

## THE THEME OF “A NEW LOST GENERATION” IN THE PRODUCTION OF PREŠOV NATIONAL THEATRE



ELENA KNOPOVÁ

Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava

**Abstract:** The authoress elucidates the concepts of generations and generational affiliation, while focusing on various names and characteristics referring to a group of young people born during the 1980s and early 1990s. She introduces Generation Y, also called Millennials, and gives a short characteristic of a generation referred to as the Lost Generation, the Set-aside Generation, the Scarred Generation. She captures the external manifestations of the generation together with inner mechanisms and motives resulting in these manifestations. Using the example of Prešov National Theatre (PND) and its production, she introduces a new concept referred to as “A New Lost Generation”. The authoress endeavours to define it in Slovak context through the partial analyses of the plays included in *Prešovská trilógia* (*Single radicals* (2013), *Kindervajco* (2015), *Good place to die* (2015), [Prešov Trilogy (*Single Radicals* (2013), *The Kinder Egg* (2015), *A Good Place to Die* (2015)]).

**Key words:** Lost Generation, A New Lost Generation, Generation Y, Millennials, Prešov National Theatre, *Prešovská trilógia*, *Single radicals*, *Kindervajco*, *Good place to die* [Prešov Trilogy, *Single Radicals*, *The Kinder Egg*, *A Good Place to Die*]

Currently, the topic of new generations and the manifestations of generational affiliation, the common characteristics of a particular generation, are among frequently debated subjects and they are becoming increasingly present in various areas of our lives. The topic is present in the sciences, the arts, the media, and in social practice. It affects sociology, psychology, cultural studies, the economics, political sciences, as well as lifestyle magazines and advertising. Lifestyle magazines and the advertisements in mass media are not to be overlooked, as they shape the public discourse and have a profound impact upon self-identification or on the affiliation of especially young individuals to a peer group. We are familiar with new generation cars, new generation technology, new generation food, new generation fashion and hairstyles, new generation lifestyle (of hipsters, freelancers, Net-gen or iGeneration, etc.).

In all the areas above, experts endeavour to identify individual generations and to name distinguishing attributes or traits that make them distinct from one another. Generation identification is important, since a generation as a comparatively broad and diverse spectrum of individuals also manifests certain common traits and inclinations. Based on them, we can observe the transformation of society and individuals who, though living in different corners of the world, will respond to the circumstances in which they live, in a similar manner, and this also applies to the emotional realm. The identification with a generational group is important for the individuals per se. It frees them from isolation and enables them, be notionally, to be an integral part of a whole, to acquire identity. Today, identity determination transcends beyond

the boundaries of gender, nation or professional confines. The composite authors of *Velký sociologický slovník* [The Big Dictionary of Sociology], which was an outcome of a research carried out by the sociologists of the Academy of Sciences in the Czech Republic, approach a generation from the perspective of adolescence and post-adolescence, in direct connection with a concrete time period and concrete experiences of individuals born during roughly the same period in historical time. Hence, a generation is “a big and internally differentiated group of individuals bonded by a period-determined way of thinking and acting, which experienced a significant period of its socialisation in identical historical and cultural contexts”<sup>1</sup>.

Psychologist and semiologist Lucia Trézová, who focuses on communication, expands on the statement by adding that generational consciousness is based on attitudes and opinions which are a reaction to a real-life experience with a shared social environment. “Irrespective of our individual lives and of the things we have experienced differently and uniquely from others, there are certain moments, certain important events indelibly imprinted in each and everyone of us, which create the things we share and that unite us with our generational followers. (...) This common experience is a reason bonding us up with the members of the same generation and at the same time it sets as apart and creates barriers to our communication with the members of another generation.”<sup>2</sup>

Societal trends affect the everyday life of individuals. It appears that the determining factor of the categorisation of contemporary generations are not birth years, but much rather life feeling and the way they make their choices as to what kind of life they wish to live. It is, in fact, a set of symptomatic reactions to surrounding impulses that are not just directed outward but also have a profound effect on the psychical and emotional quality of life. True, individual names of the so-called new generations relate to the years of birth of their members (the baby boomer generation, generations X, Y, Z), however, a particular group is internally diverse (for instance, the golf generation, the chemical generation, the singles generation, the Net generation, and the like). The New Lost Generation concept may serve to partly unite this diversity. In the study, we shall use it to refer to individuals born during the 1980s and early 1990s (i.e. especially to individuals who are currently about thirty years of age). The generation is also referred to as Generation Y or Millennials. Print and internet sources diverge on the names and on the timeframe of the birth of Millennials.

The Generation Y concept was published for the very first time in *Advertising Age* magazine, and it was used to refer to young people with a positive attitude to new communication media and digital technologies. Their upbringing was accompanied by liberal attitudes to politics and the economy. Psychologist Jean Twenge introduced the term Generation Me. As opposed to the traits attributed to the generation by the authors of, for instance, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*<sup>3</sup> (isolation, bold-

<sup>1</sup> Refer to LINHART, Jiří – PETRUSEK, Miloslav – VODÁKOVÁ, Alena – MAŘÍKOVÁ, Hana. *Velký sociologický slovník*. [The Big Dictionary of Sociology] Vol. I, A – O. Praha : Karolinum, 1996. ISBN 80-7184-310-5.

<sup>2</sup> TRÉZOVÁ, Lucia. *Generácia X vs Y. Alebo akí sú tí dnešní mladí dospelí v porovnaní s nami – generáciou X?* Part 1. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/gener%C3%A1cia-x-vs-y-alebo-kto-s%C3%BA-%C3%AD-dne%C5%A1n%C3%AD-mlad%C3%AD-dospel%C3%AD-lucia-trezova> [cit. 25 May 2017].

<sup>3</sup> HOWE, Neil – STRAUSS, William. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York : Vintage Books, 2000. ISBN 0-375-70719-0.

ness, pressurising others, assertiveness, team spirit), Twenge lists other characteristics of the generation, such as tolerance, open-mindedness, responsibility and ambitiousness, and also proclivity to possessiveness, narcissism, distrust and anxieties, or the feeling of senselessness.<sup>4</sup> The narcissism of today is not perceived just as the narcissism of extroverts but also as the narcissism of introverts which, alongside attention, self-satisfaction in various areas, calls for urgent protection. Therefore, we are confronted with a view that Millennials need to live in a group of friends but, at the same time, the group must not restrain or bind them to a continuous responsibility or to having to accept other people's rules.<sup>5</sup>

Before we get to the topic of A New Lost Generation, as captured in the production of Prešov National Theatre (abbr. PND), let us briefly describe the context of the contemplations over generational determination and the concepts used. This will enable us to better understand why the New Lost Generation concept was used to refer to the life feeling of present-day young people aged between 25 and 40 who are the protagonists of the productions of PND, notably of the so-called *Prešovská trilógia* (*Single radicals* (2013), *Kindervajco* (2015), *Good place to die* (2015)) [Prešov Trilogy (*Single Radicals* (2013), *The Kinder Egg* (2015), *A Good Place to Die* (2015))]. Alongside external generational manifestations and traits outlined above, we shall map out inner motivations and mechanisms that lead to these manifestations.

