

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Svetla Cherpokova-Zaharieva, PhD, member of the scientific jury,
lecturer in the History of Literature and Comparative Literature Studies Department,
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,
on the dissertation of “The Demand of Fragmentation and the Opportunity for Literary
Transgression”
for the awarding of scientific degree “doctor” in the field of higher education,
Professional field: 2.1. Philology – Literary Theory
doctoral candidate: Yoanna Ivanova Neykova,
academic advisor: Assoc. Prof. Darin Tenev, PhD

The topic of the dissertation, “The Demand of Fragmentation and the Opportunity for Literary Transgression”, fits excellently into a familiar and definitely modern scientific trajectory related to research on “fragments” and “the fragmentary”. This trend finds its roots in the early German romantic period in a literary context and in questions about the fragmentary nature of the contemporary world in an epistemological context. At the same time, this supposedly familiar topic is positioned in a “conceptual bonding” (p. 10) with the concept *transgression*—something that takes it to a whole other road of research that leaves the familiar and trodden paths. Thus, even from the topic title, this work announces its independence and originality and proceeds to back them up as the research unfolds.

The title elegantly paraphrases a question posited by Maurice Blanchot and cited in the introduction: “The Fragmentary: what comes of it—a question, a demand, a practical solution?” (p. 5). Blanchot’s quote, however, also creates a matrix that the dissertation uses to develop its own trajectories. From setting up its own questions, which are clear and pertinent, to deliberately translating all meanings of the concept of “demand”, discussed in the introduction (see pp. 9 – 10) and applied up to chapter three, up to offering practical solutions (chapter four)—this is the model that the work follows and turns the reader empathetic to the intriguing tale of the meeting between the fragmentary and literary transgression. And, finally, with its four chapters, introduction, conclusion, and bibliography, the dissertation answers one of its author’s own queries, posited at the very beginning: “Can we write about the fragmentary in an unfragmented form?” (p. 6). The answer to this question lies in its own structure and composition, the latter fitting well with proper traditions of classic writing, detailed research of its sources, and careful and intelligent discourse that builds upon the main theses and convincingly argues in their favor.

The introduction defies the genre expectations that include a few expository pages to guide the reader. Instead, it sets up a solid foundation with solid arguments that serve as the base level of the text, a zero-level for the upper floors. There is excellent and logical

argumentation for the use of a connection between fragmentary demand and transgression, as well as the “theoretical framework” that holds the dissertation together—“the ideas of Friedrich Schlegel, Walter Benjamin, and Maurice Blanchot” (p. 8).

Chapter one, “The Romantic Fragment and the beginning of modern fragmentation”, focuses on the problem of fragments and the idea of the fragmentary in early German romanticism. Additionally, it seeks the influence of early German romanticism on literary processes during the 19th and 20th century. Friedrich Schlegel takes center stage here with his *Athenaeum Fragments*, but they are recontextualized into several pertinent contexts: literary historical, geographical, philosophical, and literary critical. “Accomplices” in this research are Novalis and August Schlegel, as well as modern theoreticians and researchers of German romanticism and fragment theory. Along with *Athenaeum Fragments*, other key texts that serve to demonstrate romantic moods toward the fragmentary include Friedrich Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poetry* and *Lucinda*, August Schlegel’s lectures, Novalis’s *The Novices of Sais*, and others. Their “predecessors” are also there: Blaise Pascal, Winckelmann, Goethe, Schiller, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Most notable and useful for the construction of the hypotheses is the presence of Herder as well (pp. 56 – 58).

While the first chapter used an archaeological approach, the next two chapters delve into specific case studies where ruins also hold significant importance (e.g., “the ruins of the Baroque”, p. 65, etc.). The author draws upon intriguing and mostly productive examples to illustrate the research (e.g., the example of Ludovico da Feltre). Chapter two, “Walter Benjamin: Allegory and Ruin”, gradually approaches another key concept of the dissertation: transgression, which takes on an increasingly central role in the narrative. One of the most productive findings of the work lies in this chapter—the possibility of “drawing parallels between concepts such as catastrophe and ruin with fragment and the fragmentary” (p. 69) based on Benjamin’s ideas. The theme of language, introduced in the previous chapter, appears once more, becoming one of the leitmotifs that maintain the compositional coherence of the work. Personally, I found the section “The Fragment as Ruin” (pp. 83-87) particularly fascinating. The author extends the established line of comparison by introducing new elements: death, transience, nature, and history. In addition, the observations on Baudelaire add new and unexplored dimensions, both to his emblematic texts and to the problematic issues discussed in the dissertation.

Chapter three, “Maurice Blanchot: The Work as a Torn Unity”, tackles the writings of Maurice Blanchot, an author renowned for his challenging prose. The doctoral candidate works with Blanchot’s texts with remarkable ease, taking on theoretical treatises, essays, and novels

to fit into the narrative. She continues the tradition of posing questions, but this time she uses ample text to provide answers. A particularly poignant question-answer exchange emerges at the end of the section titled “Where is Literature Going?”: “If we must return to the question, ‘Where is literature going?’ the very brief answer would be: to its inception” (p. 126).

Chapter four, “Paul Auster and the Transgression of the Gaze”, illustrates one of many “practical solutions” to the problems discussed in the dissertation. It somewhat resembles an experiment. It transitions from theoretical discussions supported by select examples to a more compact illustration, all through the eyes of someone who has a connection to Maurice Blanchot. The author demonstrates a deep understanding of Paul Auster’s work. While acknowledging at the beginning of the chapter that “only selected aspects of Auster’s oeuvre will be examined” (p. 176), the overall impression the chapter leaves is one of thorough research and familiarity with the American writer.

The conclusion clearly articulates the findings and summaries. It echoes the delicacy and self-reflectiveness that characterize the entire text, making it particularly engaging to read. Overall, the dissertation stands out for its elegant style and mature writing. As the reader turns the final page, they can confidently conclude that the author’s initial “unseen anxieties about the dissertation” (p. 5) have been unfounded and have led to a successful outcome.

Overall, I have no major comments on the dissertation. Minor technical errors will undoubtedly be corrected upon publication, which I wholeheartedly wish for the work. Personally, I would have liked to hear more about Novalis’s work in the first chapter. Discussing his fragments, especially those about language, would have definitely enriched the dissertation. However, I understand that for a doctoral thesis, discussing Friedrich Schlegel is already quite a challenge, not to mention the company he finds himself in: Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, Paul Auster, and so on.

The supplemental material clearly and systematically presents the content of the dissertation, and the applied publications meet the national minimum requirements.

In conclusion, I think that Yoanna Invanova Neykova’s dissertation has all the necessary qualities for a successful defense. Based on that, I suggest that the honorable jury awards the doctoral candidate with the scientific degree “doctor”.

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