

REVIEW

By

Assoc. Prof. DSc Boyan Manchev

New Bulgarian University

On the PhD thesis

“Invention and Literature in Contemporary Theory”

in 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature – Theory of Literature)

PhD Candidate: Enyo Konstantinov Stoyanov

Department of Theory of Literature, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Sofia, 2024

Introduction

Enyo Konstantinov Stoyanov was born in 1979 in Sofia. He is an assistant professor at the Department of Theory of Literature at the Faculty of Arts of Sofia University since 2008. His main research interests are in the field literary theory, contemporary philosophy, critical theory. Stoyanov is the author of 36 academic publications.

The PhD thesis “Invention and Literature in Contemporary Theory”, the thesis abstract and the competition documents meet the requirements of the law. The work is 286 standard typewritten pages long and consists of an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography of 119 titles in Bulgarian, English, French and German. The scientific contributions are formulated precisely and correctly.

Exposition

Just as the text of Enyo Stoyanov’s dissertation, despite its large corpus, represents a fragment of a much larger research project, so this review will represent only a fragment of a much larger, long-standing conversation – a scholarly exchange and a shared research attitude. Like the doctoral dissertation itself, the dissertation review is a conservative genre with formal constraints and requirements, and with a strictly pragmatic mission-to assess the merits of a work with an eye toward a symbolic transition into academia. Of course, I set myself the task of fully meeting these requirements; at the same time, I cannot overlook the following. I have known and followed Enyo Stoyanov's work for 27 years now, first as my student, then as a brilliant young assistant professor, colleague and friend with whom I invariably find myself in inspiring exchanges. In this sense, my review is undoubtedly burdened by a personal perspective; however, it is precisely this “close optic” that allows me to go deep into Enyo Stoyanov’s work, to grasp not only its explicit but also its implicit stakes, and last but not least, to allow myself to formulate without embarrassment critical questions that in this case are the continuation of an ongoing long-standing conversation.

Enyo Stoyanov’s thesis is an exemplary piece of literary scholarship, posing a fundamental question for both literary theory and art theory more generally, a question associated with its very definition: the question of creation, creativity, or, according to the central concept of Stoyanov’s work, invention. Enyo Stoyanov’s long-standing work has led to the clarification of research

methodology, a common stumbling block for young researchers. The dissertation is grounded in a thoughtful, mastered-in-the-details and clearly aware of its stakes individual methodological strategy. Here is how Stoyanov articulates it on the very first page of his thesis' abstract: "Given the cognitive inaccessibility already indicated, which any research that brings the new into its focus is forced to acknowledge, the present work resorts to metatheoretical commentary. This makes it an attempt to interpretatively extract relevant conceptual moments from the history of the use of the concept of invention and contemporary literary and philosophical engagements with the problem of the new, with the intention of productively assembling them. Methodologically, this means that research itself feels obliged to find a participatory approach to its object, to reflexively take up aspects of invention itself in its operations." (Abstract, pp. 4-5) In passing, but this is by no means without significance, Enyo Stoyanov implicitly presents his method as Schellingian – thus the notion of invention is paired with the notion of construction, in the dynamic sense of constructing. This conceptual pairing constitutes a key metatheological move that allows for the work's metatheoretical disposition, but also its conceptual invariance: the work exemplifies, in the sense of Nelson Goodman's constructivist theory, its own experimental object: it is a research invariance on the notion of invariance. (Hence the first question I would like to pose to Enyo: would you define your thesis as constructivist?)

Moreover, I also pose the perhaps surprising question of whether Enyo Stoyanov's approach is not at the same time crypto-transcendental (even if not directly indebted to Kant, whose legacy Stoyanov is rather critical of – e.g. "This epistemological obstacle to access to the new is perhaps surmountable on the basis of an indirect approach to it, namely, one that addresses itself to its conditions. The dynamic self-reference between the meaning stocks of the conceptual trajectories involved in thinking about literature and invention constitutes this orientational axis of the *condition* [emphasis mine, B.M.] of novelty that research seeks to delineate" (p. 4) It is clear that it is the exploration of the condition of novelty that is the methodological stake of Stoyanov's study; the exploration of the condition would enable the tackling with perfect precision of the epistemological obstacle, if not the aporia, that confronts any study of the *new*. How do we investigate that of which the transformation of conditions, of the mode of formation and signification, is a characteristic, and for which therefore we cannot have an adequate instrumentarium? The way out proposed by Stoyanov is essentially transcendental. Later, in the chapter devoted to Lubomír Doležel, we will see that Stoyanov also sympathizes, even if with critical reservations, with the semantics of possible

worlds that Dolezel elaborates and on which he relies in order to avoid Russell's reductive theory of signification.