The name of the New Lost Generation originates from the economics (on the verge of the 20th and 21st centuries) and, at the same time, it calls to mind the well-known Lost Generation of the men-of-letters and artists around Gertrude Stein after World War I (for instance, Ernest Hemingway, Erich Maria Remarque, Romain Rolland, and also Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Edward Estlin Cummings, James Joyce, William Faulkner and others). It is a generally known fact that the Lost Generation is tied to the feelings of one generation that lived through the world war. A number of writers, being its active participants, responded to the deep emotional experience and reflected it in their literary works. However, their works did not manifest the features of a documentary work. Instead, their authors focused on communicating the feelings of men affected by war while primarily expressing their own state of mind and the difficulties in coping with the consequences of war. They were consumed with disappointment, suffered from internal wounds and depression from experiencing traumatic events. They personally experienced a time when values such as human life, God or love were outplaced and they were not a protected value.<sup>6</sup> The disillusionment of the Lost Generation writers (basically, they all were young people) continued even after the war was over. They were faced with the chaos of the world, a shattered and unstable belief system and insurmountable stigmas, alienated from

<sup>4</sup> TWENGE, Jean M. *Generation Me – Revised and Updated: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. New York : Atria paperback, 2014. ISBN 978-0-7432-8885-9 (ebook).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, SYZYGY research. Available at <https://syzygyny.app.box.com/s/ipepbhdy-di1pev18qcow5k50tt3bq0k5> či Pew Research Center (the so-called U.S. Fact Tank, focused on the gathering and analysis of contents related to public opinion and demographic data).

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the representatives of the Theatre of the Absurd declared their disbelief in Man after World War II, in his capacity to communicate and to understand each other. Their antiheroes did not defy anything, they did not counteract, because it was futile. The world and Man will not change and they keep "reanimating" only in their destructive essence.

their own lives and unable to attune themselves to a normal running of society, they were lost.<sup>7</sup>

Although a modern young generation where the theatre professionals of PND can also be included (the founders – director Júlia Rázusová and playwright and dramaturg Michaela Zakuťanská – and also collaborating actors, musicians and stage designers), has not experienced world wars, it continues to live in a world of constant fighting. It lives in an atmosphere of tension and insecurity, of terrorist and extremist attacks, and it has experienced the after effects of the stock market crash (e.g., 2007 global financial crisis). An illusive prosperity and wellbeing are accompanied by unemployment and poverty, by an appalling rate of lifestyle diseases and the disintegration of traditional forms of relations. The generation lived with the generation of their parents (Baby Boom Generation) and elderly siblings (Generation X or the so-called Husák children), who had to adapt to the rapidly developing society of the 1990s. They were expected to be strong, prompt and competitive. Society valued individualism (inventiveness) and assertiveness (to assert oneself against competitors). On the other hand, many succumbed to workoholism, suffered the burnout syndrome and they were replaced with younger and more competent individuals on the run. The family as the basic unit was replaced with other forms of coexistence. The spiritual was replaced with the material, personal friendships were replaced with social networks. Increasingly, mobile and internet networks facilitated communication and the country's employment policies changed. Housing and payment policies were transformed, too (loans, mortgage loans, credit cards). This milieu shaped the Millennials generation during adolescence and their acquiring basic social skills. During post-adolescence and adulthood they were to make a choice between the universal world of uncertainties and their own way which would lead them away from failed endeavours and disenchantments of older generational followers. It will come as no surprise to learn that Millennials are a generation of individualists and egocentrics, who, on top of that, are well-educated and have access to a variety of resources including the arts. What possibly can fill the emotional world of individuals in such societal and interpersonal contexts and what are their own visions of the future?

Journalists Milan Čupka and Andrej Barát write about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the term Lost Generation. They analyse the terms of the Set-aside Generation or Scarred Generation within the global context. The effect of scarring is among the long-term consequences of our failure to solve the fate of today's young generation with untapped potential. Regrettably, neither political structures, nor the schooling and education systems have been paying enough attention to the fact that this generation is completely different from that of their parents. "The theory on the appropriateness of the attribute *lost* (generation) is upheld by Japanese experience. After a dynamic growth of the island state in the 1980s, there followed a period of stagnation. That also explains why in Japan the 1990s are referred to as the lost decade. (...) ...the 1990s created a bubble in which one whole generation was trapped. A lost generation of a lost decade. Such a situation not only leaves scars on financial

---

<sup>7</sup> Let us mention several works where the ultimate feeling of going astray is evidenced: *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and especially *The Sun Also Rises*, novel by E. Hemingway, in which the author states "You are all a lost generation."

well-being but also on an individual's feeling of happiness and on his or her health. One feels to be truly lost."<sup>8</sup>

The term A New Lost Generation, or, the generation of young people born during the 1980s and 1990s (Millennials) primarily refers to individuals who, despite their proficiency and qualifications, are unable to find adequate employment, or to find a job at all. It goes without saying that it affects other areas of their everyday life. The impossibility to find a job makes them look for alternative ways to make a living. Long-term plans or stability give way to temporary quick solutions or solutions are sidetracked and the immediate step is waiting to see what happens next. This applies to all areas of life (looking for a permanent job or a partner, starting a family, seeking a flat or a house, etc.). There is more at stake than just building a professional career or financial means to support oneself: It is about the setting of priorities they follow in their private and emotional lives. They are constant happiness seekers, in quest of independence, love, harmony and of their true selves. They are travellers shunning commitments, or, just the contrary, individuals assiduously waiting for their dreams to come true. They frequently experience the feelings of unfulfilment and vulnerability and it largely follows from their recognition of the dichotomy between ideal opportunities and the real state of affairs they can achieve. Among other characteristics are mobility, migration, rather shallow roots, perceptiveness, and agility.

