

La Sapienza

Valutazione tesi Cavazzoni, Mecco (37° Ciclo)

CAVAZZONI ANNA

Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

Nikolai Gogol's and Juliusz Slowacki's Ukraine: Self-creative Processes

Affiliation of the reviewer

University of Cagliari

Report

The Candidate's work on Nikolai Gogol and Juliusz Slowacki and their self-creative processes regarding Ukraine is based on a rich bibliographical corpus and takes into consideration a good portion of the most important and even recently published works on the two writers here analysed. The work is characterised by a solid and structured methodological approach, and by a clear initial setting of the objectives. The consideration of elements and motivations that go beyond certain rigid categories and militant approaches (such as strictly binary oppositions regarding national self-reflection, which at the time when the two writers lived was not yet developed as we know it today), can be considered as very appreciable. The appropriate methodological integration of specifically historical-literary and comparative analyses with sociological reflections, centred on the opposition of languages on the basis of social principles and prestige, and with evaluations that the candidate defines as 'moral' (valid in particular for the Ukrainian language) can be considered virtuous and productive, also from the point of view of self-representation and self-evaluation. Within a general framework of fruitful application of post-colonial theory, the use of exegetical tools such as "accommodation" or "self-creation" are particularly appropriate to emphasise the aforementioned "moral associations". Among the aspects that can be further appreciated are the candidate's "anti-presentist" considerations regarding Gogol's national character, which even lately unfortunately continue to influence a more balanced study of the issue. In view of a desirable continuation of research by an undoubtedly talented Candidate, one of the lines of interpretation that is recommended is precisely that which can detach Gogol studies from immediate and extra-philological aims, and in this perspective the present Thesis seems to be moving in the right direction. Certain terms, such as borderlands, hybridity, multiple identities are very appropriate reference points and keywords that correctly render a decentralised, multiple and multi-perspective historical and literary image. Finally, the Candidate's command of different languages and their intersection, a prerequisite for dealing

with post-colonial topics, is highly appreciated.

Despite these excellent qualities, there are also some passages that are less convincing, such as those that emphasise the contribution of the Ukrainians themselves in trying to unify the cultural histories of Russia and Ukraine, which perhaps should be supported by a more rigorous commentary and bibliographical apparatus, or some statements that are taken for granted, but not proven (“The Muscovites did not claim an ethnic affinity between Ukrainians and Muscovites and did not consider Kyiv a lost territory”, or, regarding Gogol: “his decision to write primarily in Russian reflects a distance from the idea of constructing a purely national identity based on language”, “Gogol did not stop loving Ukraine; rather, he readdressed his feelings towards Italy”, “even his laughter marked him as unmistakably Little Russian”, “Apparently, Gogol enters the Saint Petersburg literary scene by offering his intimate knowledge of Ukrainian life as a cultural token, presenting it, at least ostensibly, akin to a servant showcasing local customs for his lord’s approval”, “Unable to return to Ukraine, he sought refuge in what he perceived as a ‘distant Ukraine’”). We do not mean to say that these statements are necessarily incorrect or lack interesting argumentative content, but we feel that for their very cardinal importance they could perhaps be framed and supported in a slightly more stringent manner.

On a very few rare occasions, the tone and exposition are less academic and more didactic, while at other times one would feel the need, on the contrary, to specify terms that require more precise contextualisation and which are instead taken for granted (one example above all: Towianism). With a view to a future and desirable publication of part or all of the present work, it is therefore advisable to rebalance in some (not very many) cases the relationship between what can be considered common knowledge of the scientific/academic community and some elements that instead require to be better contextualised in the expository rhetoric. On a purely formal level, which does not affect the excellent overall quality of the work and its good argumentative structure: sometimes the original version of the quotation is given in the footnotes (instead of its English translation), sometimes the original versions of the authors’ letters or their translations are missing, in some cases the literary works are not reported in italics, which makes the comprehension of the text (otherwise well laid out and pleasant to read) less fluent. Sometimes there are small typos, and a revision of the spelling and of the translation of the Polish letters is recommended.

Having said this as a mere obligation of fairness (in essence, we simply recommend a careful re-reading and the clarification of a few passages), in conclusion we would like to emphasise once again our definite and undoubted appreciation for a well-structured Thesis, which we consider to be of significant scientific interest, since it is supported by an excellent philological approach, and by a undisputable ability to move within the existing bibliography, which denotes important qualities in the Candidate. We sincerely hope that this qualities can be cultivated and made to bear fruit, starting with the at least partial publication of this work, which can certainly contribute in a fruitful way to the advancement of studies on the two literary giants in question and on a whole series of themes of relevant importance.

Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

Evaluation file (optional)

Presentation and clarity

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and 'user friendly', without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

None Poor Average Good Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

The thesis can be considered for a 'cum laude' award

Yes No

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

- 1) adequate as is
- 2) require minor revision
- 3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation board.

Accept as is Minor revision Major revision

Date: 12/7/2024

Reviewer: Tria Massimo