



REVIEW

by Prof. D.Sc. Lubomir Stoykov - UNWE

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

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Cartoon in the Media)

with a dissertation on the topic: **"Characteristics of modern cartoon in the press (Based on case studies from the newspapers "Sega", "The Guardian", "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" and "Le Monde")"**, presented by **Petar Borisov Shoylev**, independent doctoral student in the History and Theory of Journalism Department, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski” with supervisor: **Prof. Zdravka Konstantinova, PhD.**

I. Presentation of the doctoral (PhD) student on the basis of the submitted documentation

Doctoral student Petar Shoylev is a unique example of the concept of "Learning throughout life" and at his venerable age is about to become a record holder for educational longevity and lifelong education. He graduated from the Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Institute (today the Technical University) majoring in "Power Stations, Networks and Systems" in 1959, as well as from the Higher Economic Institute "Karl Marx" (now the University of National and World Economy), majoring in "Industrial Economics". He specialized in various fields of foreign trade. In 2017, he completed the master's program in "International Journalism" at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The topic of his master's thesis "The role of the cartoon in a magazine. "The Economist" at the beginning of the XXI century (2015-2017)" is a serious allusion to the future scientific research of doctoral student Shoylev. In December 2019, he was enrolled as a doctoral student of independent training at the department "History and Theory of Journalism" in the scientific specialty "Media and Communications (Cartoon in the media)". In November 2022, he was deducted with the right of defense. Petar Shoylov has written two books. He also has teaching experience in the field of marketing, advertising and leasing. He speaks four languages: French, Russian, German and English. He is a recipient of the Golden Order of Labor.



II. Assessment of the qualities of the text of the dissertation

Cartoon is such a hybrid genre that mixes in a unique way the advantages of sharp and restless journalism, resourceful drawing and the bold and witty social and cultural reflection of the "newsworthy" artist. It usually has a lightning effect on the audience and, like the ubiquitous humor genre - a joke, causes a spontaneous reaction of laughter. The sketchy nature of the cartoon favors it to pass without serious resistance the walls of prejudice and doubt and to provide a quick and in most cases - a reliable media result.

The relevance and significance of the dissertation work derives, on the one hand, from the increasing role of cartoons in modern media content in an era of global economic and political collisions, crises and even collapses. In such situations (global and local), the cartoon is a particularly valuable means of combating and resisting shortcomings and weaknesses of any nature, and at the same time it is an herb in the interest of the public, of human health. On the other hand, in aesthetic and socio-psychological terms, this journalistic cartoon is able to bring about the much-needed catharsis - in politics and business, culture and the media. The dissertation has a volume of 259 pages and includes 116 bibliographic sources in different languages. The scale and reliability of the research is also evidenced by the fact that the doctoral student examined over 800 cartoons in the four newspapers during the six-year research period. His focus falls on 65 of them, based on criteria such as relevance of the topic, expressiveness of the message, creativity and originality, etc.

The aim of the dissertation work is to highlight characteristics inherent in the journalistic cartoon genre in the context of significant international events. The author rightly noted his priority tasks, which logically derive from and are tied to the main goal: highlighting in a historical perspective the journalistic cartoon genre; analysis and characterization of selected media; selection of event tags; situating the research analysis in the context of individual editions and in parallel between them; interpreting and making sense of the influence of cartoons on the editorial policy of the investigated newspapers.

I find the choice of the research subject to be reliable and justified: political cartoons in four newspapers with the ambitions of quality journalism: "Sega", "Guardian", "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" ("FAZ") and "Le Monde".



In the first chapter, "The Journalistic Cartoon Genre", Petar Shoylev competently and reasonably examines both the main characteristics of this genre, its historical features and theoretical foundations, as well as the types, functions and communication specifics of the cartoon. An important point at the beginning of his work is that he offers not only models, means and methods for the study of the genre, but also highlights such significant aspects as the semiotics of political cartoons, verbal humor, etc.