After these metacritical reflections on the original methodological apparatus of the dissertation, I will briefly address its central concept and stakes, to which the logic of the structure of the work corresponds. The Introduction and the First Chapter of the dissertation offer a genealogy of the concept, introducing progressively its theoretical modulations, which Stoyanov ties into a complex trajectory over which he builds the individual perspective of his own research. In this way, the notion of invention is inclined into different conceptual modalities. Following the historical semantic overview carried out in Chapter One, moving into a conceptual genealogy, the following chapters of the study offer elaborations on key uses of the concept of invention in several key philosophical, logical, art historical and literary concepts, which Stoyanov incorporates into the general thrust of his work, deriving significant semantic vectors. I must emphasize that the very delineation of the corpus of theoretical texts and models underlying the eight chapters on the notion of invention is itself a highly original, inventive, metatheoretical gesture.

The genealogy of the concept of invention in Chapter One reveals the origins of the concept in the field of rhetoric and follows its conceptual trajectory along Greek and Roman rhetoric, reaching its Renaissance take-off and reworking in the work of Sidney and Gracián. The introductory chapter testifies both to the author's remarkable erudition and his acute sensitivity to the historical fluctuations of the concept's semantics and, more generally, to its conceptual plasticity and variation. Of course, we could also ask about the place of the concept in scholasticism, acting as a kind of conceptual relay of modern philosophy and science. But such an exhaustive historical panorama is not the explicit task of this dissertation. Its task is to trace/construct meaning nuclei, or rather meaning nodes, between which to unfold a field of semantic intensity. Such a task, even if unnamed in these terms, is accomplished brilliantly.

Thus, in unraveling the semantic knot of invention, Stoyanov links the dynamics of the concept to other concepts or conceptual and figurative kernels that form the field of the idea of the new and, respectively, its relation to the emerging modern idea of art/literature. After the significant for semantic genealogy and philosophical analysis of the concept of invention in the second chapter of the work, discussing Jacques Derrida's essay "Psyché, l'invention de l'Autre", the different stages

of the study focus successively on the semantic branching and coupling with the problematics of the category of mimesis, of the figural, of fiction, and of the notion of the new in the field of philosophy of art and literature – in Theodor Adorno and Peter Bürger, and in Lubomír Doležal, Wolfgang Iser, Paul Ricoeur, and last but not least, Radosvet Kolarov (although it does not include a chapter dedicated to Radosvet Kolarov, the work of the influential Bulgarian theorist runs like a red thread through her dissertation, as we know, has been the object of Enyo Stoyanov's research as well as an inspiring theoretical model) to reach the problem of the virtual and creativity through the prism of the philosophical theses of Henri Bergson, Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze.

I do not set out to offer a model of Enyo Stoyanov's theoretical invention, but it seems to me that each chapter follows a similar methodologically grounded structure. Each chapter begins with a brilliant propaedeutic section, essentially an introduction, but also a clear and accessible synthesis of highly complex theories that, thanks to Stoyanov's individual reading, directs them and makes explicit their stakes in the semantic mode and economy of the basic stakes of his own work. This feature of the dissertation reveals not only the qualities of an original interpreter, researcher and theorist, but also of a brilliant teacher. The next structural moment is the problematization or dramatization – I would call it the dialectical moment of the exposition: Enyo Stoyanov problematizes each of the theories under consideration by dramatizing them conceptually – double-voiced, dialectically, for example in the opposition of Bürger's and Adorno's theses, or in the critical mobilization of Iser's literary anthropology. Let me give a striking example: "In the synopsis of the anthropological thesis thus proposed, however, a number of problematic areas arise. In the first place, the question arises of the transition from the pure potentiality of the unformed to a continuous and non-teleological (there is no final and real form) process of changing forms. Perhaps the process is actually more quasi-teleological – the search for true form drives the process regulatively (in the sense of Kant's Ideas). Iser states that man is constantly striving to attain self-existence. One "is" but also wants to "have" oneself. Here being and cognition necessarily diverge. Perhaps it is this striving to "have" the self that must be posited in order to make thinkable the movement from pure passive potential indeterminacy to dynamic actual permutation of determinacies. But does not this aspiration then remain a completely unjustified, metaphysical residue? Moreover, if we turn to the process of actual production of new forms from old ones itself, does not this logic force us to postulate some initial form as a necessary condition for the process of permutations to take place?" (p. 91) This passage unquestionably offers an example of dialectical strategy at its height. To pose similar questions to Adorno, Iser, or Ricoeur, one must certainly know

what one is talking about; be aware of the conceptual depth, context, and functional orientation of the theories; and speak their language without thinking in it at all costs.

