

REVIEW

**by DLitt Prof. Rumiana Damianova – Institute for Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for the dissertation thesis of Nikolay Genov
"The Virtual Body in Science Fiction: Experiences in Phantomatics"
for the award of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor"
in the direction of 2.1. Philology - Theory of Literature**

Virtual or computerization of the world has long been a closed or solitary activity. In the first decades of the 21st century, rushing to study fiction is kept up not only by traditional interest over the years, but above all by the boom in technological support for most human activities, the widespread use of Facebook, Internet living, and powerful video games. (W. Gibson, E. Cline, St. Lem, M. Rosati, At. Slavov, V. Pelevin, M. Nikolchina, E. Borisova and so on).

Within this meaning, Nikolay Genov's dissertation thesis - "The Virtual Body in Science Fiction: Experience in Phantomatics" is no surprise. The surprise comes from the ambition - competently defended in the work - to present, "clarify" and above all rehabilitate before the scientific community the theory of Stanislaw Lem. The presentation and the development of Lem's theory of the field he studied - phantom science - is a scientific challenge. But there is something more - in Chapter I of the work "The Phantomology of Stanislaw Lem", namely in revealing the essence of phantomatics, N. Genov not only convincingly and competently presents Lem's theoretical postulates, but also develops them, builds up on them, creating his own theoretical modes. He manages to compare and reconcile in-depth theorizations, methodological stipulations and literary interpretations, on the one hand, with a literary-historical view of texts in the tracing of history and performance, on the other.

This impression is also supported by the manner of scientific expression, where, not without the inevitable dose of risk, the doctoral student "communicates" with Lem, enters his style of speech, lined with irony. He makes phantomatics the main character of his text. Nikolay Genov seems to "start" from Lem's words - "Phantomatics means creating a two-way connection between" artificial reality "and its recipient", and is perceived as "art with feedback". The

dissertation thesis reveals a respectful competence of the author on the essence of the theory of St. Lem combined with theoretical reasoning. N. Genov not only traces Lem's terminological apparatus, which he openly admits was absolved from responsibility because Lem precisely developed it, but he manages to "impose the phantomology developed by the Polish science fiction writer as a paradigm of virtual reality" by directing to "the preparation of a comprehensive theoretical model" (pp. 6, 10). The formulated task of the dissertation thesis is clearly highlighted - "to restore the theoretical apparatus of Stanislaw Lem, to solve some of the more serious conceptual problems of the theory of Polish science fiction and to delineate its own boundaries" (p. 7), and N. Genov performs this methodically, precisely and convincingly.

The theoretical development of the individual postulates in Lem's theory has been successfully achieved, but simultaneously the approach is convincing: N. Genov not only sets and comments on the statements in Lem's theory, but, and this is essential, he also shows how it works on some of his literary texts. This model of presentation will be continued in other parts of the work, too, where, introducing theoretical postulates, N. Genov will seek and present appropriate examples from fiction to illustrate the role of the created models. This type of analysis of Lem's theory, although with a delay in the humanities of several decades, is undoubtedly an achievement and contribution to the dissertation thesis of N. Genov.

The actual scope of a comprehensive reading of Lem's theory is revealed in the following Chapters II and Chapter III of the dissertation thesis. In them, analyticity manifests itself in a clear theoretical structure. The leading task of Chapter II, "Basic Problems of the Phantomatic Machine" actually traces how Lem's theory itself works, what the possible problems with phantomatic machines are, and how they can be discovered. From all the titles in "Sum of Technology" N. Genov chooses phantomatics, which obviously prevails over the others with its qualities and active realization, as well as the construction of phantomatic machines.

I see subchapter 2.2 as the most serious contribution to this chapter. "On the threads of the web: entanglement in the cables of history. Types of Phantoms ", as well as the traced connection with psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan) and the comparison with sleep. There is an interesting detail in it - a question, a consideration: to what extent and how we can answer our questions during the dream? N. Genov recalls that Lem also stressed the probability of possible problems in the implementation of phantomatic machines. In an effort to find a possible solution to such a question, the doctoral student offers several types of phantoms - F-1, F-2 and F-3 -

from three various generations, which ensure the security of the operation performed by the phantomatic machine. These types of phantoms are directly dependent on "media development", they are also terminologically defined: classic, network and game. Or, the classic phantom, proposed by Lem in "The Sum of Technology", there is the feature that "the line between the proto-phantom and the phantom is too short", more precisely distinguishable with difficulty. It remains in the traditional operation of phantomatic machines.

