

Analysis of Docudrama Techniques and Negotiating One's Identity in David Edgar's *Pentecost*

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Abstract

Edgar manages to invert the subordinate function of generally accepted objective indicators of membership of a particular national group—language, religion, common history, and territory—into the essential mode of imperative distinction shaping the unique national identity. In other words, it is the fresco and the value assigned to it that defines and consigns meaning to Catholic or Orthodox denomination, the refugees, and their hostages in *Pentecost*, not vice versa. The fact that it is only after they learn about the hypothetically enormous estimated value of the painting that Fr Petr Karolyi and FrSergei Bojovic fervently announce the fresco (as well as the abandoned church where it was discovered) as belonging to their particular denomination, which enunciates that each of the national constituents in their lack of distinctive features suffers from processes similar to the major redesigning and reconstruction of the sense of identity in the nation.

Keywords: docudrama, Pentecost, identity, imitation, crticssim

1. Introduction

“Docudrama” (also drama-documentary, drama-doc or docu-fiction) is a type of drama (usually a film, television show, or play) that combines elements of documentary and drama. It may consist entirely of actors performing recreations of documented events, or (in the case of film and television docudramas) may combine that with contemporaneous footage of the events themselves,” (<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Docudrama>). Although the term was first used seven decades ago by John Grierson, its definition is still controversial. Not only the definition of the term documentary is still complex and difficult but also the developed genres that go under it (Eitzen, 1995, p. 81). Some definitions will be discussed in this paper to clarify the topic. In the early 1950s, Edgar E. Willis defines it as “a program presenting information or exploring an issue in a dramatic fashion, with story emphasis usually on the social significance of the problem” (Willis, 1951, p. 101 in Bartlett Musburger, 1984, p. 10). According to Kaiser, docudrama is a combination of real events and fiction as he defines it as the “dramatization of actual events using actors and actresses as opposed to a pure documentary, which uses real people and events” (1980, p. 42). Another definition by Ogunleye:

The drama documentary simulates reality, and is used to analyze current events and issues. Drama documentaries are based on fictional events, which are derived from in depth research, resulting in believable scenarios. On the other hand, the docudrama is usually based on historical events, thereby providing an analysis of past proceedings (Free Dictionary). The docudrama is the marriage of two unlikely forms—the documentary and drama. The documentary is a record of factual events. It is the story of ‘something’ or the process or the process of ‘something’. On the other hand, drama is the imitation of life- a contrived story. The docudrama can therefore be described as a hybrid genre (2005, p. 480).

To sum up, it is clear that, “the docudrama is a fact-based representation of real events. It may represent contemporary social issues –the “facts-torn-from-today’s-headlines” approach — or it may deal with older historical events,” (“The Museum of Broadcast Communications”).

In fact, docudrama has many categories. Hoffer and Nelson (1980, pp. 162-163) assert only nine categories of docudrama:

1) Monologues: Events or personal aspects in the lives of actual persons based on documentary evidence, performed by one person.

- 2) Historical: Recreated, non-contemporary, non-religious events with emphasis clearly on the events and not personalities.
- 3) Biographical: Programs which portray events in the lives of actual persons but with emphasis on the personality of the subject.
- 4) Contemporary: Distinguished from types 2 and 3 because of topical or contemporary relevance, but also dealing with actual persons and events.
- 5) Religious: Historical religious figures and themes drawn from religious writings.
- 6) Documentarized Fiction: Based on actual occurrences, but characters are fictionalized or composite.
- 7) Aberrations: Speculations about what might have been.
- 8) Partial Docudrama: Partially recreated events in the lives of actual persons, usually centering on historical events.
- 9) Fictionalized Documentary: Based on actual characters but occurrences are fictionalized or composite.

Musburger (1984, p. 14) summarizes the main criticisms to docudrama in his words “Major criticism of docudrama has been based in the belief that they often distort history, advance prejudices and concepts in reckless disregard of facts, and the writers may invent and rearrange characters, events, or time and present the truth.” Besides these, we can state three challenges for docudrama:

The first challenge is to sort out and select meaningful events, to collect and combine this data and finally, to derive a meaning from the sequences of events.

The second challenge is to find out a meaningful way of presenting this event data to the user. To these end three alternative foci for event presentation can be provided: the focus may be put on the interaction with folders and documents, present something more abstract like the story of a project, or present the interaction between team members.

The third challenge is to present the project’s history and progress of work in an entertaining way which captures the users’ attention and conveys complex information fast and effectively (Schafer et al., 2003, p. 46).

