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SOCIAL PHENOMENON AND THEATRE. ECONOMIC MIGRATION IN CATINCA DRĂGĂNESCU'S PLAY „ROVEGAN”

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Abstract

Catinca Drăgănescu is one of the key figures in today's Romanian theatre. As a playwright and stage director she's inspired by Romania's social realities, and she always militates towards a theatre of consciousness, a theatre that's always grounded in 'present tense. „Rovegan” as a play but also as a theatre show represents a clear example of Drăgănescu's proactive and focused approach towards Romania's social problems. In „Rovegan” she approaches the problem of economic migration. This is one of the most important issues in Romania's society today. The main factors that influence Romania's citizens to make this decision (leaving the country) are poverty and lack of perspective. These main subjects are key elements in Catinca's play. Following the script of the well-known fairy tale „Capra cu trei iezi” by Ion Creanga, the play follows the story of a mother who goes abroad, in Italy to work and her children who remain at home. The main subjects of the play, that bring up violent emotions in the audience, are capitalism as we know it today in Romania and the separation between mother and children.

Keywords: social theatre; economic migration; Capitalism; social consciousness; contemporary;

1. INTRODUCTION

At the moment, Romania is facing a number of problems that have an impact upon the society and the artists are trying to explore the most profound issues and offer possible solutions.

The Romanian artists start paying attention to a theater that acts as a binder, creating a space for dialogue and debating about the problems that contemporary society is facing to. There are many social categories that remained invisible in Romanian society, whose problems are not expressed; they are not discussed and nobody is looking for solutions in order to change something. One of these categories is represented by the migrants from Romania, those who leave to make a better living abroad, because they do not manage to get on their own feet in their own country.



2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

„On February 1, 2016 we recorded a net loss by external migration of one Romanian every 5 minutes and 27 seconds, at the population level, according to the INS data. Should I say more? Silent Romania, ignored Romania, that's it. What does it mean to be a good mother: to go away from your children in order to get money for their sustentation, or stay close to them and watch them dying of hunger?” (Drăgănescu, apud Tecuceanu, 2017)

Catinca Drăgănescu brings us attention to these aspects during the interview given on the occasion of the National Theater Festival in 2017. What should be the correct answer? What should a mother do in order to give her children a decent living and a minimum of comfort? About a poor Romania and a poor educational system, about the fact that we do not have a good relationship with the national identity, all these questions are raised by the Romanian artists today.

Catinca Drăgănescu is one of the representative images of the present Romanian theater. Director and play-writer, Drăgănescu has developed an interest in the social area, looking for detailed and profound information and proposing in her texts and plays, themes that reflect various social realities in present Romania such as: economic migration, exodus, degradation of the contemporary world, loss of identity and so on. Drăgănescu proposes a theater of social conscience, a theater deep-rooted at the present time, as stated in an interview given to the critic Iulia Popovici:

„Unlike many of colleagues in her generation, Catinca Drăgănescu has an active creative awareness and a greater availability for risk and for what, in the local context, would be called experiment. And her main area of experimentation is related to the work process and the approached conventions and artistic languages.” (Popovici, 2015, p.144)

In Yorick magazine, Catinca Drăgănescu talks about an artist who should be in a judgmental position to the world where he lives:

„We live in a world lain at the crossroads (speaking about Romania and Europe and the whole world). We have consumed almost everything that was to be consumed and it has come again the moment when we need new forms, new ideas, a real process of the past in order to start building a future. It may sound rhetorical, but to me it is a fact. I see a lot of inertia around me; many artists who are too relaxed to go on the stage because they never think about problems, they have few guiding marks, few values and extremely little courage.” (Drăgănescu apud Coman, 2018)

Through her texts and shows she creates, she try to generate reactions and offer experiences by means of the proposal type she is launching in the Romanian theater:

„My theme is an effect: I wish to accomplish those artistic products that can touch the viewer's conscience, produce a click and make him ask some questions. I am not proposing myself to give him answers, to communicate him my own opinions about the world and life, but to open topics that I consider relevant.” (Drăgănescu apud Iacobuțe, 2019)

This fact does not make her easy to be accepted, sometimes becoming uncomfortable for both public and critics.

The text and the Rovegan play represent a clear example of Catinca Drăgănescu's proactive and committed attitude. Rovegan presents one of the main problems facing today's Romanian society, namely the phenomenon of labor migration. The main factors that determine such a decision are poverty and lack of alternative, elements that represent central artistic pillars in the director's approach. Rovegan play, a text written and directed by Catinca Drăgănescu, casted Mihaela Teleoaca, Silvana Negruțiu and Valentina Zaharia. It is a production of ARENA Association and Replika Educational Theater Center.

