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Romania in Transition: An Exploration of Dramatic Themes

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Romania today is a culture that presents many paradoxes. It struggles to fix its identity and to envision a future that exists after the fall of Communism. Stripped of their theatrical past, Romanian playwrights have created a new theatrical landscape for their plays to exist in. They are fighters, speaking out about what is happening in their country, and it is the intention of this thesis to illuminate what these playwrights see that we may not. This thesis explores modern Romanian plays (defined herein as plays that are written in or after the year 2000), within the context of Romanian history, and identifies prevalent themes that surface in these works. It uses theatrical texts to explore Romania's current transition period, and to examine issues of identity and the cultural anxieties that plague both Romanian and American societies today.

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INTRODUCTION

PECA: ...Anyway, the thing is that usually Romania is a misunderstood concept. In your mind it equals Dracula, vampires, incest, communism, Russia, third-world countries. But I can tell you it's much more than that. (beat) Much more than that. (beat) A whole lot more. (pause for thinking) I won't enumerate right now, but please take my word for it.
-Peca Ștefan, *Romania 21*

Romania today is a culture that presents many paradoxes. It struggles to fix its identity and to envision a future that exists after the fall of Communism. In this thesis we will be examining modern Romanian plays (defined herein as plays that are written in or after the year 2000), within the context of Romanian history, and identifying prevalent themes that surface in these works. We will be using the texts to explore Romania's current transition period, and to examine issues of identity and the cultural anxieties that plagues Romanian society today.

Under Communist rule, Romanian playwrights were given the choice of writing realism that furthered state policies or risking

imprisonment for espousing dissident political views. If playwrights wanted to challenge the system they had to do so through coded, Aesopian language and the use of metaphor and symbolism. After Communist leader Ceaușescu's death, playwrights found themselves free to throw off the shackles of duplicity and to commit themselves to a more direct form of communication. What resulted from this was silence.

In the first years that followed the revolution of 1989 Romanian plays were virtually eliminated from the repertory of the theatres. During this time, fewer Romanian plays were produced than in the most repressive period of communist rule, when it was mandated that fifty percent of the performances were to be by Romanian authors. Self-induced exiles like director Andrei Serban returned to Romania after over twenty years away from home, only to grow disenchanted by the state of the theatre.

When Serban returned to Romania in 1990 to assume direction of the National Theatre in Bucharest, he expressed the hope that “the big mirror that is our theatre would no longer be condemned to reflect

reality indirectly only through metaphors, but freed from censorship and cleansed of the old and no longer in need of metaphors, the mirror could reveal the truth of our present human experience” (Stefanova and Waugh 181). What he discovered was that it was too soon for this sort of reflection in the theatre. After only three years back in Romania, Serban left his country for a second time.

The playwrights I have chosen to focus on in this thesis are all attempting to do what Serban had only dreamed of: to reveal the truth of their human experience in a direct way. Gianina Cărbunariu’s commented on this in an interview with the New York Times saying, “We are looking for the important themes of Romanian reality. It’s time for our generation to take some responsibility. During communist times, everything was metaphorical. Now we have to make a connection with reality” (Orel).

Stripped of their theatrical past, these playwrights have created a new theatrical landscape for their plays to exist in. Each and every one of them has dedicated themselves to a language that does not shy away from the reality that they exist in, but is dirty, gritty, and violent.

They are fighters, speaking out about what is happening in their country and it is the intention of this thesis to illuminate what these playwrights see that we may not.

Playwriting has changed for the new generation, according to Romanian playwright Saviana Stanescu. Playwrights in their twenties are even bolder now than those that came before them. “The younger generation is going further than we did. They are writing about how fucked-up things are” (Schreck). She describes the writers in their 20’s as having “a new style, rediscovering writing in their own terms.” Playwrights in their 30’s, like herself, she continued, “write about identity, about living in two worlds” (Orel).