Particularly interesting in this regard is Chapter Four's peculiar excursus, offering a "heuristic reconstruction of Iser's theoretical model in terms of Luhmann's systems theory" in Stoyanov's words (p. 128), which arrives at a contributory proposal on the "logic of the fictional" as producing criteria of validity that productively contain the distinction between the real and the imaginary. In this heuristic constructivist reading of fiction, Stoyanov also implicitly approaches Nelson Goodman's constructivist thesis (fiction as world-making), itself influenced by Iser, but not within the scope of the dissertation, which nevertheless implicitly also throws up a bridge to Doležel's complex productive notion of fiction and the semantics of possible worlds. (By the way, let me note in passing – once again! – the connection of the constructivist thesis to Kant's transcendental philosophy, a connection made clear enough in Iser by the introduction of Hans Vaihinger's *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*).

One of the main critical stakes of the study is to reveal the dark mimetic double of invention – the mechanisms by which mimesis returns to the figures or concepts of its own negativity. This project is exemplarily sustained by both Iser and Doležel ("Besides inevitably introducing the danger of returning to the familiar terrain of Plato's mimesis in speaking of fictional worlds, the incompleteness on which Doležel insists undermines his claim that the model of thinking about the literary referent here avoids conceiving of it as something general and restores its particularity.", p. 147). My question in this regard would be: what would happen if we radically inverted the premise according to which mimetic theory is the ground from which antimimetic theories depart? Stoyanov does so, following early Deleuze, by embedding difference in the very foundation of mimesis. My alternative attempt was based on Georges Bataille's notion of *altération*, which offered a completely different paradigm for thinking the foundations of aisthesis, respectively an alternative to Plato's mimetic paradigm.

Comments and questions

Based on this overview of the stakes of the dissertation, I will formulate two lengthy comment-questions. The first concerns the conceptual corpus of the study, and the second concerns its genealogical dimension and grounds. It is clear that Enyo Stoyanov's work does not aspire to systematics or exhaustive genealogy, but rather to an epistemological cut; in this sense, we cannot formulate critical remarks on the basis of a criterion of exhaustiveness – obviously the most banal, and not infrequently retrograde instrumentalized, quantitative criterion. However, I will venture to question the absence of two authors, respectively theses, not so much in terms of quantitative measurements, but because of their qualitative, intensive, as Stoyanov would probably say after Bergson and Deleuze, in some sense structurally defining role in the imposition of the discourse of the new, respectively the new sense of invention/creation – Friedrich Schlegel and Charles Baudelaire (and Friedrich Nietzsche in between). I am referring to Friedrich Schlegel's famous Romantic thesis, expressed synthetically in his lectures in his course on “Transcendental Philosophy” read in 1800-1801 in Jena, which I have quoted many times: “any philosophy that is not new is not true. Invention [sic!] is therefore one of the first requirements of philosophy and of all the arts and sciences.” At the same time, it is surprising that even a mention of Charles Baudelaire, the ideologue of the new, directly placing him in relation to the notion of modernity (which he invented in his essay “The Artist of Modern Life”), as well as the debate surrounding the notion of modernity itself, is absent from the dissertation. Of course, this is not a fetishization of the author, who himself contributed to the modern fetishism of ideas that unfolded in parallel to commodity fetishism (as Benjamin brilliantly points out), but the initial impetus of the defining line of thought of the new in modernity – as an ontological cut and thrust, reaching perhaps to the ontology of the event in late-century philosophy in Deleuze, Badiou, and Derrida. The relation of the idea of the new to the categories of event and truth is unquestionable, and it has a direct bearing on the problems enunciated by Enyo Stoyanov, addressing the dialectical tension of invention/fiction and the risk of equating it with the opposition process/result. As Iser's suggestion shows, a possible way out of the reduction to dichotomy might be offered by a performative conception of fiction. From this perspective, it seems to me productive to situate the tension between invention and fiction, or to put it more banally, between creation and work, in relation to the theory of theatre and performative forms in art. (In this respect, Ani Vaseva's work *Theatre and Truth*, related to Dimitar Vatsov's performative theory of truth, offers a number of intersections with the

problematics of Stoyanov's dissertation and opens up new possibilities for dynamic conceptual exchange in the field of literary and art theory in Bulgaria.)

