) announces a national contest for *New Playwriting* and in its first edition (1998) the first prize discovers and successfully introduces into the theatre field a new author (Elin Rahnev). The contest is the first of its kind and plays a significant role in finding new texts. It is conspicuous that it is initiated by an organisation of the private sector and as its founder and chairman, Victor Popov, states: "At this moment it felt like there were no new names, just the established authors, but I was positive that was not true and there would be some interesting propositions. When we started I wanted to create a new, genuine contest without any pre-empted winners."<sup>9</sup> The contest is anonymous. Part of the competition plays reach the stage. Foundation *Concept for Theatre* is a driving force behind publishing two collections of new Bulgarian plays<sup>10</sup>, which widen the scope

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<sup>9</sup> A conversation carried out by the author with Victor Popov, 23.11.2010, Sofia.

<sup>10</sup> Млада българска драматургия на 90-те. Съст. Божидарова, Ина. София: Фондация "Концепция за театър", 2000; Нова българска драматургия на XXI век. Съст. Стефанова, Аглика. Фондация "Концепция за театър". София: Аскони-издат, 2006. [*New Bulgarian Playwriting of the 90s*. Ed. Bojidarova, Ina. Sofia: Foundation *Concept for Theatre*, 2000; *New Bulgarian Playwriting of 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Ed. Ste-

of new authors and actually help their popularisation.

Some of the forums that existed before 1989 are revamped as being useful and developed with a new ambition. These were the existing ones in 1966 and from 1970 to 1976 *Drumevi Theatre Days*, organised by State Drama Theatre in Shumen named after the Bulgarian playwright Vasil Drumev. The forum was revived in 1993 under the name Shumen Theatre Meeting *New Bulgarian Drama* and for the first time included in the festival programme there was a tendency of readings of unpublished and unreleased new Bulgarian plays. After the selection process, around 10 titles are shortlisted, which are then presented as readings by actors from the theatre troupe in front of the festival audience and jury. One prize for playwriting is awarded. The organisers publish the selected plays in collections, having published eight books so far from the series *New Bulgarian Drama. Festival Plays*.<sup>11</sup> Around 35% of the partic-

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fanova, Aglika. *Foundation Concept for Theatre*. Sofia: Askoni-pub., 2006]

<sup>11</sup> Нова българска драма. 8 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2002; Нова българска драма. 13 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2003; Нова българска драма. 13 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2004; Нова българска драма. 10+ фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2005; Нова българска драма. 6 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2006; Нова българска драма. 7 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2007; Нова българска драма. 8 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2008; Нова българска драма. 6 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2009.

[*New Bulgarian Drama. 8 Festival Plays*. Shumen, 2002; *New Bulgarian Drama. 13 Festival Plays*. Shumen, 2003. *New Bulgarian Drama. 13 Festival Plays*. Shumen, 2003; *New Bulgarian Drama. 10+ Festival plays*. Shumen, 2005; *New Bulgarian Drama. 6 Festival Plays*. Shumen, 2006; *New Bulgarian Drama. 7 Festival*

ipating plays have been put on stage in the theatre in Shumen or other theatres.<sup>12</sup>

One more initiative in the field succeeds in supporting new Bulgarian plays. This is the contest organised by the Drama Theatre – Pleven under the name of the theatre's patron – the playwright Ivan Radoev. The competition is held every other year. All the nominated plays are published in a special edition<sup>13</sup>, printed by the organisers of the contest (Pleven Municipality and Drama Theatre – Pleven), with a main financial resource being the local authority (Pleven Municipality) and the event takes place under the patronage and the city mayor. The theatre acquires the right to put on stage the play which received the first prize in the contest.

It is one theatre mainly that demonstrates ambition to find new plays through a contest organised by itself. Theatre 199 in Sofia creates a contest under the name of the actress Slavka Slavova, whose major work is associated with this theatre. The contest is anonymous and has a strictly defined genre profile – chamber plays (plays with up to four characters). Theatre 199 receives the right of the first staging of the awarded play, and the winners from the first two editions have their successful theatre fates on the stage of the theatre.

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*Plays*. Shumen, 2007; *New Bulgarian Drama. 8 Festival Plays*, Shumen, 2008; *New Bulgarian Drama. 6 Festival Plays*. Shumen, 2009.]