2. Background of Docudrama

Theatre and motion pictures are considered the origins of docudrama. Actually, playing real events in theatre is as old as the history of theatre itself “according to theatre historians, all Greek tragedies of the influential golden age of the Greek theatre are based on history or myth, although each playwright rendered his own interpretation,” (Bartlett, 1984, p. 61). This kind of plays appeared also in Shakespeare’s theatre. Historical records are used by Shakespeare as a source for many of his plays (Borenstein, 1999, p. 38). “Following World War II, the German theatre developed the ‘theatre of fact’, which also was known as ‘docudrama’. By the 1960s this genre used actual events, generally recent, to explore a concern for guilt and responsibility in public affairs and morality,” (Bartlett, 1984, p. 62).

Early documentaries are also the antecedents of docudrama. Although the definition of the documentary genre itself was unclear during the early years, one can still claim that these early documentaries became the sources for the development of docudrama genre since they were reinterpreting the reality. For instance, Flaherty’s 1922 dated famous documentary *Nanook of the North* includes some interpretations of real life and there was also fiction in the film. Actually, Flaherty interpreted Nanook’s real life through the use of the camera. Besides, Flaherty also reconstructed scenes inside the igloo since the family’s real igloo was too small and dark to shooting film in it (Brummitt, 2007, p. 10).

All these interpretations and reconstructions of the reality in all these art genres led to the development of docudrama as a useful and preferable documentary genre. But one can say that the originator of docudrama is the historical drama.

All the same, the docudrama improves on the historical drama through its use of actuality presented in recordings of events and locales where possible, and closeness to original stories. This form (docudrama) arose because of the desire of filmmakers during the post-war period in Europe to utilize the documentary format developed during the war in the commercial arena. (Ogunleye, 2005: 482).

3. David Edgar

David Edgar is a British playwright and journalist. He is the most creative dramatist of the post-1960s generation in Great Britain. He was born on 26 February 1948. His works are known for their strong political

content. Edgar has written for many companies in Britain, including the Royal Shakespeare Company. Edgar wrote *Destiny* (Other Place, Stratford, 1976; Aldwych, 1977), *Nicholas Nickleby* (Aldwych, 1980; Plymouth Theatre, New York, 1981); *Maydays* (Barbican Theatre, London, 1983); *a version of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Barbican, 1991); and *Pentecost* (Other Place, 1994, Young, 1995). He is the only living playwright to have had original plays directed by the incumbent Artistic Directors of both the major British companies (Trevor Nunn, co-director of *Nicholas Nickleby* for the RSC, and Sir Peter Hall, who directed Edgar's reworking of *Entertaining Strangers* for the National Theatre in 1987).

Edgar is interested in dramatizing problematic relations between individuals within a public context in his plays, *Destiny* (1976) and *Maydays* (1983), which are considered to be important antecedents of *The Shape of the Table*, *Pentecost*, and *The Prisoner's Dilemma*. His works with factual material introduced a truthful reflection of the social life in Britain during the mid-eighties, these plays helped determine the nature of future Edgar's criticism (Peacock, p. 173).

Edgar's interest in showing the radical changes in the European political climate after the fall of the Berlin Wall "conflicting social perspectives" (Demastes, p. 136) was shaped in his urge which is improved by his "obsession with history and with the dialectic between the individual's private experience and the public, social world" (Demastes, p. 137). Edgar's "faction" technique of creating his schematic character with documentarily accurate reflections of the real political context in Britain and Europe suggests confusion and sometimes misunderstanding in the interpretation of his plays. In *Radical Stages*, Keith Peacock explain the "faction" technique as follows: "[Edgar's] major contribution to the historical drama [...] has been in his employment of what he himself has termed as 'faction'—a combination of fact and fiction" (p. 169). Indeed, Edgar was experimenting with "various fictional characters who were historically 'typical' of the evolution of left- or right-wing extra-parliamentary politics during the post-war years" (Peacock, p. 174) has limited the appreciation of *Pentecost* (1995) to the analysis of a near development of the playwright's aestheticism to social realism and, ultimately, his honorary position as "secretary for the times" (Painter 2). Critics like Susan Painter are tempted to see Edgar's evaluation of post-communist social history in his plays as a direct consequence of the evolution of the playwright's political views emerging from *Destiny* and *Maydays*. Critics' attention to Edgar's "faction" technique and his political views seem to distract them from a number of other issues as national identity negotiation raised in his plays. The "faction" technique was in part elaborated to reduce the complexity of the issues the plays deal with in order to fit the expectations of western audience. Ironically, it is the "faction" technique that has given *Pentecost* disparate criticism. Added to the confusion created by the "faction" technique, Edgar's political views openly expressed in his political journalism influence the critics' interpretations of his works. Emphasizing the complexity and diversity of Edgar's plays and how little has been done to illuminate his unique re-construction of history on the theatrical stage.