The Rovegan text started by researching the phenomenon of people migration from Eastern European countries to Western countries and from the topic of Bitter Cherries book written by Liliana Nechita, that presents the personal experience of going to work abroad. The mise en scène, that the director and play writer puts on, is the contemporary version of the story The Goat and Her Three Kids by Ion Creangă. The text describes the journey of a mother who has to go to work in Italy in order to provide to her children the survival support.

Following the plot of *The Goat and Her Three Kids*, Ion Creangă's story, Rovegan is a text written and constructed as an allegory, presenting the goat's story by real means. Dramatically and directorial, Drăgănescu approaches the subject with a kind of detachment, combining the text with show, music, projections and a minimalist decor. This directorial detachment makes the subject of economic migration or rather the separation of a mother from her children provoking violent emotions in the consciousness of the readers or public when they read the text or watch the play. The documentation was done in Vaslui County, where a large part of the inhabitants left for the western countries in search of resources for survival.

Parents departure effects on children can be countless, from school dropout, mental and physical abuse, depression, criminality. From a home perspective, migration is scary. Families crumble, and money earned by departed people can never compensate for the void and disadvantages that a person's absence brings. Although the main argument of leaving abroad is to guarantee a better future for the children and family, the effect is not the one you expect. The effect, most of the times, is a negative one, people lose more than they earn. Going abroad means a full-time job where you can't really leave it when you want to; you have to stay there and take care of others; you let your family pending, they are not allowed to get sick, they are not allowed to suffer, they are not allowed to die:

„Hello. How are you doing, sis'? I have no credit. I was waiting for your phone like a breath of fresh air... What's up, sis'? ... How do you know that? Have you talked to ...? What does it mean she is on her last legs? Tell her I have enough on plate, I need not any of these! You know what? Next time when you call me, call me from her phone. I want to tell her some words in order to get her together. She must be strong ... for the kids ... What do you mean she doesn't talk anymore? How long has she been like that ...? (Long pause) I must come home...? (long pause) And those things, how much does it cost? ... and the money you give to the doctor and nurses ... anyway you have to take her to Vaslui, to the hospital; she dies on her feet there ... yes ... well, I'll send, I'll send . I'll send it tomorrow. (long pause) ... But I won't be able to come home ... I have to stay here ... for a while ... come on ... tell to my mom I love her ... come on, kiss the girls, too ...and that little one ... kiss you, bye, bye. She suddenly turns off the phone and bursts into tears. She wants to scream, but she stops her scream with the hands. She turns off the flashlight and cover herself with the blanket.”(Drăgănescu, 2016, p. 11)

In her play, Drăgănescu juggles between two parallel worlds: the ones left at home and the perspective of those who left the country. Suffering exists on both sides; all suffer, some because they feel abandoned, and others because they give up, forced to detach themselves from home, children, country, enduring humiliation, hunger, fear, despair, loneliness:

„Mioara: My name is Mioara and I am from Romania. Romania. La Roumanie./Signora 2V: We are looking for a care giver for an elderly couple. We offer accommodation and three meals per day, possibility of shower, telephone signal. No pasture. We mention that one of the elderly is immobilized in bed and needs extra care. Housekeeping included. 500 euros per month non-negotiable./Mioara: I am willing to offer my services for taking care of an adult person, for an indefinite period, abroad. I mention that I am 47 years old and living in the fear of God. I ask for seriousness. Please hand on if you are not interested. Urgently!”(Ibidem, p.2)

Migrants live on the middle line of the land; they think about their country, but they live who knows where, in a country whose language is foreign for them, whose lands they do not know.

„Eastern Europeans became, after communism collapse, the new economic slaves of the West. An inside perspective appears here about the chaotic capitalism (original, like democracy) experienced by the Eastern Europe for a quarter of a century and which generates labor shifts from one space to another, with negative effects on professional and personal life.”(Stoica, 2016)

The perspective of the one who left his country is not a happy one and full of beautiful experiences; he will get, most of the time: humility, hard work, payment under the market level, depression, phenomena that lead to an acute form of uprooting. The migrant, after crossing the border, loses himself, remaining stuck somewhere in a house that does not belong to him and a new world, where he does not fully integrate and where he is treated as a second-class citizen.

