

## REVIEW

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of the dissertation work of Dimitar Radev Radev on the topic "TIME AND SPACE IN THE BULGARIAN NOVEL AND FILM AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR. OPPOSITION OF SACRED AND PROFANE TIME AND SPACE" for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"; professional direction 2.1. Philology/Bulgarian literature - Bulgarian literature after the Second World War

Let me begin with the professional-creative profile of the author of the dissertation (from the CV attached to the procedure documents), as it is directly related to the choice of the dissertation topic and largely to the approach taken towards it. Dimitar Radev is an actor, director, screenwriter, and has already published a debut book of short stories. Therefore, it is only logical for him to focus on an interdisciplinary topic that involves literature and cinema, without limiting the research solely to comparing two artistic systems.

The universal formulation of the topic, "Time and Space in the Bulgarian Novel and Film after World War II," is specified by the subtitle – "The Struggle between Sacred and Profane Time and Space," and the selected extensive period of novel development after the first half of the 20th century (viewed as a palimpsest of several cultural epochs) is examined through the lens of three Bulgarian but epoch-defining novels: "The Iron Candlestick" by Dimitar Talev from the 1950s, "Time of Parting" by Anton Donchev from the 1960s, and "Elevation" by Milen Ruskov from 2011, as well as the films based on them. Although the doctoral student has noted the temporal proximity depicted in the three novels, the historical-cultural, literary, and political context is evidently not among his objectives. If the literary-historical line of novel development after World War II were traced, three novels would be insufficient. Dimitar Radev has perceived entirely different "meetings" within and between the three novels, directly connected to the originality and provocativeness of his work.

Another general impression is that Dimitar Radev approaches his research subject analytically, creatively, and wholeheartedly (almost as Talev does with his characters: "It is as if he does not write about them, but lives with them.", p. 12), inviting different levels of perception of the dissertation (even intimate self-reflection). This is perhaps aided by his dramaturgical handwriting, recognizable even in the "conflictual" subtitle of the work: "The Struggle between

Sacred and Profane Time and Space." Furthermore, "the feeling of curiosity and literary mystery" (p. 14), which he claims guided him in writing the work, also explains how some pages captivate the reader in the same way.

To find the possible dialogue, the "sacred connection," as he calls it, between the three novels, the doctoral student has harnessed all his erudition in the fields of theology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, film studies, and his entire intellectual power to offer an innovative research-artistic work, executed at the edge of philological standards. And something very important for the objectivity of research: despite the general theoretical framework of the dissertation, each novel is "unlocked" with a specific key, justified by the doctoral student as inherent to its internal structure. For "The Iron Candlestick," it is the theological-historical key, for "Time of Parting" – the psychoanalytic-philosophical key, for "Elevation" – the postmodern and intertextual key. Incidentally, if we consider intertextuality not only as a dialogue that the novel text openly or covertly leads, it can be said that this is the doctoral student's favorite approach in his readings of the three novels: often a "foreign" text (not necessarily literary) enters the dialogue, the product of an association, idea, reference, which accordingly requires (and receives) the necessary comprehension. The further it is from the novel text, the more surprising the "discovery" (perhaps this has a dramaturgical effect, but it certainly opens the interpretive framework of the works): for example, the beginning of the introduction with the diary fragments of Julien Green or the beginning of the philosophical-psychological reading of "Time of Parting" with George Lucas's "Star Wars" saga, created based on Joseph Campbell's "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," or the text of Jean-Paul Belmondo at the beginning of the film "Pierrot le Fou," and so on.

It became clear that the topic of the dissertation has nothing to do with the study of the literary chronotope through literary, cinematic, and historical contexts. The field on which the research is carried out is the narrative models of the three novels (let me emphasize that it is not one, but more than one model, with the most complex due to its postmodern basis being in "Elevation"). It is precisely in this field that the doctoral student seeks closeness between them. It involves the use of clear or indirect elements from autobiographical genres by all three novels (the claims for the autobiographical "indirect" discourse of "The Iron Candlestick" are justified on pp. 11-12): from autobiography, memoir, diary prose, confession, travelogue, which open the way to the "philosophical-psychological microcosm" of the characters and the intimate "meeting of the T

with the 'Other', with Otherness" (pp. 5-6). This is also the field of the most genuine unfolding of the "struggle of sacred time and space," ensuring a complex analysis on what seems like an inexhaustible communication field.