4. Pentecost

Five years after the Berlin Wall was knocked down, this play was written. It analyzes the consequences of the "new freedom" for Eastern Europe with its historical sweep and tragic violence although it seems to be an intellectual detective story. This appears clearly when the refugees enter, the discussion of the fresco changes from an academic observation of the rise of humanism and uneasy relation of East and West to an actual and tensely dramatic issue. It is also very comical, the non-English speakers have some effective comments as Gabriella Pecs' respond to Oliver Davenport's query to whether the church was Orthodox: "When we are Hungary, it Catholic, when we are holy Slavic people, Orthodox, when we have our friendly Turkish visitor who drop by for few hundred years, for while it mosque. When Napoleon pass through, it house for horses." The unnamed country refers to Bosnia with echoes of the events that took place in Sarajevo.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Pentecost shows the problem of negotiating one's identity as a self-among-a-multitude-of-others operation and it is expressed clearly through the metaphorical agency of the concept of mirror reflection. Edgar discusses the phenomenon of individual nationality as well as a collective of individuals or modern nation state. The concept of national identity and its constituent elements have different interpretations ranging from knowing national history and language. This appears simply when we have a name that is indicative of the individual's ethnic roots and thinking of oneself as belonging to a certain nationality. These interpretations perceived within a more global phenomenon of social identity negotiation, take on new significance when placed in the new social and political conditions of post-communist Europe. What unifies the individual instances of the characters' national self-identification manifested in the play is the image of an ancient fresco that is discovered in an old church and that becomes the grounds of a dispute between the characters. Edgar describes the fresco functioning as a

“fixed”/“static” mirror reflecting their collective identity. The fresco’s creators and its modern viewers experience its function in qualitatively marked different ways. Benedict Anderson’s argument will be employed to explicate this idea—staged within a larger dispute about nationalism and the concept of nation as “imagined community”—that invites us to “turn to the visual representations of the sacred communities, such as the reliefs and stained-glass windows of medieval churches, or the painting of early Italian and Flemish masters” in order to witness that “a characteristic feature of such representations is something misleadingly analogous to ‘modern dress’” (p. 22). He further argues that “the medieval Christian mind had no conception of history,” and therefore, “figuring the Virgin Mary with ‘Semitic’ features of ‘first-century’ costumes” (Anderson, p. 23) is an “unimaginable” undertaking since the masters conceived their religious paintings as representations of medieval reality. At the moment of the play, almost seven hundred years later, the fresco conflates its “curvature” with the “reflection” of reality, in Martinot’s terms, and produces a new surface that embraces both making the two forms inseparable and, at the same time, reflects back on the modern viewers. It follows, as the plot evolves, that the reflection communicated by the mural painting to the modern viewers (art historians, terrorists, judge, priests) is mistakenly understood by them as only individual-oriented, thus creating the perfect space for manifestations of their idiosyncratic conflicting constructs of national identity. Once these idiosyncrasies are voiced, they acquire a catalytic function, which, as Eva Knodt explains in her analysis of autopoiesis of communication, provokes a constant change in a social order “whose instability is the only source of its stability” (Knodt, xxix). Actually, this autopoiesis of communication is reconstructed in the play as a necessary element of paradoxical and unpredictable character of the process of identity negotiation. “Autopoiesis of communication” indicates the sense that communication requires zero consensus in order to continue its operations, according to Knodt.

The concept of national identity created by the characters in the historical context of *Pentecost* has multifaceted interpretations. The characters of *Pentecost* not only distinguish national identity idiosyncratically, but also conflate it with other manifestations of social identity. For example, some of them affiliate themselves to the nation-state (Germany, Belgium) that can potentially provide them with work and, consequently, help survive. There are two spheres from which this variety arises. The first sphere is external; it reveals how the nation-state attempts to negotiate a unique space among other nations, which is offset by its potential authority to rewrite European art history if the fresco discovered on its territory proves to be authentic. The second, internal, sphere deals with the individual citizens of this unnamed country and their struggle to negotiate their personal identity within the framework of a paradigm shift that occurs in the traditional understanding of nation and state.

Pentecost reveals the problem of negotiating one’s identity as a process that occurs on two social levels simultaneously. The first level concerns the process of individuals’ self-identification among other selves that are undergoing the same process. The second is recontextualized within a broader map of the process of national self-identification of a state among other nation-states. The metaphorical agency of the mirror reflection is the mechanism that Edgar employs in revealing the processes. The metaphorical agency of the mirror reflection is portrayed in the play through the medium of a newly-discovered mural painting. Marshall (2001) derives the ontological function of the artwork from Gadamer’s words as existing to assure the reader “that the truth does not lie far off and inaccessible to us, but can be encountered in the disorder of reality with all its imperfections, evils, errors, extremes, and fateful confusions” (p. 261). In *Pentecost*, the understanding and interdependent mode of identity negotiation in art and politics hesitates between the characters’ interpretations of true and untrue, subjective and objective, individual and collective, authentic and fraud. Edgar succeeds in showing that “the assertion that every artwork’s meaning and use are in fact political is evidently paradoxical (Marshall, p. 258). The paradox lies in the fact that any interpretation of the artwork is inherently political; therefore, it would be a mistake to single out one concrete interpretation among others as ideologically colored, as well as it would be inaccurate to label any such interpretation as a misreading of a work of art. Thus, the fresco in *Pentecost* stirs a multitude of interpretations that are all political in their nature and evoke the particular political use of the mural painting.

