

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 Bologna, Associate Professor

Report

Anna Cavazzoni's thesis, "Nikolai Gogol and Juliusz Slowacki's Ukraine: Self-Creative Processes", explores a very complex and crucial sphere of the cultural activity and production of two major authors emerging from what the author lucidly describes as the Russian-Ukrainian-Polish triangle in the early Nineteenth century: i.e., the shaping of identity in times of the rise of national discourses.

The selected topic may be seen as a very ambitious choice by Cavazzoni: current studies on both literary figures mostly revolve around attempts at "nationalizing" their role and literary production within the narrow borders of national canons. By adopting a postcolonial lens – first – and focusing on "epistolography" – second, Cavazzoni is then able to embark on a thorough exploration of the reasons behind the need for going "beyond the national", looking at the image of Ukraine shaped in Gogol's and Slowacki's respective epistolary practices.

The thesis is well structured and organized. Cavazzoni undertakes:

1) an exploration of the historical and literary context surrounding Ukraine vis-à-vis the control of the Polish nobility and the Russian Empire. In this section, on the one hand, we may appreciate the analysis of the extra-literary dimension, which is able to highlight the relevance of social and political allegiances for the shaping of identity affiliations in the "Ukrainian borderlands". On the other hand, the analysis of the Ukrainian experience through postcolonial lenses could have taken advantage of a wide literature elaborating on the peculiar position of Ukraine between imperial projects: Cavazzoni goes for mentioning some major postcolonial approaches in general terms (e.g. "Bhabha's third space"), but does not dig into the results of the concrete application of these tools to the Ukrainian case. Going through the debate over the postcoloniality of Ukraine among Ukrainian and Russian

historians (Kasianov, Hrytsak, Gerasimov) could have enriched this section of the work.

2) The second methodological pillar of Cavazzoni's thesis is then introduced in the second chapter, which revolves around the evolution of national identities and movements in the early nineteenth century. This section mostly relies on Benedict Anderson's constructivist theories of nations: still, in order to get a better understanding of the historical evolution of national movements in 'premodern empires', a better use of Myroslav Hroch's studies (mostly mentioned in dedicated footnotes, but not central for the argument) could be made. The role played by Romanticism and folklore in the "intellectual phase of national movements" (or the first stage of national movements) – as Hroch theorized it – could clarify some passages of this sections.

3) Finally, the third and fourth chapter are the main section of the thesis and embody the most crucial part of the work. The comparative analysis of the authors' life and literary experiences, and the analysis of their epistolary practices are well constructed and provide a very interesting and promising result. Even if Gogol's epistolary production is definitely larger than Slowacki's one – and also addressed to a more diverse audience, the analysis is definitely convincing.

The concluding remarks highlight the difference between Polish-Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian hybrid identities, and the need for other criteria (such as morality and class) - rather than nationality – to grasp the complexity of national consciousness in the 19th century. This ambitious work creates the groundwork for potential future research, where a new generation of scholars in Slavic studies could embrace a more sophisticated analysis of literary actors living at the crossroads between empires, nations and emerging literary canons.

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: 12/3/2024

Reviewer: Puleri Marco