

Writing a doctoral thesis in the field of theatre – a voluntary, necessary or “imposed” act

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Abstract: In nowadays Romania, when the interest in encouraging and promoting our cultural values has greatly declined, writing a PhD thesis in theatre may prove of less importance. Along with the weaker educational background provided by both family and school, a relatively new issue that reflects on the scientific and cultural benefits of the paper in question has emerged into this process, namely that of continuing to a PhD immediately after graduating an MA. In my study I will try to indicate the reasons that underlie the above picture. As such, I will emphasize the importance of the PhD supervisor – candidate relationship and the differences that may appear when the candidate has recently completed his MA studies. Without claiming that my own doctoral research has fulfilled this cultural objective so far, I will advertise in my study the need for any PhD thesis in theatre to grow into a cultural expression. Also, I will point out a series of general ethical aspects defining the writing of any scientific paper as well as the specificities of a theatre PhD paper: rules, requirements, relationships, cultural experience and subjectivity. I will focus more on the last term as it defines the process a candidate who develops a PhD thesis in parallel to acting goes through.

Keywords: PhD thesis, culture, education, ethics.

Introduction

The following three factors have been crucial in choosing the topic of this article: 1. the fact that I belong to a period when interest for professional and, implicitly, cultural evolution was constant; 2. the need to highlight a topical issue which is not discussed enough – that of the importance of writing a paper as vast as a doctoral thesis in the field of theatre, which obviously has considerable cultural potential; and 3. my desire to show a number of aspects related to the ethical behaviour involved in writing such a thesis.

For starters, I have considered it useful to offer some general information about Romanian doctoral studies, based on the article written by Cătălin-Daniel Pop, associate professor with the Department of Political Science within the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences of Babeș-

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Bolyai University of Cluj, called *Evoluția legislativă și istoria studiilor doctorale din România între 1898 și 1995* [The legislative evolution and history of doctoral studies in Romania between 1898 and 1995]¹.

Looking for legislative answers

As the author says in the beginning of his research, “This study will present and analyse chronologically the elements of innovation or return to the old doctoral traditions appearing throughout history. The two important historical periods we will refer to with regards to doctoral studies are between 1898 and 1948 (the time of the Romanian Kingdom) and between 1948 and 1989 (the Communist regime).” But this does not prevent him from also analysing the following periods, discussing the doctoral phenomenon between 1990 and 1996 and also offering brief reflections on the period after that. Using mostly the information found in decrees, government decisions and laws regarding university studies and, implicitly, doctoral studies organised within this framework, found in the *Official Monitor* (law publication existing officially since December 1832 and authorised by Law no. 202, with modifications and additions, in 1998), Cătălin-Daniel Pop reviews a great deal of key moments in the history of Romanian doctoral studies. At first, doctoral studies were not discussed (Law 1150/25 of November 1864 published in the aforementioned publication) and the only thing mentioned was the organisation and structure of university studies, called “higher education,” in the law created by the mathematician Spiru Haret (Minister of Education and Religions and the first Romanian obtaining a doctorate in Paris), referring to “secondary and higher” education².

This law talked about *autonomy, studies and awarding a doctoral diploma* and about the number of years needed to obtain one, which “should definitely [...] not be fewer than [...] 5.” No. 151/1898 of the *Monitor* shows progress in this direction, stipulating that the four years of university studies will end with a state exam, followed by a fifth year offering the candidate the opportunity to become a *doctoral candidate* and by at least five years of writing a “scientific treatise” which will then be presented in public, in front of an examination commission in charge of deciding whether the candidate will become a *doctor*. The beginning of the 20th century brings some modifications, in the sense that the title of doctor needed to be certified by royal decree, not just by the Minister of Public Education, the rector of the university and the dean of the faculty, following an oral examination. A quote that I found

¹ Cătălin-Daniel Pop (2019). *Evoluția legislativă și istoria studiilor doctorale din România între 1898 și 1995* [The legislative evolution and history of doctoral studies in Romania between 1898 and 1995], published online on 25.09, retrieve from: <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/27-Article-136-2-10-20191011.pdf> (accessed on 25.11.2024).