In the second chapter "The role of the cartoon in the analyzed newspapers", the author specifies his analysis on the peculiarities of the development of the cartoon in Bulgaria, England, France and Germany. He benchmarks his observations on the media landscape in the respective country and fixes the typical signs of the journalistic genre in the context of different national cultures and media systems. A positive quality is his effort to make a professional dissection of the brightest and most impressive cartoonists in the various editions. In Sega, the receptions of one of the emblematic names in modern Bulgarian cartoons - Hristo Komarnitsky - are analyzed. The philosophy of our famous humorist, related to the thesis that the genre of the newspaper cartoon derives from real persons and events, as well as his agreement that every cartoon is also a kind of manipulation with a view to the inevitable - of course, artistic, deformation of reality and hyperbolizing various fragments (most often personal flaws and blunders). With confidence, Petar Shoylev reveals the way in which the political cartoons are created in the "Guardian". A mark of research confidence is also the way in which he evaluates the style and creativity of some of the most prominent cartoonists in the publication - Steve Bell, Chris Riddell, Martin Rawson, Ben Jennings, Simon Lea, Andrzej Krause, David Squires, Stephen Collins and others. The doctoral student is no less thorough in the analysis of cartoons and cartoonists in the authoritative French newspaper Le Monde. The doyenne of cartooning in this much-loved issue, Planteau, is a symbol of humorous talent and remarkable productivity. As Mr. Shoylev also writes, he published more than 60 books with his satirical drawings, and during his entire practice he drew 14 thousand cartoons. An important feature is that all the cartoons in Le Monde are in color and accompanied by texts. Respect also arouses the interpretation of the humorous genre of the influential German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung - both in a general context and quite specifically, by looking at the output of Achim Greser and Hubert Lenz. I accept the author's claims that cartoonists are able to shape the political line and/or direction of the newspaper and that they are able to give birth to and offer new ideas and perspectives for the development of media influence, as well as building the adequate political image of a newspaper.

The third chapter, Cartoon Commentary on Events, is particularly indicative of the doctoral student's analytical and interpretive abilities. It clearly shows his skills in distinguishing the important from the unimportant, the significant from the insignificant, the permanent from the transitory in media content, journalism and journalistic humor. Petar Shoylev logically focuses on four extremely important and, at the same time, favorable cases for the cartoonist's pen: Brexit in 2019, Donald Trump's meeting with Kim Jong Un in 2018, the Covid pandemic of 2020 and 2021 and the presidential 2016 and 2020 US elections.



Here, the doctoral student relies on two research methods that have proven their effectiveness, such as content analysis and comparative analysis. These approaches enable him to draw important and well-founded conclusions about the media coverage of Brexit in 2019. This fundamental event (not just for the European Union, but largely for the rest of the world) has been explored through the humorous works of the press, from Boris Johnson to Theresa May's cartoons. The high analytical culture and the desire to refine the generalizations are also evident in the interpretation of the remaining three case studies.

Using semiotic analysis in dissecting Donald Trump's meeting with Kim Jong Un in 2018, the author examines four cartoons (one from each newspaper) highlighting the problems, absurdities and intransigence of both sides. Noting the US president's political juggling act and the North Korean leader's imitation of a quest for understanding, the doctoral student clearly marks the ways in which newspapers from four countries, and in particular their cartoons, express through humorous and satirical means the anxieties and concerns for the preservation of world peace. A clear idea of Petar Shoylev's approach is given by the semiotic analysis table with its well-structured criteria: communicative purpose of the genre, author's concept, event content, factor of the communicative past, factor of the communicative future, linguistic embodiment.

The differentiation of the cartoons based on the national, cultural and media specificities of the four editions allows to get a full picture of the mastery and application of the genre in different social and cultural environments. This is eloquently seen in the analysis of humorous interpretations of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In *Sega* the emphasis is on the conflicting opinions of doctors, medical communities and politicians; in *Le Monde*, the emphasis is on the mutation of Covid-19 and the mutations of politicians, the conclusion being that both are equally dangerous and harmful to public health; in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* a hint is made (again with laughable means) about the Chinese genesis of the pandemic. Here, the doctoral student explains the D algorithm method he uses or more functions of discourse (D), and in the table he has set out the criteria visual-verbal approach, degree of adequacy between fact and realization and answer to the question "What problem is affected by the cartoon and what decision is given?".

In the last, fourth, case study - "The US presidential elections in 2016 and 2020, in *Sega* newspaper"

Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are depicted as a beast and a beast tamer, and Komarnitsky's cartoon from 2020 illustrates Trump surprised by the election results and his arrogance in the debates with Biden. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper emphasized Trump's intention to solve immigration problems (most notably by curbing Mexican incursions into the US), which is not without irony given Trump's megalomania and delusions. The author rightly notes the similarity in the cartoon interpretations of Donald Trump as a beast - for Komarnitsky as a lion, and for his French colleague Planteau as a dragon.