It is this struggle with identity, and the constant negotiation between the old and new values of the country, that makes many of these plays resonate so strongly in our own culture. Living in the post-George W. Bush era, there is a sense of contention and resentment present amongst the young generation of Americans that mirrors that of the Romanian playwrights represented herein. As Americans, we

have inherited a ruined empire from our previous leaders and been left to survive in the ashes.

If we are to truly understand the works of these young Romanian playwrights we must first examine where they are coming from, and the context in which the plays were written. In the case of Romania, it all returns to December of 1989, and the beginning of the Romanian Revolution.

THE REVOLUTION

There are different versions as to what sparked the Romanian Revolution of 1989, however most scholars attribute it to the events of December 16th, 1989. What began as a protest in the town of Timisoara soon grew into a political uprising. The protest was in support of a rebellious Protestant Hungarian minister, Reverend Laszlo Tokes, who was believed to be facing deportation for sermonizing against Ceaușescu. A small meeting of parishioners, including women and children, met in front of Tökes house, and by that night they were seen marching through the streets.

The town hall was raided by those who joined the masses, a fire was set in the street below, and the situation quickly developed into an anti-government riot which required police and military forces to control. Tanks and armored cars opened fire and ran down men, women, children, and the elderly alike. As rumors of the Timisoara massacre circulated that night riots broke out in Arad, Sibiu, and Cluj in outrage for the civilian blood that was shed.

In an effort to bolster public support, Ceaușescu made the grave error of holding a rally in the center of Bucharest on December 21st. Boos and jeers erupted in the 100,000-strong audience, as chants of “TI-MI-ȘOA-RA” and the song “Awake, Romanians” ripped through the crowds. In the middle of the rally, which was being televised live, the crowd unexpectedly became violent and tried to break through police lines. 13 young people were killed in the conflict and police used gunfire and armored cars to try and control the crowds. That night more Romanian citizens took to the street and began gathering in the center of Bucharest demanding Ceaușescu be overthrown. The next day Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena attempted to flee the country in their helicopter. They were captured by military forces and returned to Bucharest where they were put in front of a “kangaroo court”.

The trial of the Ceaușescu’s took place on December 25th and lasted for approximately fifty-five minutes. Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu were accused of crimes against their people: of living in a palace of gold while people died on the streets and eating from golden

platters while the people starved. Not only was Ceaușescu seen as living in luxury at the expense of the people but also in their eyes, he was responsible for the death of the innocent Romanians protesting in Timisoara. Ceaușescu never accepted responsibility for any of these accusations, in fact he refused to recognize the court at all.

Saviana Stanescu comments on this in her play *Waxing West* in a scene where the ghosts of the Ceaușescu's put the protagonist, Daniela on "trial" for her crime of stealing from the common wealth:

CEAUȘESCU: ...Our trial / was nothing but a parody plotted by foreign agencies and carried out by our own people. Poor stupid bastards, they got drunk on power. The power that I gave them! I made them. I created them. And how do they pay me back? They let themselves be manipulated by my enemies, the Western spies, by those jackals plotting to steal our country, to destroy the Golden Dream of Communism, to steal our wealth, to steal our lives...

ELENA (*overlapping CEAUȘESCU's speech*): Ours was not a trial. They killed us with no trial. A bunch of worms. No spines, no brains. We should have kept them in the darkness forever. Send them all to prison. Starve them to death. Crash all those ugly dirty pipsqueak thieves, those Romanians... (204-05)

Though they refused to answer allegations of their guilt, the Ceaușescu's were found guilty on all counts. On Christmas Day in 1989 the two were executed by firing squad- a gift to the Romanian people.

Under Ceaușescu the people of Romania had suffered a long and silent war. Ceaușescu reduced the country's foreign policy debt in the 1980's, but only by severely rationing food supplies, amenities, and energy. Though the country was rich enough to support its people, their leader decided otherwise, and the citizens suffered and died because of this. Furthermore, not everyone suffered these shortages equally. Ceausescu, his family, and the men closest to them, were able to live comfortably, even luxuriously, while the people starved.

