

## Review

by Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stoycheva

on the dissertation of Julian Petkov Razsukanov

*Utopian discourses in the novel "Tobacco" by Dimitar Dimov*

to obtain the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Let's start from the formal to the substantive parameters of this dissertation. The impressive 397 pages are organized in the classic format for a dissertation, consisting of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion and contributions. The chapters, in turn, are broken down into subchapters with corresponding subheadings.

This is the extent of the 'conveniences' of reading this work. The initial reading of the content does not provide a clear and convincing guide to the applied research logic. The work needs to be read especially carefully so as not to lose the thread of "Dimitar Dimov" due to the numerous contexts (some of them far from Dimitar Dimov) through which it passes. Very often, one catches the thread and then finds oneself intertwined with another surprising external discourse - hence the feeling of constant back and forth from the object of study. The approach is in fact an attempt to achieve the "nuclear reaction" of Umberto Eco, when the text of a work is correlated with a huge number of external texts that either oppose or outline it. However, the condition for the connection of the subject with these external texts is not always apparent.

The historical and political context of the novel is brought to the foreground here in a way that, let us emphasize, has not been considered so far. The doctoral student himself explains that the impetus for his research is given by the phenomenon of the simultaneous distribution of two versions of the novel after the republishing/updating in 1992 of the first one. A parallel reading of the two proves that there is still something to be found in the differences, and on a semantic level that may have eluded critics and readers so far. If this is a virtue of the work, the omission is that it lacks the support of what has NOT escaped them - more precisely, the dialogue with the literary-historical and theoretical readings of the novels. This is the reason why the first contribution of the thesis seems to be incorrectly formulated: "For the first time Dimitar Dimov's novel, *Tobacco*, was determined to be an independent cultural unit, distanced from the problem of socialist realism."

The concept of the dissertation is (paraphrased): if the first version of the novel shows the anti-utopia of capitalism and the triumph of the new communistic utopia, the second version takes it even further (for those who manage to read between the lines), warning of the inevitable transformation of this utopia into another anti-utopia, as implied by Irina's words, "a doomed mirage" (taken as a key implication and therefore repeated many times). The proof of this thesis is developed by an analysis of utopian and anti-utopian discourses, recognized in the novel, "Tobacco". However, it is appropriate for the doctoral student to justify his understanding of the term "discourse", since he uses it so fundamentally.

The doctoral student finds a hidden challenge in the fact that the first version of "Tobacco" was awarded the Dimitrov Prize and almost immediately afterwards critiqued by almost the same "paragraphs" on which he was awarded. Even this fact is enough to provoke the question of an ambiguous reading of the novel, and it is this switching of meaning/message that he tries to capture. The second version, as we know, was accepted by the critics, but the revision, as proposed by the doctoral student, defends his position of an anti-utopian picture eloquently disguised as utopic.

The noted interesting parallel connections between the other novel by Dimov, "Condemned Souls", and the first version of "Tobacco" (their almost identical ends, but also the proximity of other separate scenes (Dissertation, p. 152), correspondences between the characters) lead to the opinion about the first "Tobacco" as a semantic continuation of "Condemned Souls" (Dissertation, p. 153), but it is exaggerated to consider it as its "reflection" (Dissertation, p. 196). Interpretations are relevant. However, where is it proven that Dimitar Dimov used the finale of Charles Dickens's famous novel "The Great Hopes" as a basis?! (Dissertation, p. 8). Why was the novel, "Lieutenant Benz" completely ignored, in which more signs of utopian discourses could be found? Both the First and the Second World Wars for Germany and for Bulgaria began with a historical, so to speak, shortage, giving rise to utopian expectations. The three novels, "Lieutenant Benz", "Condemned Souls", and "Tobacco" could illustrate the dialectic between utopia and anti-utopia, which the doctoral student otherwise discusses through his numerous other sources.

The work intersects two lines of research: one goes in search of the logic and mechanisms of social and political utopian practices, looking for connections in all possible directions - even in human nature itself (which makes Homo sapiens trust the "ideological mirages"); the other is

in search of evidence of the same in the chosen amount of Dimov's works (it has already become clear that there would be more if the reading covered all his work).

It is logical to choose the main utopian models, between which parallels are drawn: communism, fascism and Christianity. Liberalism is accepted as the source from which the main dominants of communism, fascism and national socialism are drawn, all of which have reached their negation. The neoliberalism of the 21st century supports the same. So all the utopian clashes in the novel, "Tobacco", according to the doctoral student, make it socially and politically actual.

Perhaps fascinated by today's social situation and today's utterance of the picture of the world, supported by the medical education of Dimitar Dimov, the doctoral student chose the metaphor "intellectual vaccine" for the warning he gives to the next (current) generations (Dissertation, pp. 37-39). It refers to the discrediting of one of the main mythologies of communism - the "bright future" and the "socialist humanism". It also refers, according to the doctoral student, to the transformation of liberal democracy to the "tyranny of the oligarchs" (the expression is taken from Dimov).

The doctoral student's teaching experience has obviously helped him in making a number of associations with other works from the school literature canon.

Despite some controversial statements and controversial style, as well as the remarks made, I recommend the esteemed jury to award Julian Petkov Razuksanov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" - because of the rich contextual reading, because of provocative associations and interpretations, because of interesting intertextual and semiotic connections. They have the potential to enrich the reading of one of our most popular classics: viewing it not so much as a psychology of souls, but as a political psychology.

12.08.21

Prof. Svetlana Stoycheva