In fact, Edgar’s *Pentecost* is crucial for understanding the implications of the concept of national identity of the historical development in Eastern Europe. In *Pentecost*, Edgar establishes a variegated, complex, and ambiguous series of social relationships with a far-reaching political and social implications for their agents. These implications emerge from the agents’ self-identification as belonging to a certain national identity among a multitude of identities. He is able to achieve this in a number of ways. First, instead of reducing the process to a juxtaposition between two intrinsically irreconcilable ideologies, he emphasizes the complexity and heterogeneity of one seemingly monoculture and mono-ethnic nation-state, reflected in “an unnamed south-east European country” (xx). This heterogeneity is underscored through different dimensions of the social experience of the characters, as well as the instability of their ethnic identities, self-determination, and affiliation to the state

of origin. Edgar, in a subtle and compelling manner, complicates and intersects individual stories and perspectives on the events related by the actors with a stratum of broader issues such as art and its role in national identity formation. He explores the notion of history and its interpretation by individuals and by reporting it on stage, the playwright problematizes the actual constitution of the territory that is referred to as Eastern Europe, what makes the peoples inhabiting it feel a unifying cultural kinship as opposed to Western Europe. In a masterly way Edgar's *Pentecost* marks a shift in drawing national frontiers and reconceptualising the image of a state within Europe and questions the notion of purity embedded in determining ethnicity, culture, political and religious affiliation. One of the first things that strikes the reader is the cover of the play's printed edition, which already frames the interpretation (or at least directs the reader's anticipation) of the text through the use of a reproduction of Giotto's *Lamentation*, and together with the title "*Pentecost*" dictates that the topic of either religion or a work of art is going to play a vital role in the fabula. Rather, the concepts will be simultaneously interchangeable and polar especially in revealing their ideological essence and place in human development and self-determination supporting the assumption that "the political is not simply a good, nor even the highest good, but the only good, so that every other sphere of life must be subordinated to and measured by it" (Marshall, p. 258). The prominent religious nature of the painting is originally an icon. This nature asserts its value and power as a distinct factor in the formation of art history and social relations not only within the contemporaneous context but also outside it, in modern times. The ensemble of title and illustration discloses the underlying assumption that British or other west-European reader might misinterpret the work, because of the role of religion. Orthodox faith particularly, in the development of east European civilization cannot be underestimated.

In this paper, the interpretation of the play is based on reading of its dramatic discourse rather than theatrical, background and therefore the researcher may not be able to account for the potential modifications or complementary emphases made to generate certain effects on stage. The preamble and the opening scene of the first act reveal the implied connotation. First, the preamble/epigraph, which is a quotation of Leonardo da Vinci evoking the primary purpose of the painter in his work, invokes the idea of intentionality and reception of an artwork. Then, the arrival of Oliver, a British art historian, and Gabriella, an employee of the local art museum, in a church determine the direction of thematic development of the play. Inside the church, facing the audience is the wall, "on which a large heroic revolutionary mural has been painted" (xx) already suggests that the house of worship has not been lately used according to its purpose; moreover, the stage directions make it prominent that debris in the church are meant to "attest[ing] to the church's chequered history". Edgar deliberately does not provide his audience with the precise geographical location where the action of the play takes place. This may be done for several reasons, but there is no explicit indication in the stage directions or the preamble of the play justifying or interpreting this choice, except for the hint that though "the language of 'our country' is in fact Bulgarian [...] Bulgaria is not 'our country.'" Thus it is left to the readers' discretion as with which particular analogue from the choice of real south-east European countries should 'our country' be associated. Having discovered a mural painting "clearly very similar to Giotto's *Lamentation*"(xx) and strongly believing that it precedes the Italian work, Gabriella Pecs does not msh to disclose it to her colleagues at the National Museum because ironically in the "grown-up democracy" of her country "that's bullshit" (P. 10). Her personal firm belief that her finding pre-dates the *Lamentation* (which from this moment is argued to be a copy) in the light of her behavior and emotional discussion with Oliver yields insecurity and fear. She is afraid that the priceless work of art will be underestimated or declared a fraud by its very owners, and therefore the opportunity to acquire an independent distinct 'voice' in the world history of art and, by implication in the development of European civilization, will be lost forever. Gabriella attempts to prove the painting's authenticity not only for the purpose of adding to her country's collective identity, but also because with it she will be able to reconfigure what she sees as western view of her country and people:

GABRIELLA. You think we don't know what you say? East Europe. Where even crooks don't know what icons worth. Where you pick up masterpiece for string of beads. Where everything is ugly and pathetic. Where they botch up socialism and make even bigger botch of market system too.