It is symptomatic that this population group is the focus of attention of Michaela Zakuťanská and Júlia Rázusová. It is their own generation about which they want to talk through theatre. They are familiar with its lifestyle and thinking, problems, feelings and desires. The ambition is to communicate an authentic image of life with which they have an intimate experience and are familiar both with their outer (the environment and relations) and inner sides (personal experiencing and psychical condition). The development of stories, characters and dramatic situations is based on their own experience or the experience of their contemporaries, while such an experience is oftentimes subject to an analysis. They focus on capturing "the middle class" of intellectually gifted young people who embody the intellectual stratum of Slovak society. Extreme characters and characters with a borderline personality are outside their focus. They get out of the role of mere observers and work with technical literature (sociology, psychology, aesthetics) and with statistical data which are once again subject to scrutiny in their immediate ambience. Their location is the eastern region of Slovakia, the town of Prešov and its inhabitants as their characters. The town becomes an important protagonist in some of their plays and productions determining the stories of their human protagonists (their action and feelings). Ironically, using this author's method, they examine how one generation and intergenerational changes are affected by global issues. They share a common perspective of the phenomena around them, while humour and irony are not being sidetracked. Humour and irony, in places escalating in grotesque grins, is a manner of expressing themselves. All the plays of *Prešov Trilogy*, as well as the most recent play *Deň, keď zomrel Gott* (2017) [The Day When Gott Died]<sup>9</sup>, are tragicomedies. The feeling of time is also present in them. Despite being somewhat at a loss as to what to do with itself, the New Lost Genera-

<sup>8</sup> ČUPKA, Milan – BARÁT, Andrej. *Stratená, zjazvená či len odložená generácia?* Available at <http://profesia.pravda.sk/ludske-zdroje/clanok/283908-stratena-zjazvena-ci-len-odlozena-generacia/> [cit. 25 May 2017].

<sup>9</sup> A pun – the name of a popular Czecho-Slovak singer, in its phonetic form, suggests God.



tion remains to be optimistic<sup>10</sup>. It believes that things will get better and it does not lose faith. In fact, this is imperative. If the generation were to take itself too seriously, it would have a tragic ending. It is not about social criticism which is usually achieved by the mixing of genres. It is more of a teasing along the lines of Chekhov's dramatic works, however, not in the sense of "hey, look, what a comical life you live", but rather "look, the life we live is so sad that it is comical".

### **Pragmatic idealism, or, the founding of Prešov National Theatre**

The Prešov National Theatre was founded by Júlia Rázusová and Michaela Zakuťanská in 2013. It was inceptioned by a production and creative community whose collaboration was started at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Upon graduation, both the creative professionals returned to eastern Slovakia, to their roots. The reasons behind that were personal, financial, and artistic by nature. They believed that in order to achieve self-fulfilment, a young theatre professional did not have to live in the capital, on the contrary. The "backwoods" may be more peaceful and offer a greater freedom of creation, though it means living under more difficult material and financial conditions. It was an opportunity to grow and mature artistically, to embark on experimenting, to create their unique profiles thematically and poetically, all of which were threatened existentially and commercially in Bratislava.



Michaela Zakuťanská: *Deň, keď zomrel Gott* [The Day When Gott Died]. Peter Brajerčík (Roman), Gabriela Marcinková (Karla), Anna Rakovská (Izabela), Tomáš Mischura (Dávid). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 28 January 2017. Direction Júlia Rázusová. Photo of the theatre archives.

<sup>10</sup> BURSTEIN, David D. *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping Our World*. Boston : Beacon Press, 2013, p. 3. ISBN 0807044695.

They turned Prešov into their stable base and shelter. In the town, there had been three professional theatrical institutions operating long-term and there was also a university. The relationship between Bratislava (the country's centre and capital located in western Slovakia) versus eastern Slovakia, i.e. the "remainder of the world", or "the end of the world", is oftentimes addressed in Zakuťanská's plays as a thematic element. Other theatre professionals with whom PND collaborates have a similar perception of this relationship. It is correct to say then that the founding of PND was a programmatic initiative, that is, to start an alternative theatre vis-à-vis existing theatres, to create a free space for their own themes and a theatrical language and to offset the mismatch between the creative potential of the country's eastern and western regions. This was how PND was founded, whereby the abbreviation hints at the well-known catchphrase Punk is Not Dead.

The seemingly prankster approach to the theatre name which also alludes to Slovak National Theatre, has a more serious basis. It was about the expression of the personal opinions and attitudes of the two theatre professionals. Their conviction that it was doable and necessary to also engage in creation at the far end of the country, in a region of high unemployment and a poor cultural policy followed the pragmatic idealism of David Burstein.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding difficulties, the New Lost Generation is confident in its future and capable of a swift mobilisation and prepared for bringing its forces to action and, if need be, to shape the world to its vision. It wants to do things differently and better, to make the world a better place. It is among their desires and it is prepared to sacrifice a lot to reach this idealistic goal. It is clear to them that new institutions and groupings must be started first and the avenue of stepwise (and difficult) attempts using the old or existing institutions must be abandoned. This is pragmatism.

On the other hand, choosing PND as a name was a smart marketing move. A name of this kind is an attention-catcher and easy to remember. They designed a theatre logo which they called the pope. It is a graphically modified coat-of-arms of the town of Prešov, resembling a male face with a moustache, with the Slovak double cross on top of his head. It came along with stickers as part of the promotional campaign of the new theatre. The stickers read: "It worked out to be Prešov" and "Prešov, if there were such a chance". Initially, the theatre was meant to serve as a cultural platform. Before it was started, there had been stage reading sessions of The Theatre without a Theatre. The ambition of its founders was to develop the first ordinary theatre production about and for the inhabitants of Prešov, to test out whether such a project was feasible in the given location. Another ambition was to give guest performances in other theatres and to attend festivals. However, they were overambitious and the idea was dropped. At present, it serves as a laboratory and space for generational personal themes.