In addition to this there were was a decree made in 1966 that declared that the fetus was the property of the entire society. Anyone who avoided having children could be seen as a deserter. Ceaușescu forced women to have children without proper nutrition or adequate prenatal care, which caused death rates amongst infants to soar. In

order to enforce these laws Ceaușescu created a police force dedicated to monitoring the pregnancy and propagation of Romanian women. Women under the age of 45 were taken from their workplaces every one to three months and brought to clinics where they would be examined for signs of pregnancy by police officers. A pregnant woman who failed to give birth could be called into question under the suspicion that they had, in fact, aborted their child. Women who did not, or could not, have children were forced to pay a “celibacy tax” of 10 percent of their earnings.

This created an environment in Romania that was equal to wartime conditions before the Revolution even happened. When the word of the Ceaușescu’s execution spread, the country erupted into a frenzy of celebration. The death of the Ceaușescu’s was, in a sense, a collective self-cleansing for the nation. All the atrocities of the past could be heaped upon the heads of the deposed leaders and then removed with their deaths. All had been tainted by the reign of Ceaușescu, to some extent, and now the people could finally exorcise the demons of their past. But is the past so easily erased?

THE TRANSITION PERIOD

The revolution was a turning point in the life of this country and in the lives of its artists. After this fateful day, Romania has found itself in a period of transition. Seemingly overnight this country has moved from a communist past to a capitalist future, but it is not without sacrifice. Peca Ștefan talks about this in his play *Romania 21*, describing the transition period as “the new Dracula” and a time when “everyday is new and exciting and everything changes and everybody tries to steal as much as they can from their fellow countrymen, and you can’t trust shit and you’re at risk for getting killed” (111).

Saviana Stănescu’s play *Waxing West* examines the way in which values have shifted during the transition period, resulting in old and new Romanian values being placed in conflict with one another today. *Waxing West* tells the story of a Romanian cosmetologist, Daniela, who is “sold” as a mail-order bride-to-be. Her mother, Marcela, arranges the marriage with the mother of a rich, young American engineer named Charlie Aronson. Neither Daniela, nor her younger brother Elvis, is thrilled with her marital arrangement but she

is eager to get out of Romania, and Elvis is content with the new VCR and video camera that is sent from Charlie.

Once Daniela arrives in America, she finds herself isolated. The only friend she has is a homeless Bosnian war veteran named Uros who begs from his wheelchair in Times Square. As Daniela tries to adjust to her new life in America, her nightmares become tangible as Romania's former dictators, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, return as vampires to haunt her dreams. The play moves between Daniela's former life in Bucharest and her new life in the United States, between the past and the present, and between an image of the American Dream and a reality that is far different than it is in the imagination.

In the play, Daniela's father is held up as a perfect example of the old ideals in the country. He holds on to the standards of a pre-Ceaușescu generation. He rebelled against Ceaușescu's reign, facing imprisonment for doing so, because others lacked the courage to protest. Even amidst the chaos of the revolution he held on to a position of honor where he was willing to starve before stealing from

the common wealth, and believed himself incapable of lying even though everyone around him was doing it.

Daniela's mother, Marcela, lives with post- Ceaușescu ideals that applaud thinking about yourself first and taking what is rightfully yours. She resents her husband for not showing the initiative to earn money after the revolution, like other Romanians, by stealing what was left after Ceaușescu's execution and selling it to the foreigners or, more specifically, the Americans.

MARCELA: ...All the smart guys in Romania, in Russia, in the whole Eastern Europe, did what was to be done, robbed the damn dead socialist state, seized those ugly gray factories, buildings, lands, Ceaușescu's gold, something, everything, everybody with a tiny bit of brain stole what was to be stolen, and everything was to be stolen, in '90, in '91, even in '92, one could make a fortune in a blink, one smart enough to be in the right place at the right time and sign a damn piece of paper, "this factory is mine," "those tons of oil are mine," "I'm the owner, I sell them to you," to the foreigners, to the Americans, for dollars, REAL money, that's all, MONEY, privatizing yourself, bribing who was to be bribed, opening businesses! Everybody moved around but your father...

ELVIS: Played chess in the park with the other retired guys.