Catinca Drăgănescu fictionalizes the cases of women from Vaslui who go abroad to take care for elderly people in Italy, leaving at home children who fail to cope with their responsibilities, and fail to

keep the family together. The story begins in Vaslui and the goat is a woman named Mioara, who is preparing to go to work abroad, together with other Carpathian Goats. In this text, Drăgănescu follows the story of both kids and departed goat. By this text, Drăgănescu tells us about disintegration of the family, failure, lack of opportunities, lack of perspective and lack of money. What the play writer tries to point out is that no one abandons her family for good but because she has no other solution; because leaving home seems to be the best solution to guarantee accomplishment of family needs:

„BADANTA 2: I left because of needs; nobody leaves the own children because they lives happily. BADANTA 1: Come on, girl, we all come out of poverty, what else? If you have no money you are good at working on the yoke./BADANTA 2: Yes, ya... yes, she was unlucky.

She was brought here by someone who, as soon as she came, took her to an old man who opened the door to his bedroom in the evening and said that she should sleep there because he wants a wife, too. And when she said she wasn't coming, he kicked her out in the middle of the night and told her she was on her own account. And after that...” (Drăgănescu, 2016, p.6)

The play writer emphasizes the idea, that appears constantly in the text, „that no one leaves the own children because they live well”, the need, the hard living, the lack of money, urges most of people to take their steps to the West. Catinca Drăgănescu inform us from the first lines of the text about the painful effects of the family „separation”:

„V: Once there was a goat, widowed and unemployed for some time, who had three kids. The eldest and the middle-born were very naughty, but the little one was reasonable and hard-working.

S: It is said: There are five fingers on one hand and they don't resemble each other.

V: One day, when she saw that she had no more food to put on the table, the goat called her kids out and said to them:

T: - My dear kids! I have to go to the forest to get some more food. But you, lock the door behind me, listen to each other and not open the door not an any account until you hear my voice.” (Ibidem, p. 1)

Drăgănescu establishes from the first lines the story of contemporary goat who goes to work abroad in order to be able to feed her kids. Just as in the story of Ion Creangă, the goat train her naughty kids to open the door only when they hear her voice: „When I come, I will announce you, so that you will know it'll be me and I'll say to you: Three kids, little kids/Open door to your mommy/Mommy's bringing to you all/Fresh grass on the lips/Milk and salt on the back... (Ibidem, p. 1). After training her kids, the goat went to work: „And as it were, all the roads lead to Rome; so, our goat arrived there, too.” (Ibidem, p. 2)

The play writer does not offer alternatives; she does not offer another exit, another solution, separation of family is the only chance for survival. In a world where there is no alternative, in a world where you cannot choose which path to take because it is already written in your destiny, which is the path you will go, Mioara goat left her kids alone and went after food.

Oana Stoica, theatral critic, says about Rovegan that:

„The show develops like a chorus in which the stories, live music and projections are performative combined, playing in short scenes the film of an abandonment, self and others, motivated by poverty (another torturous line:„We are poor here, too, but nobody knows us at least”). The theatrical fiction is followed by the filmed reality, in the end. Catinca Drăgănescu avoids melodrama, refuses to affect through victimization; she prefers this form of a fairy tale a little bit comic, a little bit magical, which stops the sentimental effusions, but it has a much stronger impact on the public.” (Stoica, 2016)

Catinca Drăgănescu offers different types of games, dramatic scenes, live music, chorus. It also uses the Moldovan dialect, once to give the flavor to the narrative path and to locate the characters. The actresses play several characters, from the main ones (the kids and mother goat), to the episodic ones (Badanta 1, Badanta 2)

“Perceived as an economic detention (it is forced by external circumstances - the poverty), the work away from home causes severe depression. Intimacy is usually low, as well as the leisure time. Therefore, the contact with family or time for oneself is short, so the identity of the migrant is limited to that of worker. In the play, the Moldavian dialect acquires an identity function, which allows the characters to partially preserve their identity.” (Ibidem, 2016)

Drăgănescu maintains a balance between drama and emotion, while preserve, at the same time, the tragic nature of the characters and the humor, the force, the fragility and the irony offering to the reader / the viewer the opportunity to access the experience of the one who left home because of needs, the one without income, the one separated from his house and children.

