

REVIEW

for

the dissertation of Prof. PhD Amelia Licheva

on the topic: "Is the Nobel Prize an Award for World Literature?"

for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science"

in the professional field 2.1. "Philology" ("Theory of Literature")

Academic life of Professor Amelia Licheva suggests that the proposed work for Doctor of Science degree is expected. The way in which the author develops her main hypothesis is also expected by people who have followed her texts over the years: in a wide network of contexts, demonstrating wide erudition and rich argumentation. But before I talk in more detail about the *way*, I will expose clearly the essential elements required by the genre „review”: the work and the defense procedure meet all legal requirements which, as we all know, recently have been changing with a dynamic that the world literature itself would envy. Although the title of the work grammatically focuses on the Nobel Prize, the expectation that the dissertation concentrates more on the Nobel than on the question of the world literature is naive. The focus of Amelia Licheva is on the world literature, and the Nobel Prize (the awards in general) for her is an Aristotle's telescope for her observation. This is the discovery of the work. Therefore, we can read the title in a rhysonomically dispersive ways: is it possible to think the tendencies and specific features of the world literature through awards?; when the term "world literary" dynamically changes its content, especially today, whether and how the awards (in particular the Nobel Prize) can adequately reverberate the development of the concept? We can see some of the contributions in this work in the answers of these questions.

I will start with the structure of the work: the dissertation has 285 pages and includes three chapters (divided into smaller parts), a conclusion, an appendix and a bibliography. The chapters have a clear continuum: the first one outlines the territory of the world literature and sets up important contexts of the work, the third one follows the tendencies in the modern world literature or in other words maps the outlined territory of the world literature in the first chapter, and the second one focuses - through the Nobel Prize - on the connection between the

world literature and the awards, permeating into the first and third chapter. The conclusion is unexpectedly short - only one page, and an appendix is not quite typical of the genre of dissertation, but symptomatically yet with its title ("Bulgarian case") makes a connection with the title of the work and even widens its connotations (next to the main question we can see the shadow of the question "Is there a chance for Bulgarian author to win the Nobel Prize in literature?"). However, the conciseness of the conclusion is deceitful: the appendix completes in an unexpected way some of the thoughts (one of the views of small literatures and their relation to the world literature, of language and translation, etc.), part of the "conclusions" are at the end of the chapters, and in this sense I accept this diversion from the requirements of the dissertation canon. The position of the author in the work is clearly articulated and defended skillfully. The ideas in the work are unfolded at least in two directions – the historical, contemporary and future contexts of the Bulgarian Nobel Prize (is it possible) and the dynamics in reading of the term "world literature". The first direction can be thought as the "small topic" in the dissertation, and the second one as its "big theme", but they are examined in their interdependence. The first chapter, "The World Literature at the Beginning of the 21st Century", outlines the context in which the question of literary awards, and particularly the Nobel Prize, is examined. It does not conceal the effort of the author to make the world literature a key problem in her work. Two parts of this chapter - "Comparative Literature, Contexts and Searches" and "Definitions of the World Literature Today" - not accidentally cover almost the whole range of reflections. The last eleven pages of this chapter relate to the second chapter of the study – „The Nobel Prize”. Thus, the question of the Nobel Prize is "displaced" from the problem of the world literature (in particular, from the problems of comparativism, but above all from the relationship between them). If at first glance the focus is on the word "Nobel", in the course of reading we can see that the world literature is not a context for understanding of the Nobel Prize, but the Nobel prize is a new possible key to understanding of the world literature. And when we are speaking about keys (but also about contexts of reading), let's remind that at the beginning of the work the concept "world literature" is thought through the term "comparative literature".