MARCELA: "I cannot lie," "I cannot steal from the public wealth," like there was anyone there to judge him if he would. Everybody was doing the same. Everyone who had the/brain to... (175-176)

We see this mentality again when Daniela's mother is given a letter from her poor neighbor begging for an opportunity to work so she can have heat in the winter. Marcela is obviously moved, but this does not, however, mean that she is inclined to generosity towards those that are less fortunate than herself. Rather, she insists that her daughter take a more "western" approach to the situation and think of herself first. Contrary to the old values held in the country, Marcela suggests to her daughter that "If you keep thinking like this, you'll be a loser even in America. This is how people get rich there: they take care of each Mr. Green, they save every cent. There is no such thing as "lend" if you don't get something in return" (190-91).

The transition period in *Romania 21* further illuminates the way in which the ideals of Romania shifted from the time of Ceausescu to the present day. In this play we follow a Romanian family living in

the transition period as they try to achieve their dream of creating the perfect family and life, only to see their dreams fall apart. There is an anxiety present in this play, indeed in all of the plays discussed in this thesis, that is inherently linked to the transition period Romania finds itself in. It is a time in which everyone is anxious to find a job, a mate, and an identity outside of communism.

In the beginning of the play the main character, Ion, struggles to find himself within communist Romania and prays to God for guidance.

ION: Dear God, my name is Ion. I don't know if you exist, but if you do, please talk to me. I don't know what to do with my life. I don't know where to go. I do not have a job. I do not have any real talent or anything. I do not have any particular wish to succeed. I live in a communist country. I'm a mediocre man. I'm not free, I cannot think free, I cannot dream free, I don't know how to do any of those things. I live in a basement. I need you, God. I'm insecure and Romanian... (114)

God advises Ion that in order to succeed you must "think only about yourself, your land, your family. This is all about *you*. *You* have

to be happy, *you* have to be satisfied. Do so, my child, and you shall live a happy and rich life” (115).

This reference shows the self-serving Communist system that many Romanians found themselves oppressed by. Placing personal needs above those of others could often be seen as a survival mechanism of a traumatized nation. Ceaușescu sold his people’s food to other countries while the people starved so it is not difficult to imagine that citizens would find it necessary to look out for themselves. This precept would provide a firm groundwork for the capitalist mentality present in Romania today.

Ion himself follows God’s advice to focus on his own self-advancement and marries a young, virginal, Romanian girl to start a family with. In order to provide a nice home for his blossoming family he has his own father thrown in prison. When capitalism finally comes to Romania, Ion benefits from the economic turn-around and he and his wife begin to do what everyone else is doing: they sell anything of value to the highest bidder.

Ion gets a government job and spends most of his time away from home while his wife, Mio, pursues a career as a talk-show host offering advice to her faithful viewers.

MIO: I know that after a prolonged period of absence and abstinence, one could only ask oneself, “Where do I go from here? What can I do from now on? Should I start cheating on my husband?” Well, ladies, the answer is: do what I did. Ignore his absence in everyday life, sell more babies than he does, start drinking heavily, and resort to high-level prostitution. You might land some big TV show job, who knows, right? You might become one of the country’s most obnoxious and respected TV stars. Start feeding innocent people theories about relationships and fashion when your own relationship is on the rocks and you dress like hell. Smoke a lot. Smoke a lot of pot. Lose pounds. That will make you feel better. And puke! Just keep on puking and your figure will bloom. Take my word for it, I’ve been there, done that. And to tell you the truth I think the nature of contemporary Romanian women is to just sell their bodies to very rich men...Have I lost my sense of independence? No way! It’s just now that I’m starting to feel universal! (*pause*) And before I introduce our first guest today, one last piece of advice: abandon your children! It’s Romania, they’ll manage to grow up anyway! And you’ll have much more time for shopping and sleeping around! (138-139)