The novelties in this process gradually come with the phantom F-2 proposed by N. Genov, a stage which reflects the penetration of the Internet, when the inhabitants of the virtual world are more, share a common space. Building up the theoretical postulate of F-2, N. Genov actually presents the increased opportunity to study and trace the creation and the role of phantomatic machines at a new stage, with a new research language. Such is the nature of the next phantom, proposed by N. Genov - F-3, directly related to the boom of the video games. He thus convincingly proves that these network phantoms are "socially oriented" and manage to attract "other genres or penetrate other media, such as computer games, for instance" (p. 104). This third and "so far last" generation of phantoms opens up new possibilities, but also poses new problems. I believe that in the development of this problem and the further development of F-2 and F-3 this part is among the most contributing to the work, because it is N. Genov's own theoretical discovery with the general conclusion: "The question of the ideological development of phantomatics remains to be read as a matter of its models. " I am tempted to ask a question which arose after getting acquainted with this part of the work - are these generations of phantoms coming to an end or would it be possible to discover on another level, already F-4 (not to mention 5 and 6 for now), and also on what it is presumed, depends and what possibility for realization there would be?

And if Lem in "Sum of Technology" thinks phantoms are related to cinema as a medium, then with the advent of the Internet and video games, questions are being raised on two other levels. This is why in this chapter he also reveals the two possible models of Lukyanenko and Nevelin. Faced with the problems of realization of the phantomatic machine, N. Genov distinguishes the possible problematic directions - biological, financial, ontological - this is where the two models are included, also empirical and social. The complex of problems is difficult to overcome, but namely the creation of models is one of the ways out, N. Genov says in his work. In Chapter III "Phantomatics: Body and World" the worlds of phantomatics, as the

doctoral student emphasizes in his conclusions, "do not cease to seem dependent on some appearance, on a "solid" anchor which holds them like in a ship" (p. 144). Namely this anchor, this holding mechanism, is the human body, which in the frame of science fiction is the constant, the unchanging quantity which participates in the processes of phantomatic experience. At some level, the human body is as close to the character as the phantom is to the video game. N. Genov also presents in detail and analytically a part of Levy's theory of the transformation into the phantomatic experience, the possibility to pass from one mode of existence to another. He also sees three disciplines used as metaphors for constructing a world: grammar, dialectics and rhetoric. As grammar means the very creation of the phantomatic world; dialectics - is the connection of the subject with the "external", the movement, the availability of an avatar; rhetoric reveals what is new in this world and how changeable it is. In this part of the work, as well as in the previous ones, there is a kind of assimilation of the unknown to the comfort of the known, and this is imposed as the main epistolary mechanism in presenting the theses.

I would add to the qualities of the dissertation thesis both paratexts proposed by N. Genov. One is entitled "Appendix No. 1. Dictionary of Phantomological Parts", which clearly presents the theoretical concepts used in Lem's theory, and clarified in the text: protophantomatics, teletaxia, phantomatics, phantomology, phantoplication and cerebromatics. The second paratext are the numerous - 198 in number - footnotes which have a textual meaningful role in the dissertation plan: they present the facts and the original titles of works, clarify terms, present certain aspects of the problem, the placement of which in the text would deflect the logic of presentation of ideas.

Dear Members of the Scientific Jury,

Nikolay Genov's dissertation thesis is inventive - he discovers new problematic niches in the theory of Stanislaw Lem to fill with new ideas and upgrades, introduces into scientific circulation the forgotten theory of Polish science fiction, emphasizing its relevance today and its ability to works of art are analyzed through the phantomatic. The text of the dissertation thesis is an illustration of professionalism and very good theoretical training, which convince in its merits. Therefore, I strongly recommend to the Honored Members of the Scientific Jury to award the doctoral student Nikolay Genov with the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

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