To be taken seriously at home, and to be heard in the west about the painting's authenticity. Gabriella resorts to the authoritative judgment of an art historian from Great Britain, Oliver Davenport. The playwright makes it clear through the words of Gabriella Pecs that this struggle for self-determination and identity negotiation is not the product of modern cataclysms in whatever sphere they occur (political, military, social); instead it is a recurring historically-evoked construct of behavior triggered by the arrival of larger and more powerful groups denying this particular collectivity its national status. "When we are Hungary, it Catholic, when we are holy Slavic people. Orthodox. When we have our friendly Turkish visitor who drop by for few hundred years, for

while is mosque. When Napoleon pass through, is house for horses” (*Pentecost*, p. 5)—Gabriella goes on in telling Oliver the history of the church sheltering the fresco - “one abandoned church. As well as warehouse, church is used by heroic peasantry for store potatoes. [...] And before potatoes. Museum of Atheism and Progressive People’s Culture. And before museum, prison. [...] ‘Transit Centre’. German Army” (*Pentecost*, p. 5). Additionally, Edgar’s exploration of political implications of identity formation in Eastern European countries (and the unnamed south-east European country in the play particularly) positions this process beyond the acknowledged initial stage of becoming conscious of one’s national identity, and the process of self-definition as a nation-state. Conversely, Edgar exposes the conflict resulting from the indoctrinating policy of establishing an isomorphic relationship between the nation and the state by attempting to assimilate the variety of minority cultures within the dominant culture’s state borders. In doing so he alludes to the almost totalitarian politics installed by the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher. The conflict transgresses its locus and expands into new spaces geographically and politically. This transgression is most convincingly displayed in the scene of the violent interruption of refugees into the church. Consequently, paraphrasing Lynn Williams, the collective of Palestinian Kuwaiti, Azeri, Mozambican, Bosnian, Russian, Ukrainian, Afghan, Sri Lankan, and Kurd seeks political and physical power to protect a national identity they believe and represent. Although being detached from their indigenous territories, they negate their claim the conventionally established construct of territoriality being one of the first conditions of national existence. The issue of the correct dating of the fresco becomes even more confusing in the second scene of the first Act of the play, when two priests appear in the spotlight: “the Orthodox, middle-aged and bearded Father Sergei Bojovic and the younger Catholic Father Petr Karolyi” (*Pentecost*, p. 13). There is no open discussion of the relationship between the priests and the social context within which they operate. It is only clear that historically being ‘hereditary’ competitors for the ownership of the church—the information about this fight emerges in their constant reciprocal accusations—they have now united in their attempts to prevent the removal of the painting from the wall in the church onto a display panel in the National Museum:

BOJOVIC. It is more recent Catholic because in 1940 Roman Church in thrall to aristocratic-military regime who are themselves enthralled to Nazis. Hence Catholic Bishop hands it to SS for special center. KAROLYI. In fact, of course, as Father Bojovic is well aware, it was not handed over but expropriated. For three weeks. Whereas for the last 40 years, as the whole world knows, the Orthodox obedience has demonstrated amply why it is so called. (p. 18)

The priests get into a debate unveiling their country’s traumatic experience during the World War II and problematizing the issue of interpretation of historical events, which is reduced to the skillful use of rhetoric and the power to convince one’s audience in the play. The array of Edgar’s aesthetic choices in *Pentecost* allows for multiple perspectives on and readings of the concept of misplacement, framing, and deterritorialization constructed within the invented form and composition of the play. The clash of ideas in the debate about the most appropriate location of the fresco (in the old church or Art Museum) ignites a potentially radical chain of effects produced on multiple social and cultural levels. The deterritorialization of the fresco from the initial native environment as a religious painting within a place of worship and, literally and figuratively speaking will destroy its frame as a construct that traditionally balances the form with its meaning. The simple procedure of removing the painting and displaying it for the public will dramatically transform not only its inherently religious purpose into a passive and inert actuality. This action will result in changing Art history and theory, the national tourist business (incoming capital), national self-determination and possibly offers the acquisition of a new niche within the European space. In a different scenario, if the fresco remains within its microcosm, its artistic value is challenged and acquires a concrete political tonality as is equated with the lives of fifteen humans detained in the church. In other words, it functions as a strategic move in the procedure of political negotiations. At the end of the play, the painting becomes a conspicuous void that is filled in with different meaning depending on the political necessity dictated by the moment. In this view, art is simultaneously objectified as an entity associated with a place and common history, and subjectified, as a context for relations that enable realization of individual goals intrinsic to the objectified culture.

