

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Habil. Alexander Vladimirov Shurbanov

for the Works of Dr. Angel Mihaylov Igov,

participant in the competition for Associate Professor in 2.1 Philology (English Literature after the Second World War and Translation - English Language),

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Dr. Angel Igov participates in the competition for Associate Professor of English Literature after the Second World War and Translation – English Language with 15 publications, which include the main habilitation work entitled *Flags and Keys: Poetics of the Epigraph*, the monograph *How To Make a City: Fictional models of the city in the modern British novel (Ian McEwan and Martin Amis)*, an essay co-authored with Boris Popivanov under the title "You, Party, are the mother of life": Bulgarian literature in the conditions of totalitarian rule", an article called "Apology for the superfluous: reflections on a narratological novel" and eleven more articles, to various degrees thematically related to the habilitation work or the monograph.

The habilitation work sets out to investigate the form, functions and manners of using the epigraph in fiction. Its focus is on English literature, in which, according to the author's research, this specific type of paratext arose and has been established. The analytical part of the work is divided into five chapters, framed by an introduction and a conclusion. The first of these five chapters is a historical survey of the epigraph's presence in English literature from its earliest appearance in the sixteenth century, in Shakespeare's narrative poem "Venus and Adonis", through its widespread use in the Gothic novel and later adventure and historical novels, as well as in the poetry of the Romantic age, to its decline in the periods of Realism and Modernism with some notable exceptions, and its eventual revival in recent times. Special attention is paid to the characteristic contributions of Anne Radcliffe, Walter Scott, George Eliot, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, John Fowles, Anthony Burgess, Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, Graham Swift, Ian McEwan – a whole gallery of remarkable authors, each with their own unique approach to the epigraph.

The second substantive chapter sets forth the methodological principles in the study of the thus outlined material. Since the epigraph is a type of paratext, the author relies primarily on the structuralist typology developed in Gérard Genette's theoretical work *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*, but also refers to the theory of intertextuality associated with the names of Julia Krasteva and Roland Barthes, to Peirce's semiotics, Bakhtin's dialogism, and Radosvet Kolarov's studies of autotextuality. This chapter divides the vast variety of epigraphs used in the English literary tradition into two main functional types, which Igov calls "keys" and "flags" respectively. The first of these two kinds, he argues, "unlocks potential meanings within the text[over which it is placed - AS]", while the second is "responsible for the location and functioning of the text in an overall cultural system" (pp.76-77), or, as they are defined even more clearly in the introduction, the former "points to something definite within the main text and thus sets up a possible interpretation," while the latter "emphasizes the relation to the text from which it derives" (p. 6), but as turns out later, it can also have a much wider range of application. On the basis of the chronological research carried out in the previous chapter, it is established that the use of the epigraph is gradually extended from an initially external to a predominantly internal orientation, from the "flag" to the "key" type, but also to more and more complex combinations of these functions.

The next two chapters focus on the key and the flag epigraph respectively. They are devoted entirely to a close reading of significant examples of the one or the other function, as well as of their frequent interplay and overflow into one another. In the chapter on "keys" a central place is allotted to the poems of T.S. Eliot, George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Coleridge's poem "Despair," and Charles Tomlinson's "Assassin," while the flag epigraphs feature novels by Walter Scott, Laurence Darrell, and John Fowles, as well as the poetry of W.H. Auden. In this central part of the study, Angel Igov demonstrates his ability to probe into the very fabric of a literary work and highlight its subtleties.

The fifth analytical chapter turns in a completely different direction – the entry and spread of the epigraph in Bulgarian literature. The author considers this phenomenon as an example of importing a form already created outside national borders, interpreting it within the framework of Franco Moretti's evolutionary theory of literature and Alexander Kyosev's theory of cultural self-colonization. The reader is exposed to a surprisingly intensive and varied application of the epigraph in our new literature since its inception – at first as tackled occasionally in separate writings by Joakim Gruev and Hristo Botev, and then, in an

increasingly consistent way, in the work of Ivan Vazov, Stoyan Mihailovski, Geo Milev, Yordan Yovkov, Alexander Gerov, Anton Donchev and Georgi Gospodinov, notable for their marked affinity to this literary method. As a result of this study, the researcher arrives at two important basic characteristics of the Bulgarian employment of the epigraph, which he formulated as: 1. a marked preference for folklore source texts, and 2. an enhanced conceptualism.