My second interpretive comment-question concerns the conceptual history and etymology of the concept of invention. Of course, it is clear from the subtext of the work that the historical semantics and genealogy of the concept of invention is key to its study – it is the historical semantics that lies as its backbone, leading implicitly to the question of invention i.e. the invention of literature – and in these transitions, from its very beginning, through Derrida's essay, the question of the invention of truth will be raised. It is hardly necessary to note here that I am highly skeptical of etymological "inventions" of the Heideggerian type; at the same time, I have been inspired by, and have considered myself in some sense a follower of, the historical anthropology of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, of Detienne and Frontisi-Ducroux. Without speculating on the conceptual potential of words and their archaic semantics, their semantic dynamics and, consequently, their potentiality to give rise to meanings that have an immanent semantic regulation is particularly important to me. In this sense, I would suggest that the concept of "invention" itself, before being coaxed through associative conceptual historical relations and inventory series, could be deployed through its immanent semantic potential. Critical etymological analysis could further clarify the semantic vector explored by Enyo Stoyanov. Undoubtedly, the etymology of the concept of invention should be significant for its researcher. Certainly, he does not fail to note the etymology of the term and the significance of its root in Romance languages: "Inventio" is an attempt to translate this term into Latin – the expression means "to come across something" and its root will appear in many Romance languages further on, including in the word "avenue" which has entered the Bulgarian language. The semantics of this root point to something encountered "on the way"-something encountered in motion, a find" (p. 12) The emphasis on motion is significant. For the Latin word *inventio* points to a semantic core that is also central to modern philosophy. The word *invention* derives from the Latin *inventio, inventionem*, from the participle of *in-venire*, and is consequently directly related to the verb "to come," *venire*, and through it to the problematic of coming. When the author quotes the following phrase of Derrida, it is obvious that the morphology and etymology of the word "invention" are of key importance: "Invention must be something proper to deconstruction **itself**. Deconstruction must be inventive, in the sense of leaving open the moment of entry for what is coming" (p. 62) This passage cited by Stoyanov clearly shows the importance of the etymology of the concept in the context of the dissertation and especially in its structuring conceptual transition of its second chapter.

At the same time, insofar as one of Enyo Stoyanov's main fields of interest is precisely leap changes and reversals, discontinuities and unexpected transferences, linguistic transfer should not be underestimated. In Bulgarian we usually translate *inventio* as "izobretjavane", "izmisljane" [изобретяване; измисляне]. How does Stoyanov motivate the choice of the term invention at the expense of *изобретяване*? It is only in the last, eighth chapter of his work, "Difference and Invention: between Gilles Deleuze and Gilbert Simondon," through the prism of Simondon's theory of individuation, that Stoyanov directly addresses this most banal meaning of invention: "As mentioned at the beginning, Simondon developed his theory of individuation as a theory of invention in a technical context (i.e., as invention)" (pp. 231) The meaning of technical invention/invention is the most accurate analogue of the dominant meaning of invention in English and French in the era of its highest frequency of use-and, respectively, significance-from the Enlightenment to the late 19th century. (It is worth remembering that the classical Latin word for device is *inventum*.) In this regard, the following question arises, a question that figures prominently in the final chapter of the work: what is the place of technical and especially scientific invention in Enyo's proposed history and typology of literary invention? Would not a study of the genesis of the concept of literature and of the historical dynamics of its generic semantics reveal an interesting parallel with the assertion of a new meaning of the concept of invention, bringing it closer to the concept of creativity, but also to that of scientific discovery or technical invention?

Having reached the final eighth chapter of the dissertation, I come to the concluding part of my review. This chapter, written with panache, demonstrates not only an admirable level of knowledge and mastery of Gilles Deleuze's complex philosophical system, its fluctuations in different periods of his oeuvre, and its defining connections to and readings of Kant, Bergson, and Nietzsche (of course, we must not overlook the *prince of philosophers* in Deleuze's own words, Baruch Spinoza), but also an ability for critical distance, rethinking, and building upon. Being familiar with the literature on Deleuze, I daresay that Stoyanov's interpretation of Deleuze's notion of invention is distinctive and innovative, and his suggestions in the concluding pages of the thesis clearly mark the horizon of further original research. I will make a particularly heuristic philosophical point: "it is important, however, to emphasize the suggested relation of particular complementarity between invention and creativity in the way in which conditions for novelty are

constructed: in invention as actualization, the virtual is the condition for the new as new actuality, and in creativity, actuality is the condition for new virtuality” (p. 234).

