

REFERENCE

on the (scientific) works of Dr. Nadezhda Stefanova Tsocheva, presented in the Academic competition for the position of Associate Professor, field of higher education 2. Humanities; professional field 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature), announced by Shumen University "Ep. Konstantin Preslavski"

Dr. Nadezhda Tsocheva participates in the scholarly competition with a published habilitation thesis – "The Poetics of Melancholy in the Context of Bulgarian Modernism and Postmodernism"; scientific publications and citations exceeding the minimum requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria in the number of points they collect in the groups of indicators applicable in the competition for associate professor.

Dr. Tsocheva is known to the literary scientific collegium in the country for her book "Chavdar Mutafov and Bulgarian Culture between the Two World Wars" (2007), which established her name as a thorough expert and interpreter of the work of this Bulgarian avant-garde and of the processes in Bulgarian and European culture of the interwar decades. Her numerous publications and her participation in scientific conferences and seminars attract attention for their research topics and for her precise analytical work as a well-trained specialist with an interest in Bulgarian literary modernism and its synchronic and diachronic projections. The appreciation that her scholarly explorations and achievements evoke is evidenced by the citations of her works, including those published as early as the 1990s.

Nadezhda Tsocheva's professional interests include her writings on aspects of twentieth-century Bulgarian modernism in a massive corpus of research on it that has grown steadily since the 1980s. Despite the serious achievements of Bulgarian literary scholarship in this direction, Nadezhda Tsocheva has managed to discover unexplored minefields in which she has worked with passion, entering peripheral and deep zones and focusing on details that no one else has looked into. Here I will point to her texts "The Calendar in the Context of the Bulgarian Avant-Garde", "Aesthetic Dimensions of the Tragic – Between the Art of the Album ("Weeping Willows" by Em. Popdimitrov) and the epistolary ("Literary and artistic letters from Germany" by G. Milev)", "Following the shadows of the clouds, the signs, the aromas", "Archetypal images of the woman in Bulgarian modernism and the iconography of Secession – the image of Salome", etc. The orientation to the periphery and border territories of literary modernism, to its common nature with other arts, its philosophical projections, etc. broadens the idea of the essence and limits of the phenomenon. Dr. Tsocheva has a particular affinity for the aestheticism of modernism, for the tools of its artistic realizations, decorative and secession imagery, the hidden nuances and connecting elements that present literary modernism in a processual manner, not just statically, in its polyvalence in the context of its time, but also beyond it, in its reflections in the artistic practice of postmodernism.

It is therefore not surprising that the topic of the habilitation thesis, which N. Tsocheva presents in the competition. The emotional prism through which Bulgarian literary modernism is read in her research is not something that has not been applied to the literary heritage of modernism before. However, I will immediately specify that such a prism was primarily chosen in the analysis of specific authors and works of Symbolism, or more generally in the interpretation of avant-garde rebellion with its ecstatic nature. Finding an emotional characteristic that cuts across the various aesthetic and artistic projections of Bulgarian modernism, and in which it resonates,

refracting itself in a specific way in the artistic practice of postmodernism, is Nadezhda Tsocheva's personal discovery, her original contribution to understanding, interpreting, and studying this part of Bulgarian literature and culture.

Sadness/melancholy as a personal trait of the modern subject of creativity and world-view in the twentieth century, as a distinctive characteristic of the aesthetic in Symbolism, together with its potential to lend itself to various transformations – through the use of the ridiculous, the tragic, the heroic, the ironic-parody, the mystical, etc. – is an exceptionally well-found meaning and structuring axis of the study. Around it are circularly superimposed the mini-plots of the literary narrative, centred around the correlation of melancholy to the cultural languages through which it is articulated, linked to the interaction of Bulgarian modernism with European modernism, with our culture's thinking about melancholy and its uses in different modes of aesthetic experience of the world in the context of modernism and postmodernism, melancholy as a concept and its cultural intersections with other concepts characteristic of modernism.

What emerges is an enviably organized and thoughtful work – albeit composed of texts written at different times and on different occasions. Its fragmentary nature, however, does not detract from the density and coherence of the concepts and analytical procedures of the textual whole.

The study of the poetics of melancholy in Bulgarian literature in the context of the modernity in the twentieth century – as the research object is articulated, (formulated) is grounded on intertextual and hermeneutical principles and involves the interpretation of important relations that densify the knowledge of Bulgarian modernism: European-Bulgarian, verbosity-painting, philosophy-literature, psychology/psychoanalysis-literature.