The church itself in its inherently inculcated functionality has been ‘deterritorialized’ continuously for centuries—” Church. Mosque. Stable. Torture centre. Food store. Fortress. Cemetery” (*Pentecost*, p. 104) —and reaches the apogee of losing its innate purposefulness and sovereignty at the moment it has to shelter a teenage local girl and a middle-aged Swedish man intending to have sexual intercourse on its premises. Edgar manipulates with the audience’s perception of the structure’s mutability by elaborating on the dynamics and unpredictable adjustability of the form that inevitably occurs with the change of distinction marking this form. The presence and active participation in the fight for the ownership of the fresco by representatives of the two

most prominent denominations in the space within the play problematizes the ambivalent geopolitical role and place of religion within the process of national identity formation. Although the text does not provide enough in-depth analysis of the binary opposition between the two religions, historical reference to the complicated relation within the nation as well as with the outside invaders' religious beliefs opens up a space where in some cases religious differences prove to facilitate the strength with which one ethnicity experiences its national identity; sometimes, the force of these differences is inverted, where they are rendered as ineffective and subscribe several ethnic groups under the umbrella of one sect. John A. Vincent states that, "Historically, the primary ethnic difference in Yugoslavia, in general, and Bosnia, in particular, is related to religion" (p. 51). He perfectly illustrates religion's key role in nationalist politics:

Atheists claim to be Serb or Croat, and Bosnians explain that Moslems are a national group (narodnost). Furthermore, there are communities and individuals who do not quite fit the stereotypical categories: Albanian-speakers, Catholics, Montenegrins or Gypsy groups who seem to be able Moslem or Orthodox. Bosnian Moslems have had, in the past, to declare themselves as Croatian Moslems or Serb Moslems. Some Serb extremists claim that Moslems are not an ethnic group, merely Serbs who have lost their true religion. (p. 52).

The fragmentation of the concept of identity into smaller constituents (religious belief only, or territorial affiliation, or common history) for the purpose of making an argument about one's identity proves inefficient, problematic, and impossible when individuals are trying to make it operate on the level of national politics. The debate slowly devolves from the national scale, and one can see how Father Bojovic turns to using personal accusations by cynically remarking that for Father Karolyi it is "easier to say from London than from here" (p. 18) and implicitly blaming his counterpart for not being present in the country when all the atrocities took place. This invalidation of his opponent's claims proves the fact that there is no one universal criterion defining the constituents of national identity. Anna Jedlikova, a former dissident but now executing the function of a judge, shares Bojovic's opinion. She dismisses Karolyi's insistence on using their mother tongue during the meeting deciding the fresco's destiny by referring to the fact that even "at home in London" (p. 18) they spoke Bulgarian. Although Karolyi's parents immigrated to Great Britain when he was a boy of twelve, Anna Jedlikova still aligns him with those who "eat their names" and builds an argument about her view of elements indispensable in identity formation. In its broad metaphorical sense implying family, past history:

OK. I tell you what I think. You leave, you stop to be a witness. Worst story that I ever hear, in the Second World War, Serb children are transport to camp at Jasenovac, and they are so hungry that they eat cardboard tags around their neck. Which is their family, their age, their name. They eat their history. [...] And now, already, here, our past is being erased. And exiles with new names come back, and restore old names of streets and squares and towns. But in fact you cannot wipe it all away, like a cosmetic. (p. 38).

Father Bojovic goes as far as inviting and paying a professor from Cornell University (Leo Katz) for a second opinion on the newly-discovered painting. From this, he infer that leaving the fresco in the church is of paramount importance for him. Even the argument about its potential deterioration caused by the neighboring international auto route and 'sprinkling of water' and 'candle grease' do not stop Father Bojovic in his determination to leave the fresco in its initial place. In ignoring Gabriella's concern about the painting's preservation, Bojovic underscores its value as marker of identity regardless of the painting's state. Bojovic addresses Leo with the following request: "It is in our interest, still, that you say 'no' 'is followed by Leo's 'Father, that's how I earn my living' (p. 35). Even Oliver's seemingly trustworthy intention to achieve a compromise and still remove the painting: "But however out of favor, it would mean one set of clergy gets the church, your national museum gets the painting, and you get the biggest tourist trap since the Chinese terracotta army. So everybody's happy" (p. 22) is subverted by Leo's interpretation of this solution: "Or even, now we come to think of it, wouldn't it be actually much happier, and much more accessible to doctors and professors and their ilk, in a nice new hi-tech California Gallery with state-of-the-art air conditioning and three gold trowels from Architecture Quarterly? Hey, come on. Oily, wasn't that the deal?" (p. 45). Edgar refrains from leading the judgment of the reader where lies the truth about what should be done with the painting, about whose intentions and interest the reader should support or condemn. Should it be Gabriella's ardent desire to get to the 'truth beauty and universal European values' or Leo's almost personal involvement in the story based on contract? As the debate evolves, it becomes obvious that 'truth is where the interests lie' and the difficulty of choice stresses the arbitrariness of each individual's positions. For its readers Pentecost is an embodiment of the disguise-and-reveal game with truth; the irony of the whole situation described on stage suggests "not only the world's absurdity, but whether through language, action, or gesture, the creative and redemptive forces of consciousness as well" (Wilde, p. 11). Though the mother-tongue, Karolyi determines his affiliation to a

