

REVIEW

By Prof. Dr.Sc. K. Nikolova

on the submitted scientific papers for participation in the competition for the award of the academic position of Associate Professor (Directing for Drama Theater), in the professional field 8.4. Theater and film art, scientific specialty "Theater Studies and Theater Arts", Announced by NATFA "Krustyo Sarafov with a single candidate
Dr. PETAR MIHAILOV KAUKOV

The habilitation work “Dennis Kelly and the Criminal Daily Routine” which is a theoretical and practical development of the creative activity of Dr. Petar Kaukov, as well as the creative activity itself presented by him for participation in the competition, fully meet the minimum national requirements to award the academic position of *Associate Professor*.

For his participation in the competition, the candidate has presented two of his performances – *Love and Money* by Dennis Kelly (director – Petar Kaukov, set design and costumes – Rozina Makaveeva) performed at the Nikolay Binev Youth Theater in 2011 (recording of the last performance of the production in 2014), and *DNA* by Dennis Kelly (director – Petar Kaukov, set design and costumes – Kreshimir Tomats) performed at the Virovititsa Theater and Academy for Art and Culture in Osijek, Croatia, in 2019 (recording of the performance premiere on 7th June 2019); his translations of the two plays by the English playwright and the theoretical and practical development “Dennis Kelly and the Criminal Daily Routine” to his work on the two productions in which he presents and analyses the plays by Dennis Kelly in terms of some major issues associated with their aesthetics, their possible interpretation and the problems the director is faced with in their stage production. For the purpose of this review, I consider all the listed works of Petar Kaukov presented by him for participation in the competition for Associate Professor in Directing for Drama Theater as well as referring to some of his other productions and teaching activity as an Assistant Professor in the same specialty at NATFA.

The theoretical and practical development work “Dennis Kelly and the Criminal Daily Routine” extends Petar Kaukov’s useful and productive experience which he launched with the pick and run-up of his thesis “Shakespeare’s Comedies: Issues of Stage Interpretation”, defended in 2018. Both in his dissertation and now in his habilitation paper, he strives to make a two-way research to achieve an effective result for both his staging activity and his work as a teacher in Directing. In his dissertation, Petar Kaukov examined the Shakespeare’s comedies (which he as an acting director has a keen interest to and has staged a number of productions)

trying to seek solutions to issues of their stage interpretation that arose in the process of his directing practice, with the help of their purposeful research and analysis, and vice versa – through the lens of accumulated theoretical knowledge, to develop new strategies and approaches for his staging work. In the theoretical and practical elaboration on two of the Dennis Kelly's plays (1970) presented as his habilitation work, Petar Kaukov steps on this strategy already build and tested by him. Now, the subject of his two-way research is another part of the scripts he prefers to stage – the latest British drama from the first two decades of the 21st century in the person of one of its most famous representatives whose plays are favorites for staging in the recent years. As a *quality contribution* of the work, I would like to point out this use of the findings, competences and skills developed by the candidate in the process of preparation of his thesis which is also the undisputed objective of the doctoral degree.

The theoretical and practical study is 27 pages long and is structured in three main sections. It has a bibliography that contains 19 sources in Bulgarian and English.

Petar Kaukov's research intention is stated as clearly as possible. It is expressed in his effort to highlight and try to clarify and offer solution to “three main challenges the director is faced with”, posed by “the British drama from the beginning of the new millennium” (p. 1). As already mentioned, the author chose to do that by focusing on Dennis Kelly's drama and particularly through the thorough examination of two of his play that first appeared on the London stage one after another – *Love and Money* (2006) and *DNA* (2007). It is important to emphasize that Petar Kaukov did his theoretical and practical study after he had already translated the scripts, had got acquainted with the main studies on the latest British drama in our country and the plays of the discussed author, and had staged them – the first, with the acting company of the Youth Theater in Sofia, and the second – with students in Acting, in Croatia, just months before. In other words, he is not only thoroughly familiar with the two scripts but has directly confronted the issues encountered by the creative teams who decide to stage them. Relying on this complex experience, at the beginning of his work Petar Kaukov lays out three key challenges they contain: 1) the physical and/or verbal violence as a determining part of the characters' interrelations; 2) the irregular, rude and vulgar language, and 3) the half-expressed/unfinished cues frequently used by the playwright which require a specific decision in the possible staging or, as the author specifies, “catching up with sense, aim and message through the stage behavior of the actor”.