Mio is willing to sacrifice everything she has, including her family, her health, and her self-respect, to get ahead in the world. Like

her husband she thinks only of herself and their daughter becomes a product of this self-centered environment. Fifi also sells her highest asset, her body, in her aspirations to be famous. In her acceptance speech for the Golden Stag Award (an award given to pop artists in Romania) Fifi offers this observation:

FIFI: ...I know I'm hot, I know the other girls in the band are hot. Yes. Well, to tell you the truth, I wanted to do pornography. It's about time Romanian porn gets out there, becomes visible. I think it's only natural for our TV stars, dancers, and pop singers to get involved in porn. We look so hot. We all do. All Romanian women should do porn and prostitution. That's what Cristi and my mother taught me, yes. Yeah. Yes, I know a lot of people say we can't sing, or dance, or speak proper Romanian. But that's my point. In porn, you *don't need* all of that! You just need to know how to sleep with somebody. We're all experts at that, right? Yes. Yes. I'm going to star in porn movies. Of course I'm eighteen.
(150-151)

Fifi's speech shows the generational depravity that thrives within the new Romanian capitalist system, as interpreted by this theatrical text. For Fifi all that matters is sex appeal and if sex is an easy commodity for women to come by, why not sell it to get ahead?

This is the forward-thinking way of things; this is the way to get ahead. In the new Romania, everything is for sale.

CAPITALISM COMES TO ROMANIA

Vera Ion continues to explore the problems of capitalism and the mythical American Dream in her play *Vitamins*. *Vitamins* tells the story of a seemingly typical Romanian family struggling to live out their dreams. Father is a self-made business man who dreams of remodeling his home and taking a much-needed vacation to Hawaii, Mother is a stay-at-home mom who lives vicariously through her children's achievements, Andrea is a young tennis player struggling with her budding sexuality, and Bro is the black sheep of the family—the college dropout who works at McDonald's and doesn't know the value of money.

In the play, Bro runs away from home with a girl he found in the McDonald's ball pit and the family is thrown into a state of chaos. Traditional family roles dissolve as a familiar dysfunctional family arises from the ruins. Mother stops cooking in order to make time for re-living her college days, Father drowns himself in work and starts having sex with his boss while their daughter Andrea locks herself in her room in an attempt to isolate herself from the chaos around her.

When it is discovered that Bro is, in fact, alive and well thanks to a 50,000 euro donation, Father is not relieved, as would be expected. Rather, he is disgusted.

FATHER: I can't believe it.

MOTHER: Thank God he's alright.

FATHER: He'd better be dead.

MOTHER: What?

FATHER: You have to work for money. You can't get it just like that.

MOTHER: What?

FATHER: I am a hard-working man and I'll never get 50,000 euros. And this moron gets 50,000 euros. It's not right.

MOTHER: Go get some sleep. You're tired. You talk nonsense.

FATHER: I'm not fucking tired. How is this possible? That's what I want to know. You can't get such a slap on the face after a life of hard work. I know him well. He would never have managed to EARN that money. He has no talent, no personality, no wit, he's lazy, he can't make decisions! I know him!

MOTHER: JUST THANK GO HE'S OKAY AND SHUT UP!

FATHER: Fuck "okay." (72)

To Father, the most important thing in life is a good work ethic. To live off of handouts is a disgrace and, more importantly, it is a personal insult to everyone who is trying to make a decent living. In short, it is a slander against everything Father has worked for. He takes pride in what he does, enlisting everyone he knows into the family business, and picking up business partners whenever the opportunity arises. In Father's Romania, everything is free to those possessing the insight and courage to take what is rightfully theirs.

FATHER: ...Do you know how many new partners I found in the last two days? Fifteen. Do you know that yesterday I went all by myself to do the shopping? Seven new partners while I was shopping! It's somehow natural now for me to convince them. Do you know how long it took me to make the shop woman downstairs join my business? Three minutes. I just asked her "What's your secret dream? Just take my arm. Trust me. I will lead you to your dream." You have to be really good at words. After reading our booklet, she gave me a dozen Gillette

Ultra Sensor packs for free. That's what it's all about.
Successful partners for a successful business. (77)

The only one Father can't seem to convince is his son. Unlike Fifi in *Romania 21* Bro rebels against the values of his parents. When he dies he comes back to visit his family members through their dreams. Upon entering his father's dream, Bro is confronted by the fact that his own father doesn't recognize him. The only thing that matters to Father is his business and whether or not Bro ties into it.