For sure, this was also affected by the problems of running an independent theatre. In 2015, they approached the municipality and tried to lease the vacant premises of the Senátor hotel in the city centre. The plan was to set up a theatre scene on their own cost. Despite the promise and several tenders invited, the plan was never materialised due to odd circumstances and a bizarre turn of events in

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

municipal politics.<sup>12</sup> The PND continues to operate in a rented-out hall of Alexander Duchnovič Theatre in Prešov, without a much-needed warehouse and a stable actors' ensemble. It invites musicians, stage designers, actors to work on their projects and decisions on the cast are made based on the type of a character needed in a particular project. The choice follows a pattern similar to the method of theatre and direction work and to the choice of themes, namely, authentic style of acting, playfulness and commitment. The ensemble works ad hoc, while the majority of members come from eastern Slovakia. It is a smart advertising move on their part to invite popular young actors to join in. Their role is to attract the public at large. The court playwright of the theatre is Michaela Zakuťanská and Júlia Rázusová is the theatre director, except for the second production which was directed by their classmate Zoja Zupková. Up until now, PND has had four productions in its repertory: *Single radicals* (2013), *Kindervajco* (2015) *Good place to die* (2015), *Deň, keď zomrel Gott* (2017) [*Single Radicals* (2013), *The Kinder Egg* (2015), *A Good Place to Die* (2015), *The Day When Gott Died* (2017)]. We shall focus on the first three productions of which the trilogy is composed.

### The Singles

The PND continuous production was started by stage reading and the production of *Single Radicals*. It was the only play that had been written before the theatre makers or, rather, its core members, set up a theatre group (actors Tomáš Mischura, Gabriela Marcinková, Zuzana Dancáková)<sup>13</sup>. *Single Radicals* was a play that introduced Slovak theatre space to a long-missing generational view along with a current theme which never before had been presented on Slovak theatre stages with such an overarching comprehensiveness. It was a female view of the singles issue, the life of young people under thirty, the emotional and psychical crisis of young women and men in day-to-day, real-life situations.

An increase in the number of singles is considered the biggest sociological phenomenon of our time. It is even referred to as an alternative lifestyle due to the sweeping changes in mentality and motivations. According to the father of the term, Dirk van de Kaa, from a demographic point of view, the phenomenon is based on the second demographic transition. It refers to a set of changes in behaviour and to the population's belief system when individualism and personal freedom are overvalued, the institutions of marriage and family are weakened and birth rate is reduced to a level that does not guarantee the self-reproduction of the population.<sup>14</sup> In Slovakia, these trends began to show more markedly after 1989. They were a consequence of the sweeping socio-political and cultural changes. In Slovakia, too, the necessity to primarily develop life strategies other than marriage or the starting of a family (the

<sup>12</sup> For more refer to the article by Michaela Zakuťanská *Prešovský národ sobje*. Available at <http://www.pnd.sk/prescaronovskyacute-naacuterod-sobje.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Two actresses got married and their surnames changed. It was Gabriela Marcinková (Gabriela Mihalčinová) and Zuzana Dancáková (Zuzana Gibarti-Dancáková). In the meantime, the founding director-playwright couple have become mothers.

<sup>14</sup> Refer to PASTOR, Karol. *Demografické dôsledky zmien demografického správania*. In MATULNÍK, J. et al. *Analýza sociálnych a zdravotných dôsledkov zmien demografického správania na Slovensku*. Trnava : Filozofická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity, 2006, pp. 22 – 30. ISBN 80-8082-051-1.



Michaela Zakutánská:  
*Single radicals* [Single  
 Radicals]. Ladislav  
 Lodomirjak (Bohuš),  
 Gabriela Marcinková  
 (Denisa). Prešov National  
 Theatre, premiered on  
 11 October 2013. Direction  
 Júlia Rázusová. Photo of  
 the theatre archives.



priorities being education, career promotion and financial stability) has led to an increase in the number of single-living, individualised and independent beings.

The catalogue of the Touches and Connections Festival features the following comment regarding the *Single Radicals* production: "Four single citizens of Prešov, one night at a music club, five beats of alcoholic intoxication and divulging desires (...) ...It is a narrative of a generation of individuals who only recently graduated from the university and are contemplating the next move in a life that has just begun. They define their space in which they want to live. They seek a goal to hold on to and they yearn for the perfect partner. Ego trip, disparity between the western and the eastern regions of Slovakia, the missing generation of twenty- and thirty-year old singles in the town makes the heroes rethink their interpersonal relations and values. While trying to find a new definition of love, they come to realise they have turned into Single radicals and stripped of ideals, find it impossible to build new relations."<sup>15</sup>

*Single Radicals* is a play about the young people of Prešov (aged between 24 and 29), who are fearful of love. They are educated young men and women yearning for someone close, for starting their own families, for a good job and life in their hometown but they do not know how to achieve it. It is questionable whether the town can offer them such opportunities. They are a set-aside generation whose train has left and it waits for another one to arrive. While waiting, they kill the time by alcoholic get-togethers in local bars, overcoming sadness by shots of vodka, glasses of beer, or vodka and beer.<sup>16</sup> They keep friendly relations with each other to make up for the absence of partner and family ties. A shelter is created and a single is a shelter to himself/herself.<sup>17</sup> The instance a single gets the chance to establish contact with

<sup>15</sup> Michaela Zakutánská: *Single radicals* [theatre festival catalogue]. Dotyky a spojenia. [Touches and Connections]. 10th edition of Martin Theatre Festival. Martin: Slovenské komorné divadlo, 2014, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Sociological surveys prove that interaction with friends is vital to singles. To meet others, they use direct links, such as joint activity, outings, entertainment venues or indirect links, such as social networks.

<sup>17</sup> "A single may have a partner. A single may have several partners. A single does not share an apartment with a partner. A single is an egotist, a single can enjoy his/her own company. A single creates the town's culture, the economy and the atmosphere... A single is inwardly-focused. He/she is a prime



Michaela Zakuťanská: *Single radicals* [Single Radicals]. Tomáš Mischura (Saša), Gabriela Marcinková (Denisa), Ladislav Ladamirjak (Bohuš), Zuzana Dancáková (Aďa). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 11 October 2013. Direction Júlia Rázusová. Photo of the theatre archives.

someone at the bar, he/she acts for himself/herself. Any further attempt is doomed to failure, which brings him/her back to drinking, contemplations over life and unfulfilled goals. However, it is not a state of self-pity. The characters treat themselves with a certain degree of cruelty. There is no space in their lives for crying, only for new adventures and challenges by which they draw attention to themselves (they organise the Prize for Life competition, go for a trip in the forest, or smoke marihuana in the ladies' bathroom).