particular nation sharing the same language, and the opposite may be said about Leo Katz and his own self-characterization as “not a western European” but “an American of mixed Polish and Lithuanian descent” (p. 59), although he speaks neither Polish nor Lithuanian or Hebrew. Edgar in a nuanced way juxtaposes the two possible paradigms of identity formation—European and American. In the first, one has to speak their ethnic language, while the second paradigm allows one not to speak the language of their ethnicity and still preserve ethnic identity. Language is another constituent element associated with ethnic identity sentiment formation. Like the group of artists openly forming an opposition to Thatcherism, Edgar sees language as a great potential and equal weapon in his struggle against ingrained ideology and new connotations of the concepts of freedom and identity. In spite of language’s crucial bonding power in the construction of collective national identity, Edgar seems to be emphasizing its ability to distance individuals and groups. The audience is constantly conscious of this function of language as a spatial marker by being provided with a limited choice in understanding the characters—natives speak Bulgarian and the refugees speak Russian and Arab. The playwright’s control over what the external audience knows and receives and what remains understood only by the characters is unevenly granted the potential possibility that among the audience there are individuals who speak/understand the languages spoken in the play. It creates an almost Bakhtinian heteroglossia and stimulates a heterogeneous mode of reception. Another consideration of people speaking more than one language is their degree of fluency, which might range from fluent to basic acquaintance with the alphabet. This provides differentiation already among those who possess the linguistic skills. Edgar makes the rhetorical claim that language is an embodiment of ideological discourse and “those particular historical tasks that the ideological discourse has fulfilled in specific social spheres and at specific stages in its own historical development” (Bakhtin, p. 1197).

This discriminatory move, in fact, is related to the preservation and protection of ethnic identity, traditions, government, economic capacity, and national interests within the newly designed space of unified Europe. The concept of the Tower of Babel is undermined, however, within the play, which shows a group of randomly organized refugees who understand each other’s language very well. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have been able to act so effectively. It is the hostages and the audience who are exposed to a certain degree of censure imposed by another language. This focus on the functionality and variety of languages in the process of social communication illustrates the Bakhtinian view that “the author does not speak in a given language [...], but he speaks, as it were, through language. A language that has somehow materialized, become objectified, that he merely ventriloquates” (Bakhtin, p. 1197). Therefore, the imagery of Pentecost is reduced to a vessel for the author’s message, and it is a mistake to attempt to establish the moment of *Pentecost* within the play. The act of communication is taking place and being observed not only for those on the stage and participating in it directly (horizontally), but it also works in vertical direction. The play becomes a mediator between the author and his audience. Consequently, the underlying analogy with the Christian holiday commemorating the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles is one more mechanism for the playwright to manipulate and actively involve the viewers of the play. Edgar places the emphasis on the act of communication per se in the second Act by allowing his characters tell a fairy-tale in their native languages. After the first moments of frustration at the sound of unknown speech pass, the participants come to realize that it is possible to understand the folk tale without knowing the language that transmits it. This is one of the central points in discussing the process of national identity negotiation based on linguistic difference. The ability to engage in the process of communicating/negotiating one’s identity through a number of media supports the idea that the operation of othering might also result in discovering likeness. Edgar does not provide much background information about other characters, such as Mikhal Czaba (the Minister of Preservation of Culture) and Pusbas (leader of Heritage); however, their interests seem to be also affected by the correct dating of the fresco and its proper function in the history of the nation. The image of the painting, although only partly revealed to the audience, disturbs the participants of the drama because it impersonates a frontier between the past (medieval times) and the modern world, and provides with a starting point from which it is possible to simultaneously look in the past and future. In unifying the two poles of history in time (past and future), this painting, like the horizon, perpetually eludes its observer. Its constant movement makes it unfeasible to use it as a fixed set of criteria for one’s own calculations of ethnic identity.