I will place a final emphasis by directly addressing the author of this impressive work in order to continue our quarterly long conversation by offering a brief commentary on the following summary statement from the Conclusion, which also offers the original concluding definition of its core concept: “invention is in the process of invention of its own conditions, literary mimesis is in the process of creation of its own presuppositions, but both processes turn out to reciprocally condition the very unconditioning of the new. The interplay between these two modalities of self-definition seems to make it possible to preserve and make thinkable the essential indeterminacy of the new as dependent on a transcendental horizon, itself presupposing the new in its constitution” (p. 237) I would in turn define this formulation of Enyo Stoyanov as *super-Kantian*. For in fact the transcendental itself in the Kantian – or, to be more cautious, *super-Kantian* – sense can be defined as the *invention of a condition*. The invention of a condition actually indicates the very ground of the philosophical operation or, in my understanding, of the *existential* operation as the creation of the possibility of self-transcendence, which is precisely *the new*. Without the creation of the condition, the new – as we know not only from Derrida, but from Kant himself (from the “Analytics of the Sublime”) – would only be monstrous. It would be unknowable. In this sense, the creation of a condition is the creation of a sense in which the event could not only be recognized as new, but could ontologically excise its own condition. I introduce this concluding super-Kantian emphasis, which is also a Deleuzian emphasis, to keep the conversation with Enyo on a level that probably exceeds formal conditions and requirements; however, its place is precisely here because it testifies to the level at which Enyo Stoyanov’s dissertation fulfils its requirement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a few words on the context of the research, its manner and its spirit. Enyo Stoyanov is one of the last representatives of the encyclopaedic culture, but also of the encyclopaedic thought, grasping and containing the vast heritage of the history of culture, of literary history and philosophy, which is not influenced by fashions, but which is also not only a culture of the archive (in the doxic sense of the term). The legacy of humanism is key to understanding contemporary thought as the starting point of a critical history of thought, of a critical history of

criticism itself. In this attitude Stoyanov is close to a number of scholars close and not so close to him, among whom I would note more closely Angel Angelov and Darin Tenev. Like Darin Tenev, Enyo Stoyanov tends towards a strong theoretical thought, which brings him closer to both Radosvet Kolarov's unshakable line in Bulgarian literary theory and Miglena Nikolchina's innovative literary-historical paradigm. The dissertation offers stunning evidence of Stoyanov's erudition and depth of knowledge, often marginalized in enormous footnotes: for example, the note on p. 240 on Iser and Adorno, or the one on Luhmann and Iser (p. 128), which could constitute a master's thesis or even dissertation topic in itself for one of Enyo's graduates. What certainly distinguishes Enyo Stoyanov from most of his predecessors of earlier generations of erudite and encyclopaedic scholars is his ability to combine the legacy of the humanist tradition with some of the most important contemporary theoretical trends and to weave it with them, a quality that can certainly be attributed to his inspiration, Gilles Deleuze, but not to the vast majority of contemporary philosophers and art theorists, even the most influential among them.

Of course, in the forthcoming monograph these connections will be thickened by weaving them with other conceptual threads and networks, as well as research perspectives and writings (e.g. Auerbach's or Panofsky's research on the notions of figure or idea, as well as the key relation of the notion of invention to the notion of *poiesis*; the Bulgarian tradition of research on the notions of mimesis and poiesis should not be overlooked either – I am referring to the research of Bogdan Bogdanov, Nikolaj Gochev, Nevena Panova, as well as my proposed philosophical figurology).

To conclude, Enyo Stoyanov's PhD thesis represents, paradoxically but legitimately, not just a youthful experience, but a mature, significant work of a distinctive scholar who has gone through many years of research, rethinking, and modulations of his thesis. In this sense, the thesis could also be conceived as a theoretical palimpsest (it is no coincidence that the theme of memory, the virtual power of invention, is central to this work, as is Henri Bergson's place in it). Last but not least, I would like to note the qualities of Enyo Stoyanov's style – clear, precise, managing to weave complex concepts into an engaging narrative, built almost according to the laws of rhetoric.

I believe that everything written so far motivates my extremely high evaluation of Enyo Stoyanov's thesis. The PhD thesis "Invention and Literature in Contemporary Theory" fully meets the highest requirements for this level – not only a thorough knowledge of the matter under study

and the ability to master it methodologically, but also an original theoretical synthesis and theoretical invention. As if following Gilles Deleuze's requirement for writing a *worthy* book, quoted in the dissertation, Enyo Stoyanov fulfils the polemical, inventive and creative functions indispensable for a *worthy* study. All this gives me reasons to vote with full conviction for the award of the degree of PhD in the field 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature – Theory of Literature) to Enyo Konstantinov Stoyanov.