In the play, the singles are typologically diverse. Using Arthur Shostak's classification,<sup>18</sup> Denisa embodies a Resolved Single. According to Peter Stein's<sup>19</sup> typology, she is an Involuntary Stable Single discontent with the development of her life situation (relations) but her hitherto failures have led her to believe that this is a permanent condition. She is a teacher of mathematics. She returned to Prešov to prove to everyone that it is possible to prevent brain drain westwards. Her profession is her purpose of life and she is firm on her decision to stay no matter how bad the situation in education is. She went through a disappointing love relationship (the question is,

---

number that can be exactly divided only by itself and by one... A single would spend the nights in bars, because the only thing that awaits him/her back home is his/her TV set which he/she might not even have... A single is a radical". Zakuťanská: *Single radicals* [programme booklet to the production]. Prešov: Prešovské národné divadlo, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> BORGATA, Edgar F. – MONTGOMERY, Rhonda J. V. *Encyclopedia of Sociology*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2000, pp. 17 – 18. ISBN 0-02-864853-6.

<sup>19</sup> STEIN, Peter J. (ed.). *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, pp. 10 – 11. ISBN 0312725965, 9780312725969.



Michaela Zakuťanská: *Single radicals* [Single Radicals]. Ladislav Lodomirjak (Bohuš), Zuzana Dancáková (Ad'a), Gabriela Marcinková (Denisa), Tomáš Mischura (Saša). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 11 October 2013. Direction Júlia Rázusová. Photo of the theatre archives.

whether she is able to fall head over heels in love), her biological clock ticks and she wants to have a baby. Finding the right romantic partner is difficult, given her strict checklist conditions:

"DENISA: The domain of definition of the *Potential Partner* function equals Prešov; male aged between 25 and 40, reads at least a book a month, has got a job he likes, doesn't live together with his momma, he's single and I like him. An X equals two. *Potential Partner* function equals two.

BOHUŠ: That sounds optimistic. You've a crush on two guys.

DENISA: Hey, wait. I've diluted some of my conditions and construed the domain of definition of the *Will-we-be-together?* function. That one equals Prešov, male aged between 25 and 40, reads at least blogs, has got a job, will move away from his momma when we start dating, he's single and I like him. An X equals five. But when I add the *Does-he-like-me?* condition, the *Will-we-be-together?* function equals zero."<sup>20</sup>

Ideally, she would choose having a baby without having a man: "Don't you worry. Matriarchy will be back. You might have a baby, even I might have one. We'll have them without men. The kind of love our mothers once knew will be gone. Such love can't be today. Women have gotten rid of the very last bit of gullibility."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> ZAKUŤANSKÁ, Michaela. *Prešovská trilógia*. Bratislava : Občianske združenie Vlna a Drewo a srd, Bratislava 2017, pp. 20 – 21. ISBN 978-80-89550-31-9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

Ada falls in the category of Ambivalents and Involuntary Temporary Singles.<sup>22</sup> Currently, her priorities are other areas of life (study, friends) and she procrastinates living in a stable couple. Breaking-up with her boyfriends does not cause her a headache. She is prepared to jump into new dating adventures. She is more concerned about having to live the life of another person and that she will have to subdue to the expectations of her parents with whom she must live for the time being: "And what if I don't care about having a university degree and having to work from nine to five for the rest of my life? I'd much rather sell donuts on a beach". And immediately she adds that her house will be tiled, with high ceilings and climbing plants, in the city centre<sup>23</sup>. Her perception of the world is that of an open playground with plenty of opportunities which she is determined to explore. What counts are experiences, school is a burden and it does not teach you what life is all about. She is a modern young woman and a girl of fashion (hairdo, dress, social networks, consumer goods). She dreams of a life in a big city which would transform her life into a happy one: "And when you stand in the street, people are smiling at you, with a beer in their hands, so different from here. Everybody's happy in Prague."<sup>24</sup>

Out of all characters, Bohuš is the one to be least aware of his life situation and of its quality. Being a teacher of visual arts, he does not earn much but is reluctant to do any extra work. To save money, he lives together with his mother. His sexual contacts with women end under the staircase of night clubs. He is a pragmatic person of short-term goals. He thinks girls today are carefree beings and because of his reputation, only the younger ones are left but they are superior to him and he finds them financially burdensome.

"BOHUŠ: Imagine, I'd be in a relationship and we'd even be dating each other on Facebook. It's a huge responsibility. What if she keeps checking on me? A girlfriend costs me money. I'd much rather buy myself a new bike before I have a girlfriend."<sup>25</sup>

Unlike Ada, Bohuš falls in the category of Wishful and Voluntary Temporary Singles. He keeps waiting and shoving all commitments aside. His lifelong goal is to be free and to have a wife and kids at the same time, enjoy his Friday night hangovers and a stable job. A lack of serious-mindedness and machismo in his action doom him to failure. An accompanying phenomenon of such a lifestyle is a feeling of emotional aridity: "I'm not looking for an ideal woman; I'm looking for a woman to fill in the hole in my head."<sup>26</sup>

The last of the group of four friends is Sasha. He got used to an independent lifestyle and is reluctant to give up his freedom and independence. He has no special ties to his friends or to Prešov. He comes here to relax and to brag to his friends when an apple or a strawberry picking season in Italy or Scotland is over. It is important for him to be treated as someone special and experienced. He is the most important person in his life. He indulges in Eastern philosophy which he advocates: "You don't have to travel or to walk out of your flat entry door to get to know the world. I want to

<sup>22</sup> Refer to BORGATA, Edgar F. – MONTGOMERY, Rhonda J. V. *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, pp. 17 – 18; also STEIN, Peter J. (ed.). *Single Life: Unmarried Adults in Social Context.*, pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>23</sup> ZAKUŤANSKÁ, Michaela. *Prešovská trilógia*, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

let go all my desires, I want to be self-sufficient; what I grow is what I get. No money and stores, no people. The only thing I can't get rid of is smoking and doping."<sup>27</sup>

Sasha's idea of an outing in the woods is to have each of them go on his/her own. His convincing statements turn out to be a defense mechanism. He worships the woods and solitude, but meets people in bars. He preaches Eastern philosophy, but ends up having beer and vodka. He professes self-sufficiency and solitude, but has no problem hitting on Denisa, right after breaking up with Ad'a. His home is the whole world, but every year he would come to Prešov to be in the centre of attention. In fact, he is a Regretful and Voluntary Stable Single. He appeased himself with a life in solitude and is no way near to wanting to change it. He is fearful of having to attune himself to another person, his nomadic experience makes him change locations and groups of people he meets. He is not in a state of mind to initiate any change, as he may find it limiting.

What connects these characters? They all have narcissistic proclivities, they cling to freedom but they crave for a soul mate. Despite enjoying social stability, they experience emotional deficit. They are cruel. They perceive their lives as a bizarre life in a bizarre world which puts pressure on them to make everything look positive. This picture of singles is dramatically different from what is offered by popular TV series, such as *Ally McBeal* or *Sex and the City*. The generation in *Single Radicals* has gone astray on its quest for happiness, but it continues to march on.

