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R E V I E W

Of the dissertation with extended abstract and publications

Presented by **Assoc. Prof. MARIA ILIEVA ENDREVA, PhD**

For the award of the academic degree „Doctor of philological sciences“

EVALUATION OF THE PROCEDURE

I participated in the meeting of the Dept. "German and Scandinavian Studies" (FCNF at SU) following the special order of the Rector of the University, at which the dissertation and its abstract, presented by Maria Endreva, were extensively discussed. From the statements of the specialists in German-language literature and in literary theory from the universities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo, it became clear that the work presented is a serious and in-depth study in need of minor editorial improvements. In view of the positive opinions, the department council decided to take steps to open a procedure for the defense of the dissertation work for the acquisition of the academic title "Doctor of Philological Sciences".

A very positive point during the procedure is the prompt processing of the documents and the decisions of the competent authorities in the university administration. Thanks to this, the formation of the Academic Commission, the handing over of the defense materials and the holding of the first (online) meeting of the Academic Commission went in a smooth and well-organized manner. The candidate Maria Endreva also did her best to present the materials for the defense of the academic degree in the format required by the normative documents.

In my opinion, no procedural violations have been committed and there are no obstacles to the holding of the second meeting of the Academic Commission within the time limit stipulated in the respective order of the Rector.

PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE CANDIDATE

Assoc. Prof. Maria Endreva is already well known among Germanists not only in Bulgaria. She has been working for a long time, has built a rather broad professional profile, focusing consistently both on the history of German-language literature and on the ethnographic discursive premises for the contemporary peculiarities of culture in the German-language region. In her academic and educational doctoral dissertation on Rainer Maria Rilke, she showed a very good sense of the poetics of a not easy author with a controversial profile, and in the publications presented in the competition for Associate Professor, she proved herself to be an oriented and socially engaged observer of cultures and policies that played a significant role in building the cultural identity of modern Europe.

Assoc. Prof. Endreva stands out among the current members of the department in that she purposefully and independently assesses the realities and, without unnecessary hesitation, tries to extract the best possible benefits for the department from the conditions available at the given moment. One, in my opinion, strong example of this is her willingness to participate in the establishment of the journal "Germanistics and Scandinavian Studies" (ISSN: 2815-2867), which is advertised as a "national electronic academic journal with open access and double anonymous review by independent reviewers". The wording itself shows both the rather good orientation with regard to the modern scientometric parameters in our normative documents, and the sense of measure in shaping a one-of-a-kind proclaiming text.

The candidate's professional commitment is also evident from her participation in the foundation of the "DAAD Alumni" association (i.e. the German Association for Academic Exchange), from her participation in a number of scientific events of the

Union of Germanists in Bulgaria, her readiness to be involved effectively and with understanding in the preparation of academic and scientific-popular forums. Her work at the Austrian Library at Sofia University also shows her ability not only to think modernly about enriching the cultural programme there, but also to implement her ideas.

COMMENTARY ON THE PRESENTED DISSERTATION

In view of my impressions of the candidate outlined above, I am not surprised by the topic of the presented dissertation. It is the sociological approach to fiction that seems to best suit Maria Endreva's current interests. She wants to see meaning in the work of art, and from public life she expects it to perceive at least some of the humane messages of fiction.

What this work positively surprised me with is both the wide range of researched theoretical publications (the author seems to be writing a kind of archeology of the discourse on "work"), and the numerous works that make up the corpus of her research. For both kinds of texts, it is true that they are not the traditionally taught over the generations, classic works (eg Marx, Weber, Adorno, etc.) or novels of the industrial boom years of the 19th century or of the post-war economic miracle of the mid-20th century. Maria Endreva is interested in the present in order to glimpse the future.

The preface and the first chapter of the study raise expectations for a deep sociological approach to this very important topic of our civilization. Although tautological ("in the 21st century" becomes redundant, as soon as "in 2000-2020" is written), the title of the paper indicates the focus of the research. But the consciousness of "literary order", as the Russian formalists call the archetypal figures in literature, justifies the broad overview of the preceding cultural-historical narratives. In this sense, the preface defends the declared intention of the author to work structurally. The embedding of the biblical narrative in the discursive history of the concept of "work" as punishment and

pain is noteworthy - an interpretation that becomes an opposition to the positivist interpretation of work as a song, for example. This not only indicates the deep roots of modern interpretations of the concept, but also underlines the archetypal in art as a secondary semiotic system, as formulated at the time by Lotman (and confirmed years later by the cited Luhmann). Although the historical survey of labor narratives is too quick and therefore at times quite superficial, it builds a solid foundation for the study of the works of the present century.

