

OPINION

by

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Field of higher education: *Arts*; Direction 8.4. *Theatre and Film Art*, Scientific Specialty *Theatre Studies and Theatre Art* for awarding a Doctoral educational and scientific degree in professional field 8.4. *Theatre and Film Art*, to dissertee Desislava Shpatova

The proposed dissertation entitled *Ingmar Bergman on the Bulgarian theatre stage*, as evidenced by the title, examines an issue barely touched upon by Bulgarian theatre researchers. The topic is worthy of scientific attention as the figure of Bergman has a tremendous influence on cinema and theatre worldwide, impacting both artists and audiences in cinema, theatre and literature alike, and Bulgaria is no exception to this. The author focuses on stage plays providing an account of Bergman's life story in Bulgaria through films, translations and responses by critics. An important element of the dissertation is Shpatova's personal commitment to the staging practice of Bergman's texts, which allows her to have a double point of view on the researched problem, both as an impartial researcher of a phenomenon and as a subjective creator deeply involved in the process herself. A successful balance between these two points of view has been achieved since the author derives the essence of her experience in the above fields. This feature has the merit of chronological tracking (with the added value of historical and factual perspective) and a rationalized personal perspective (not only with a focus on her own personal experience but on several case studies as well). An important argument aptly put forward, is that unlike his films, Bergman's stage plays and their influence on Bulgarian soil have not been researched as yet. The scientific significance of the research problem is deemed convincingly developed.

The nature of the research problem is presented in detail thus adding further justification to the paper's objectives and tasks proving them necessary and relevant. Perhaps the most significant of tasks the dissertation sets is to highlight the manifold impact Bergman has on the flow of artistic ideas in theatre; on the one hand, outlaying the specific themes and approaches which make Bergman's works blend into Bulgarian theatre traditions, mainly as an inciter and innovator (a psychological approach), and on the other hand, exploring territory largely uncharted hitherto in terms of topics such as obsessions, sexual identification, transcendental questions, subjective search / denial of the idea of God, etc.

The chosen methodology is a combination of research devices leading to a variety of effects. There is an impressive adherence to a timeline of historical facts, falling into several parts (chronology of Bergman's work; specific autopoetic motives and connections, Bergman's reception in Bulgaria and history of stage interpretations related to Bergman's texts). The central topic of the research is enriched by documented personal testimonies of three individuals with varying professional views on the topic (through identical questions in extensive interviews). The synthesis of these diverse elements is achieved by implicitly referring attention to what Bergman brings in as novel, intriguing and extraordinary in terms of theatre, which at the same times fits into the Bulgarian contexts.

The main direction of the dissertation is towards highlighting the specific value that Bergman's works invest in Bulgarian theatre. It is pointed out that the traditionally strong acting school of psychological research is renewed through Bergman. The research emphasizes the fact that the images of transformation and of scattering variations of faces and versions of the "I" encourage directors to develop ways for stage expression of the modern personality. Audiencewise, these performances open unmapped spaces of intrinsic meaning. In this aspect the study could be enriched and expanded with more examples and details of actors or directors' interpretations.. This recommendation is applicable to list of plays directed by the author herself (it is clear from the research that there is no other example of a director with such a rich and lasting interest in Bergman in the Bulgarian theatre than the author of the dissertation herself).

The important conclusions about the intertwining of film language and theatre expression tools in Bergman's aesthetics constitute an original synthesis of the research.

The dissertation reference list contains three scientific publications in esteemed scientific journals deemed to have deservedly found a place there with their original research reflections. In the course of the exposition, the author repeatedly refers to the opinion and judgment of respected theatre critics and researchers, who highly appreciate her interpretations of Bergman on stage. The appreciation of Spatova's scientific articles, her creative interpretations on the topic, as well as the esteemed theatre awards and participation in forums at home and abroad, demonstrate that Shpatova enjoys recognition by competent professional staff.

Besides its research nature, the dissertation carries the signs of publicity addressed to a tempted but wider audience, hence a few recommendations can be made. Perhaps linking the issues studied with the processes that take place in Bulgarian theatre life in the course of Bergman's entry onto Bulgarian stage would have highlighted better his uniqueness, and thus his significance too. The third part of the study is a case study of three artists related to Bergman's plays but fails to offer a reasoned argumentation on the choice of these particular persons. Further, the impressive and carefully researched list of literature on the subject at the end of the paper, should be organized first in Cyrillic

and then in Latin, not vice versa. In addition, proper names and names of theatre bodies have not been translated / transcribed into Bulgarian, which does not demonstrate courtesy and respect to the Bulgarian reader. The latter comments, however, do not change or lessen the intrinsic merits of Shpatova's research and if taken into account, would only contribute to the overall value of the paper. The thesis is deemed original and enriching, independently carried out by the author and meets the requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

I vote in support of awarding D. Shpatova the PhD educational and scientific degree.

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Sofia