<sup>12</sup> Нова българска драма. 6 фестивални пиеси. Шумен, 2009, с. 5. [*New Bulgarian Drama. 6 Festival Plays*. Shumen, 2009, p. 5.]

<sup>13</sup> Десет номинирани пиеси от конкурса за българска драматургия "Иван Радоев". Т. 1 (2002), т. 2 (2005), т. 3. (2006), т. 4 (2007), т. 5 (2009), Плевен [*Ten Nominated Plays from the Contest for Bulgarian Playwriting "Ivan Radoev"* – 1 (2002), 2 (2005), 3 (2006), 4 (2007), 5 (2009), Pleven.]

In 2010 Sofia Theatre organised the first anonymous contest for a contemporary Bulgarian play, being sponsored by DSK Bank.

Apart from these contests, there are different initiatives, related to particular events. Such is the contest organised by the National Theatre in 2000 for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the birth of the theatre patron – Ivan Vazov.

There is a clear tendency of initiative by theatres in the search for and encouragement of new Bulgarian plays. The contests seem to be a guarantee for overcoming competition of the theatres for new texts, giving rights to the organisers for first premieres. The traditional division between centre and periphery is overcome with an emphasis on the activity of the theatres outside the capital. The practice of the playwriting contests is a true reflection of self-organisation in the theatre field and a real way of finding and stage interpretation of new texts. This practice is facilitated by the authority of the specific theatre structures, which through their own positions in the field, transfer economic and symbolic capital to the authors.

In the field of symbolic positions the role of the different theatre awards is increasing. In addition to the traditional theatre awards by the Union of Actors in Bulgaria (*IKAR* award), there is the award for playwriting by the *Askeer* Academy for a new Bulgarian play put on stage and a sequence of collections of the plays nominated for the contest (since 2005)<sup>14</sup>. Both theatre awards have a strong public response on a national level, and award cer-

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<sup>14</sup> Драматургия АСКЕЕР. 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010. Фондация А'Аскеер, София. [Playwriting ASKEER. 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010. Foundation A'Askeer, Sofia.]

emonies are broadcasted on BNT during television prime time. The authors and their plays focus on the interest shown by a diversified audience and contribute to the expansion of the circle of new theatre viewers. The author's figure is placed on the same level as the popular and well-known faces of leading actors and directors, and in the context of glorious and "star" atmosphere, the playwright is brought out of the darkness behind the curtains and into the limelight.

The specialised theatre publications (*Theatre Magazine* and *Homo Ludens Journal*), as well as other literature editions (*Plamak Magazine*, *Savremennik*, *Ah, Maria*), publish new Bulgarian plays. Unfortunately, some of the cited editions do not withstand this twenty-year period; the existing ones have a small print run, and their readership includes mostly professionals.

The described processes have not exhausted their dynamics. The theatre field continues intensively to search for its own logic and goal – something that requires certain understanding by the political field. The current state clearly shows that what is needed is mutual attention and response to the specific logics of each social world. The agents in the theatre field (theatres, authors, directors, publishers, managers of particular cultural events) receive little or no support from the state when it comes to searching, encouragement and realisation of new Bulgarian plays. This reduces the chance of appearance and staging of texts by young and unknown authors as it either leaves them in the periphery of theatre life, or suffocates the seeds of artistic risk and experiment. What is missing are specific forums, supported by the government, aimed at enhancing the professional skills and qual-

ifications (creative writing ateliers, meetings with distinguished playwrights from Bulgaria and abroad, workshops, professional meetings between practitioners and theorists, ateliers for translation of Bulgarian plays into other languages, spreading information about new Bulgarian plays abroad, etc.). A meaningful cultural policy is also non-existent – one to support academic research, dedicated to these issues. The retreat of the state from its previous over-controlling and censoring role has transformed into a retreat from responsibility and care of the field in the delicate sector of new Bulgarian plays,

and the belief in the absoluteness of its ability to self-regulate. The risk of giving free rein to commercialism and simplifying the criteria for success already give results. It is becoming more and more apparent that it is necessary to go along a new and difficult path – one of harmony between social, political and artistic worlds.

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