

## **Opinion**

*by Prof. DSc. Valery Stoilov Stefanov,*

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*member of the scientific jury in a competition for awarding the  
the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences"  
of Associate Prof. Dr. Boyko Penchev Penchev*

The dissertation thesis "Progressives and Conservatives. Temporal patterns in Bulgarian literature from the late 1940s to the 1970s" was presented by Associate Prof. Dr. Boyko Penchev. The work was discussed and referred for defense by the Department of Bulgarian Literature of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Prof. Boyko Penchev is a long-time teacher at the Department of Bulgarian Literature at Sofia University. He is an author of a number of publications with a wide thematic and problematic scope as well as of several books.

The meeting of the department was held in compliance with all administrative requirements, and with the active participation of the college.

"Progressives and Conservatives. Temporal patterns in Bulgarian literature from the late 40s to the 70s of the 20th century" is a study that seeks to interpret and discuss important problematic aspects of the history of Bulgarian literature.

The work follows its interpretive intrigue within fifteen distinct parts. Three of them are defined as "diversions" and have the role of deviations-additions to the chronologically unfolding thread of the research. The first and last chapters of the study conceptually open and close the work.

The introductory chapter "Literature between the experience of the past and the intuitions about the future" clearly identifies the problem area and specifies the methodological approaches to it. The chosen chronological segment is important for the specificity and social existence of literature for a number of reasons. Closely linked to ideology, it is subjected to all kinds of pressure and its reactions create a series of tensions, "inflammations", and problematizations. Hence, the understandable admission that the study seeks to meet literary science with "the knowledge of society and man." An additional argument for such a meeting is the "heteronomous" literary field itself, complexly articulated by aesthetic

normativism, public gestures, control systems, thematic dominance, stylistic solutions...

The work explores patterns of experiencing time in the wide range between textual organization and ideological orchestration. Socialist man is forced constantly to measure himself against the yardstick of the "big, historical" time, which is clearly ideologically mapped and imperatively valued. This imperativeism constructs desired personal and collective identities that have been diligently and carefully developed. At the same time, the fact that literature is capable of acting as a counter-adaptive factor is taken into account. In other words, its ability to undermine the ideological values and dogmas, to soften the ideological monolith, to create conflict zones in terms of schedules for purpose and meaning.

Looking around for theoretical references, the work eschews "heavy figures" such as Heidegger and Ricoeur, instead, refers to Foucault only to stop its choice on Mikhail Bakhtin and Reinhard Kozelek.

The scope, the heuristic potential and the uses of Bakhtin's concept of "chronotope" are carefully traced by the author. Despite its apparent terminological "softness" and the inconsistency of usage, it turns out to be most adequate to the specifics of the task at hand, and to the "problematizations" focused in the work.

The chronotope is a concept through which both individualized and typological descriptions of different historical moments can be successfully made. If time and space are the "fields" in which power and ideology willingly fall, then chronotope is the optic for observing these power-validating practices. The essential benefit is that both disciplinary techniques and transgressive tactics can be traced through it. Last but not least, along with the big term "chronotope" it operates with minichronotopes, with "chronotopic motifs" such as the Road, the Meeting, the Convention, the Wedding. In the course of the research, these minichronotopes are successively introduced and described.

Kozelek's concepts of "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" are also drawn to the conceptual fruitfulness of the chronotope. The work defines its purpose precisely as an insight into the "historical dynamics" with the help of the selected conceptualizations. Future, present and past are found in the dynamic space of situational evaluations. Thus, for example, the aggressively underestimated, mistaken and denied past is able to resurrect and return as a desired reference point in a new conjuncture. As it happened in the 60s and 70s.

Being a "field of constant reconfigurations", the space of experience allows us to trace and describe displacements and dislocations as an effect of the complex entanglement of ideology and life, of tired conjunctures and transgressive gestures. Thus, the main working concepts of progressivism and conservatism turn out to be applied to specific transformations involved in the change of ideological dominance. Literature itself is understood as a mirror of displacements, but also as an active means by which the past is rearranged and the future reimagined. An understanding that makes it possible to identify the profound changes in self-awareness.

The chapters tracing the specifics of the literary processes are a good illustration of the productivity of the chosen approach. I will highlight only few things. The author examines the major dispositifs of ideology in order to reveal those factors that require their reconfiguration, such as exploring them through claims to time. As an example, I would point to the reflections on socialist realism and the traumatic problems with the "objectification of social capital" in socialist Bulgaria. Boyko Penchev looks into the vocabulary of the era to show how words make things, in this case – ideologically convenient meaning configurations. Another good example is the use of the term "objectivism" in the speech of Pantelei Zarev, one of the popular heroes of the era.

Criticism is an institution of mentorship, of periodic sanctions, and its verbal acrobatics are also symptomatic of the development of conjunctures. The reconstructed "libraries" of some of the conservatives (in the style of Carlo Ginzburg) give an idea not only of the infidelities of memory, but also of the tactical approaches of the Bulgarian counterparts of the curious Menocchio.

Insofar as literature is directly tied to the postulates of ideology for various areas of life - notions of past and future, problematic private property, migration, labor, meaning... the study is "forced" to introduce broad contexts and to test again and again the effectiveness of the union "ideology-literature". Thematizations and problematizations such as the battle with narrow-mindedness, the conservative revolution, tribal mythology, the Dionysian beginning, etc. fit convincingly into the conceived and carefully constructed literary-historical plot.

Last but not least, the wide thematic and genre range of the attracted texts should be noted. A text able to speak fascinatingly and interesting about the functioning of chronotopes, and to give us some insight into the characters

summarized as progressives and conservatives, should not be ignored. I find all this precisely on the pages of the work under consideration.

### **Conclusion**

**The work of Prof. Dr. Boyko Penchev is an impressively conceived, conceptually rich and correctly done scientific study. This is a serious and completely sufficient argument to support the aspiration of Prof. Penchev to receive the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".**

**I vote positively for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boyko Penchev Penchev.**

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