Having formulated the questions raised by his work on Dennis Kelly's scripts, Petar Kaukov undertakes a search for their possible answer. Before doing this for each of the two plays, he presents the biography of Dennis Kelly at length, beginning with his debut play *Debris* (2001), stressing on his first real success with *After the End* (2005) which was performed at the British

Showcase of the Edinburgh Festival (where I also had the opportunity to see it in 2005) thus bringing him an international fame and made him a playwright with frequently staged plays in both the UK and a number of countries around the world, and then he focuses on the two considered plays in the context of the playwright's work so far. In his introduction to Dennis Kelly's biography, Petar Kaukov quite precisely clarifies that the plays by this author, as well as all the latest British dramaturgy created since the beginning of the present century, are driven by the rapid development of British drama during the 1990's, as a significant part of today's playwrights, including Dennis Kelly, extend and transform the emblem of the 90's - in-yer-face drama, in the new socio-cultural conditions. Considering this close relation to the heritage of the previous decade, Petar Kaukov explains the presence and nature of its elements that are problematic in his work – the violence (verbal and physical), the rude, obscene language and the fragmentariness of the dialogue. The author's attempt to investigate the genesis of these elements and their complex multilevel function in the script in order to seek options for their adequate solution in the presence of the actor on the stage is one of the *important contributions* of the work. His proposal for violence, for example, to be presented not by efforts to make it look sound, etc., but through the specificity of acting and in particular, of the intensive presence of the actor's body and voice with carefully developed plastics, gesture and intonation, is quite convincing.

The recommendation I would like to make here is that the analysis of the scripts and in particular of their genesis and their dynamic relation with the in-yer-face drama from the 90's would gain if expanded with consideration of the irrational compensatory charge present in the exaggerated violence, in the rude language and the demonstrated inability of the characters to express themselves as well as in emblematic images like the actual/imagined murder of a common passer-by, a child or a close family member or a friend. Such images – quotes from the famous play „Saved” (1965) by Edward Bond, from the well-known scripts by Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill are present in both of the discussed plays by Dennis Kelly and are a determinative moment of his aesthetics.

The core of the theoretical and practical work are the three sections: “Love and Money – the Crimes of the Common Consumer”, “DNA – the Crying Game of the Corrupted Innocence” and “Challenge for the Director”. There, the author proves his skill to break down the drama script into unexpected structure-forming parts thereby highlighting the more or less directly readable as well as the surprising connections, intertwines and conclusions. A virtue which should also be emphasized as *one of the merits* of the presented work.

Over the last two decades, Petar Kaukov has established himself as a director and a translator who introduces established but not staged in our country English-speaking and

especially British playwrights in the Bulgarian theater agenda. His translations of works by authors like Christopher Hampton, Abbey Morgan, etc. saw a number of stagings to prove it. It is not without reason that in the competition for Associate Professor, he applies precisely with his translations of plays by Dennis Kelly and his staging them. That is why I would like to emphasize also on the good translation and, above all, the attained bright (close to the specific obscene expression of the author and at the same time, suitable for speaking by the actor on stage) theatrical language in the translations of the mentioned plays by Dennis Kelly presented by Petar Kaukov.

The two performances that are in fact the reason for both the translations of the drama scripts by the British playwright and the theoretical and practical work of Petar Kaukov discussed above, are naturally the actual focus of the materials presented for his habilitation. Staging *Love and Money* (2006) at the Chamber Hall of the Youth Theater in 2011, the director introduces Dennis Kelly's drama in Bulgaria for the first time, with the play to this day considered to be the best theatrical work of the author. *The indisputable quality* of Petar Kaukov's staging of the bold and strikingly written script that in the changed socio-cultural conditions of today transforms the eagerness of the in-your-face theater from the 90's to shake and pull modern man out of his pose of steadiness and success to see the daily little atrocities he experiences and afflicts to the others, is the director's skill to find the appropriate way to present it effectively and convincingly through the actors on stage. Not only they were able to handle the obscene language turning it into a major tool for the specific expression of their characters' inner frustrations and tensions as well as into an unexpected springboard to achieve intimacy and an atmosphere of frankness and sharing much needed for a chamber performance. It was not without reason that the performance had a good viewer response and earned Iskra Donova (Jess) the IKAR'2011 Award for Supporting Actress and Stefan Mavrodiev the ASKER'2011 Award for Supporting Actor.

Petar Kaukov's choice to stage the next play by Dennis Kelly, *DNA* (2007), with the students at the Academy for Art and Culture in Osijek, Croatia, is not accidental. It deals with the same issues of daily little violence and cruelty of modern man towards himself and the others which is also the subject of *Love and Money*, but it does that as a drama writing especially for teens (commissioned for the Connections Festival for youth companies by the London National Theater). In the performance, Petar Kaukov made use of his findings on work with the actor in staging such a writing which he had achieved at the production of *Love and Money*, with the emphasis here primarily on the verbal intensity of the performers.

Finally, I would also like to mention another important virtue of the presented materials and of the Petar Kaukov's work as a whole. The matter in hand is his dedication, above all, his impressive effort to arrange, reflect and clarify for himself his experience as a director and as a

teacher in directing. It is this effort to analyze the path he covered and sift out the appropriate, the creative and the useful for the people he trains, is the main contribution of the theoretical and practical habilitation work presented by the candidate.

CONCLUSION: The materials presented for the competition as well as my personal impressions of Dr. Petar Kaukov as a director, my doctoral student and a colleague, convinced me that he meets the requirements for awarding of the academic position of Associate Professor in Drama Theater Directing at the “Kr. Sarafov” National Academy for Theater and Film Arts. I will vote in favour of him. I vote YES.