² *Ibidem*, p. 89.

relevant with regards to this is that offered by Pop from art. 12 of the Regulation/1908 of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of Bucharest, defining the awarding of the doctor's diploma as having the purpose of "proving that the candidate has succeeded in going deeper into a specialty, so that he can further work successfully to help develop the science in which he is specialised."³ The candidate went through annual exams in front of a commission of four professors and a final exam in front of a commission of five professors, in the months of "October, January, and June,"⁴ the title "doctor" was awarded upon him immediately after the exam, and his diploma was offered after the aforementioned royal decree.

The year 1912 brings changes in the doctoral process, basically reducing these studies to 2 years, taking into account the fact that the bachelor years and the doctoral years indeed made up a number higher than 5, of which the first 3 years were dedicated to the bachelor studies; the final exam was taken in front of a commission of 3 professors and the acquisition of the doctoral title was facilitated by the dean, who filed a request, through the rector's office, to the Ministry of Education. Between 1912 and 1918, regulation appears regarding the names of the general and specific courses to be taught within doctoral studies and a series of fees to be paid by the candidate, while the right to become a doctoral candidate outside of the field of one's bachelor studies is restrained. During this time, the task of certifying the validity of the doctoral thesis is given to the coordinating professor and the dean; it established the number of pages of the paper, the final number of copies, but also an aspect which will later become an important topic of debate, namely the fact that "the faculty considers the opinions presented in this work as belonging to its author and does not express any approval or disapproval of them."⁵ In 1932, when Nicolae Iorga was the Minister of Education, Religions, and Arts, new regulations appear, namely the exclusion of the royal intervention and the certification of the title of doctor by the rector and by the dean of that faculty, as well as by the Ministry of Education; moreover, the candidate was free to take the doctoral exam at any time throughout the year, which is maintained as a regulation nowadays. The duration of the doctoral studies was also established then, according to the principles of university autonomy, to be 1 or 2 years within each academic institution. In 1936, within the Faculty of Law, which Pop mainly refers in the aforementioned article, the duration of the doctoral studies is reduced to just 1 year, preceded by 4 years for the Bachelor's Degree.

Trying not to take up too much space with the broadest possible image of the evolution of the doctoral approach in the Romanian space, I will skip a

³ Cătălin-Daniel Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 94,

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

number of years marked by less notable events in this context and I will briefly present the new coordinates of doctoral studies after 1948. The following period is considered by the author to mark a break from the previous doctoral process – only the candidates who had graduated from universities and polytechnic schools were guaranteed the right to become doctoral candidates; this excluded “higher levels of specialists destined for production, such as engineers, agronomists, doctors, etc., as well as schoolteachers.”⁶ On the other hand, just like nowadays, they were allowed to also become doctoral candidates within other faculties than the ones where they had got their Bachelor’s Degree, with 3 years of study, but the number of spots for each faculty was decided not on the local administrative level, but by the Council of Ministers, according to the needs of the country. In 1950, the Ministry of Public Education decides that bachelor’s studies should be followed, after an exam, by 3 years of “aspirantship” and 3 years of doctoral studies. The “aspirant” benefitting from a grant from the government throughout the 3 years of study was supposed to be 40 at the most and to have a university degree in the same specialty that he was about to study for the following 6 years. In the end of the 3 years of “aspirantship”, the candidate presented a thesis which needed to be original and this gave him the title of “sciences candidate” and the possibility to become a doctoral candidate. The doctoral thesis needed to be an “(original) paper of high scientific qualification,”⁷ and it was presented not in front of the examination commission, but in public, which facilitated the elimination of candidates who were not accepted politically and made it impossible for them to teach in academic institutions. The year 1967 brings interesting changes for doctoral candidate: the “aspirantship” exam disappears, they can take a doctoral entry exam (which should be marked with at least 7 out of 10) even if their degree is in a different field, and there is an alternative examination, namely an initial discussion, but, in that case, the candidate is not paid and the studies will last for 4 years.