They are aware that their life ideals will most likely never come true. They want to live a new way of life but they do not have a clue how this can be achieved because they carry the remnants of traditional models and values in them. They are fearful of relationships, emotions and of love. Love as a productive activity of self-renewal and self-assertion remains hidden to them. They have experienced it only in the sense of having rather than being. The times in which they live make them react in a similar way in other areas of life. They are stigmatised individuals, they are a product of hasty times full of nonsensical contrasts. Their life feeling may be demonstrated on an example of a line at the end of the play:

"DENISA: You know what, let me tell you this, Sasha. I would've killed myself ages ago if there wasn't a chance for me to become a mother one day. I would shoot or hang myself, or eat pills. But that idiotic control light in my head won't let me do it. I know suicide scares the shit out of me."<sup>28</sup>

### **Kindervajco [The Kinder Egg] – the town in the lead role**

In the second part of the trilogy, in *The Kinder Egg*, Zakuťanská focused on male-female relationships against the backdrop of city life and its municipal and cultural policies. The contemplations focus on questions as to whether it is feasible to create a functioning life in a couple and a functioning environment for a normal life in our time. Prioritised values were put under scrutiny. Local policies blend with the lives of characters as an allusion to the impact the policies have on the existence of PND and on the real-life activity in the town of Prešov.

This time, the protagonists of the play are "Post-Singles", aged between 27 and 35,

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 47.





Michaela Zakuťanská: *Kindervajco* [The Kinder Egg]. Andrej Sisák (Dunčo), Peter Brajerčík (Gregor), Gabriela Marcinková (Slávka), Tomáš Mischura (Urban), Zuzana Dancáková (Lucia). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 21 February 2015. Direction Zoja Zupková. Photo of the theatre archives.

and they live in couples. Among the lead characters is the town of Prešov in the form of a leitmotif of a gigantic kinder egg made of Belgian chocolate. While in *Single Radicals* the town was presented as a one stoplight town, a place without opportunities where one first has to return to bring back life in the town, in *The Kinder Egg* the town lives by its own rules. The wretched destinies of the town's inhabitants are met in its shadow and under its influence. Relationships and friendships are distorted, marital and partner infidelity thrive, people are in quest of what has been left of traditional values and they struggle with unmet ambitions. The town is depicted nearly as a war zone, where hesitation equals social death. Everyone is each other's rival, everyone cheats the other. It is a place where one comes to morally die.<sup>29</sup> The magic kinder egg casts a shadow on ordinary people, public and private lives blend together. "A gigantic Kinder Egg casts a golden reflection of the rising sun on the town. The trolley bus No. 1 is late. The teeth of the people waiting at the bus stop chatter with cold. Trucks loaded with child seats head for the west. (...) An unknown company that was awarded a lifetime contract for the maintenance work on the gigantic Kinder Egg mounts chimes in the hen's beak hidden inside the egg. While František, the blue-collar worker, is throwing up from a scaffolding, Milan is eating his roll and cod (...) The city legend says that women who touch the gigantic Kinder Egg with their right boob during their fertile days can immaculately conceive a semi-divine offspring of the City Manager."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> In the play, Prešov is humorously interconnected with Paris and New York, by the 49th parallel.

<sup>30</sup> ZAKUŤANSKÁ, Michaela. *Prešovská trilógia*, pp. 52 – 57.



Michaela Zakufanská: *Kindervajco* [The Kinder Egg]. Gabriela Marcinková (Slávka), Zuzana Dancáková (Lucia). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 21 February 2015. Direction Zoja Zupková. Photo of the theatre archives.

The Kinder Egg acquires divine and magical powers. On festive days, managers would lay wreaths and cooked eggs there and project on the egg names like The Athens on Torysa River, Slovak Seattle, etc. TV crews shoot cooking programmes in its shadow. Moreover, the egg helps conceive progeny and it heals by virtue of a small kinder egg being forced out of its body once a month. In the dimness of the Kinder Egg monument young people indulge in alcoholic and sexual pleasures.

It may appear to be an ideal place for life. But with the passage of time it turns out to be hypocrisy and fake. A marketing move to make the quasi-cultural town of unprecedented opportunities visible (the Kinder Egg monument is an allusion to an actual ambition of city councillors to erect the statue of Christ in Prešov that would surpass the one in Rio de Janeiro) was a total disaster and a business fraud. The Kinder Egg was built without a building permit on unconsolidated land. The promises of local politicians to save it ended up in its dismantling: "Fifty tons of Belgian chocolate past its shelf life of which the gigantic Kinder Egg was made was donated by the municipality to socially marginalised citizens. The golden hen was melted down and handed over to a collection enforcement company owned by the City Manager. An audit disclosed that the town was in default and it would take a hundred years to have its debt paid off. Fortunately, the historical buildings in the downtown area which were privately owned by town managers, were kept by the town."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 93.



Michaela Zakuťanská: *Kindervajco* [The Kinder Egg]. Zuzana Psotková (Gréta Čierna), Peter Brajerčík (Gregor). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 21 February 2015. Direction Zoja Zupková. Photo of the theatre archives.

In parallel with the crumbling of the myth of a miraculous town and its Kinder Egg totem pole other, equally rotten and immoral things happen inside a group of six friends. Some of them got lucrative jobs, others remained day-dreamers and forever young adolescents. Gregor, the city councillor, does not hesitate to snatch at any opportunity to be promoted or to have a romantic affair. He benefits from his business deals and uses the contacts of his mistresses. He would not allow his marriage with Lucia to enthrall him. Outwardly he insists on an impeccable image of a happy family, but he is despotic within. He has been cheating on his wife Lucia with her girlfriend Slávka who is a journalist. He is up to doing just the same thing to Gréta, who is a writer and girlfriend of his buddy Urban. Nothing is sacred to him, so long as it stays covert.

“GRÉTA: But you’ve a wife.

GREGOR: Would it be OK if I find myself a lover?

GRÉTA: I don’t know what’s OK. It makes no difference to me. You demean her anyway, one way or the other.

GREGOR: I should finally start putting myself first, her presence kills me. She’s been so terribly cold. She wouldn’t tell me she’s loves me.

GRÉTA: Do you tell her that?

