

OPINION



for: the dissertation on acquisition of PhD degree (bulg. doctor), in the professional direction “Theory and History of Culture”, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, at the Institute for Balkan Studies & Center of Thracology (IBCT) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), of the regular doctoral student **Yanita Kirova**, entitled “Non-verbal theatrical forms in South-Eastern Europe (the 1990s – the first two decades of the 21st century)” with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Vanya Lozanova-Stancheva

prepared by: Assoc. Prof. **Antoaneta Balcheva**, PhD, (Institute of Balkan Studies & Center for Thracology – BAS) – member of Scientific Juri (SJ), based on the Order of the Director of IBCT Prof. PhD Rumyana Preshlenova for SJ №189 ПД-16/20.12.2022 and Protocol № 01/11.01.2023 of the first meeting of SJ.

The dissertation of Yanita Kirova “Non-verbal theatrical forms in South-Eastern Europe (the 1990s - the first two decades of the 21st century)”, consisting of an introduction, four chapters, conclusion and bibliography, is an ambitious project in the field of typology and systematization of the non-verbal theatrical forms of the Balkans in a broad European context. The topic of the spread, development and fortune of the non-verbal theatrical forms in Southeastern Europe from the 90s of the 20th century to the end of the second decade of the 21st century is a contribution with its actuality and variety. The author's aim to create a landmark construction of certain representative models of the non-verbal theater in the region, reflecting its current state and development trends in the dynamics of socio-political and cultural changes, has no analogue in research dedicated to this issue. Referring to specific examples from the professional practice of selected theaters and theater formations working in the field of non-verbal theater, as well as a representative sample of theater festivals offering non-verbal performances in their programs, Yanita Kirova also achieves one of her main tasks, aimed to summarize the attempts to develop and present to an audience non-verbal theater in the specified region, as well as its application in alternative theater spaces (hospital wards and others) as part of therapeutic theater (medical clowning). Against the background of rich empirical and theoretical material from the field of theater criticism, cultural studies, history, sociology, a broad interdisciplinary analysis of the main object of the study was achieved: physical theater, pantomime, dance theater, shadow theater, mask

theater, puppet theater, including black theater and theater of objects. A special emphasis in the work is placed on examining the performative aspects of medical clowning as therapeutic theater.

The clearly defined goals, tasks, subject of the study, together with a successfully applied cultural-historical and theater approach, allow the author to outline, through the method of comparative analysis, the essential characteristics and manifestations of the innovative hybrid genre in the performing arts against the background of a wide territorial scope, including the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Croatia, Kosovo) and Bulgaria, on the one hand, and Greece and Cyprus, on the other.

The First chapter *Theater and non-verbal communication* offers a conceptual examination of the notions and definitions of non-verbal communication and its features and manifestations in the theatre. They are distinguished – physical non-verbal theater (pantomime, dance theater, shadow theater, mask theater) and puppet non-verbal theater (black theater, theater of objects, etc.) and the corresponding thematic fields of analysis are highlighted – the history of ideas for imposing the stage language of the body in the European theater in the context of modernism and postmodernism and the contemporary audience perception of theater and art.

The comparative aspect in which the socio-cultural context of non-verbal theatrical forms in South-Eastern Europe is studied in the Second Chapter *Socio-cultural context of non-verbal theatrical forms in South-Eastern Europe: (the 1990s – the first two decades of the 21st century)* is particularly productive in unraveling the changes in cultural policies and the resulting economic and organizational problems for the non-verbal theater formations that arose in the new conditions. In the optics of the theatrical and cultural historical analysis, the debates on updating the theatrical forms, their modernization and adaptation to the identified social and political realities are highlighted. In the complex knot between regional and universal, the specifics in the development of non-verbal theater forms in the former socialist countries and the countries behind the "Iron Curtain" such as Greece and Cyprus are outlined.

A full-fledged picture of the contemporary state and dynamics of non-verbal theatrical forms in South-Eastern Europe is achieved in the Third chapter "*Festivals of non-verbal theatrical forms and formations in South-Eastern Europe in the 1990s – the first two decades of the 21st century*" aimed at systematization, cataloging and analyzing the available

information and tracking the current trends in the development of the analyzed theater processes. Dedicated to the most significant international festival platforms of non-verbal theater forms and formations in South-Eastern Europe, it allows for diverse interpretations both regarding the multi-layered festival phenomenon and the dynamic changes in theatrical forms, styles, genres and related to its syncretic nature. themes, expanding and shifting the boundaries of theatricality, between "high" and mass art.

An original contribution to the study is Fourth chapter *Application of non-verbal theatrical forms in the context of therapeutic theatre: medical clowning*, examining the practical aspects of non-verbal theatrical forms in the conditions of a parallel theater environment with a focus on a specific theatrical direction in the field of therapeutic theater such as medical clowning. The author's personal experience in clarifying the role and place of the theater aimed at patients in hospital inpatient facilities is especially valuable. Successful models used in practice are outlined, as well as the overall concept of the role of the clown as a therapist in the hospital room.

The ideas presented in the *Conclusion* about multiplicity and significance in the development and confirmation of the phenomenon of non-verbal theatrical forms as part of the general processes in the development of theatrical art in the countries of South-Eastern Europe are result of solid theoretical preparation and scientific argumentation, revealing the maturity and professionalism of the author.

The extensive bibliography attached at the end of the dissertation is a sign of thoroughness and intention to enrich the issues under consideration, related to a difficult to define concept, increasingly diverse in terms of manifestations, forms, trends and styles.

Successfully achieved goals and tasks in the research study are result of both the scientific interests and the serious professional growth of Yanita Kirova. Artistic director, art director and teacher of pantomime, medical clown, manager of "Art-Metamorphosis" Ltd., graduate of acting for Theater of Movement - Pantomime, in NATFA 'Krastyo Sarafov' (2016), winner of numerous awards and honors, she managed to acquire considerable practical experience in the field of non-verbal theatre.

Yanita Kirova has 6 out-of-print publications on the topic of her dissertation in well known refereed publications, some of them in English. The text of the abstract and reference to the contributions correctly reflect the content of the dissertation.

Based on the indisputable contributions of the dissertation work “Non-verbal theatrical forms in South-Eastern Europe (the 1990s - the first two decades of the 21st century)”, the publication activity and prominent participation of Yanita Kirova in scientific forums and projects, I give a positive assessment and propose to award her the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences.

20.01.2023 г.

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