

## OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Habil. Boyko Penchev Penchev, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski,"

regarding the dissertation of Dimitar Radev Radev on the topic

"Time and Space in Bulgarian Novel and Film after World War II. Conflict between Sacred and Profane Time and Space"

for the award of the academic degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 2.1 Philology.

Bulgarian Literature (Bulgarian Literature after World War II)

The presented dissertation consists of a total of 273 pages, organized into three major parts, introduction, conclusion, and bibliography. The work has a clear structure, which is a result of the candidate's choice to focus on three novel works and their film adaptations - "The Iron Candlestick" (1952) by Dimitar Talev, "Time of Parting" (1964) by Anton Donchev, and "Summit" (2011) by Milen Ruskov. These three works are the subject of the three main parts of the dissertation. At first glance, the choice of only three, very different in genre, poetics, and historical context, works deviates from the panoramic perspective stated in the dissertation title. However, the limitation is a manifestation of the overall personalistic approach of the candidate, who does not hide his personal point of view both in the selection and interpretation of the works under consideration.

Dimitar Radev's approach is difficult to be defined within the traditional categories of literary theory. His approach aims to reveal those aspects of the work that represent the path to spiritual enlightenment. However, this enlightenment is conceived in a specific philosophical perspective, namely the concepts of dialogicality of Mikhail Bakhtin and particularly of Martin Buber with his "I-Thou" relationship. It is not accidental that Buber is one of the most frequently cited authors in the work. For example, in connection with the analysis of "Time of Parting," it is stated that "... Buber's concept of the I-Thou world as an interaction of love and freedom between subjects, as well as of the I-It world as relationships based on possession and the entrenched prejudices of memory and objectification of the other (p. 15)" will be followed. To a large extent, this theory is embedded in the dissertation as a whole.

The work seeks in literature (and its cinematic transformations) the moments of dialogical turning towards the Other, who is both God and the divine within the human being. To the extent that Radev also relies on theological authorities such as John Zizioulas, Kallistos Ware, Alexander

Schmemmann, we could call his method "dialogical theology." In this approach, attention is focused on the hidden conversation of the individual with their inner self, which is actually a product of dialogical communication with the Other. It is this dialogue that constitutes the realm of the sacred. The dissertation works with its own interpretations of the categories of "time," "space," "sacred," and "profane." Time and space are conceived as constellations of signs for a dialogical process of spiritual "maieutics," i.e., "the birthing of truth through dialogue" (Gicho from "Summit" will be explicitly compared to Socrates and his "midwifery"). This dialogical nature unfolds in a specific time-space, hence it is not surprising that the work does not delve into social or historical time, or when it does, the discussions do not surpass the trivial. Illustrative of this specific use of the category of "time" is the quote from Kallistos Ware cited in the work: "Time is the interval between God's call and our response." (p. 30).

The dialogical-personalist principle also manifests in the fact that out of the various aspects of structural organization of the literary text, the candidate prefers to focus on the characters and their relationships. Particularly significant to him are character pairs like Stoyan - Sultana, Rafe - Katerina, Lazar - the Rila Monk, Karaibrahim - Abdullah, Gicho - Stoyancho... Throughout most of the work, the interpretations revolve around the dialogical relationships between such characters. (At times, the researcher seems to forget that the characters are narrative constructs, functions of ideological and literary codes.)

Dimitar Radev's interpretations are original and laden with existential tension; they seek that "vertical" whose pursuit makes man a spiritual being. At the same time, methodologically, the work can be defined as postmodern literary criticism, as it continuously changes its interpretive lens, introducing new paradigms of reading. In places, especially in the section on "The Iron Candlestick," the interpretation of religious archetypes and practices in everyday situations creates a sense of over-interpretation. Dimitar Radev quotes Barthes, who asks himself, "What does the text I am reading represent for me?" to answer, "It is the text that I would like to write." This position fully corresponds to the dissertation author's own approach, who is not afraid to "rewrite" the works in such a way that dialogical relationships are highlighted in the spirit of Buber's "I-Thou."

Here is where we can comment on the relationship between the literary source material and its film adaptation in the dissertation. Within it, we find many strong and original interpretations of scenes from "The Iconostasis" (directed by Todor Dinov and Hristo Hristov) and "Time of

Parting" (directed by Lyudmil Staykov). The dissertation undoubtedly contributes to showing how cinema "adds" to literature, bringing forth certain levels of meaning even at the cost of adding text that is absent in the literary source material. However, it must be noted the candidate seems to choose those moments from the respective film that support his interpretive intuitions. In this sense, the differences between the novel and the film are not of particular interest, and the connections between literature and cinema as comprehensive systems, which are in complex relationships of convergence and divergence, are neglected. However, this is a logical consequence of the chosen angle of dialogical reading, seeking transformative moments that orient the Self along the "vertical" of spiritual insight.

A hallmark of the "postmodern" methodology of the work is the significant difference in interpretative models used in the three parts. In the first part, dedicated to "The Iron Candlestick" and "The Iconostasis," an analysis of five episodes (although six are promised at the beginning of the chapter) is made, where the focus of the study is "the imitation of the gods" (Eliade), i.e., the cases where some form of illuminating the profane by the sacred through the path of discovery towards the Other and spiritual truth is represented. In the section on "Time of Parting," a psychoanalytic approach is taken towards Karaibrahim and the Venetian. I find the interpretation of Donchev's novel and Lyudmil Staykov's film particularly valuable because it manages to take the works out of the usual framework of national ideology and convincingly portrays Karaibrahim as a melancholic, overwhelmed by the trauma of losing his own childhood Self. The third part, which is also the smallest in volume, explicitly examines Milen Ruskov's "Summit" in the context of postmodern theory. Despite the different methodological models, the work does not fall apart because it is held together by the unwavering desire of the candidate to explore the issue of spiritual transformation and the "conquering" of the profane by the sacred.

An important feature of the chosen approach is that Dimitar Radev interprets the sacred and the profane not as two independent, opposing fields, but seeks the transformative penetration of the sacred into the profane. It is not coincidental that figurative variations of the Eucharist in the works are a frequent subject of analysis in the dissertation. We cannot overlook the multifaceted cultural knowledge of the candidate, which allows him to make unexpected and productive connections between the texts under study and various theological, philosophical, and psychoanalytic discourses. Although some of the assertions may provoke objections, Dimitar Radev manages to

construct and maintain his own interpretive prism, which opens up new possibilities for reading key works of Bulgarian literature after the Second World War.

#### Conclusion

The dissertation meets the requirements of the law and academic standards, presenting a valuable study that enriches Bulgarian literary science. I give my positive assessment and recommend that Dimitar Radev be awarded the academic degree of "Doctor."