Another important aspect in this context is the title of “teaching doctor” which was given the doctor of science and enabled him to become a doctoral coordinator. Just like in present times, the title of doctor was given by the Professors’ Council of that faculty, but it was later confirmed by the Ministry of Education and Teaching. According to the present-day website of the Ministry of Education, “... the doctoral commission proposes the awarding of the title of doctor and this proposition is sent to the National Council for Certifying University Titles, Diplomas, and Certificates (NCCUTDC). Following the evaluation of the file, the NCCUTDC will propose the awarding or non-awarding of the title ‘doctor’ to the Minister of Education. After the

⁶ Cătălin-Daniel Pop, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

validation of the doctoral thesis, the title “doctor” is awarded by order of the minister.”⁸

The year 1978 brings another change, namely the elimination of the intervention of the Professors’ Council in awarding the title “doctor” – now, the State Council is the only one in charge. After 1989, according to Government Decision no. 301/30 April 1996, published in the *Official Monitor*, doctoral studies last for 3 or 4 years full time or 4 or 5 years part time and the NCCUTDC gets directly involved, which offers legitimacy and academic recognition (in institutions accredited by the Ministry of Education) to these studies and to the doctoral coordinators, professors or scientific researchers holding the title “doctor,” whether from accredited institutions or not, the latter being able to be doctoral coordinators only in accredited institutions. The doctoral candidate can now obtain a grant either by means of a competition within the institution providing his doctoral studies, where he would have the professional rights and obligations of an instructor, or from their own income, in the form of sponsorship or donations for this purpose. From the generous range of stipulations of the aforementioned government decision, I thought it would be useful to also mention some aspects of interest for this research, namely: the minimal entrance average is 8 out of 10; the doctoral coordinator can coordinate the papers of no more than 15 candidates simultaneously and they decide the number of spots offered during each competition; “the methodology regarding the organisation of doctoral programmes and the awarding of the scientific title ‘doctor’ is elaborated based on the provisions of the current decision by each institution which organises doctoral studies.”⁹

With regard to the specificity of the organisation and progress of doctoral studies in the field of theatre, specialised Romanian websites I have checked have not proved too generous, as they offer similar information and point out aspects found in the norms presented in the previous paragraphs. It was surprising for me to discover that, among the many faculties presented in the central website of Bucharest universities, which promoted its doctoral studies offer thus: “a wide variety of fields, from humanities and social sciences to natural sciences and mathematics, for all cycles and all organised forms of university training, as well as for numerous other post-graduate programmes, professional conversion and improvement...”¹⁰, the Theatre Faculty was not present and it had its own website. When checking it, we can see that, right

⁸ The Ministry of Education and Research. *Doctoral University Studies* in <https://www.edu.ro/studii-doctorat> (accessed on 25.11.2024).

⁹ Decision no. 301/30 April 1996 regarding the organisation and progress of doctoral studies, published in “Monitorul Oficial” no. 102/20 May 1996, in <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/9046> (accessed on 25.11.2024)

¹⁰ Doctoral University Studies, University of Bucharest, in <https://unibuc.ro/studii/programe-de-studii/doctorat/> (accessed on 28.11.2024).

now, according to “international standards in the field,”¹¹ the doctoral school within the UNATC (which includes Theatre, Cinema, and Media) only offers the possibility of becoming doctoral candidates in a scientific doctorate. Possibly contradicting this regulation, the description provided by the website points out the close connection between research in the field and the act of artistic creation, containing “... profound creative aspects (...). The doctoral studies within the “I. L. Caragiale” UNATC directly involve research and artistic creation. Artistic creation, in its turn, directly involves continuous, maturely undertaken research.”¹²

This situation is found not only in the Bucharest doctoral school, and the degree of involvement of artistic creativity in scientific doctoral studies can be questioned and become a topic of ample debate which I am sure would interest many others, as well. In this context, I would dare state that the interest of many actors aspiring to the title “doctor” in their line of work, especially that of those with a sufficient number of years of experience, consists (for a significant percentage of them) precisely in the need for “artistic” expression. The high degree of subjectivity and the emotional involvement due to the constant presence on stage in various hypostases are two important factors turning the writing of a scientific doctoral paper into a more difficult process. The need for using very precise information in writing a scientific doctoral paper can constitute a supplementary professional effort for an actor who is less used to the rigours of such an endeavour. In agreement with the goal of the Theatre and Performance Arts Doctoral School within UNAGE Iași, as seen on its website, which underlines the need for connecting *art* with *research*,¹³ we have taken another quote which is subject to interpretation, to continue the statements above: “Artistic experience (whether from the classical field or from performance) does not exclude reflection – rather, it includes it as a necessary stage. The analysis of the creative process, based on inner knowledge / experience on stage, is a *possible* strong point by means of which the transition is made from descriptive models to applicative ones, determined by the adoption of a different perspective and the exit ‘from the square’.”¹⁴

