

REVIEW

**by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yordan Eftimov,
New Bulgarian University,
New Bulgarian Studies Department**

on the dissertation
of Julian Petkov Razsukanov
on the topic: “Utopian discourses in the novel “Tobacco” by Dimitar Dimov”

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the scientific specialty Theory and History of Literature, professional field 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty

Scientific adviser: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maurice Fadel

I. Technical characteristics. Information provision. Bibliography

The dissertation of Julian Petkov Razsukanov has a volume of 397 pages. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, scientific contributions to the dissertation and a bibliography with 208 titles.

The doctoral student's publications on the topic are the required three, in prestigious Bulgarian electronic academic publications such as “Liternet” and “Literaturen klub”, as well as in the scientific journal of Varna Free University.

II. Analytical characteristics of the content of the dissertation

Julian Razsukanov's dissertation aims to analyze the presence and behavior in a canonical Bulgarian text of the 20th century – Dimitar Dimov's novel “Tobacco” – of a large super-unit, which he calls “utopian discourse”. Thus, from the very first pages of the Introduction, it becomes clear that the novel studied by so many scholars will be analytically attacked in view of its attitude to one of the most important concepts of leftist ideologies – utopia. Yulian Razsukanov does not hide that he considers utopia to be closely connected with the horizon of hopes for social prosperity. And even Dickens's “Great Expectations” boldly intervenes. “(The collapse of expectations, especially of the great ones – for a bright communist future, is inevitable.” (p. 8) doctrines or personal views of a visionary type” (p. 8). This large-scale picture from the very beginning of the work threatens to blur the specific task of describing the ideological rasters in the novel. Because if you start from Plato and Erich Fromm, the

work of a Bulgarian writer begins to look small. Julian Razuksanov takes care of overcoming this risk by focusing on individual episodes of Dimitar Dimov's novel, as well as by using intertextual connections at different levels.

One of these well-found episodes Yulian Razuksanov describes as follows: “The place of action – in front of the community center cafe in the town of X... Dimov, 1988, ie Italian and German fascism). The participants in the episode are a veterinarian (personification of the author), an electrician who fixes the fan of the cafe and a denkchiya – from the striking tobacco workers. Regarding the representative of the so-called working class the influence of communist ideology and its rather chimerical projects for the bright future of mankind is relatively clear. His attitude towards the veterinarian as a representative of the bourgeoisie is also expected, especially during the so-called left-wing sectarian course of BRP (k). The situation with electrical engineering is more complicated. He is certainly not a character introduced by chance.” (pp. 22-23) The following is a risky summary: “In modern novels such as Tobacco (in both editions), there are no really minor characters. In the context of time, the electrician is clearly an allusion to Nikola Tesla.” (p. 23) But the result has been achieved – not just the first of several assumptions about the prototype characters in the novel Tobacco (one of the merits of the dissertation), but the figure of the characters, the conductors of ideas, is also brought out. Tobacco as a novel of ideas has never been talked about so strongly.

Thus, the Introduction outlines not only the broad definition of the utopian, but also the strategy to present different contexts of intertextuality as “sleeves”. The use of the term utopia, of course, was not possible without reference to Thomas More, but Gustave Le Bon seems to be relatively more important to the doctoral student (pp. 32-38). The neglect of Karl Mannheim, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Slavoj Žižek and Krishan Kumar on utopia from a sociological point of view is accompanied by ignorance of the texts of Fredric Jameson, Patrick Parrinder and Douwe Fokkema on utopia in fiction. On the other hand, Nikolay Berdyaev builds a large-scale critique of utopia as a field connecting the political with the religious.

It is a real miracle that the work turned out to be so provocative, given that the aim of the research was “to clarify the author's intention in a maximally integrated system of texts that go beyond his own work” (p. 43). And indeed – the dissertation was completed not so much as a literary-historical study, but as a philosophical, political science and in some parts sharp-journalistic text.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, “Utopian and Anti-Utopian Discourses – Levels of Semanticization”, a large-scale analysis of the communist utopia is developed, starting from the “Communist Manifesto”. Declarations of “Tobacco” characters such as Max and Dinko have been used to prove Dimitar Dimov's deep interest in ideological productions (pp. 98-100). Through the images of Redingota and Von Geier, pessimists and ironists who continue to serve the state they consider unjust, the connection with Plato and Machiavelli is made (pp. 56-58). The distinction between the utopias of “political”, “physical” and “historical” (pp. 101-105) is an original,

though well-founded, attempt by Julian Razsukanov to build his coordinate system of the concept.