Father quizzes Bro on what he does for a living, besides working at McDonald's, and Bro answers,

BRO: I saved a girl, she was...I mean...She had a shitty life here. And now, after I took care of her, she's alright. She went to the US with a scholarship. It's the most important thing that ever happened to me, I mean...It's the most important thing I've ever done.

BRO as FATHER: "And did you tell her to join our family business?"

BRO: "No."

BRO as FATHER: "Aha."

BRO: Father writes down something in a notebook. I feel like shit. Maybe I should have told her to join the business... (86-87)

Bro's heroism is not respected or acknowledged by his father. Instead, he is chastised for not taking advantage of a prime business opportunity. This is the world these children have inherited.

When his family finally realizes he is dead, after days of his rotting corpse sitting in a box beside them, they do not feel the remorse or sadness one would expect of a grieving family. Instead, they feel inconvenienced, even betrayed, by his untimely death.

MOTHER: No, this can't be true. I wonder what I have done wrong to deserve such a terrible fate. Wasn't I a good mother? Why did this have to happen to me- all I've ever done was love and support my family? Why should he do this to me?

FATHER: This boy never understood the way things go.

MOTHER: You love your children all your life and you get...this??

FATHER: He was my child, after all. I invested all my trust in him. (95-96)

Bro is a bad investment, a bad business choice, whose failure to thrive in this capitalist society is seen as a poor reflection on his parents. In an effort to deal with their son's death, Bro's family decides that the best course of action is not to focus on the reality of the situation but instead to look to the future in an effort to learn something.

FATHER: ...Life is a lottery. Either you win, or you loose. If you want to be on the winner side...

ANDREA: You have to clean up.

FATHER: You have to keep fresh.

MOTHER: You have to keep a good vacuum cleaner and some clean clothes near you.

FATHER: You have to cut off all the rotten branches.

ANDREA: So you don't get rotten...

FATHER, MOTHER, and ANDREA: From their stinking smell. (99-100)

Bro is not capable of existing in the "Westernized" environment of his parents and so, like a rotting branch, he must be cut off before his imperfections spread to the whole family tree.

THE GENERATIONAL GAP

The change in Romanian ideals is even further suggested by the gap in generations represented in *Waxing West*. Marcela, and her husband, come from the pre-Ceaușescu era, they celebrated the death of their dictator, but were not seen shedding their own blood in the name of revolution. Daniela, on the other hand, was the one to fight in the streets rather than going to college. She was the one who surrendered her youth fighting for political freedom in her country and now she wants nothing more than to live in peace. Daniela's brother, Elvis, is the youngest generation, the farthest removed from Ceaușescu's reign, and the one that seems to have adapted the most readily to American pop culture.

Like his older sister he fights in the University Square against the current political situation, but he chooses to videotape what is being done, rather than joining in the brawl. The difference in generations is apparent in a scene between Daniela and her brother as she tries to convince him to stop his protest before he gets hurt.

DANIELA: You saw them only on TV! You were a ten-year-old snotty brat. I was HERE. In '89, in '90, in '92, in '96! Here for all of the protests of the opposition. Here at the revolution. Here! I've seen blood in this square!

ELVIS: Your opposition hasn't done shit. A bunch of corrupted snobs! Your Inthhhellectuals... They got us here, in this shitty situation, and washed their hands of us. We are doing goooooood! In the year of our Lord, 2000, we have to choose between the good old communist Iliescu and the bad old crazy Vadim, who declared he'd close the borders and take us back to the dark caves, where it seems we belong anyway... Funny isn't it? You have no choice but to vote for Iliescu, who sent the miners to beat your ass in '90... I hope you're not going to vote for Vadim!