Just like in the case of the UNATC regulations, in the Theatre Doctoral School of Iași, which is over 20 years old, various modifications have been made throughout time, and the result right now is that the scientific doctorate is predominantly accepted. In the context created by the topic of this research,

¹¹ Doctoral Studies – Theatre and Performance Arts, “I.L.Caragiale” Theatre and Cinema National University, Bucharest, in <https://admitere.unatc.ro/doctorat-teatru-si-artele-spectacolului/> (accessed on 25.11.2024)

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Metodologii cercetare Teatru* [Theatre research methodologies], DOCTART IOSUD UNAGE IAȘI, in <https://doctart.ro/metodologii-cercetare-teatru/> (accessed on 29.11.2024)

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

without taking anything from the value, importance and usefulness of the scientific doctorate formula, the lack of an alternative ensures, from the beginning, the presence of a *determined* act. A possible structuring of the *voluntary act*, according to the article on the subject written by psychologist Liliana Irofte, would contain: 1. Conceiving the situation – establishing the goal to be attained; 2. Deliberation – examining the available solutions, going through pros and cons, according to the system of values that they have, hesitations and oscillating between various alternatives; 3. Decision – retaining one course of action from all those available; 4. Execution – acting and attaining the proposed goals.¹⁵ Analysing the four stages presented above, we can easily see that, in the case of only one possible course of action, we are no longer talking about a voluntary act, but rather about an *imposed* one. I, for one, first had to deal with hesitations, fears, and doubts regarding the fact of taking on an endeavour the size of a scientific doctorate, but, without an alternative, I “dared” go down this road, accepting its challenges and novelty.

Imposed and *necessary* are both terms showing different degrees of obligation, since a *necessary* action also involves some degree of constraint on one’s will. It is now known that doctoral studies are indispensable for obtaining a teaching position in an academic environment. This “requirement” can attract the appearance of a considerable number of cases of “forced” completion of bachelor’s and master’s studies by means of the doctoral ones and the formal, unjustified awarding of the title “doctor.” To that effect, I will quote from an article which is also applicable to the present context, referring, this time, to the situation of medical graduates who desire a university career: “A doctorate is compulsory if you want to enter the teaching system and, if you go into research after graduation, you implicitly arrive at a doctorate.”¹⁶ This quote is followed by an optimistic statement which is also a goal: “A doctorate is not a burden, it is only a necessity for those who want to teach.” Searching for arguments for these statements, I discovered a series of opinions about this on a well-known forum and I will only quote two of them which are more or less opposed to each other: 1. “You don’t pursue a doctorate for it to ‘help you in life’ – it is only for people who want to not only go deeper into a field, but also to contribute to its development.” and 2. “...yes, it has helped me realise that I would never go through that again. No one so far has mentioned the psychological burden of a doctorate, if you are the type of person who really

¹⁵ Liliana Dorofte. *Structura și calitățile actului volitiv* [The structure and qualities of the volitional act], in https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/107-112_22.pdf (accessed on 29.11.2024).

¹⁶ Ioana Nicolescu (2015). *În ce condiții este doctoratul obligatoriu pentru absolvenții de medicină* [The terms under which doctoral studies are compulsory for medical graduates], “Adevărul”, 12 January, in <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/educatie/in-ce-conditii-este-doctoratul-obligatoriu-pentru-1592032.html> (accessed on 29.11.2024).

wants to be good (not to say perfect) at what they do. Going deeper into any field shows you how little you actually know about it, so, paradoxically, the deeper you go, the more you think you have no business being there.”¹⁷