For the theoretical foundation of the topic, interesting additional sources from the fields of theology, philosophy, and literary studies are included: Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov, Emmanuel Levinas, Alexander Schmemmann, Martin Heidegger, Vladimir Lossky... – an idea of the completeness of the list is given by the bibliography at the end of the dissertation. The specific usage (when present) of the employed terms and concepts is consistently outlined: for example, the concept of "sacred," which through the lens of the three novels and the films based on them, acquires an additional meaning for the doctoral student – that of "transformation," related to the change the characters undergo (p. 8). Terms that, although created for the analysis of other works, are creatively turned into tools for the present analysis are borrowed (an example is Bakhtin's thesis on the "vertical chronotope," which arose in connection with Dante's "Divine Comedy," which the doctoral student finds particularly suitable for describing the specific time-spatial structure in "Time of Parting." Or the "novelistic polyphony" (Bakhtin) in Rusev's novel develops into the "postmodern ambiguity and ambivalence of heteroglossia" (p. 10). Delving into the essence of the theoretical platforms used leads to one's own clarifications such as: "...by definition, postmodernity is an inclusive and multilayered, not synthesizing process of interpreting the existence of human consciousness." (p. 10)

Let's open the three main chapters of the dissertation, dedicated to the three novels and the films based on them. For "The Iron Candlestick," I do not believe that the most important achievement of the doctoral student here is a theological interpretation, as he correctly asserts has been missing until now, but rather the study of the overlay of Christian theological traditions on folkloric-mythological ones in the thought system of the characters. This is the path to reaching the "transcendental depths and obscure religious and historical implications" (p. 13) of the novel. The question "Can cultural layers really be so displaced?" (regarding the changes in the semiotic code of the sacred and the profane in pagan and Christian culture) seems rhetorical to me, without the need to talk about a "hybrid existence where folklore, myth, and theology are postmodernly intertwined" (p. 19).

The analysis of the six excerpts from the novel highlights the points where the sacred and the profane "meet, interact, and repel each other" (p. 20). In his argumentation, the doctoral

candidate skillfully references researchers of Talev such as Ivan Stankov, Simeon Yanev, Svetozar Igov, Valeri Stefanov, and Paulina Stoycheva. While reading, I come across interestingly formulated theses that could be discussed. Due to lack of space, I will highlight only a few: “It is not at all illogical that for Talev, Sultana and Stoyan are not only the names of his characters, but also fundamental life energies flowing through the collective memory and conscience of the people of Prespa in the 19th century.” (p. 22); the epic time-space positions the characters of the novel closer to Old Testament figures (p. 27); “...in this ‘self-creation,’ in this free personal conscience and will, the clash between the profane and the sacred occurs in the characters...” (p. 32) In this chapter, the precise analysis of the meeting between Sultana and Stoyan stands out, as well as the adept decoding of biblical paraphrases (which can also be applied to other chapters): Old Testament and Gospel truths, the sermons and parables of Christ. The interpretation of the figure of the anonymous monk from Rila as a possible composite image of prominent Revival writers, the biblical and historical “underpinning” of the image of Lazarus Glaushev, and the theological-philosophical approaches to the image of Sultana are all successful.

In the abundant “archetypal-poetic” symbolism and “mysterious” synchronicity in the novel, Radev sees foreshadowings that propel the plot forward. In this chapter, interdisciplinary connections are enriched with visual arts: the association with Andrei Rublev’s icon “The Holy Trinity,” the comparison of Rafe Klinche with Michelangelo da Caravaggio.

The art analysis of the differences between the film “The Iconostasis” by Hristo Hristov and Todor Dinov and the novel’s original, as well as the understanding of the selected emphases in their screenplay, is noteworthy. Here, the figure of Rafe Klinche and the semiotics of the altar in the sacred space of the church stand out. According to Dimitar Radev, the screenwriters and directors have adequately conveyed the clash of the sacred and the profane in the novel.

I have the following question: Can it be said that the film develops a more modern stylistic approach than Talev’s (in terms of surreal elements, parallel editing, camera angles, etc.), without comparing the impact strength of the literary original and the film adaptation?

The characters from “Time of Parting” are examined from an uncharacteristic and unconventional perspective, as the doctoral candidate asserts. This is especially true for the characters of Karaibrahim and the Venetian, both seen as “burdened with the trauma of lost identity” (p. 141). The doctoral candidate finds theoretical support for the analysis in Freud’s concept of the “mourning” and “melancholic” psyche and in Martin Buber’s “dialogical Eros” in the world of I-

Thou and I-It. The connection made at the beginning of this chapter with Joseph Campbell's work "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" is not only original but also methodologically significant for the analysis – Campbell's theory of the monomyth is based on the psychoanalysis of myth. On this basis, the analogy between the character of Darth Vader from "The Matrix" and Karaibrahim from "Time of Parting" sounds entirely appropriate (archetypal analysis yields its results). A psychological diagnosis of Karaibrahim is also made: “fanatical aggression as a form of compensatory defensive reaction to a melancholic and mourning process, unassimilated in the consciousness of the mourner” (p. 170), reaching “angry mania” and a mad drive toward death (p. 179).

