

# The Dream of the Conductor

Mihail Baykov

There is something pretty utopian and also extremely romantic in the belief that the situation in Bulgaria and in Bulgarian culture can improve against all odds. I do not remember how many fruitless ideas we have lamented for during the past years and how many great ideas we did not dare to even imagine because nobody would have supported them, season after season. And just what a great fear they inculcated in us – in a way that we cannot get rid of it for all our life. Fear for our work, fear of our work, fear of the other, of the stranger, of someone different, of the intimacy, of the lack of intimacy, of you, of me, of me in the mirror.

Today, more than ever, I start thinking what a hard effort shall be required from a person in order to be able to preserve his identity in the art and in the things that he is doing. To be not only honest and responsible, to be not only able to suffer the slings and arrows of the outrageous fortune, but in spite of the present times, the state and your personality, to find will and motivation within yourself and oppose alone to a sea of troubles, which is waiting for you – wild, quiet and furious at the same time. It is waiting for you to dive into it and if you occasionally survive and swim through the hardships of life, be ready to end them by yourself.

A work of art is not a result of indifference neither cheerfulness. In times of trial the works that emerge out on the surface are the ones that we can obtain tranquility and consolation from. But how could we obtain these, when those pieces actually derive from anxiety and desolation. This sudden touch, this expectation that some-

thing new will happen, that the fate of the spirit will be decided, precisely that feeling for Nirvana, indicating that you have finally achieved something beyond the mere talk is what makes me hold on – professionally and missionary.

“Fear“ is the third child in the family of the State Puppet Theater in the city of Stara Zagora, born in the art laboratories, which the theater inaugurated more than ten years ago. And if you would let me use the metaphor, that in the first staging – “Commedia Dell’ Arte“ (well, not really “Dell’ Arte“) *faith* is the prevailing motive, related to the idea that all the efforts made in those art meetings, should reach a final grand show, which should have more than one happening in front of an audience, while in the second staging “We won’t pay“ *hope* is evoked for the purpose that this mission should be continued, so then it is precisely here in “Fear“, where *love* is definitely apparent, because such has been put into the show.

It was in April that I watched for the first time the results of the art laboratory “A never-ending story“ and I rendered myself an account for the direction of the development in which the team wanted to work. Among all of the uncertainties, quests, confusions and other useless ideas, something became clear just then and it was the fact that the future show will not delight the eye, will not need to engage the audience morally and didactically or try to open its senses for what was going on. This time we will use firmness and rudeness in the shows that we used to be gentle with. Delicate thing is the soul! But then, how

and when would it be possible for you to provoke a catharsis, if you do not open the box of Pandora, if you do not let the vultures peck all of your sins and in this way free your soul; if you do not get in touch with music or do not shake the baton of the conductor in your personal life; if you do not force the contrabass to play in your soul till the very end or do not affect your own time dynamics. Nothing will happen. And it will never happen. Never!

“Fear“ focuses on the personal story of a human being, who revises his own life. It refers to his great desire for life in pink, but actually a life in fear, alas. A fear, that he does not have the will to cope with and the fear, that he does not have the will to stand against. The close-up, in which the action develops, is quite interesting. On the stage, the childhood, the maturity and the old age meet. And they ask their questions and grope for possible answers about who they want to be, but unfortunately are not.

*When I grow up, I want to become big immediately!*

*If I could start my life again, I would have lived it in a totally different way.*

*I would live with another speed. I would get up early. I would live life fully!*

*If I could start my life again, I would have been happy!*

And while we voyeur on these moments of someone else’s unconsumed life, on the stage appear different pictures, which present to us the endless expressions of fear, one after another. Here comes the fear of the first date of two loving each other persons. Here comes also the fear of sociality, the fear of the possibility that the society may not let you become a part of it immediately or may even reject you. Here is also the fear of the Military Commission and its questions to you when you are just 18 years old, the fear of the

questions that they ask you on the silly TV show, which you were invited to participate in. The fear for your child – not to fall, not to get hurt, not to catch cold, not to break his leg, not to get burnt by fire. The fear that almost always converts the parent in a terrible monster, which is communicating imperatively with his child: “Do not touch the vase!”, “Do not jump into the puddle!”, “Do not talk to strangers!”, “Do not speak if they do not ask you!”, “You know who will come if you do not obey, don’t you?”. Those are the roles that the adults always play out whether because of fear, whether because of indifference, only for the sake of justifying their own behavior. And in the end Bogeyman always comes. That is why I keep on asking myself, why do we inculcate this fear in our children? Why do we convert their dreams into a nightmare? Is it for making them leave childhood earlier and for the sake of letting them swim across the river of fear, so that we could meet them on the other side of this river, snarling in pain because of our problems?

I wonder if the performance of this show will resonate for a long time among the public circles in Stara Zagora and I cannot know this for sure. I also do not know if the life of the show is going to last long, because it does not aim at being funny, pleasant or entertaining for the brutalized audience. On the contrary, it puts a finger on your sore places, it starts to suffocate you and who may I ask, *simply who* is the person that nowadays likes to be pointed at, be hold responsible for his pusillanimity or inactivity? No one, of course!

There is something else, which I believe is more important and socially significant. The level and the professional attitude which mark the appearance of “Fear” on the theater map in Bulgaria, puts forward two questions to me.



„Страх“  
“Fear”

The first one is – why has not the period of revival of the so called puppet shows for adults come yet, if their additional value (artistic, aesthetic, social, financial) is higher than that of the obligatory repertoire titles, which the State Institute must produce? In this train of thought, do not we have to think about creating conditions, which can make the shows happen in terms of the undertaken engagements? And here comes the second question – what are the obstacles and the prospects of creating a Center for Theater Research and Puppets – a laboratory which will work in direction of the development of the stage theater language in the field of puppet theater; a laboratory which will become the meeting place of stage directors, playwrights, actors, stage designers, composers, light designers and theater critics, which will work together for the purpose of consolidating the artistic quests in this sphere, which today we call quite inappropriately “*puppet theater for adults*”. I consider quite improper the fact that there is only one puppet theater festival for adults, which is taking place once in two years and it is considered the objective showcase for the

status of the national repertoire in the category “*adults*”. Besides, the lack of a signed agreement in fact does not oblige anyone to work for this cause. However, what happens to those who want to develop both their troupe and their repertoire? It is because of them that I believe in the possibility of creating such a Center, in which the principle of the workshop and the work-in-progress could develop throughout the year those things that today are considered as symptomatic. A place where artists from all the puppet and drama puppet theaters can gather and generate ideas, try to make them become true and in this way do their searches in a team. And I believe that this format must be recognized by the central authority because its momentums are the same authors, which make our children laugh on Saturday and Sunday. From my point of view, I think that someone should make the first step and give a chance of the others to follow him. Otherwise we will continue doing things against all odds or just of fear.

In spiritual relation all torment is a chance, only in spiritual! ■

Translation by Nadia Zhereva