

## **Review**

of the thesis submitted by Enyo Stoyanov on the topic "Invention in literature and contemporary theory" for the academic and educational degree doctor of philosophy in field 2. Humanities, subfield 2.1 Philology (Theory of literature)

Reviewer: Prof. PhD Todor Hristov, Department of literary theory, Faculty of slavic philology, The University of Sofia "St. Climent Ochridski"

In effect of order No.RD-38-425/15.07.2024 of the Rector of the University of Sofia, I have been appointed as a reviewer of the PhD thesis submitted by Enyo Stoyanov. The applicant has followed adequately and fully the relevant legal procedures. He overperforms the minimal standards for academic field2.Humanities,subfield2.1Philology.

## **General information for the academic activity of the PhD student**

Enyo Stoyanov has graduated in Bulgarian philology at the University of Sofia. He holds a MA in literature from the University of Sofia as well as another MA in philosophy and literature awarded by the University of Warwick (UK). Since 2008, Enyo Stoyanov has been an assistant professor in literary theory at the University of Sofia. He has authored 36 academic publications in Bulgarian and international journals and edited collections.

## **Evaluation of the thesis**

The thesis "Invention and literature in contemporary theory" submitted by Enyo Stoyanov is 286 standard pages long. It consists of an introduction, eight chapters, conclusion and a bibliography of 122 titles 72 of which in English and French. The object of study is the relation between invention and literature in contemporary theory. The argument inscribes invention in a constellation of concepts: new; literature; mimesis; fictionality; performativity; creativity; invention; innovation; wit; modification; repetition. Each concept, in turn, is inscribed in other theoretical constellations derived from relevant texts by Radosvet Kolarov, Balthazar Gracian, Emanuele Tesauro, Edward Young, Edmund Burke, Jacques Derrida, Wolfgang Iser, Ljubomir Doležel, Paul Ricoeur, Henri Bergson, Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze. For instance, Theodor Adorno and Peter Bürger associate the 'new' with

reification, alienation, ideology, the market and jazz (71)<sup>1</sup> all held together by the gravitational force of a star that is beneath the horizon of late-modern capitalism yet nevertheless heralds the future redemption of art (73).

The conceptual constellation of invention is mapped by means of a "metatheoretical commentary" (4) of the authors listed in the previous paragraph. How does one map a new constellation? Firstly, one needs to discover a new gravitational center; in the thesis, this center is the 'new'. Secondly, one has to de-center or re-center the already familiar conceptual constellations. For example, Peter Bürger addresses the question whether the avant-garde can be defined through the 'new', but that already implies a concept, and if Bürger's question is abstracted from the avant-garde, if it is auto-reflexively folded onto itself, then it brings to the fore a new problem: what is 'new' or, more precisely, what are the conditions that make the 'new' possible. Insofar as Bürger relies on the concepts developed by Adorno, the metamorphosis of the problem of the avant-garde into a question about the 'new' dislodges Adorno's aesthetics from Marxism, and his concept opens up an unexpected perspective toward the "self-undermining autonomization of the work of art" (80) which, in turn, manifests a retroactive transformation of the actual into virtual (79; the latter provides the basis for the concept of counter-actualization developed in the last chapter of the thesis). That mode of re-centering of Bürger's and Adorno's concepts undoubtedly is adequate to critical theory, yet it uncovers a potential overlooked even by a reader of Adorno as astute and faithful as Peter Bürger (83). Such self-reflexive foldings, de-centerings, re-centerings and re-de-centerings of concepts are abundant in the thesis. I find particularly inspiring the anamorphosis of the concept of metaphor into a problem of the conditions of possibility of emergence of new references in speech and, consequently, into an argument about the value of the 'new' as a referent (186); the interpretation of the Bergsonian concept of subject as "openness to the perseverance of the new" (197) as well as the account of authorship as a modality of the emergence of the 'new' (135). Such readings of classical theoretical texts not only discuss the 'new', they are embodying theoretical invention.

Thirdly, to map the conceptual constellation of invention, one needs to draw transversal lines between terms embedded in different milieux. For instance, the introduction links invention to mimesis in order to delineate the in-between situation of the 'new' as self-positing (10). The concluding chapter doubles the link and transforms it into a background for the discussion of the "complementarity between invention and creation in respect to the mode of emergence of the conditions of the new" (234). The discussion of that complementarity, however, retraces the link between Deleuze and Simondon (229). All the three superimposed links define the frame of the argument about counter-actualization as a necessary condition for the actualization of the new which, in turn, is weaved into the thesis

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<sup>1</sup>In the following, the numbers refer to the respective pages of the thesis.

of the thesis. Of course, that fabric of discursive relations is interlaced with additional arguments tying together creativity, mimesis and literature, in fact, fastening them into a knot notwithstanding their historical incongruence (233). As a whole, Enyo Stoyanov develops his arguments as a tightly-knit texture of discursive relations between imaginary and unconscious (93) or invention and duration (193), Iser, Sydney, the muses and Plato (106) or Ricoeur and the New Criticism (192), among many others.