By dividing the research into five thematically distinct centres, N. Tsocheva seeks to arrange her observations step by step. Starting from the history of melancholy over the centuries and the parallel search for the genealogical roots of the modern subject of melancholy, she chooses the theoretical supports of her research. These relate to the poetics and aesthetics of melancholy, to its psychic aspects, to its cultural connotations. With a view to applying them in the following analytical parts of the work, the understandings and theoretical formulations of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Karin Johannisson, Walter Benjamin, Jean Starobinsky and others are drawn upon.

Within the Bulgarian cultural and literary context, the research focuses first on Symbolist-Secessionist literature, as the author defines it, and more specifically on the relation of melancholy to decorative imagery. Detailing the aesthetic uses of melancholy in artistic practice in the early twentieth century reconstructs the aesthetics and artistry of Symbolism in a different way. Of particular interest to me personally here are the cultural readings linking melancholy to the semantics of gardens, flowers, and scents. The new semantic networks that the study weaves provide a new analytical perspective on the work of Dimcho Debelyanov, Trifon Kunev, Emanuil Popdimitrov, Theodor Trayanov, Nikolai Raynov; the influence of European symbolism on its Bulgarian counterpart is projected here in a new way; the cultural and aesthetic image of the magazine is formulated in an original and successful way. “The role of aestheticism in the self-consciousness of the modern artist – for his emancipation from reality, and for the overcoming of the “tragedy of the world” during the years of the wars.

The research further aims at new discoveries related to the poetics of melancholy in the Bulgarian avant-garde with its characteristic tendency towards de-aestheticizing and new aesthetization of reality through its deformation, deconstruction, and reconstruction. In this part of the work, the focus is on the linguistic and figurative ironic-parody transformations characteristic of the avant-garde, brought about by the post-war idea of the collapse of human

individuality and uniqueness, the unification and technification of man in the new era of mass culture. The selected texts by Konstantin Galabov, Geo Milev and Chavdar Mutafov focus on the detachment of the avant-garde from the previous aestheticism, the imposition of a new worldview and a new, grotesque imagery. There is a penetrating insight into the parodic transformations of the melancholic image in significant works of the interwar avant-garde. The analysis of the image of the flâneur and its projections in the poetics of Symbolism and the avant-garde, as well as its postmodern realizations, is very interesting and loaded with potential for development. A very appropriate angle in this intersection with modernity is found in the decorative prose of Alexander Sekulov. I would recommend another author whose characters will certainly satisfy Nadezhda Tsocheva's research curiosity in the direction of the image of the flâneur – Chavdar Tsenov.

In the context of the aesthetics and artistic practice of Symbolism and the avant-garde, the section on Dimitar Dimov's novels appears somewhat surprisingly. But its very beginning sets up the logic by which they are inscribed in the literary plot – with the aesthetic worlds and worlds of those as similar to the preceding as different aesthetic uses of melancholy in his novels.

The postmodern synonymy of the melancholic image, reduced more to its postmodern function, is rather extensively read in the last part of the study in works by Georgi Gospodinov, Emilia Dvorianova and Todor Todorov. Here, however, the contextual web is different, its threads are not drawn directly from the interwar avant-garde, nor from Dimov's novels, but figuratively speaking, it is parallel to them despite the connecting emotional prism of sadness (melancholy, spleen). Without disputing N. Tsocheva to include it in her study, I think it deserves a more enriched, if not separate study, adding to these authors and works others no less suitable for deepening her observations.

As I highlighted above, there is a well-structured scientific presentation. The chosen research prism hardly escapes notice. After each chapter, conclusions are drawn that summarise the inductively achieved knowledge. The notes, comments and references aid the reading. The bibliographical list at the end of the work includes titles in Bulgarian, Russian and English and is correctly prepared. The text is literate, clear, and readable. The work offers new knowledge and new perspectives on familiar cultural and literary phenomena, opening its own, original path for cultural and literary reconstruction of aesthetic and artistic phenomena of the twentieth century. In conclusion, I unhesitatingly propose that Dr. Nadezhda Stefanova Tsocheva be elected for Associate Professor of Theory and History of Literature at the Shumen University “Ep. Konstantin Preslavsky”.

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Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Penka Vatova, PhD,
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