



Attention:

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Opinion

on Galina Avramova's Academic Achievements and Doctoral Dissertation Entitled
Проблеми на идентичността и особености на постмодерния наратив у Тимъти
Финдли

Canadian writer Timothy Findley's international reception is by no means a new development, in fact his first two novels, *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967) and *The Butterfly Plague* (1969), were originally published in London and New York after having been turned down by Canadian publishing houses. It was only after the publication of his third novel, *The Wars* (1977) that Findley received acclaim in his home country too – an experience shared by so many other Canadian writers – and reached an extensive international readership as well due to its translation into a host of languages. Still, even today, Findley's work is not widely known outside the English-speaking world. In Bulgaria, for example, only two of his novels have been translated and published so far, *Pilgrim* (originally published in 1999) in 2001 and *The Piano Man's Daughter* (originally published in 1995) in 2005.¹ The same is true of the international awareness of Canadian literature in general, and literary scholarship outside the Anglo-Saxon world has also paid relatively little attention to works

¹ See Galina Avramova's excellent article "Timothy Findley: The Canadian Pilgrim in Bulgaria." *Canada in Eight Tongues: Translating Canada in central Europe*. Ed. Katalin Kürtösi and Don Sparling. Masaryk University: Brno, 2012. 136.

published by Canadian authors. Timothy Findley's literary output is no exception in this regard.

Having said this, it should be also noted that Alice Munro's recent Nobel Prize has brought prestige not only to her own work but to Canadian literature as well. The Nobel Prize marks a significant milestone in the history of Canadian literary works as far as their recognition is concerned and, as a result of this acknowledgement, literary critics no longer need to argue for the increasing significance of Canadian literature, the rising course it has taken in the past few decades and the worthiness of Canadian literature to be the subject of a literary analysis anywhere in the world. Yet, literary studies has a lot to catch up with in terms of the interpretation of Canadian literature in our part of the world and Galina Avramova's doctoral dissertation is an important step exactly in this direction. Not merely as a work focusing on a Canadian writer, which is a nice gesture in itself, but more importantly because it deals with its subject matter in a mature manner, employing a consistent methodology, adopting a clear structure and making use of a whole range of current theories without falling into the trap of over-theorizing.

Ms. Avramova's dissertation concentrates on the output of a prominent Canadian writer, examining identity and features of the postmodern narrative in Timothy Findley's oeuvre, with a special focus on the novel *Pilgrim*, but also referencing *The Wars* (1977), *Famous Last Words* (1981), *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984) and *Headhunter* (1993), which are other examples of the historiographic novel by Findley, representing the Canadian postmodern.

Findley is often associated with the Southern Ontario Gothic and his writings are frequently concerned with mental illness, aberration psychosis, sexuality and gender, and, as Greg Gatenby has observed, he is at the same time "one of the most popular and beloved authors in English-Canada."² Galina Avramova's dissertation maps out aspects of Findley's literary world from a postmodern point of view, addressing questions of identity on several levels of the novel *Pilgrim*, and as such it contributes to the advancement of literary studies in Central-Europe in general and the awareness of Canadian literature in our part of the world in particular.

Linda Hutcheon's concept of *historiographic metafiction* serves as a guiding principle for the narrative model used in the dissertation. The first chapter, "Native and Foreign in the Fictional Text," revolves around the issue of intertextuality as a special form in which texts exist and assume their multi-layered identity. The the second chapter "Identity – The Children of Darkness," which is the central and most complex discussion in the dissertation, is aimed at

² Gatenby, G. (2002, Jun 25). Obituary: Timothy Findley: Bestselling Canadian Writer Who Articulated the Sensitivities of the Outsider in Society. *The Guardian*. 18.

analyzing the narrative identity of Pilgrim and other characters of the novel on the basis of four large categories: biography, mythography, iconography and psychography. The third chapter – “Mutations – Forms of Presentation” summarizes as well as further develops the main ideas set out in the dissertation. In this part of the study the author attempts to show vistas of collection, construction and reconstruction, thus – in my view – presenting a modernist strand or desire lying behind the Findley’s work.³

Galina Avramova’s special and long-time field of interest lies in Timothy Findley’s literary output. I have known Ms. Avramova for about a decade now and have had the opportunity of witnessing her gradual development in her field of research. I attended several of her papers at Canadian Studies conferences and on the basis of my experience it is not an exaggeration to say that Ms. Avramova is an exceptionally well-prepared young scholar; she is highly-motivated, hard-working, conscientious and reliable. Galina Avramova has been engaged in Canadian Studies for many years and has proved to be an outstanding student with a strong interest in Canada and its culture. She is an excellent communicator and is keen on learning from her colleagues. As former president of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies (CEACS), I was glad to see and acknowledge that Ms. Avramova greatly contributed to the success of the Translation Research Project of our Association. The project began in 2010 and came to a close in 2012, and Ms. Avramova, together with Prof. Madeleine Danova, participated in all three phases of the project on behalf of the Bulgarian chapter of CEACS: she helped set up a comprehensive database with around 2,500 entries, participated in a two-day conference held in Budapest in October 2011 by presenting an important paper and published a significant article in the collection of studies entitled *Canada in Eight Tongues: Translating Canada in Central Europe* (2012), which appeared as a result of this international research.

To this day, Galina Avramova has published a 13 scholarly articles, 5 of which are directly related to her doctoral research, she has given 14 papers at various Bulgarian and international conferences on topics related to her doctoral research or other aspects of Canadian literature and culture, and participated in 8 research projects conducted in Bulgaria and abroad.

In its current, final form in Bulgarian, the dissertation is a substantial reconsideration of the author’s previous work in English. In this final version, the introductory part has been extended, the range of Findley’s novels referred to has been supplemented with additional works, the third chapter has been significantly revised, concluding pages have been added to each chapter and the work has received a conclusion. In summary, the dissertation has been

³ See Linda Hutcheon. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988. 2.

expanded and improved. The dissertation uses 137 sources, 128 footnotes and comprises over 418 thousand characters on 210 pages, thus meeting all the formal requirements set against doctoral dissertations. The study falls into three large chapters and several subchapters, making its structure clear and logical.

To my knowledge, Ms. Avramova's dissertation is the first book-length study of the work of a Canadian novelist in the Bulgarian language, and as such it deserves special praise. I would like to encourage Ms. Avramova to publish her dissertation as a monograph, after due consideration of the reviews and opinions received in the course of the doctoral procedure. When preparing the final version of the book to be published, I would recommend that the subchapter "Iconography" be extended so that it approximates the length of the other subchapters in Chapter II. If the work could be published in English, in addition to Bulgarian, it would be of great benefit to a wider, international readership as well.

On the basis of the above, I express my unconditional support for Galina Avramova's application for a doctoral degree and propose that her dissertation be discussed in the course of a public defence and that Ms. Avramova be awarded the PhD degree by St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia.

Yours sincerely,



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