The prelude to unraveling the voices is stylistically one of the most well-executed in the doctoral candidate's work: “...the rich amalgam of the collective myth, in which, besides human voices, one can also hear the roaring and rumbling of nature (the mountain), and the archetypal Orphic layers as a subliminal, bass part [...] This ‘tangle’ of voices must be unraveled slowly and carefully...” (p. 125) This is precisely what the doctoral candidate does, focusing on the semiotic codes of the novel, attempting to read the “diary” of the characters’ consciousness (the metaphor is Radev's and refers to the Venetian’s consciousness, p. 154). The different names of the same character are interpreted in the light of Jung’s analytical psychology as names of his various personas or as signs of the levels of awakening/sleeping of the personality (the Venetian-Abdullah-Giuliano-Slav being the most richly named and developed character in the novel). I will also note the doctoral candidate's appreciation of the dramaturgically well-crafted scenes in the novel (especially the scene of the unrealized fratricide and the inflicted wound, interpreted as a *damga*/mark of the split consciousness of Karaibrahim/Strahin).

The highlights that Lyudmil Staykov makes in the film “Time of Parting” are considered his original cinematic reading of the novel: differences in the emotional profile of Manol are captured; the impossibility of achieving the “implicit chronotopic communion” in the film to the same extent as in the novel, which the diaries of the Venetian and Pop Aligorko provide, is understood (p. 16) – the doctoral candidate is well aware of the different semiotic nature and hence the different potentialities and “boundaries” of the language of literature and cinema.

The novel “Elevation” is examined entirely within the framework of postmodernism, which, even if it does not have a cohesive theoretical system, has impressive theorists such as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Julia Kristeva, Jonathan Culler, Franco Moretti, Ben Hutchinson, and many others,

all studied by Dimitar Radev, “ready” to enter his associative matrix. The author's greater ease of writing is evident, living in the same hybrid cultural environment he studies. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that he skillfully practices the position of the postmodern reader, as explained by Ivaylo Znepolski: “The measure of the work (created by the Author) at the beginning of the chain is replaced by the measure of the reader at the end of the chain.” (p. 229)

Here, the analysis of another character pair stands out – Gicho and Asencho – again examined in a dynamic interrelationship (to the point of seeing Asencho as Gicho’s alter ego). All possible literary prototypes of the pair are decoded, which can be included in the intertextual frames of the novel: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Estragon and Vladimir, William and Adso, and from Bulgarian pairs – Grandpa Liben and Hadji Gencho, Mitrofan and Dormidolski, etc. According to the doctoral candidate, “Milen Ruskov follows this character model but overturns it from horizontally comical equality to vertically value-based opposition, following the Sancho Panza-Don Quixote model...” (p. 233) The observations on Gicho’s “tracts,” compared to “Socratic midwifery in search of truth” (p. 235) and generally on the bouquet of various high and low discourses, without fully identifying with any of them, are interesting.

The film version of the novel clearly does not receive the high praise that the films based on "The Iron Candlestick" and "Time of Parting" do. However, the historiographical metafiction, intertextual “pun,” heteroglossia, and autobiographical discourse are compared with similar techniques from the film language of Jean-Luc Godard in "Pierrot le Fou" (one of the most extravagant intertextual connections in the work), showing both the permeability of the languages of the arts in contemporary “post” culture and the transcendence of any interpretative conservative boundaries. The combination of picaresque with the autobiographical (Gicho’s notes) is recognized by the doctoral candidate from Augustine of Hippo, Montaigne, Unamuno, Julien Green, and finally in Godard’s character. This “recognition” ultimately “enriches the chronotopic dimensions of the novel ‘Elevation’” (p. 16) and places it in the global literary and cinematic context. I see a controversial charge in the doctoral candidate’s thesis about cinema being more direct and unequivocal in showing postmodern techniques compared to literature. But this might

be the starting point for a new dissertation.

context.

What has been stated so far should be accepted as evidence of the contributory nature of Dimitar Radev's dissertation, which meets all the requirements of the Law for the Development of

the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB, and the corresponding Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." Therefore, I confidently give a positive assessment of the proposed scientific research and recommend that the esteemed academic jury award Dimitar Radev the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor."

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