Angel Igov, somewhat apologetically, calls the final, framing chapter of his work "Instead of a Conclusion," admitting at its very opening that he has no taste for conclusions, either as an author or as a reader. For my part, I have also felt this prejudice against the summation of conclusions from the completed research before parting with it, which is accepted as an almost mandatory component in any scientific publication. These summaries often turn into a rather unnecessary repetition of what has already been said. But in our particular case what happens is something quite different and very meaningful: Igov fills his closing chapter with ideas about how and in what directions his research could be continued and expanded. Such ideas are generously shared in the preceding chapters as well, e.g. on pp. 151, 155-6, 197-9, 200, 201. The reader gets the feeling that the work in its true scope is still open, alive, in the process of fermentation, and that it is capable of giving rise to many subsequent studies. With his last sentence, after having enthusiastically encouraged his colleagues to get involved in the further development of the topic he has dealt with, the author promises to continue participating in this endeavor, and there is little doubt that he is going to be as good as his word.

In addition to being a researcher and critic of literature, Angel Igov is also a well-known writer and translator of fiction and poetry from English. He is the author of two collections of short stories and three novels, distinguished with prestigious awards and published abroad in German, French and English. His skill as a writer can also be recognized in the lively, flexible and expressive Bulgarian language in which he presents his scientific findings and discoveries, entering into a casual dialogue with the reader and establishing a noticeable personal presence literally from the first to the last sentence of the work under consideration. Igov's artistic writing makes reading easy and enjoyable, without detracting from the value of serious research. I appreciate this style, which also conveys a sense of calm confidence and mastery of the material on the part of the writer. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that there are some pitfalls in it, which require caution.

The artistic approach to his exposition has prompted to the author to forge and use metaphorical terminology for the two categories central to his study: "key" and "flag." While the first metaphor is self-evident, the second is rather opaque and puzzling. I would prefer the taxonomic language to be non-figurative, because figurative language is more often than not multidirectional, and in scientific speech we strive for maximum precision of expression. For the same reason, I would avoid the elegant variation between the two synonyms, "epigraph" and "motto", which would be advisable in other types of text, but not in a scholarly work. And one more thing: throughout the exposition there is an unresolved hesitation between the casual *I* and the formal *We* of self-referentiality, which should be reduced to something more unified.

There are also a few, albeit very minor, factual inaccuracies. On p. 16 it is said that "in Shakespeare's lifetime plays were generally not considered worthy of print." Whereas it is true that representative anthologies of an author's dramatic texts did not appear until the early 17th century, individual plays, including not a few created by Shakespeare, were published in his time and seem to have been in demand. Such editions would be much more numerous if they did not affect adversely the financial interests of the theatre companies that owned the plays. On the same page again, "Venus and Adonis" is called a "lyrical poem." It seems to me that the term "lyroepic" would be more appropriate. And finally, on p. 59, the author corrects the widespread misconception that the famous passage from the works of John Donne which served as the motto and title of Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is a poem, only to inadvertently replace it with another one, stating that the excerpt is taken from a sermon, whereas it is actually an excerpt from a book of meditative prose.

Two final remarks will touch on the substance of the habilitation work. The historical survey of the use of epigraphs in English literature, which takes place in the second chapter, shows an obvious fluctuation in its frequency since the 19th century, and it is duly noted by the author, but the reasons for this variability are not explored. It would be very useful, in my view, to carry out a more thorough study of the matter. And one more thing, again concerning the two functions of the epigraph, "key" and "flag." From the numerous examples presented in this work, one gets the impression that in the overwhelming majority of cases we do not have an absolutization of one or the other function, but rather a balance of both with a variable, often uncertain predominance. If such is indeed the case, this unstable equilibrium deserves to be highlighted more unequivocally as the norm of the matter. under discussion.