A good impression is made by the way in which Petar Shoylev captures and systematizes the dissonances in the cartoonists' creative approaches to their objects of mockery and irony, satire and sarcasm. He logically claims that: "Obviously, different cartoonists dwell on the same event in different ways, and this is explainable from the point of view of mentality, culture and degree of intelligibility on the part of the given peoples" (p.212). It is commendable that in his conclusion Petar Shoylev outlines the importance of the cartoon for the good reputation and convincing image of the respective publication. He thoroughly nuances the role of cartoon and highlights its powerful impact and more visible effect of its powerful messages compared to such widespread satirical genres as cartoons and jokes.

In the conclusion of the thesis, the following summary is made: "Cartoon is distinguished by its unique property of containing complex ideas in a single image. A cartoon can be perceived immediately, regardless of language barriers, and evoke an immediate emotional response. This is the power of visual art – to recreate events, characters and social flaws with a few expressive strokes. Furthermore, the cartoon's direct visual humor and exaggeration often make it more accessible to a wider audience than a text-based feuilleton or joke" (pp. 215 - 216). The role of the cartoonist as a social commentator, as well as his satirical freedom - his scale and scope - have been competently and comprehensibly examined, or rather - synthesized. Here, Mr. Shoylev also appropriately shows some of the differences in the cartoons of the four examined publications, such as the fact that in the newspapers Sega and FAZ their objects are rather from the sphere of domestic politics, while in The Guardian and Le Monde - of international life. Other dissonances were also pointed out - for the use of foreign cartoonists by Le Monde, local ones by The Guardian and FAZ, while Sega used only one - Komarnitsky.

The final summaries in the dissertation are systematized in a more convincing way: on the effectiveness of cartoons and on their enriching role in relation to public discourse; for the artistic value, but also for their informative and communicative power. In this very important part of the work, the refraction of the meaning and specific meaning of the cartoons through a few more conclusions related to the time factor, diversity and complexity, interaction with the media, etc. is not missed. Again, the greatest advantage of this genre is emphatically emphasized – its ability to offer a critical, analytical and artistic perspective to political dynamics and especially current topics and events of today.

III. Contributions to the dissertation research

The contributions in Petar Shoylev's dissertation contain scientific news and undoubtedly enrich the existing theories and views on the newspaper cartoon. I acknowledge his stated scientific contributions, highlighting a few more important ones:



1. Culturology and sociology are given an even greater opportunity to capture the dynamics of cultural norms, stereotypes and power structures and, more specifically, the ways in which public opinion is formed, its distribution and the ultimate effect - the provoking of resistance among different social groups.
2. The value of the political cartoon in the context of its historical development and its role as a serious documentation and chronology of public sentiments and political events and moments at different times is highlighted, thus providing unique facts and data for the study of what was happening through the ages.
3. The utility for political science and media studies is derived based on the cartoon's ability to be a vehicle for political messages, propaganda or anti-propaganda, and an indicator for understanding political processes and media strategies.

This dissertation also contributes to the further clarification of the topics and problems related to freedom of expression, the fight against censorship, the guarantee of honest and critical authorial journalistic positions, etc.

IV. Notes and recommendations

Against the background of the notes to the peer-reviewed work, its advantages stand out even more. However, the work can be improved in several directions. More precision is needed in the structuring of the text. The place of the last paragraph in the first chapter - the comparative analysis of the "media tools" used by the newspapers, should be at the end of the dissertation.

The four case studies in the last chapter are unequally examined, with the most space allocated to Brexit, and the least to the meeting between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un. Regarding the scientific methods used, there is also something to be desired, because now in places there are certain deviations from the systemic-structural approach and the applied methodology. These omissions are of secondary nature and do not detract from the overall very good impression of the dissertation work. I recommend the author to publish his work as a book, monograph or textbook, which would be useful both to students of journalism, political science and cultural studies, as well as to working journalists, editors, artists, publicists, political scientists, art critics and cultural scientists.

I will ask the doctoral student one specific and one more general question:

1. What does the author think is the reason for the lack of fiction in the Guardian newspaper about the US presidential election, as noted on p. 212 in table 8, titled "Through the lens of a general theory of verbal humor"?



2. What is the future of the cartoon genre and what is common and different in the presence of cartoons in traditional and new media?

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

The doctoral student has fulfilled the requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" and has adequately approved and published the results of his research.

VI. Conclusion

The dissertation contains a valuable and representative analysis of the political cartoon in four authoritative editions in Bulgaria, Germany, England and France. The author has adhered to academic standards in writing scientific papers and has shown serious knowledge, self-discipline and consistency.

I categorically recommend to the respected scientific jury to vote **"For" the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Petar Borisov Shoylev - independent doctoral student in the History and Theory of Journalism Department, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski” - in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Cartoon in the Media).**

Date: 16.01.2024 г.

Reviewer:

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