The selection of the theoretical concepts discussed is probably debatable. In my view, Althusser, for example, is not the most reliable sociologist of literary modernity, being too essayistic and prejudiced in some already stereotyped and proven not quite adequate theses for public life. The author probably feels this inadequacy, because despite the special attention she pays to the so-called "symptomatic reading" in a separate chapter, she also resorts to the more logically grounded concepts of Deleuze or Baudrillard. However, the other theoretical emphasis in her methodology - the systemic theory of Niklas Luhmann, is a well-chosen platform for the literary reading of fiction. The candidate appropriately emphasizes the moment of autopoiesis in literature (which Luhmann did not discover, but only borrowed from the Chilean neurobiologist Maturana). Endreva's self-comment regarding "the choice of Luhmann's and Althusser's theories not as a tool for analysis, but as a theoretical basis for interpretations" (Abstract, p. 103) is well-grounded and accurate. The red thread of the research is the question of a sociological reading of modern fiction, which does not aim to be a decoration or even a consolation and a manual for the ability to live but strives to construct a living world itself. The modern human being seeks in the novel both a confirmation of their increasingly difficult access to individuality, and a door to the spaces of super-individual communication.

Unfortunately, Endreva does not quite fruitfully use this conceptual platform. She fails rather consistently, through a slower, more detailed reading of literary texts, to reveal the interpenetration between text and context, between discursive practices in a society and the independent unit of the novel reacting to these practices and sending messages

as a corrective to social reality. But the remarkable unfolding of the panorama of sociological conceptions of "labour" through the centuries of modernity would have gained much if, in subsequent chapters of literary reading, the aesthetic analysis of the literary text had asserted more strongly its right to a soft, but very stable corrective to the scientific approach to the subject.

On the other hand, the main chapters of the study surprise again and again with new models of "work", which in the successive unfolding of the natural chronology of the civilization process in the 21st century, build an almost apotheosis of dystopia, whose semiotic center is "work". While in the second and third chapters the latest variations of the already usual dimensions of man's attitude to work are considered, in the last two chapters (fourth and fifth) of the main part of the study, work is placed in the light of qualitatively new power relations, for which it may be unattainable. However, since the price of this freedom from obligations and commitments is the personal disintegration, we arrive at the paradoxical transformation of "work" into social prestige. "It is much more difficult to fight against social disrespect than against exploitation" (p. 361), the author quotes Harari - one of the modern observers of technologically transformed societies and individuals.

CONCLUSION

In Goethe's language, it could probably be said that the work presented by Maria Endreva contains the "prime egg" of at least two monographs.

The dissertation is based on a very careful study of the thematic circle focused on theoretical publications and aesthetical narratives as a fundamental concept in sociology, psychology, an archetype in the arts and the center of a number of policies and practices in real social systems. The examination of the theoretical conceptions dedicated to this concept is approached without strong prejudices, with sincere research interest and a clearly defined goal. Overcoming traditional notions of work as a pedagogical tool and/or a means of suppressing and unifying the personality and

looking for new interpretations that can overcome the dystopian figures of the concept in public consciousness and in literature.

In view of this approach, the dissertation achieves successfully two very important goals: A significant amount of theoretical literature has been collected and studied, mostly in the field of sociology and - to a lesser extent - art studies. The latest artistic works of fiction from the last two decades have been traced, which - without being at the center of literary competitions - significantly contribute to the more concrete vision of the concept of "work". The processed material is classified into an easily comprehensible composition, which in a cultural-historical sequence reveals specific features of one of the foci of social formations.

The study of the collected material allows for a more accurate delineation of the latest interpretations of the concept of "labor" and establishes a growing lack of readiness for positive and sustainable figures in fiction, associated with a positive meaning of the concept. This depressive trend is derived from the increasing trend towards horizontal stratification of societies and the transition to isolation of the so-called "superfluous people" (Marcuse) from the world of work. It would be advisable for the presentation of these results to establish a slower pace at the expense of a more in-depth aesthetic analysis of the commented novels. Narrative as the leading classifier in the study presupposes the need for a more in-depth presentation of the main narrative techniques when considering specific works of art.

As a member of the oldest department of German in the country, Assoc. Prof. Endreva will probably be not an easy, but always a noticeable, purposeful and effective factor in strengthening the team. As a researcher, she demonstrates both a will to increase her theoretical qualification and a curiosity for new phenomena in cultural life. With an understanding of the artistic origins in every culture, she remains sober and analytical in her judgments and her publications are a reliable source of up-to-date information.

Based on these observations, I support the candidacy of Associate Professor Dr. Maria Ilieva Endreva for the academic degree "Doctor of Philological Sciences" and call on the members of the Academic Commission to vote positively.

Veliko Tarnovo, 30 August, 2022

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(Prof. Nikolina Burneva, PhD)