The monograph *How to Make a City: Fictional models of the city in the contemporary British novel*, is actually the candidate's 2012 PhD thesis dedicated to the representative works of Ian McEwan and Martin Amis and their treatment of the metropolis in them. Since the public defense procedure, in which I also participated, included a serious discussion of this publication and gave it a reasoned assessment, it is not necessary to consider it in detail again. Suffice it to say that the dissertation was defined as an in-depth study of a significant problem in contemporary English-language literature. It is only appropriate that it has been made available to a wider readership.

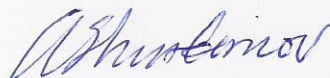
As a third item in the list of publications submitted for the competition, Angel Igov placed a co-authored study published in 2004 under the journalistic title "You Party, You Are the Mother of Life": Bulgarian literature in the conditions of totalitarian rule". As Igov himself points out, this essay is "an attempt at an interdisciplinary examination of the strongly emphasized 'care' that the totalitarian regime in Bulgaria bestowed on literature... [T]he study indicates and discusses a number of manifestations of this special attitude, as well as the characteristic features of Bulgarian state policies concerning writers during that period. In the practical application of the Leninist principle of "party literature", many subtleties and even curiosities are discovered, which attract research attention. These specifics are also determined by the changes that the totalitarian regime itself underwent over time, shifting the emphasis from direct to indirect legitimation [of the regime]."

The recent past of Bulgaria in the era of the so-called "socialist revolution" and "real socialism", as well as its subsequent destruction, have been constant themes in Angel Igov's creative writing since the appearance of his earliest works of fiction. Igov's novels and short stories testify to a deep sympathy for the fate of the nation and to an effort to make sense of the recent political developments in the country. In this context, I also see the natural place of the present study devoted to the ruling Party's guardianship over native literature and its creators, a journalistic paper written vividly, temperamentally, with the irony of a younger generation that can see and appreciate the absurdities of the past at a salutary distance and yet is still able to feel their characteristic flavor.

It is also worth mentioning the interesting literary article "Apology for the Superfluous...", which analyzes the A.S. Byatt's fantastic novel *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* with an emphasis on the narratological issues it ̀ха дх ш. The author makes a special point that the underlying theme of the novel is the understanding of the superfluous as a potentiality and form of freedom and that it engages in an indirect dialogue with certain theoretical ideas in Tzvetan Todorov's works. As already stated, the remaining eleven publications on the candidate's list are articles closely related to the two monographs and focusing on particular aspects or details of their topics forming an integral part of these more complex studies. For the specific purposes of the present competition, the ones that are particularly important are those related to the habilitation work: "Thresholds and Windows: Crossing at the point of the paratext", "The Paratext as a Network", "Reception through Hypertext...", "The Quoting Modernist and His Hellish City", "A Princess in the Garden...", "About the Skin of an Epigraph...". They often highlight little-known or newly discovered curious connections and relations between Bulgarian and English writers, realized through the means of paratext. Particularly intriguing is the discovery of the splitting of a single poetic line by the French symbolist Albert Samain for the creation of epigraphs to two poems by the American Ezra Pound and the Bulgarian Dimcho Debelyanov – apparently without any collusion between them.

If, at the end of this review, a few concluding words must be said despite Angel Igov's bias against all conclusions, I would point out that his solid professional training, his keen eye and his heuristic cast of mind are merits that give me reason to recommend his election for Associate Professor of English Literature after the Second World War and Translation. I would only add that the pleasure with which Angel Igov carries out his research and which he amply conveys to the reader is also not to be overlooked.

Reviewer:



Prof. Dr. Habil. Alexander Shurbanov