DANIELA: I'm not going to vote for any one. I've had enough of all of them. I've had enough! (209-210)

Rather than staying to brave another fight Daniela chooses to leave the country in hopes of finding a place where she can finally have a little peace of mind. She leaves the violence of Romania behind, or so she believes, for the comfort and safety of American living.

THE MYTH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Daniela is seduced by the idea of the American dream- of a place where she can, in her mother's words, have EVERYTHING.

MARCELA: Robots that clean the house for you. Machines that cook by themselves. Money that is invisible numbers on a small card like this! She won't have to worry about anything. She can have her mind settled in the clouds forever" (190).

America, for Daniela, is like living in a movie. Everyone lives in a nice house and has "two floors, four bedrooms, two cars, one for you, one for your husband...breakfast and dinner with all the family...Three main courses. Two desserts! Everybody smiling! A coffee filter, a washing machine, a microwave..." (195).

What she finds once she arrives, however, is quite different. In her American reality, Daniela finds herself stranded at home with no ability to hold down a job, forced to clean, to cook the Romanian food that she so hates, and to play

kinky sex games with a man who is more interested in his laptop and plain bagels than his future wife. To make it worse, the erotic dramatization that Daniela's fiancée, Charlie, prefers in the bedroom is that of a traditional American icon- the turkey dinner. Every Sunday Charlie runs around wearing nothing but white socks on his feet, behind a stove made of boxes. He asks Daniela to chase him, threaten to eat him, and cut him with a plastic fork.

This twisted interpretation of a classic American celebration might seem strange to a more traditional-minded American, but Charlie is singularly uninterested in the American dream. He recognizes everything that society says he should want- the same things that Daniela herself has wished for- and he rejects them.

CHARLIE: I never wished to get married! I didn't want all that shit: two-story house, two cars, two kids, two dogs, weekends with the family. Fake communication. Fake smiles. Social convention...A cheap Hollywood movie!...A computer game is more entertaining than this old "Happy Family" game...Mom used to play it so well...I don't like being like everybody else!" (237-238)

Daniela and Charlie's searches for their own identity mirrors a crisis in both country's today. If the Golden Dream of Communism is not something to be strived for any longer and the American Dream is shown to be something false and undesirable, than what will be the national identity for the new generation?

NO ESCAPING THIS GENERATION

This new generation has been defined as the “sacrificed generation” by theatre critic Iulia Popovici. They are the young characters represented throughout this thesis and the individuals that are “constantly forgotten about when it comes time to talk about the future of the nation”. They are also those that are most often sold, abandoned, silenced, or killed in the plays we have examined.

Gianina Cărbunariu explores this sacrificed generation in her play *Stop the Tempo*. In this piece, three twenty-somethings in Bucharest decide to lash out against the materialistic and fast-paced society around them by going to nightclubs and shutting off the power.

ROLANDO: ENOUGH!- I scream
And then I stop; abruptly.
I'm no Sandokan
I'm a psychopathic
Child of a beast
Fed on Napalm
Dead from the start-
There was no solution
I'm the bear from the garbage

I'm the footage of the revolution.
(22-23)

As you can see from the passage above, this is not a generation that can be silenced. They are a representation of the ghosts that haunt Romania, reminding everyone around them of the truth that they are unwilling to face. We see this again in Bro's speech about his family when he says,

BRO: They won't feel me just like they won't feel the dirt and coughing when you smoke too much. They're all so shiny and beautiful even when they fight me like the virus that fucks up their little TV shaped, no good brains. I am the virus who destroys the shiny image in their head, that porno brightness when I see Mother eating breakfast I feel like I'm watching a porn movie, just like when I see my father shaving his porno movie face, when I see them fight and suffer and cheat they don't feel me they don't know who I am they know nothing about their son who now has become just a strange smell coming from under the table." (90)

In this passage Bro compares himself to a virus that invades and destroys the images in his parents head and I think this is a perfect allusion to what these playwrights are doing for Romania today. Like a destructive virus they are wreaking havoc on the tidy illusions they

see around them. Incurable and unstoppable, they refuse to quietly accept what they have been given.