The road from Goethe (Welek and Warren) to the Nobel Prize is long and filled both with distinctions and common features: here we can see the shadows of the synthesis between national literatures and interconnections of cultures, synthesis in which extraliterary conditions determine the success of the dialogue between „myself” and „the other”; here we register the well-

known synonymous regimes in which the world could be related to the global, international, transnational. Amelia Licheva does a valuable critical analysis of the contemporary state of the world literature demonstrating several things: a very good orientation in the contexts of reading the term "world literature", a remarkable insight in choice of tendencies and criteria for her survey, an ability to highlight the more important issues and risks (Eurocentrism). Amelia Licheva looks for decisions for crisis situations – she links Wellek's concepts about world literature as a canon of excellent works written in different languages, and his later idea about integration of literatures with the views of David Damrosch of comparativism and Theo D'haen's attitude to appeals for expanding the term "world literature". She examines in depth the problems connected to the notion of "world literature" and the tendencies in comparative and postcolonial studies. Along with the quests of Pascale Cassanova, Jonathan Culler and David Damrosch Amelia Licheva states a clear own position: she chooses the broad canon of the world literature to the narrow one in which a whole national literature can be thought through a single author.

The problem of translation is an important focus in the work of Amelia Licheva. There are usually two answers of the question: what does the world literature consist of – original works (J. Hillis Miller: world literature has to be thought through original works) and translations (Rebecca Walkowitz: we write in order to be translated into English). Giving the translation equal status with the original works is also a matter of concern: translation is an area that threatens the literary production of peripheral cultures because the world literature is most often based on the translations; at the same time, it can hardly be conceptualized beyond translation. In her reflections on this problem Amelia Licheva also brings forward the Bulgarian context through the research of Daria Karapetkova "On Translation" (2016). Here I would add Irena Krusteva's two books of the same period – "The Transformations of Hermes" and "Babylonian Deviations" (2015; 2017). Amelia Licheva confronts the thesis that world literature is written in one of the major languages and states that the world literature is also the literature in translation. The result of this collision is the insistence that "in the world literature language is thought not in terms of whether it is in original or in translation, but in line of the world it models".

A dissertation, that outlines such problems, logically tries to see its field in terms of the efforts for its definition. The second part of the first chapter does just that - examines the definitions of the concept "world literature" trying to understand their origin and the logic of subordina-

tion of the synonymous lines - from Frederick Jamison's "global literature", to Gayatri Spivak's "literary transnationalism" and "the world republic of literature", defined by Pascal Casanova. The contribution of Amelia Licheva here is in her refusal to "pile up" lots of points of view at the expense of lining up different opinions and their synchronizing in a uniting syntagma that leads to the idea of an ideal corpus of the "world literature" in its attainability / unattainability. The definitions specified by her give at least *six ways* in which we can see the notion of "world literature" through Umberto Eco's Aristotelian telescope: 1/ "the great books"; 2/ canonical works; 3/ the eternal, the universal; 4/ worldwide popularity; 5/ literature in English - original and translated; 6/ model of reading, which allows us to experience the world. Thus, on an (external) analogy with the literary space of Maurice Blanchot, the "international literary space" of Pascal Casanova is articulated. But according to Blanchot the space hosts authors and texts that seek anxiously their essence, and Casanova writes that "every written book on the planet that belongs to literature inevitably becomes a piece of the giant composition called *world literature*." The common point is intersection of paths, methods and ideas that literary space are separated from everyday world, in other words, of different maps of human existence whose boundaries do not coincide. In the perimeter of this common space we can see many views (including the nine characteristics of Damrosch for the world literature, or Franco Moretti's opinion that it is not an object, but a problem that requires a new critical method), but also hear warnings (Parks and the opposition to the national stereotypes of the "real" invasion in the space of the world; Hilles Miller and his position that Western models should not be applied to the works from marginal cultures). Another quality of the work is that in the reflections on the world literature it also observes the Bulgarian contribution (Tsvetan Stoyanov, Boyan Nichev and Nikola Georgiev). Amelia Licheva argues that today the leading idea about the world literature is its hybridity and intercultural relations. Hence, she insists that the model of Barthes (classic - modern language) and Eurocentricism are undermined, that borders are expanding, and that, as Damrosch claims, the world literature can be reduced to any text that circulate beyond the context of its origin.