There is a second, more universal function of the fresco, which is obscured in the play and may be easily overlooked. This function is metaphorically manifested through the painting’s role as a mirror with a fixed reflection being the sum total of the collective national identity of the ones present in the church. In pursuit of their self-determination, both hostages and refugees return to this fundamental marker of nation-ness; however, in looking at it, they expect a reflection that matches their personally imagined construct of their selves. The plurality and diversity of the characters’ individual perspectives on what the fresco mediates, however, is unified

in the general mistake of confusing the function of this painting in the Middle Ages and in the modern times. Benedict Anderson convincingly argues that medieval man, unlike modern people, did not consider religious frescos to mark identity. It is only with the development of technology and industrial progress that individuals turned to works of art as mediators of their national identity. Therefore, the existence of such a “mirror” that produces distorted reflections of the selves looking into it problematizes the meaning of human subject’s freedom of self-determination, which in reality proves to be a substantial and insurmountable misinterpretation of individual’s constructs of national identity. The destruction of the fresco, although unintentional, by the state authorities evinces the need for a different medium for national identity negotiation. As the foregoing discussion suggests, Edgar devotes significant attention to the division within ethnic groups, their pluralist views that call into question the essential notions of ethnic identity. The most striking technique used to show this pluralism is his use of the native languages of almost every ethnicity represented in the play. First, the reader’s attention is drawn to the language, its ambiguity, and its function as a means of distinguishing between native and non-native speakers. This function is foregrounded in multiple examples of Oliver correcting Gabriella’s English: ‘forward-looking’ instead of ‘forward-viewing’, ‘beheaded’ instead of the wrong ‘deheaded’, ‘repairing’ instead of ‘mending.’ Mistakes, which must be self-evident for an English speaking audience, are meticulously corrected by Oliver during his discussions with Gabriella, and thus the whole issue of the correct use of language is brought to light. Edgar gradually complicates his play’s use of language by offering some moments of interaction between the translations of certain Bulgarian words into English. For example, the prepositions ‘to’ and ‘from’ in Old Nagolitic (the modern version of which is Bulgarian) are interchangeable, and their true meaning could only be determined from the context in which the word is used. Then, Clop, the name of the village where Gabriella discovers the fresco, is mistakenly referred to first as ‘Clap,’ i.e., applause and VD (sexual disease), but then, when corrected by Gabriella into actually ‘Clop’ it is made sound as ‘clip, clop’—“the sound of horse’s hooves” (p. 4). Each subsequent scene of the first Act, as there appear more characters, has more and more Bulgarian and becomes more confusing for the audience deprived of their interlinear translations. The ancient fresco discovered on the walls of an abandoned church in an unnamed south-east European country, which, if proved authentic by experts, will revolutionize the history and theory of Western art ironically converts into a powerful material instrument for a motley group of refugees, seeking shelter, to achieve their goal of legalization of their status as underpaid manual workers in Western Europe. The potentially abstract scholastic value of the mural painting evolves into a means of self-determination for a newly-born national state in transition; it will distinguish the identity of this particular nation within the traditionally established European order by making them “feel bit more universal, bit more grown up, maybe even bit more European” (*Pentecost*, 42), as is emphasized in Gabriella’s interpretation. Her passionate attempt locates it diachronically before the famous Giotto’s Lamentation, to assign a new functional role to it as “the starting point of 600 years of western art,” and therefore to refigure “the frontier between the medieval and the modern world” (*Pentecost*, p. 25) in its turn results in a new ideological aesthetically determined space. This space allows for the embedding of multiple tangential conflicting attempts of political, ethnic, religious, and ethnic identity formation processes manifested by other characters in the play. As European integration becomes more of an economic reality, Edgar focuses on the power and authority ascribed to culture, and particularly art, in securing a niche in history for certain identities. This niche will, over time, become a distinctive historically and culturally conditioned component shaping such identities. The danger of the fresco being ignored or destroyed reiterates its powerful role as in the negotiation of national identity. The danger for the collective identity of the south-European country’s people to be misplaced (at best) or completely eradicated (at worst) is metaphorically revealed through its function as a mirror that allows self-identification. This mirroring process brackets out the identification of the reflection as the Other, exterior to the self. As Gypsy music in Carmela Uranga’s project *Have a Seat*. Edgar’s fresco represents one constant force, “the main source of control” for those who associate with it; it ironically transcends the ephemeral negotiated national identity borders and resists the fluidity and corrupting fragility of the process. Simon Grant’s terms about the role of music in Uranga’s project (and, by implication, in the historical reality that she is trying to mirror) aimed at a metaphorical portrayal of “the blind actions of European politicians” and their promotion of “competitive aggression,” can be transferred to the painting in that it declares, “we know who we are. [...]” and that it is “something that Europeans often find difficult to say” (Grant, p. 422). The analysis of Edgar’s *The Shape of The Table* that follows will provide a retrospective view of the process of national self-determination in Eastern Europe. It will reveal the initial stage of the rise of national consciousness in an unnamed post-communist country in Eastern Europe.

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