

OPINION¹

By **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ralitsa Kovacheva, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**

(scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution)

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) / scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications-Cartoon in the Media) with a dissertation on the topic: "**Characteristics of contemporary cartoon in the press (based on case studies from the newspapers "Sega", "The Guardian", "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" and "Le Monde")**", presented by **Petar Shoylev, independent doctoral student** in the Department "History and Theory of Journalism" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor: **Prof. Dr. Zdravka Konstantinova**

I. Evaluation of the qualities of the text of dissertation

The problem chosen by Mr Petar Shoilev is topical and significant, especially when the media and journalism face the challenge of working for an audience that prefers quick, short and easily digestible information. In this context, "the cartoon stands out for its impact and ability to communicate powerful messages quickly and effectively" (Abstract, p. 20). Moreover, the author notes, "the cartoons do not reflect false facts and are well promoted in social media" (Abstract, p. 18).

The research object is "characteristics of modern cartoons in the press", focusing on "political cartoons in four newspapers with the ambitions of quality journalism: "Sega", "The Guardian", "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" and "Le Monde".

The dissertation's objective is to highlight characteristics inherent in the cartoon as a journalistic genre in the context of significant international events. To achieve this objective, the following tasks are outlined: highlighting the cartoon as a journalistic genre from a historical perspective; characterising the selected media; selecting event markers; situating the research analysis in the context of individual editions and a parallel between them; reflecting on the influence of cartoons on the editorial policy of the newspapers studied.

The research method is case studies, and to cartoons, the author applies a set of methods, including semiotic analysis, visual analysis, discourse analysis, general theory of verbal humour, comparative analysis, etc. Over 800 cartoons were reviewed across the four newspapers over a six-

¹ Note: The text in italics offers reference points for evaluating the research results. Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages



year period (2016-2022). From the total volume of cartoons, 65 were selected according to the following criteria: relevance of the topic, expressiveness of the message, creativity and originality, visual effectiveness, and historical context. For the purpose of the comparative analysis, eight cartoons from each edition were selected.

The first chapter introduces the cartoon as a journalistic genre, focusing on the political cartoon and its functions. The author demonstrates good theoretical knowledge underpinned by relevant and up-to-date scientific literature. From the arguments presented in this part, the author concludes that regardless of technological and social changes, "political cartoons have remained a method of political commentary" (p. 34) - from this starting point, he builds his overall analysis of the cartoons in the selected editions.

The second chapter explores the role of the cartoon in the four newspapers. The history of the cartoon in the respective countries is presented. The publications studied and their iconic caricaturists are discussed. The historical method is used appropriately to present the national specificities, cultures and historical developments in a broader context, considering the individual editions and the role of the cartoon in them. The author presents an analysis of the specific characteristics of 8 cartoons from each edition, followed by a comparative analysis of the cartoons in the four newspapers.

The third chapter presents the "cartoon comments" on four world events and processes - Brexit, the meetings between Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump, the COVID-19 pandemic and the presidential elections in the USA in 2016 and 2020. In this chapter, the most serious attention is paid to the topic of "Brexit" and its coverage in the British media, which the author argues with the importance of the subject and its continued presence on the public and media agenda.

The bibliography includes 116 titles, of which 46 are in Cyrillic, mostly in Bulgarian, and 70 in Latin, mainly in English. The literature used is appropriate, up-to-date and well-chosen. The structure and layout of the dissertation meet the requirements. The abstract fully reflects the content of the dissertation. The basic requirements of the scientific style have been met. The author demonstrates broad knowledge and sincere interest in the subject.

II. Contributions of the dissertation research

As a contribution of the research, its interdisciplinary approach should be highlighted, using knowledge and tools from different scientific fields (art, communications, journalism, sociology, history, psychology, etc.). I would especially emphasise the comparative perspective, which allows us to see how Bulgarian media compares with the major European media regarding cartoons. As the author formulated, "how Bulgarian cartoonists react to significant international events". Unfortunately, like other studies, this research notes that our attention is focused primarily on ourselves at the expense of significant world issues. It is a small consolation that this applies to a large extent to the



rest of the media, with the difference that when you are part of an influential country, often your "domestic" problems are important world topics.

I agree with the author's assessment that the dissertation:

- "illuminates the role of visual satire in society, contributes to the understanding of the ways in which figurative humour influences public and political attitudes, and presents how art can function as a vehicle for social criticism";
- "analyses how cartoons reflect and influence cultural norms, stereotypes and power structures";
- explores the cartoon as "a kind of archive of public sentiments and political events during different eras, providing historians and scholars with unique material for analysing the past";
- "contributes to a better understanding of visual information and humour processing, as well as of the coping mechanisms through laughter in difficult social and political times";
- demonstrates how cartoon analysis can serve "to understand political processes and media strategies";
- raises issues such as "freedom of expression, censorship, authors' rights and the limits of satire in different legal systems".

IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

As part of his doctoral studies, Petar Shoylev participated in doctoral readings and seminars of the FJMK and published the articles "Outstanding cartoonists in the newspaper „The Guardian", " The Pulitzer Prize for cartooning – criteria, subject matter, influence of the era " and " Brexit, as seen in the Guardian cartoons from 2019" in the electronic scholarly publication "New Media 21". The requirements of the Rules regulating the conditions and procedure for acquiring science degrees and holding academic positions in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” are met, as well as the national minimum requirements for ESD “Doctor” (Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and art. 69, para. 3).

V. Conclusion

Based on the arguments presented in the opinion, I recommend that the candidate Petar Shoilev be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) / scientific degree “Doctor of Science” in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications-Cartoon in the Media).

Jury member: Ralitsa Kovacheva

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