

## **OPINION**

**of Prof. Plamen Doinov, DSc, New Bulgarian University, for the dissertation of Boyko Penchev Penchev on the topic „Progressives and Conservatives. Temporal patterns in Bulgarian literature from the late 1940s to the 1970s” for the degree of „Doctor of Sciences” in Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian literature. Contemporary Bulgarian literature)**

The dissertation „Progressives and Conservatives. Temporal patterns in Bulgarian literature from the late 1940s to the 1970s.“ was written by a researcher who over the years has proven his interest in various periods and trends in Bulgarian literature after 1878 – from the end of the 19th to the first decades of the 21st century. His authored books „End of the Century Sorrows“ (1998) and „Disputed Legacies“ (2017), his monographs „Bulgarian Modernism: The Modeling of the Self“ (2003) and „September '23: Ideology of Memory“ (2006) outline diverse thematic fields, in which literature and ideology invariably intersect, with a marked attention to the problems surrounding the construction of the modern and/or postmodern subject, which is constantly vacillated between the dilemmas of individual and collective memory.

The presented dissertation work of Boyko Penchev has a total volume of 365 pages, which contain an introduction, 10 theoretical-historical chapters, 3 literary-historical case studies (nominated as "excursions"), a concluding part and a bibliography. With its topic, structure and volume, as well as in the way of posing and solving a scientific problem, the text fully meets the requirements for a dissertation for the defense of the degree of „Doctor of Science“.

The topic of the dissertation covers an era and a problem, which in Boyko Penchev's text are presented for the first time in a way that reproduces and clarifies a fundamental contradiction. It is about the

contradiction between the progressive character of the totalitarian ideology in the early People's Republic of Bulgaria and the advance of conservative-traditionalist tendencies after the beginning of the 1960s. This process in literature has significant consequences, and today causes serious literary-historical misunderstandings. Because the socialist realist canon between the mid-1940s and the end of the 1950s was built around the axiomatic profile of the culture of totalitarian communism, embodied by the utopian-progressive vector. The crisis of this vector (as well as the crisis of the pedagogical vector) later gave the impression that it produced deviations, disagreements, hidden or overt alternatives to the official polytheistic doctrine in People's Republic of Bulgaria. Moreover, the turbulence of the "thaw" causes some modern researchers to claim that since the 1960s, socialist realism has gone into retreat, that it not only eroded and lost its dominance, but even disappeared from the fictional texts of Bulgarian literature.

The main merit of Boyko Penchev's dissertation lies in focusing on this transformation of the literary age by closely tracing the state and changes in the temporal pattern in the literature and literary criticism of the period. The author declares that he will focus „on the ways in which literary self-consciousness thinks about the placement of man and society in time“ (p. 19). Boyko Penchev announces that his main task is to trace „how literature creates models for experiencing time, how it structures the past, present and future as temporal landmarks working for the construction of certain individual and collective identities“ and to explore „the way in which literature undermines the shared past and future, introducing the dimensions of private biographical time“ (p. 5).

Of course, in the opening chapters he first describes the utopian-progressive model imposed by the communist regime until the mid-1950s. Undoubtedly, the poetry of the Stalinist era is suitable artistic material for this. Further, through the epic novels of the early 1950s, which work with the idea of „awareness“ and (re)construct the model of a specific „socialist bildungsroman“, the more complex play of past and future begins. Boyko Penchev is particularly interested in this game. So he gets to the central questions: What is the People's Republic and what is Bulgarian literature like after the „thaw“?

After the mid-1960s, the Program for Building Communism until 1980, adopted by the 8th Congress of the BKP, and increasingly strong retro attitudes in Bulgarian society clashed. This clash turns into a socio-cultural knot, the unraveling of which involves many poets, fiction writers, critics, and entire literary generations. Boyko Penchev subjected the various proposals to a virtuoso analysis and untangled the knot.

Here are the most important scientific contributions of the dissertation:

1. The concepts of „nationalism“ and „autochthonism“, which are the names of the conservative tendencies in the literature of the 1960s and 1970s, are precisely distinguished and defined. *Autochthonism* turns out to be the more accurate name of the processes in the literary-critical interpretation of the past then.

2. By analyzing the main temporal patterns – linear and cyclical – it is possible to place the time of events in some of the literature of the 60s not in *history*, but in *eternity*. The events in the sacred Bulgarian past are determined not so much by historical as by mythical (self) consciousness.

3. The ideological and intertextual corridors, invisible to the naked eye, along which the „conservatives“ of the 1960s and 1970s (mainly Toncho Zhechev and Krastyo Kuyumdzhiev) reached and connected with the authors of the interwar era, emblematising the „conservative revolution“ have been carefully traced. This has been achieved by subtle clarification work on concepts such as „valley“, „primitive“, „paganism“, „grotesque“, „myth“, „Dionysian“ etc.

4. The creativity and perception of the writers Yordan Radichkov, Nikolay Khaitov, Vasil Popov are projected as a contradictory process of opposition and incorporation into the reforming socialist realist canon in the 1960s precisely through the changes in the temporal pattern – from the *future* to *eternity*. Boyko Penchev shows how the reformation (not the elimination or rejection!) of socialist realism in the 1960s and 1970s took place as a transformation of the leading temporal pattern in Bulgarian literature.

Emphasis in the dissertation is placed primarily on the processes in literature and in literary criticism, while the tensions in the deautonomized literary field remain more like background information. This is due to Boyko

Penchev's lack of work with archival documents, not counting the citation of a small part of them through their publications in author's books and documentary collections. It is probably due to this deficiency and the limitation of the time frame of the dissertation to the 1970s that the following controversial summary is due: „*The Bulgarian „conservative revolution“ of the 1960s was more of an individualistic „practice of the self“ than a collectivist project, although the „traditional world“ and the „organic community“ were an important part of its conceptual repertoire.*“ (p. 347)

This conclusion is problematic in the perspective of the imposition of the totalitarian concept of a „united socialist nation“ and in highlighting the role of some writers, participants in the „conservative revolution“ of the 1960s, in the political-ideological realization of the „revival process“ in the 1980s. them. This last large-scale *collectivist project* of the People's Republic of Bulgaria actually brings about the convergence between the communist utopia and the national retro-utopia under the shadow of violence, in which we have yet to clarify the role of the „conservative revolutionaries“ of the 60s. Obviously, this is a discussion to come.

Bearing in mind the above, I propose that Boyko Penchev Penchev acquire the degree „Doctor of Sciences“ in Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian literature. Contemporary Bulgarian literature).

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**Prof. D. Sc. Plamen Doynov**