Regarding the term *culture*, which is the basis of the current endeavour, from the multitude of existing definitions, I have chosen the one that seemed to me to support the certification of doctoral studies as a cultural act: “Culture is the social heritage made of thinking, feeling and thinking patterns characteristic to a population or society, including the expression of those patterns in concrete things.”¹⁸ Constituting a thinking pattern becoming concrete in the paper itself, the doctorate is doubtlessly part of the social heritage of a population and is a result of its author’s action and feeling. Ever since I engaged in the doctoral endeavour, I did not hesitate to see it as something other than a cultural act. Doctoral topics should not ignore the cultural contribution that they can bring by being developed in ample papers. After checking some university websites which allow us to see the names of the doctoral theses in the field, I have become convinced that they contain, in essence, topics of cultural interest. Locally, the archive of the Doctoral School of Iași contains paper names such as: *Teatrul Național din Iași în anii de tranziție 1945-1948. Directori și directorate* [The Iași National Theatre during the transition years – 1945-1948. Managers and managing plans], *George Banu. Portretist al marilor creatori de teatru* [George Banu – a portraitist of the great theatre creators], *Monologul shakespearian în spectacolul contemporan românesc (1990-2015)* [Shakespearian monologue in the contemporary Romanian theatre performance (1990-2015)], while the Theatre and Performance Arts Doctoral School within the UNATC Bucharest proposes papers such as: *Școli de teatru, stiluri, metode, generații, poetici* [Theatre schools, styles, methods, generations, poetics], *Interferența teatrului cu alte arte și fenomene culturale* [The interference of theatre with other arts and cultural phenomena] or *Noi direcții în estetica și teoria teatrului* [New directions in the aesthetics and theory of theatre].

A final point of interest for this paper’s topic will be a brief presentation of the professional ethics criteria which are the foundation of the relationship between the doctoral coordinator, the candidate and the doctoral commission, although we certainly cannot exhaust a topic which involves a high degree of mobility and unpredictability. These criteria, which have also been expressed

¹⁷ *Do you have doctoral university studies? If so, have they helped you in life in any way?* – reddit/Romania, in https://www.reddit.com/r/Romania/comments/uutiag/ave%C8%9Bi_studii_universitare_de_doctorat_dac%C4%83_da_vau/?rdt=38944 (accessed on 01.12.2024).

¹⁸ *Cultura – definiție, componente, termeni înrudiți. Tipuri de cultură* [Culture – definition, components, related terms. Types of culture] in <https://ro.scribd.com/document/252598815/Cultura> (accessed on 01.12.2024).

by imposing limits in professional conduct, especially in the direct relationship between the coordinator and the candidate, also refer to the various possible situations in which: 1. the candidate's age is close to the age of the coordinator (and the commission!), 2. the candidate is younger than them or has recently earned their Master's Degree or 3. (less frequent) the coordinator is younger than the candidate. Some of these criteria are:¹⁹ honesty (towards oneself and towards one's partners during the doctoral studies) and moral integrity, reflected also in discouraging any fraud, plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of the information in the paper; there is a General Code of Ethics in Scientific Research which has in view international regulations in the field regarding ethics in scientific research.

Conclusions

In this context, I believe that it is fundamental for the doctoral coordinator to possess a high level of culture, general knowledge in the field and openness towards the novelty of the subject proposed by the candidate, as well as to show constant interest in supporting the candidate in the specific research they are undertaking. To the same degree, corrections and suggestions coming from the coordinator should be received objectively by the candidate, who needs to use them in the paper according to the former's guidance. Certainly, there are many cases when the candidate opposes these modifications, considering them unfounded, so the coordinator's task is that much more complex – as they need to convince the candidate that they are right, find a middle ground or even give way to the candidate altogether. The mediator role in such situations may be played by the doctoral commission, as they may have to reunite particularly for this purpose before the presentation of a “problematic” report or even the final paper.

I, for one, have enjoyed support and have been offered specialised literature and welcome suggestions, necessary modifications and appropriate advice, all while a doctoral coordinator may have to make a tremendous effort in this process, as they are often overwhelmed by many other tasks within the institution where they work. The change that occurred during my studies, due mainly to the situation presented above, has not altered my doctoral endeavour and has improved and enriched my personal relationship with my new coordinator and with the members of the current commission. The materials and suggestions offered by the whole team have contributed to the improvement of the current form and structure of my future doctoral thesis.

¹⁹ The Romania Government, The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, *Ghid practic privind etica în cercetarea științifică* [A practical guide regarding ethics in scientific research], in <http://date-cdi.ro/sites/default/files/uploads/1.%20ghid%20privind%20etica%20%C3%AEn%20cercetarea%20%C8%99tiin%20%C8%9Bific%C4%83%20.pdf> (accessed on 01.12.2024)

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