Fourthly, a particularly innovative feature of the thesis is the association of concepts on the basis of their limitations or lacks. For example, Jacques Derrida brings together the new and otherness in a manner parallel to the semiotic mechanism of baroque allegories, and thus, he turns out to be unable to overcome the onthotheological concepts that he is claiming to undermine; however, that indicates the need to examine the immanent conditions of the new (66), and, to that end, Enyo Stoyanov turns to Theodor Adorno. The latter has shaped Wolfgang Iser's early concept of negativity, but, nevertheless, Iser fails to take into account that fictionality itself is an effect of the interplay of fictionalizing acts (133). To compensate for that, Enyo Stoyanov addresses the problem of fictional worlds, and consequently, the logic of possible worlds. Yet one of the key literary theorists of possible worlds, Ljubomir Doležel, lacks a clear concept of event, so his theory turns out to be a contemporary version of Plato's account of mimesis (166–167). Therefore, the thesis supplements Doležel's concept by a discussion of the emergence of a new reference in metaphor. The discussion relies on Ricoeur, yet the latter assumes a rigid distinction between ontology and epistemology, and hence, between poetry and philosophy, which is actually self-defeating (190). To demonstrate the inherent instability of the distinction, Enyo Stoyanov turns to Bergson, but his concept of creativity ignores the different structure of duration in memory and in life (210). To compensate for that, the thesis discusses the theories of invention and creativity developed by Gilles Deleuze and Gilbert Simondon, but Simondon does not take into account literary invention, whereas Deleuze does not focus on invention, so they are able to offer a solution to the problem what is invention only insofar as their concepts are merged together.

Fifth, the conceptual constellation of invention is visible against the background of the dark matter of a mode of thought trapped in the black holes of inescapable aporias. Enyo Stoyanov associates that mode of thought with metaphysics (57), ideology (82), judgment (233) and, crucially, with the decision taken "in the period of classical antiquity, in the times of Plato, and inherited by the European thought ... that the objects of thinking should be selected on the basis of a standard ... privileging identity as a selection mechanism" (224–225). The chapter on deconstruction already formulates the aporias undermining that constitutive decision: (1) Saying something new implies transgressing the conventions, yet a completely unconventional utterance would be unintelligible; hence, the speaker needs to both flout and follow the conventions (45). (2) The new is acknowledged as new insofar as it is an object of

knowledge, but if it is already known, it is not really new; thus, the new has to be acknowledged as a known unknown (50–51). (3) Late-modern capitalism invented mechanisms for congealing the new into commodities; however, commodification involves reification, and therefore, it reproduces the same dialectics that haunts any tangible form of capital; consequently, art is new only if it distances itself from reification, and hence, only if it is a mimesis of the new (insofar as any mimesis discloses itself as an illusion and, in that sense, distances itself from its object; 73). (4) "Mimesis and authorship have seemingly contrasting tendencies" (146), yet the modern notion of literature ties them together into a knot by means of the concept of creativity. Actually, the thesis articulates many more aporias, for instance in the vanishing points of Enyo Stoyanov's perspectives on Wolfgang Iser (89,129), Paul Ricoeur (179) or Gilbert Simondon (231).

Sixth, invention is a kinetic, processual constellation. The process of its development is historical: initially, invention is unconnected to the new; during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, it was reconceptualized as a faculty, and, in effect, it gradually drifted toward the art and the New (22–23, 33) whereas the latter gradually distanced itself from knowledge (36). At the end of the eighteenth century, however, the poetics of the new depleted its energy, and disseminated into different concepts, mostly in the fields of aesthetics and the arts (42). At the same time, the meaning of invention has been displaced from constativity to performativity (53) which still determines the uses of the concept even in allegedly distant fields such as technology.

Even so, the development of invention as a conceptual constellation is more than a historical process; it sets in motion the theoretical assemblages against which background it is mapped: the Aristotelian concept of mimesis is already fractured by the tension between two regimes of knowledge the first of which posits itself as representation, while the other entails its deactualization (18); the tension between the two regimes of knowledge opens up a rift between the two types of reading discussed by Wolfgang Iser (116) and a fracture in the concept of emplotment developed by Paul Ricoeur (180); a comparable pressure shapes even the relations between discursive figures such as Iser and the Russian formalists (123) or the German romantic poets and Theodor Adorno (insofar as the latter associates the romantic notion of art with his concept of nature, and thus, shifts the focus from the subject to a class of objects resisting their objectivation "in the moments of apparent expression, that is, of quasi-subjectivation"; 76). However, notwithstanding such historical and conceptual transformations, despite the displacements, contiguities, distances, associations between the components of the constellation, the links between concepts never dissolve completely, and even classical rhetoric still retains a portion of its former symbolic energy (65).