The second chapter, *From Utopia to Utopia*, is devoted to such essential features of utopia as the construction of a society of lies, life in the projection of the future, over-centralization and hierarchization. For this purpose, the doctoral student focuses on George Orwell's novel "1984" and Aldous Huxley's novel "The Wonderful New World" (pp. 114-119), but seeks the first contacts of the Bulgarian public with modernist utopias with the translation and reception of "Looking Backward, 2000–1887" by Eduard Bellamy (published in Bulgarian in Ruse in 1892 under the title „After 100 Years") (pp. 119-121). The reflections on two of Dimitar Dimov's heroines – Fanny Horn from "Condemned Souls" and Irina from "Tobacco" as a kind of demons, women without bodies (pp. 162-163) are curious.

Chapter Two also clarifies the specific use of the term anti-utopia. For Julian Razsukanov, it is synonymous with a critique of ideologized modern society – that is why even Aleko Konstantinov's travelogue "To Chicago and Back" (pp. 168-175) turned out to be „anti-utopia“. We have already been prepared for this expansion of the concept by the Introduction and the first chapter, but still it is this that confronts us with the most important decision made by the doctoral student.

The third chapter, "The Inevitable Compromise and the Discursive Corrective of the Writer Dimitar Dimov," is the strictu sensu chapter devoted to the functioning of utopia in the two editions of the novel "Tobacco". It should be noted that, as in the other chapters, important concepts are derived not from basic research but through dictionary references. Here the first concept introduced in this way is *discourse* (p. 186).

In the third chapter many references are made to the way in which the Bulgarian high school interprets the ideological side of canonical works – e.g. Homer's "Iliad" or "Grandfather Yotso's Watch" by Ivan Vazov (pp. 194, 203). However, this sub-theme inserted as a padding is as important as a hint about the problems that Bulgarian secondary education encounters precisely with the ideas in the canonical texts.

This is also the chapter that discusses the connection between utopia and conspiracy theories and even refers to the situation in 2020 after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (p. 2015).

Chapter Three also gives a place to the theory of the Superman, claiming that its adept is Redingota (pp. 230-231). The bold assumption is made that in the features of this character from the novel "Tobacco" are used characteristics of the Prime Minister Bogdan Filov (pp. 231-233).

This chapter insists on the transformation with the help of the utopia of people into material units, screws in the system, animals. But this is done by giving power to a

new political class – the lumpen proletariat. For this purpose, an analysis of the story “Dog's Heart” by Mikhail Bulgakov (pp. 256-259) is involved.

III. Evaluation of the abstract

The content of the abstract conveys correctly the content of the dissertation. The contributions of the dissertation are listed in detail, thus highlighting in the clearest way the system of ideas that determine the doctoral student's understanding of utopia.

IV. Conclusion

Julian Razsukanov is one of those teachers who are a model for the vigilant, unyielding professional reader.

His dissertation is dotted with idiosyncratic observations and conclusions, which, however, are ideal for reviving a canonical work that students are reluctant to touch. The dissertation, like a river delta, spills over into a bundle of sleeves, each of which enriches the context in which Dimitar Dimov's novel operates. The story of Nikola Tesla with his idea of free electricity and the utopian shield of rays (pp. 23-24), the Korean War and the fact that Pavel Morev knows Chinese and Mongolian (p. 29) and dozens of other “sleeves” build the non-standard, “novel”, but also “pamphlet” (insofar as it constantly refers to events of our present) nature of work.

Given the innovative tension that the dissertation creates around its topic, the sufficiently thorough study of scientific sources on the topic, as well as the overall presence of Julian Razsukanov in the modern Bulgarian educational environment, I suggest the members of the esteemed commission to award him with a smile educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yordan Eftimov