Having dealt with its first major task – to read the contexts of understanding the notion of "world literature", the work turns the question of awards from a necessary and possible context of reading to an interpretational key. This is the function of the last and transitional part of the first chapter - "World Literature and Prizes". It is difficult to answer the question "Is the Nobel Prize an Award for World Literature?" before discussion about the territory of the

world literature. At the same time this part goes beyond the territory of the Nobel Prize. The very first words in this chapter refer to the problem: "*the possibility to explain the world literature, and above all – to illustrate it by contemporary great literary awards*" (p. 103). I perceive this as a key for reading the title of the work. Through it Amelia Licheva suggests the *seventh way* in which Umberto Eco's Aristotelian telescope can be used in examining the concept of "world literature". The thesis: "The Nobel Prize goes beyond the idea of national literatures and directs its attention more and more to the world literature" subjects the other pages of the work. The careful analysis follows the history of Nobel Prize, interprets positions, and asks questions. Moreover, Amelia Licheva, led by the feeling that the dynamics of relations between the most prestigious literary prize and literature is not enough when we try to illuminate all places in the territory of the "world republic of literature", examines also other prestigious literary awards - Man Booker, Goncourt, Renaudot, Strega prize. A decade ago Lora Shumkova made similar attempt with much modest dimensions considering the Booker prize and Bulgarian literary award „Vick” (*Literary Prizes: Mechanisms of Prestige*). That is why I think that the time when the world literature will be read through the overall palette of literary awards is not far away and that namely the work of Amelia Licheva will originate a more complex study of the problem.

The second chapter of the work, „The Nobel Prize”, interprets the relation between literary text (author), its reception and its measurability through the prestige of the prize - historically, since 1901 till now, but also through the missing structures (reflections on the authors and books that have not been awarded). Amelia Licheva's observations have both a cognitive and a methodological aspect - they show the possible directions of considering the dynamics of relations between authors, texts and awards. The second part of this chapter demonstrates the ability of the author to find a number of working perspectives on the issue - not only through names, criteria and motives for awarding the prize, but also through the Nobel laureates themselves; their speeches are at the forefront. Although there is an obvious asymmetry (the words of "unawarded" can never be measured in this way, and often we can not hear them), this is a marker because it amplifies or melts in the Nobel Prize speeches extraliterary positions and views that relate to authors and texts and are always part of the cause defended by the author / text. The context of the first years of the twentieth century is quite different from today. The text quite logically underlines the role of the media and markets in the last part of this chapter, as well as the related to them aspects: circulation, translation, and advertising. Amelia Licheva

again demonstrates the ability to engage the Bulgarian case and shows how Bulgarian skepticism has an influence on the circulation of the Nobel laureates' books. I define the last part of the first chapter as the first section of the chapter devoted to the Nobel Prize - not only because it is the smallest chapter in the dissertation but because the Nobel Prize stands out among the other awards as the main accent. We can find answers of the question „Is the Noble Prize an award for world literature” not only in the chapter „The Nobel Prize” but also in the detailed examination of the world literature (the first two parts of chapter one), and namely in the section „The World Literature and Literary Awards”.