During the action, the play writer gives us, through the zoology lessons of the little kid, the key by which we can decode the text:

„If you want to make a safe investment, buy a goat! The goat occupies the first places in the top of the animals that produce the most quantity of milk. Goat milk products are highly appreciated in the European Union, where they are sold very well, but to be found on the shelves of supermarkets, they must be approved. Goat milk is an elixir for the health of children and adults as well. Goat milk has the taste and composition closest to breast milk, that's why it is preferred by children. Goat's milk is sweet, fatty and nutritious and it has miraculous properties for our health, perhaps because these animals consume a lot of trees bark, salt, sea buckthorn, rosehip, in principle, they do not refuse anything. Goat's milk is much healthier and more nutritious compared to cow's milk, owning different effects. First of all, the consuming goat's milk protects your body from diseases, strengthens the immune system, relieves depression and makes you more optimistic.” (Drăgănescu, 2016, p. 20)

Associating the women (the labor force) with goat, the domestic animal, makes on the one hand the whole context to become an apparently funny one, but on the other hand when we think that this animal was considered the cow of the poor man, creates immediately the framework in which the Romanian workforce is cheap and willing to do anything to earn some money that they could send home. The comparison of the woman with the goat, underlines the fact that there will always be people whose destinies will be sacrificed, people who do not even have the right, never speaking about the chance, to build another future. Just like a goat that is sacrificed for milk, cheese, hair, skin and meat, so do Romanian women sacrificing their lives for the well-being of the family. The sacrifice that the character Mioara makes has a noble purpose, that her daughters do not follow her footsteps, but unfortunately Catinca Drăgănescu does not give us this perspective, do Mioara's kids choose to take after their mother?

„S: And now, among the thousands of goats in Italy, our two goats were living. This young goat came to look after a gentle and good-hearted man like the bread of God. The old man didn't care about the baby waiting for her at home, as he didn't even noticed that he forgot to put salt in his food. This young goat had been well located. While her mother was training down day by day, saving money and sending everything home; she was blooming, watching night after night on magazines with beautiful animals on the cover and falling asleep dreaming about how she would bathe in all the riches when the time will come, and how proud her sister and mum will be when they will be able to see her getting out of a black car with smokescreens and she will put her beautiful golden hooves on the table in their yard” (Ibidem, p.21)

The hardest lesson is that of the Carpathian Goat raised only for production of meat, only because it is part of a lower species of goats, as well as with the women in Romania, just because they are from Romania, they have no other chance than to have taking care of other children or old people instead of their own family.

„The kid, small domestic goat (*Capra aegagrus hircus*) is a domesticated subspecies of wild goat from South-East Asia and Eastern Europe. Goats are among the first animals domesticated by humans. In the Neolithic the shepherds began to keep goats for milk and meat, but over time, people have discovered that they can also be used as fuel, for clothing, construction and tools. The goat is called the cow of poor man. Because it's cheap and good. Goat is a very practical animal in any household. The goats are ruminant, but if there is not any possibility to

graze, the fodder is good for them, too. It is an animal without too many claims: it eats everything, it does not look for the company of other animals or humans and adapts very easily to the environment.” (Ibidem, p. 14)

3. CONCLUSIONS

Rovegan is a fairy tale about leaving home, said in Moldavian accents, accompanied by songs, humor, cynicism and a lot of pain hidden in the characters voice. Drăgănescu played with the soul and mind of public/readers, making an invitation to empathy, not in a dramatic way but together with humor of very good quality, this aspect revealing the whole context even more tragic. The experience of the whole endeavor is a laughing-cry in the best possible sense. You go from laughing to crying in a second without even realizing it. The text is raw and sincere, offering the image of a society on the brink of abandonment.

Catinca Drăgănescu chose to close the play with a short documentary from Vaslui County, where the main characters are children left home alone because their mothers went to work abroad. The end of the text, however, concludes with the voice of wolf telling to the goat, who returned home to see and hug her children, that there is no one else there: „The wolf: No one lives here anymore, auntie ... they all moved ... as they could; so, do not scream anymore, that you are talking to the moon, dear auntie... There is no trace of your family through these places.” (Ibidem, p. 32)

The text of Rovegan presents the reality of the society we live in; our parents go away, our young people go away, and this happens everywhere in Romania; poverty persists, and the possibility of leaving abroad can appear at any time. The bottom line is that we live in a tormented society, where the struggle is unfair - some have too much, others have too little and others have nothing. For those in a situation where a family member has to go abroad, the fight takes place between the four walls of the house, and the end of it captures a bleak image - the houses are abandoned, the elderly are tearfully, children are raving after parents. Rovegan is a text and a play about Romania that breaks down silently.

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