GREGOR: I’m not sure I still love her. Would you go to bed with me tonight?”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

In the eyes of the media Gregor creates an image of a citizen of integrity who cares about the culture and development of his town. Emotionally, though, he is a cynical person. He measures marital love with money, *bitch* is his son's favourite word, he foists replies on the couples he weds: "Say your no to each other". Gregor embodies nouveau riche, a man of entrepreneurial spirit who has got everything others would envy him. Despite having all this he is not happy and he cannot stand his perfect life.

His wife Lucia has a living space of her own, delineated by the financial subsidies from Gregor. She is free to do anything within the limits of building an image of a modern woman and wife of a local MP. She takes pole dance classes, gives interviews on how to keep an impeccable household, a perfect body, a happy family and a healthy style of living. She keeps her followers updated on *Viemjažiť* [My Perfect Life] social network, which creates her own reality.

"SLÁVKA: The perfect wife, a charismatic husband, a beautiful child, a stylish apartment. Would it be OK if I write a blog about you?"<sup>33</sup>

Lucia is a green widow, which is a new phenomenon of the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>34</sup> Her home, however, is not a family house in a green residential suburb, but rather a luxurious apartment in the city centre. She spends her days alone in a lavishly appointed apartment, surrounded by abundance, with a minimum personal drive and internal motivation and suffering depression. When Gregor's extramarital affairs get known, she continues to play the game of a happy family, as if nothing happened. She is unable to give up the seemingly fulfilled idea of an ideal life.

Journalist Slávka and musician Dunčo create a bizarre but not uncommon couple. Dunčo is a bit of a blockhead, a musician with a buoyant past. He lives day by day. He has no clear idea of what his future should look like. In a way, Slávka is his salvation. She manipulates him and changes him in her likeness. She moved into his place right after she broke up with Urban. She dictates the rules of their relationship. Unlike Dunčo, she is energetic and dynamic. She is assisted by the Fresh Air mobile application with a self-controller, which organises her time and postpones procrastination. For her, Dunčo is only a temporary relationship. She wants a life change, but not until she turns thirty, and she has the perfect plan to do it. She does not think much about possibly hurting Dunčo. She is a mix of a pragmatist and carefree romantic. When Slávka tells him that she is going to have a baby with Gregor, Dunčo tries to convince her that it may just as well be his. They both are aware of their action of waiting, but neither is prepared to go after his/her dreams.

By contrast, Urban, a university lecturer and organiser of cultural events and his new girlfriend Gréta, are a mismatched and boring couple. What they have in common is love of literature and they benefit from each another. Urban does not need a woman, but rather a muse. Gréta, his former student, is happy to use Urban's milieu as an inspiration for her new novel. Gréta is sceptical, she does not believe in unadulterated relations and in love. Rather than reality, she believes in opportunities. Urban is a hope for her – a truthful intellectual dreaming of culture elevation.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> OUŘEDNÍČEK, Martin – TEMELOVÁ, Jana – MACEŠKOVÁ, Marie – NOVÁK, Jakub – PULDOVÁ, Petra – ROMPORTL, Dušan – CHUMAN, Tomáš – ZELENDOVÁ, Světlá – KUNCOVÁ, Iva. *suburbanizace.cz*. Praha : Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Přírodovědecká fakulta, katedra sociální geografie a regionálního rozvoje, 2008, p. 93. ISBN 978-80-86561-72-1. Available at [http://www.suburbanizace.cz/suburbanizace\\_brozura/8.pdf](http://www.suburbanizace.cz/suburbanizace_brozura/8.pdf).

He is a representative of an old school in which mutual respect plays an important role in partnership co-existence. With him by her side, she can look at herself in the mirror. Gréta writes a novel "A Man of No Beliefs" with all friends ending up as the characters of her novel and their lives create the story line. The novel is transcended by a loss of belief diagnosis. Eight hours at work of which only two hours are used meaningfully. The rest of their working time is loitered away by posting likes on My Perfect Life social network. In the evening, they create a virtual library or they get drunk, to forget a day wasted. Creativity and work are emptied concepts, love is a business transaction, little wars are being waged around them, to cover up what is really going on. How she feels about her own generation is best expressed in the following words:

"GRÉTA: Urban, I'm in a state of decay, from top to bottom. What I'm craving for now is spraying the inside of me with Savo mould killer. Keep away, so that you don't catch the mould. (...) I'm fed up with not knowing what coveting really is. I get anything I want, and I get it right away. When was the last time you coveted for something unattainable? (...) Urban, I'm a woman of no traits. I find an opportunity more interesting than reality."<sup>35</sup>

### Good place to die [A Good Place to Die]

*Prešov Trilogy* is concluded by the play *A Good Place to Die*. In it, PND theatre professionals captured a currently experienced theme of the possibility or impossibility of the self-fulfilment of a creative and artistically inclined individual in a provincial setting. On a self-critical note, using grotesque element, they scrutinise the causes of disenchantment, failures and the burning out of young people in fulfilling their artistic and personal ambitions. Again, the element of paradox is present, which follows from idealist goals and the ways in which they are achieved. Aside from externalities, the New Lost Generation clashes against the wall of incapacity to take firm decisions. Its perception of the world is multi-layered and structured and opting for just one goal means a possibility of missing the right goal. Put in the words of one of the characters: "A sin equals missing the goal."<sup>36</sup>

The paraphrases and quotations in the play were inspired by Chekhov's *Platonov*. In a new interpretation, the character was embodied by Koňar Platonov (i.e. Prešov citizen Horsen Platonov). The lead character is art teacher Michal, whose attempts to subdue mediocre routine end up in a vicious circle of a provincial town, at an elementary art school which may easily become a gifted person's societal grave and a source of lifelong frustration.<sup>37</sup> "Michal, a former series star and art teacher at an elementary school of arts, takes a decision to fulfil his direction ambitions by rehearsing Chekhov's *Platonov* with children. Thanks to an EU grant awarded on the occasion of the Year of the Horse, Koňar [Horsen] Platonov acquires realistic traits

<sup>35</sup> ZAKUŤANSKÁ, Michaela. *Prešovská trilógia*, pp. 77 – 78.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 139. The theme of a problematic goal-setting was expressed by Denisa in *Single radicals*, the first play of the trilogy: "I've no wishes. I'm twenty-five and I've achieved everything I've wanted to. What should I wish for? I've no goal. What should be my goal? Making a career? Finding myself a guy? Having a family? It's odd, living without a goal." (p. 25)

<sup>37</sup> GODOVIČ, Marek. Radšej niekoľkokrát utiecť, ako raz zomrieť. In *kød*, 2016, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 12.