The third chapter of the work - "World Literature Today - Worlds, Messages, Predictions" - is an innovatory research of the world literature, this time through the optics of the novel. Giving reasons for this approach satisfies both with its criteria of influence on the audience, as well as with its preferences in translation (studying the world literature from perspective of translation, which is to say that we should not ignore the "small" literatures). The conception of Rebecca Walkowitz that many novels today could be defined as "world literature" with its appearance because they are published in several languages at the same time is pointed as an argument. Amelia Licheva this time rationalizes the chosen territory of the novel and translation through observations on the tendencies. Thus, we can outline six parts: about the dystopian, backward glance to the past, everyday life, migratory wave, popular world writers, and world prize-winners. The criterion is not the same: the dystopian is seen as a tendency that "marks contemporary world literature as problems and as a genre manifestation"; the past has been brought back as a choice of the modern world literature and the present moment dissolves in the next two tendencies – about everyday life and migratory wave, and of course in the dystopian. The appearance of the Nobel Prize winners in this chapter and not in the chapter about the Nobel Prize actually reveals the fact that Amelia Licheva puts her accent on the problems and tendencies in the world literature and is less interested in the questions related to the Nobel Committee and its activities; that is to say the question "Is the Nobel Prize an award for world literature?" finally tilts the scales in favor of the question, "Could the world literature be commensurable with an award?"

The conclusion of the dissertation generalizes only the exposed positions about the world literature; the context about the Nobel Prize seems to be abandoned. But after the conclusion, the work continues with an "Appendix - "The Bulgarian case" (247-266), which shows the

two faces of the conclusion. This last part is dedicated to the question about relations between Bulgarian literature and the Nobel Prize. I was able to speculate on the case of Pencho Slaveikov – proposed for a Nobel Prize in literature years ago - while I was preparing an article about Alfred Jensen for the encyclopaedia "Bulgarian Studies Abroad". Amelia Licheva has done much more - she follows up a series of Bulgarian writers - from Vazov (v/s Heidenstam), Bagryana (v/s Mistral), Radichkov, Blaga Dimitrova, Anton Donchev, Vera Mutafchieva to Georgi Gospodinov and Milen Ruskov and through them tries to rationalize some of the tendencies in the world literature (colliding national and universal, translation and small literature). This is by itself a contribution of the work.

Amelia Licheva argues that in her work she tries to *see the state of the world literature* - through tendencies that are "seen" as leading trends today. In my opinion, she does much more: for her the world literature is something more than a complex of dynamic processes: we can only situate ourselves in the endlessness of the notion and observe sketchy fragments of its movement. In fragmentation, the *understanding of an award* is melted and changed, with the help of the digital environment. But can we say that the rhythm of the change in our understanding of the prize is commensurate with the pace of the change in understanding of the world literature? The work of Amelia Licheva gives one of the possible answers in the last sentences of its conclusion: it is time to understand the world literature in a way that hinders the efforts to define it as a tradition, as a type of reading. If we do not examine this ever-changing identity of our understanding of the world literature (internet, media, translations, fading borders) using appropriate criteria for measuring literary worlds (as Daniel Kelman would have said - even if things look terrifying, it is not bad to be measured), the Nobel Prize can not be a world prize. But in order to measure this „worldiness” of the Nobel Prize in literature, there are at least two conditions: it is very important if (but also how) in our way from small to world literature we will go through „the steppes, peaks, caves, oceans and rivers” of translation and cultural diversity, or we will just stay in our cozy home and will not separate ourselves from our national literature.

In general, the dissertation leaves no hesitation in a final judgment. Among contributing moments in the autoreferat, which are specified correctly, I would like to stand out the choice of an intriguing marker (the Nobel Prize), through which the concept of "world literature" and relations between national and global literature are considered. The work - as well as the over-

all presence of Amelia Licheva in the field of culture - makes me think that we judge a colleague who demonstrates a strong presence in the field of literary studies. I am convinced that the dissertation deserves the degree "Doctor of Philological Sciences". For me it is quite important whether Amelia Licheva will continue her surveys in this direction. The topic is unquestionably significant and the way in which she poses and discusses these problems is an undoubted success. Interdisciplinary research of tendencies and literary awards is unavoidable, and we will see in the future whether other arts such as cinema and theater will try to gain self-knowledge through the world literature. Amelia Licheva is one of the authors who can suggest the correct answer.

Prof. Miroslav Dachev, NATFA