IDENTITY CRISIS

This rejection of the status quo by Romanian playwrights brings up a crucial point of what happens to those who are unable to adapt to the new environment in Romania. In many cases, the answer is simply to leave. But when Bro leaves he finds himself alone in a foreign place that he does not exist in any more comfortably than the home that he left. What happens to these people who are caught in the space between two cultures? Once again we must turn back to *Waxing West* and to the character of Daniela.

As an alien, an immigrant in America, Daniela strives to let go of her Romanian heritage in exchange for an American one. As she becomes more westernized she begins to lose herself. This removal of one's cultural identity in exchange for another is a difficult task. One of the ways Daniela seems to be able to accomplish this goal is through waxing. Waxing, for her, is comparable to fighting. Fighting "against the unwanted hair that keeps reminding you it's there, inside your skin, ready to show its ugly head. Like fighting against death..."

(186) Because hair is dead yet continues to grow, the act of waxing could be perceived as the removal of death from one's body, however Daniela makes it more violent than that.

The pain of waxing is as important as the removal itself. When she is asked whether she likes to wax herself, Daniela replies "I like to see the wax destroying the hair" (187). It is only through the utter destruction of that which mars beautiful surfaces that we see any significant victory. If people have the determination, they have the ability to change themselves, they can take matters into their own hands, and they can successfully eliminate any hints of imperfections.

The real tragedy in this play comes with the acknowledgement that any seeming elimination of imperfection is only successful on a surface level. We can wax and wax, in a sense, but the hair will always return, and so we will continue to fight a losing battle. Identity, in this way, is also inevitable. Daniela may change the way she speaks, moves, dresses, or even thinks, to appear more American, but below the surface she will always be Romanian.

Because of this, there exists an inevitable gap between two worlds for Daniela. She will never be truly Romanian *or* American yet she exists in both *America and* Romania. She is an alien, in every sense of the word, caught irrevocably between two very different cultures. The only thing that seems to connect these worlds is pain. We see this in the last scene of *Waxing West* with an intertwining of the horror of September 11th and the panic of the Romanian revolution.

As the World Trade towers collapse, Daniela sees a physical manifestation of the end of the American Dream. All hopes of safety and peace seem to disintegrate, and the dream of living in a world that is free from the violence of her past, is shattered. The walls crumble in Bucharest and the Golden Dream of Communism is simultaneously destroyed, just as the towers in New York fall and the American Dream falls with them. For the first time Stanescu shows us a bigger picture of identity and what happens to a nation when its very core is shaken.

Daniela holds a unique perspective on the tragedy of 9/11 because of her position as a foreigner. She stands as a witness to both historical atrocities, and she is both enmeshed in her search to find her husband, and isolated due to her alien status. By the end of the play, she never seems to be fully integrated into any culture. She never escapes the ghosts of her past, though she does manage to stave them off. One can never truly escape their cultural heritage, it seems, but it is possible to occupy a position in the in-between of two cultures. Solidarity comes with shared loss and, as Daniela says “Pain speaks all languages” (243).

CONCLUSION

Though Romania finds itself in a state of societal upheaval, there is hope to be found in the middle ground of the country's past and political future. A sense of anxiety is to be expected in these turbulent times but if the country is in unrest it is because it is moving forward. What caused so many theatre artists to flee from Romania after the fall of communism was the sense of stasis in the arts. Romania was still trapped in the theatrical past and so it could not reflect the current times. Whether Romania is moving in the right direction today cannot be ascertained at this moment but one fact is encouraging- it is moving.

Romanian playwrights have much to say about the state of their country today and we would be well advised to pay attention. Whether these plays can be seen as a true interpretation of the Romanian situation is debatable however they still provide an insight into their culture that cannot be gained otherwise. Art either conforms to the society it springs from or it rebels against it. These playwrights are definitely rebels, showing their homeland's scars to anyone who will

look. Only time will tell whether this will provoke the change they seem to be calling for, however one thing is certain- these young playwrights have a voice and the only question that remains to be answered is whether Romania will listen.

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