

## STATEMENT

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Professor and Doctor of Sciences in field 8.4. "Theatre and Film Art"

For the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.4. "Theatre and Film Art", with candidate Vasilena Radeva, doctoral student in independent preparation at the Department of Theatre of New Bulgarian University.

The dissertation by Vasilena Radeva, "Theatre Based on a True Story: Document and Fiction in Contemporary Bulgarian Theatre", fits into the tendency toward the search for an original and individual approach in the field of theatre studies. The dissertation contains 191 pages, of which 139 are main text, with an introduction, three chapters, conclusions and a bibliography. In addition, there are appendices consisting of transcribed audio interviews with artists connected to the topic: Galin Stoev, Blagoy Boychev, Irina and Ognyan Golevi, Yuliana Sayska, and Neda Sokolovska. These interviews are also part of the contributions - they can be used as an archive both for the individual authors and for the type of theatre based on a true story. There are four scholarly publications on the topic. As a note, I would point out that the publications are only in NBU editions, which narrows the audience of interested readers, and I recommend greater visibility for the doctoral candidate's theoretical work.

In the introduction, the parameters of the dissertation are outlined. Vasilena Radeva immediately "takes the bull by the horns" - she defines the subject (the relationship between document and fiction in the contemporary performance based on a true story), the aim (the presence or absence of conflict between them), the tasks (clarification of concepts, her own research, and analysis of certain staging methods), and the main objective (not an analysis of the creative result, but of the intentions invested by the authors). The main thesis is connected as much with artistic inventiveness as with ethical responsibility for the final result. The doctoral candidate also sets a number of self-imposed limitations: the dissertation focuses only on European theatre in the twentieth century, while the analyzed stage examples are only from the first quarter of the twenty-first century in Bulgaria; only intentions are examined, not the finished artifacts. Vasilena Radeva excludes from her analyses forum theatre, playback theatre, theatrical reenactments of actual events, lecture theatre, and other theatrical forms that also work with documentary material - and this is my possible recommendation: that they become the object of future research work.

I will not retell chapter by chapter what the doctoral dissertation covers, although the specific analyses of performances, individual scenes, or personalities are insightful and thorough. In these

cases, one can also observe Vasilena Radeva's personal preference regarding where she sees high artistic achievements, but she does this on the basis of the motives and with an overall view of the matrix.

I will summarize the doctoral candidate's achievements, which do not necessarily have the character of contributions, but which, in my opinion, are valuable in the systematization and practical application of individual methods, both those of others and her own:

- Currency both of the topic and of the developed examples and teaching practices.
- Highlighting the strong dependence of theatre based on a true story on its locality and present moment, as well as the semantic nourishment it receives from them.
- Bringing out the "human factor" in the document while preserving the document as fact.
- Constant consideration of the stage context.
- Exploration of how neo-documentary theatre is formed in Bulgaria today.
- Sharing practical work with students.
- Division into genres and tracing the connection between play and stage language in the performance based on a true story.
- Analysis of the staging methods of selected Bulgarian artists and of the stage language of their performances.
- An empirical study carried out through the conducting and documenting of conversations - interviews with Bulgarian artists who create theatre based on a true story.
- Analysis, sharing, and further development of the author's own professional directing and teaching methodology for integrating documentary material into a performance.
- Highlighting the artists' motivation for participation, connected (although to different degrees) with political and/or social engagement.
- Emphasizing the significance of grotesque and absurdity in performances based on a true story.
- Use of hyperbole and fairytale elements as added value in the practices.
- A new sense of the actor-performer, based on autofiction.

There are many strengths in the doctoral work, connected above all with the sharing of creative and teaching experience from the author's own practice and that of colleagues with whom she has had direct contact.

I also have comments, for example regarding the generalization that "to make theatre based on a true story is invariably a kind of political gesture", which acquires an attractive force for Bulgarian artists. I am prepared to accept such a statement, but then we would need a considerable number of additional enriching viewpoints and theoretical positions, and they would be in the fields of political science, history, propaganda, ecology, and other areas of the social sciences and humanities. I find this "aside" to point toward another, albeit very interesting, direction, which is not developed in the present work.

### **Personal qualities of the doctoral candidate**

My first impressions of Vasilena Radeva were as the director of "Nordost" at the Youth Theatre. I immediately liked the expressiveness and power of her style with a minimalist set in the small hall, and the sharpness of the solutions in the three so different and yet merging streams of consciousness of the heroines. For years I took my students to write about this performance, above all in the direction that is relevant to the doctorate - the relationship between fact and fiction, conflictuality, and the erasure of boundaries. With PR students, we also reflected on how, with an unfamiliar author, a young director, inactive advertising, and without the actresses necessarily being stars, a genuine artistic result could be achieved.

Later, as a colleague at NBU, I would emphasize Vasilena's exceptional diligence and her striving for perfectionism in her work. She treats those with whom she works and whom she teaches with respect and depth; this was especially visible to me on the stage of the University Theatre (again, I took students to watch and write about "The Visit of the Old Lady"). The doctoral candidate actively participates in various creative initiatives as a teacher and helps with her concrete and detailed guidance.

**Conclusion.** I consider the dissertation, with its conclusions, theses, examples, and analyses taken as a whole, to be an original and meaningful text. This gives me grounds to assess it as an independent study with a number of merits and to propose to the members of the scientific jury that Vasilena Radeva be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in field 8.4. "Theatre and Film Art". I vote "YES".