PhD THESIS REVIEW

by Prof. Penko Gospodinov, PhD,

National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts 'Kr. Sarafov'(NATFA)

on the dissertation titled:

Existential fulfillment and full human functioning in actors

(Guidelines for Psychological Counselling)

by Diyana Dobreva-Hristova – a PhD student in the Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, for acquiring an Educational and Scientific PhD Degree by higher education: 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences. Professional area: 3.2. Psychology, Specialized professional field: Counselling psychology

The set of materials presented for the purposes of this procedure, in terms of form and content, meets the minimum requirements and allows the work to be considered in substance.

It is clear from the candidate's biography that she is a specialist with a solid education, specializations, and extensive practice: a master's degree in psychology with a qualification as a social psychologist, a semester-completed master's programme - 'Defense of National Security', a professional qualification in Existential Analysis and Logotherapy, et cetera. The candidate has an extensive number of publications in Bulgarian and English and has participated as an expert and a lecturer in a great number of scientific and applied science projects. Therefore, the high quality of the proposed dissertation is not surprising.

The work has a total volume of 281 pages (content- 235 pages, bibliography- 22 pages and appendices-24 pages). A lot of visual aids are attached - tables, figures, appendices. The bibliography is sufficiently abundant with basic for the researched topic authoritative sources included. The thesis' language is strictly scientific without it being boring, the concepts and terms are adequately introduced and explained.

The overall impression is of a serious, thorough, and complete scientific work.

The dissertation is structured in three interconnected parts: theoretical, methodological, and empirical. The first part (Theoretical analysis) includes three chapters that consecutively present the topic's key issues. The second part (Design and setting of the study) contains three chapters. The general setting of the empirical study, its purpose, tasks, theoretical model, and hypotheses are presented. The third part consists of four chapters. The data and results of the main study were analysed in each of them, according to the logic of the researched tasks and the hypotheses raised. The Conclusion presents the main deductions drawn from the conducted empirical research, its contributions, limitations, and guidelines for future research.

I accept the scientific contributions indicated by the doctoral student as totally valid and relevant. They are in three plans: theoretical, methodical and a research part.

As a professional actor and teacher with a lot of years of experience in training actors, I cannot hide my joy that the Bulgarian psychological science is finally turning, and in such a serious and thorough way, towards the field of acting. A field that, globally, as Diyana D. Hristova rightly points out, has not been researched specifically, but which, in my humble opinion, contains great potential for the development of psychological science itself.

Acting is generally assumed to be entirely in the realm of creativity, intuition, the unconscious, etc., therefore not a subject of analysis with the tools provided by scientific methodology. However, it misses the basic circumstance that the actor is both the subject and the object of their work. This makes the acting profession unique from the psychological situation's point of view. What in other people is a natural healthy process, for example forgetting, i.e. pushing out, sorting out unpleasant memories in the areas of the subconscious, for actors, especially in the process of their training, is a tool for stimulating creative potential. And it becomes a professional artistic method. Because actors, whatever roles they play, whatever emotions they need to recreate, draw from their own emotional storehouse. These feelings cannot be hired if they are to be authentic. But this, to a certain extent, is "counterintuitive", i.e. could, in the long run, cause considerable damage to the psyche of the practitioner of this profession. And it is this type of endurance and self-discipline that much of an actor's training and education is focused on. And there are a lot more unusual situations that they face on a daily basis - public creativity, constant criticism, distributed attention (text, partnership, audience, stage mechanisation, etc.), the specifics of the Bulgarian theatre system, in which one role must be maintained for years and becomes part of your essence; and yet, for the most part, professional actors manage not only to preserve their mental and personal integrity, but are also able to enjoy long and fulfilling lives despite the harsh conditions of practising the profession. What is the cause of this? And it generates a lot more questions of mutual interest.

I agree with Diyana Hristova that with actors, much more often than in other professions, consulting with a specialist in the field of psychology and psychotherapy is necessary, and as the Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at NATFA, I am prepared for a closer cooperation in order to create a Centre for the Study of Creativity and a Centre for Psychological Support for Students and Professional Actors.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I value the proposed dissertation work extremely high, and I recommend to the scientific committee to award a PhD to Diyana Tsvetanova Dobreva - Hristova.

I vote ‘Yes’ with conviction and in accordance with my conscience.

11.11.2023 Prof. Penko Gospodinov, PhD

Sofia