To sum up, if one takes into account the historical shifts and the inherent tension between the concepts, then Enyo Stoyanov conceives of invention as a constellation of

constellations moving away from one another under the pressure of their internal contradictions. Even so, invention is not unstable as a concept because it is organized around a gravitational center that can be simplified to the following: the new implies conditions of possibility which, in turn, imply the new; therefore, the new is irreducible to a state of affairs; it is a process, a creative process in which invention and creation determine each other as well as the new itself; hence, the new creates its own conditions of possibility as an invention. The thesis marks the gravitational center of the conceptual constellation of invention by the concept of self-positing which variants run through the argument as a guiding thread.

### **Comments**

The concept of self-positing or self-determination condenses a dialectics that is one of the key inventions of Enyo Stoyanov. To summarize it briefly, in general, the actual effect does not coincide with the condition of its possibility; insofar as the new as an effect is retrospectively implied by the conditions of its possibility, one can either assume that (1) the new is a property of its conditions of possibility, and therefore, the possibility, or in other terms, the potentiality is the proprietor to which the new properly belongs; or, alternatively, one can assume that (2) the new, insofar as it is "self-conditioned as a dynamic process", is the condition of possibility of the condition of its possibility; in the latter case, the new is doubly differentiated from its condition of possibility (both as an effect and as the possibility of the possibility of the effect).

(1) The first option leads to a theoretical animism: it represents invention as a self-conceiving, immaculate, celestial power emancipated from the labor involved in any earthly production; then, the new is not much more than one of the small deities of contemporary theory, perhaps a distant offspring of the romantic concept of genius. However, in view of the criticism of the concept of absolute invention proposed by Jacques Derrida (47), such an interpretation contradicts the intentions and the approach of the thesis.

(2) The second alternative, the assumption that the new (already a negative category) is in a double negative relation to its possibility, seems closer to Stoyanov's approach insofar as his argument develops in general as an open series of negations. However, that approach poses the question about the identity of the new as an effect, on one hand, and as a condition of possibility of the condition of possibility of the effect, on the other hand. The thesis responds to that questions by construing the new as a becoming or, in other terms, as a process of de/differentiation (the series of negative relations coincides with the becoming of the new). Even so, the concept of becoming does not closing the question in what conditions one can refer to the new as the same, or at least, as the new in the same sense. The question is rather developed further as a self-positing process of

problematization. For instance, is the new identical with its becoming? If it is, then the difference between an actual effect and the condition of possibility is illusory, and so is the difference between the actual and the potential. Yet if the new is not its becoming, then one is still facing the question on what basis can one assume that the becoming of the new is new in the same sense as its product, the actual new. The question could stimulate one to make another step in the argument by postulating a condition of possibility of the becoming of the new as a condition of possibility of the condition of possibility of the new; thus, the question already pushes toward a new negative relation, a new distinction, perhaps even a new concept of the new justified by the hope that the progress of the argument would, in the final analysis, come back to its starting point, the new. Such an argument, developed by sublating negativities, is unmistakably dialectical, but it is a reversed dialectics which starts from a synthesis in order to develop antitheses, and works towards its starting point as an endpoint.

### Questions

(1) The relation between invention and the new is asymmetrical: the new is self-generating, whereas invention is self-obliterating. Is it plausible, then, to argue that invention self-destructs its conditions of possibility, that it defers itself or abandons itself?

(2) The constellation of concepts derived from the works of Gilles Deleuze associates literature with creativity which, in turn, is linked to counter-actualization (defined as an extraction of a new virtuality from the actual [233] or self-cancellation of actualizations [235]). However, according to Deleuze, counter-actualization involves a superficial doubling which dislodges the event from the depth of causality and transforms its actuality into a negativity, for instance, into a non-actualizable lack or a residue (Deleuze, Gilles. *Logique du sens*. Paris: Minuit, 1969, p. 247). On that basis, Deleuze links counter-actualization to the double meaning of death in Blanchot which EnyoStoyanov himself has elegantly summarized (217; see Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 176–177). Additionally, the superficial doubling is illustrated by the figure of the mime which, according to Deleuze, manifests a particular regime of representation (*Logique*, p. 172). In view of that, I would like to ask whether the representation of an event by a mime, the mimicking or the mimicry of an event, counts as mimesis. If it does, as it seems the case into the context of the thesis, then should one conceive of counter-actualization not as self-cancellation of actuality but rather as a superficial doubling of mimesis, a transformation of mimesis into a mimicry of a mimesis of the new.

### Summary and publications

The summary is comprehensive, and it represents adequately the thesis. Enyo Stoyanov is the author of all the submitted academic publications.

### **Recommendation**

The thesis is an exceptionally valuable contribution to contemporary theory, both in national and global context. Therefore, I recommend strongly and without hesitation Enyo Stoyanov for the academic and educational degree doctor of philosophy in field 2. Humanities, subfield 2.1 Philology (Theory of literature).

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