

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Andrey Tashev, PhD – Institute for Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

for Martin Plamenov Kolev's dissertation

The Nomadic Subject in Matvey Valev's Works: Nature and Machine,
for the purpose of acquiring the educational and science degree "Doctor"
in the field of 2.1 Philology, Scientific specialty "Bulgarian Literature" –
Bulgarian Literature from the Liberation to the Second World War

The **dissertation** has a total volume of 200 pages. It consists of an introduction, six chapters, conclusion and bibliography (with 246 titles, including 69 in English and in Spanish). Besides the dissertation, the PhD candidate has handed the following defense materials: **abstract of dissertation** (in Bulgarian and in English), a **list of publications on the dissertation's topic** (10 in number), a **list of contributions of the dissertation**, and a **CV**. The materials meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, of the Regulations for its Implementation and of the corresponding Regulations of Sofia University.

The defense materials, as well as my own personal impressions of the PhD candidate, speak for his excellent research and personal qualities. He is serious, thorough, active, well-read, and is devoted to his individual research topic, and at the same time successfully participates in a number of collective initiatives (research projects, participation in scholarly forums, organization of such, editing of collected volumes, et al.). His 10 publications on the dissertation's topic significantly exceed the minimal national requirements for the purpose of acquiring the educational and science degree "Doctor". Martin Kolev is already a part of the academia and is well-known not only in Sofia University. His significant creative work is also impressive, he has published six fictional books and other texts, for which he has won prestigious awards.

All of these qualities of the PhD candidate are also visible to a great extent in his dissertation, which will be the focus of my attention in the following part of the review.

From the first lines, the dissertation defines itself as belonging to that field of humanities, which deals with “the practice of rehabilitating and returning back into circulation authors who due to historical, ideological, aesthetic considerations have been marginalized and positioned in the periphery of the literary-historical discourse” (p. 5). Such author is Matvey Valev. But the rehabilitation in question is not a single act, it has been happening through several stages, each of them being more concrete and focused as compared to the previous one. If this process is not taken into account, there would be a high risk of repetition of the same things in various studies on the same author. Martin Kolev understands this processuality very well and does not fall into the trap in question. He continues precisely from where the existing studies on Matvey Valev have reached, and overbuilds them with new interpretations and perspectives, examines certain aspects of theirs through a new theoretical key. After the overall presentation of the author by other scholars in the last few years, Martin Kolev undertakes the next logical step – he approaches a concrete aspect of Matvey Valev’s creative work. I would like to congratulate the PhD candidate and his supervisor on the excellently chosen topic, which is not an easy task with an author as productive and highly varied as Matvey Valev. Nomadism is indeed one of the writer’s big topics, and offers a very suitable approach to his works. It is quite fruitful, since it functions as a focus, and at the same time includes other important topics and aspects of Matvey Valev’s works, such as Brazil, the sea, the radio, et al.

In the introduction, Martin Kolev convincingly motivates his differentiation from the hitherto existing approaches to Matvey Valev, which emphasize the writer’s biography at the expense of his works. While clarifying the reasons for that phenomenon, the PhD candidate mentions the main events of the writer’s life (thus actually confirming the inescapability of the author’s biography), and afterwards gets down to proposing “a reading of the text-Valev, resisting the intense autobiographical magnetism of its Author” (p. 17).

In order to cope with this difficult task, in the first two chapters Martin Kolev develops an interpretative key, through which he would be able to approach the subject of nomadism in Matvey Valev’s works. The chapter “The Nomad through the Sedentary Gaze: From an Object of Observation to a Postmodern Subject” traces the genealogy of the nomad and the various perspectives on him in the Western perception from Homer and Herodotus up to the present. This theoretical review of the “nomadic question” is conceptually needed for the dissertation, but it is also interesting and informative, and backs the choice of the ideas of Gilles Deleuze

and Felix Guattari with arguments. Their nomadology, the distinction between actual and virtual (instead of the traditional distinction between real and possible), the rhizomatic approach (instead of the standard tree-like structure), the concepts of the smooth and the striated space, the line of escape, and other ideas of the two French philosophers are presented carefully and yet intelligibly. The ideas are combined in an innovative way, so that they could be used for the solving of the specific research tasks. In order to develop a suitable instrumentarium, the PhD candidate incorporates ideas and terminology from other thinkers, such as Henri Bergson, Michel Foucault, Alfred Schütz, Rosi Braidotti.

Among the contributions of the dissertation is the well-grounded typology of wandering in Bulgarian literature till the Second World War. By weaving the title of the “World and Home” magazine (which Matvey Valev planned but never realized), Martin Kolev distinguishes three types of wandering. He labels them “uprooted”, “travelling”, and “nomadic”, and presents them with their main characteristics, typical authors, characters, and genre forms in Bulgarian literature. This typology is not perfect and could never be, at least due to the “a priori evading strict definitions somewhat metaphysical nature of the act of wandering itself” (p. 42). But what matters is that the typology works by virtue of the wider generalizing perspective chosen by the PhD candidate. In my opinion, this part of the dissertation has the potential to be developed into a separate study and I truly hope that Martin Kolev will continue his work in this direction.