Michaela Zakuťanská: *Good place to die* [A Good Place to Die]. Tomáš Mischura (Michal Rusnak), Tomáš Paľo (Musician), Miroslav Bodoki (Tóno Baláž). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 18 December 2015. Direction Júlia Rázusová. Photo of the theatre archives.

at the elementary art school and Michal gets all his fellow teachers involved in the play's preparation. However, he himself is being transformed into Platonov and in addition to a creativity crisis, numbness and frozen emotions in a town where one comes to die, he is challenged with an affectionate conspiracy of three (...) very different women. What is it like to live and seek self-fulfilment in the backwaters? Does one have to move to the capital to get on the 30 Under 30 list? Is it the town to be blamed for failure? Would Frida Kahlo have painted the same if she had lived in a town like ours? And how come that Kant lived in the same town his entire life? The tragicomedy *A Good Place to Die* offers a magical and grunge view of what Platonov would be like, if he lived today."<sup>38</sup>

Modern-day Platonov who lives in Prešov as a contemporary of the Lost Generation is a young and bored person. He is paralysed in love, and it is questionable whether he can feel love at all. He has no opportunity to create freely, and it is questionable whether he can create at all. He is entrapped in the town that hurts him. Had it not been his birth town, he would have lived a peaceful and meaningful life elsewhere. If it is not the town that hurts him, then it is him bringing harm to himself by his irresoluteness and inability to take over responsibility for his life. A self-destructive force of personality makes him come up with ever new excuses for his action and linger in one place before he plucks his courage to recklessly flee from a big deed he, ironically, had a desire to do.

<sup>38</sup> Available at <http://www.pnd.sk/good-place-to-die.html> [cit. 27 May 2017].



Michaela Zakuťanská: *Good place to die* [A Good Place to Die]. Tomáš Mischura (Michal Rusnak), Miroslav Bodoki (Tóno Baláz). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 18 December 2015. Direction Júlia Rázusová. Photo of the theatre archives.

The dramatic storyline begins with the death of the principal of the elementary art school. He thwarted the flight of his young colleagues by his conservative approach and by favouritising artistic preferences of school sponsors. Instead of purchasing a new equipment, he used the structural funds money for the building of a wine cellar in the basement under the staffroom. He is not the only corpse in the play. The characters in the play exist rather than live. Despite being young, they feel their life is being wasted. They slip back into the old ways of doing things – sandwiches at a meeting are a must, and they are perfectly happy with folk dance classes instead of a new creative production. They have not achieved or changed anything, they are absorbed in provinciality, laziness and libertinism. Their life feeling is that of Chekhovian erratic stones, which stand in their own way. They go to work, they shop, eat, shit, make love, sleep and fear the future just as their neighbours whom they criticise.

Michal, the lead character, despite several attempts at innovation, is trapped in his own libertarian obsessions and commercial pressure. Today, it is imperative to put yourself forward before you turn thirty, otherwise you have no chance. Being thirty, he thinks himself handicapped by swift societal changes against the backdrop of an omnipresent cult of youth. He is unable to resolve his long relationship with his girlfriend Sasha. It would be a commitment for him which would jeopardise his freedom and he would have to fulfil other person's wishes. His fear stems from the inertia of a marriage stereotype. ("MICHAL: You're wrong if you think I'm better off than you are; our relationship has sucked the very best out of me. I used to be like



Michaela Zakuťanská: *Good place to die* [A Good Place to Die]. Mário Zeumer (Jano Lukáč), Tomáš Mischura (Michal Rusnak). Prešov National Theatre, premiered on 18 December 2015. Direction Júlia Rázusová. Photo of the theatre archives.

a diamond. And now – my thinking is still lucid, but Sasha has sucked ambitions out of me. She's thirty as well, she won't be pretty forever and she's never been smart. She's even got used to my love affairs. It's amazing how much she loves me."<sup>39</sup>). He finds himself encaptured by the expectations he raised in three women: the new headmistress Romana, his fellow teacher Maria, and Soňa, his colleague's wife.

Romana will be turning forty soon. She regards her new working position as the apex of her professional career. But this is also her last chance to have a child. Therefore, she wants sperms from Michal as a suitable donor without wanting to raise the kid together. The young colleague Maria is infatuated with her pubescent and romantic idea of Michal, the one-time TV star. Soňa is a second-class actress of small roles in the local professional theatre. For her, Michal epitomises a chance to run away from an unsuccessful career and an unhappy marriage which suffocates her. He brings back to life the old boarding school love passions. The only thing Michal can do is to flee to Bratislava and give a chance to a marriage with Sasha. He realizes that there is no right choice for him. He is a lost victim of youthful ambitions, limiting personal and societal factors and self-destructive restlessness.

A New Lost Generation captured in the production of Prešov National Theatre has several things in common. Aside from representing young and intellectually endowed people, they are also selfish individuals. They are united by a similar feeling

<sup>39</sup> ZAKUŤANSKÁ, Michaela. *Prešovská trilógia*, p. 112.

of the times they live. The feeling stems from the awareness of their stagnation in time and space. It gushes out from the recognition of emotional standstill or inability of emotional fulfilment. They are unable to attain work, psychical and emotional balance, to create harmonic state they covet. It is either about having a rewarding job or well-functioning relationships. More often, they have neither rewarding jobs nor well-functioning relationships. If they are preoccupied with work and they meet friends to saturate their relationships, making a decision to start a family is hard, which frustrates them. If they decide not to work so hard, they are confronted with the money issue and that prevents them from living lives their way and according to the generally accepted materialist standards of the 21st century. If they start a family, they are faced with the controversy between a commitment and a persisting cult of values, i.e. freedom, independence, creativity that are instilled in us as something extremely important.

It is a generation that lives from desires and in self-deception. It is a generation open to constant challenges. However, it is performance-driven, perfectionist and egotistic and under the pressure it psychically collapses. It is malcontent, alienated, the controversy between the inner and outer worlds is unsurmountable. It does its utmost not to lose its independence. It yearns for love in which it seeks salvation from solitude. It fears solitude in the funhouse of the world and people. It fears its permanence and that it keeps losing something all the time and is unable to go after happiness. This generation is more about "having" than "being".

*The study was developed within the framework of the grant project VEGA 2/0170/16 Theatre as a Communication of the Crisis of Values.*

**Translated by Mária Švecová**

Elena Knopová  
Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy SAV  
Dúbravská cesta 9  
841 01 Bratislava, Slovakia  
elena.knopova@savba.sk