Most complex and most important for the dissertation is the third type of wandering – the nomadic subject. This model is the most complicated, since “escaping from any identification, analysis and structuring strategies is its very *modus operandi*” (p. 52). The nomadic subject is elusive, refusing self-identification, wearing various misleading masks. Yet, it is the most important one, since the wanderers in Matvey Valev’s works are precisely nomadic subjects, rather than migrant subjects.

We can find detailed arguments for this in the third chapter. With the help of many quotes from Matvey Valev’s works (in the introduction these works are precisely and correctly narrowed to the late creative work of the writer), in chapters 3–6 of the dissertation the presence of a binary model of the creative world of Matvey Valev is excellently grounded: from this side – beyond, nature – culture (respectively technique as a final manifestation of culture). The dissertation offers overall and thorough research of typical for the text-Valev

phenomena: wild and obedient nature, machine-repetition and machine-difference, sexual and gender aspects, which follow the model of relationship between nature and culture. Chapter 6 includes also an analysis of the very important function of language and the way, in which the nomadic subject constructs its narrative identity. Thus, with the help of the precise terminological tools developed in the first chapters, Martin Kolev succeeds to identify and present, to fix and describe the constantly slipping nomadic subject in Matvey Valev's works. Chapter 6 includes also an interesting analysis of the wandering in the early Bogomil Raynov.

These four chapters present most fully one of the main qualities of the dissertation and of Martin Kolev as a researcher. He can make theoretical and literary-historical generalizations, and he can also carry out "close reading" of particular literary works. I would distinguish the analysis of Matvey Valev's short story "From There Begins the Field" (pp. 87 – 90). Kolev not only knows well, but also freely uses a great number of texts – by Matvey Valev (whose works he knew very well at the beginning of his doctoral training), as well as by other Bulgarian writers and by the theoreticians used in the dissertation.

I would like to pay special attention to the structure of the dissertation, which I would define as exemplary. The introduction clearly specifies the existing studies on Matvey Valev; the theoretical framework, which will be applied; the authors and the methodology, which will be used; the particular aims and intentions, as well as the ways, in which the PhD candidate intends to reach them, are also pointed out. The next six chapters logically follow from one another. Each of them begins with one or two epigraphs – quotations by different authors, which are appropriate for introducing the particular problem. The conclusion correctly summarizes what has been achieved in the work and indicates other possible directions for the future researchers of Matvey Valev. The dissertation is written profoundly, academically consistent, but at the same time is easy to understand, interesting, and dialogical.

The abstract correctly and comprehensively presents the content of the dissertation.

With a view to an eventual future publication of the text, which I really hope to be realized, I will indulge in addressing to Martin Kolev some recommendations of a different kind:

1. It would be better if the Bulgarian version of the proper name of the researcher of nomadism Braidotti is equal in the whole dissertation. Now it could be found both as "Рози" and "Роузи".

2. Note 25 on p. 33 mentions that Marcel Proust's novel *Finding Time Again* – the last part of *In Search of Lost Time* – is not published in Bulgarian. Actually, it is. In 2012 the novel *Finding Time Again* was published by Panorama Plus Publishing House, translated by Maria Georgieva, although this edition is practically unfindable today.

3. There are cases in the dissertation, in which a particular Valev work is quoted in different chapters from different editions. The text would gain if the same works by Matvey Valev are quoted from the same editions, irrespectively if they are from 1937, 1940, 1988, or 2022.

4. I have some reservations with regard to the adding of Matvey Valev's fishermen to the nomadic subjects. I am inclined to consider them as a border case. Indeed they have some typical for the nomadic subject characteristics, which are correctly presented in the dissertation (pp. 83 – 85). However, some fishermen have families, also their moving and the aim of their travelling differ from these of the seamen, for example. Moreover, the fisherman's profession has much in common with the work of the villagers on the field, who are the opposite of the nomadic subject.

5. "The smooth space" of the sea in a certain sense is also striated. Ships, which cross it, have routes and time-tables or at least initial and final point of their cruise (for example, the captain in the short story "Citizens of the World" says: "We were in Jaffa, now we are after Tunisia, then we will stop in Marseille, and then through Gibraltar we will go all the way up to Norway"). Naturally, in respect of the cruise as experienced by the characters, the sea could indeed be defined as "smooth space".

These notes by no means question the high qualities of the proposed dissertation. I hope they get accepted by Martin Kolev as a ground for reflection in his further work on the topic.

Martin Kolev's dissertation opens a new page in the understanding and interpretation of the works of Matvey Valev. Furthermore, for the realization of his ideas, the PhD candidate has created a theoretical interpretative key, based on ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, which can be successfully applied to other authors too. Kolev tests this key on works by classical writers such as Hristo Botev, Ivan Vazov, Dimcho Debelyanov, Elisaveta Bagryana, Dora Gabe, Yordan Yovkov, Kiril Hristov and others, but also on works by lesser-known authors – Olga Chavova, Dimitar Shishmanov, Vesela Strashimirova. This can be defined as a contribution of the dissertation, which should be added to the applied felicitous list of contributions.

On the basis of above-written observations, I give my positive assessment of the dissertation of the PhD candidate Martin Kolev, as well as of his whole scholarly activity, and I convincingly recommend the honoured members of the Scientific Panel to confer him the educational and science degree “Doctor”.

16.09.2023

Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Andrey Tashev, PhD