

STATEMENT

by **Prof. Dr. Ivan Gerasimov Stankov**

on dissertation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science
2. Philosophy, Professional field 2.1. Humanities, PhD programme Ancient and
West European Literature: Comparative Literary Studies.

Author: **Vesela Atanasova Ganeva**

Subject: *Music and the Novel of the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First
Centuries (Problems of Ekphrasis and Time Flow)*

Scientific supervisor: **Prof. Dr. Cleo Stefanova Protohristova-Yamboliyeva**

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

By Order No. RD-21-1146 of 03.06.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv *Paisii Hilendarski University* (PU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure for the defence of the dissertation thesis entitled *Music and the Novel of the Late Twentieth Century and Early Twenty-First Century (Problems of Ekphrasis and Time Flow)* for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education **2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Comparative Literary Studies**. The author of the dissertation is **Vesela Atanasova Ganeva** - a full-time PhD student at the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies with a scientific supervisor **Prof. Dr. Cleo Stefanova Protohristova-Yamboliyeva** from Paisii Hilendarski University.

The set of materials on paper presented by PhD student Vesela Ganeva is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU and includes the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of PU for the disclosure of the procedure for dissertation defence;
- CV in European format;

- minutes of the departmental council related to the reporting of the readiness for the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- dissertation;
- abstract;
- list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of the scientific publications;
- list of citations noted;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- report on compliance with the minimum national requirements for the defence of a doctoral dissertation.

The doctoral candidate has also attached a list of five (5) publications on the topic of the dissertation, most of them are incorporated in the text of the dissertation. Also attached is an Abstract, which corresponds to the statement in the dissertation. All required documents are present. The preliminary stages of the dissertation defence procedure have been completed.

2. Relevance of the topic

The dissertation of doctoral candidate Vesela Ganeva is topical in its very conception, as it is thematically based on problems from samples of contemporary literature and culture, including Bulgarian. In England, in the USA or in Bulgaria - the protagonist of the novels under study is a person of today, in a literal sense contemporary, facing all his problems.

3. Knowledge of the problem

Vesela Ganeva's dissertation deals with a wide range of authors and works in English and Bulgarian. The topic requires knowledge not only of the vast range of literary works, but also of specific musicological research on polyphony and on the history and theory of the fugue as a musical genre. The dissertation presupposes serious cultural studies and Vesela Ganeva has met this challenge very successfully.

4. Research methodology

In addition to the depth of analytical observations on the books under study, the dissertation also operates with tools from scientific fields adjacent to literary studies. It is interdisciplinary in nature. As there are not so many literary-

musicological developments, the PhD student has procured theoretical, aesthetic, philosophical and psychological justifications from authors from antiquity to the present day. In addition to the theoretical, historical, and interpretive approaches, comparative observations on books and authors closer or more distant in time have been used extensively.

5. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis and contributions

Let me note from the outset the highly contributory nature of the doctorate. This refers not only to the authors and books analysed, but also to the conclusions drawn from the analyses, which touch (often with undisguised concern) on the cultural, sociological and moral layers of our contemporary living.

The focus of research attention is on the books by Jennifer Egan, Zadie Smith, Milan Kundera, Julian Barnes, Emilia Dvorianova and others. They are all united by the organic presence of music in the novel's narratives. Hence the need to theoretically justify the use of ekphrasis as a major interpretive tool in exposition in direct relation to the passage of time. Musical, mnemonic, pictorial and digital examples of ekphrasis are delineated and their possibility of being used in pure or mixed form in the contemporary rock novel, the fugue novel and the ekphrastic novel is discussed. And not only for their constructive but also for their meaning-making function.

Chapter One begins with a necessary overview of the use of ekphrasis in Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, who set the tradition of "translating" visual representations into the language of words. Examples of musical ekphrasis are found in Debussy, Beethoven, Strauss, Mussorgsky, Dvořák, and Rachmaninov. The distinction between program music and musical expression is drawn. The content of musical expression in literature is generally seen as an opportunity in literary art text "to comment on musical works from different eras, given new meaning in contemporary literary works" (p. 26).

In exploring the interplay at a structural level between expletive and temporal flow, the author focuses on the Proust-Bergson model to derive the two types of duration: *le temps* is the spatial time that can be "lost", and *la durée* is the time of consciousness that involves duration' (p. 31). This brings up the idea, important for the exposition, that through the technique of ekphrasis, authors interrupt narrative time "in order to give the reader access to the inner world of the hero and the inner time of the characters" (ibid.). These are those moments in novels when the listener-character assimilates the music and refracts it through their

imagination or memories. This is how the music of Bach, Shostakovich, Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Madonna, etc. diffuses in literary texts.

Chapter two traces the function of ekphrasis in the contemporary rock novel. Logically, a brief overview is given of books in which music defines the characterization of characters. The focus of the exposition is Jennifer Egan's novel *The Visit from the Goon Squad*, necessarily drawing the distinction (historical, technological, sociological and political) between the analogue and the digital situation in their dramatic diachrony: from the collective pacifism of the hippies, to the group rebel aggression of punk, to the solitary indifference of the digital music consumer. In Egan's novel, these subcultural layers are distributed among the main characters, who stand as if facing each other in an insurmountable communicative refusal. The researcher devotes a special role to Lincoln, who is "a connecting piece not only for the two generations but for the entire novel" (p. 58). The author's idea to consider the musical pause as an important part of the plot, whom she puts "on pause," is interesting. In the silence engendered, the solitary listener-character turns deeply inward. The pauses are associated by both the author and her researcher as a desert, a "place and time" for self-absorption.

The PhD student emphasises the writer's insistence that the novel be read alongside listening to the musical works discussed in the text. For the chapter, presented as slides from a Power Point presentation, Vesela Ganeva metaphorically sees a fusion of the analogue and the digital situation, a merging of the book and the tablet into a common body. In Jennifer Egan's testimony, she has conceived her book precisely as a "hybrid novel" in which the information from the fiction text and the website are in constant relation" (p.75), and it is in this direction that much of the PhD student's analytical observations lie.

The formalised division of the book's chapters into two sections, A and B, which narrate the fates of Benny in A and Sasha in B respectively, are in fact a direct analogy to the two sides of vinyl albums. One often finds oneself between A and B, always at a moment of plate flipping from the past in side A to the future in side B. The turning of the record is actually our present. And each individual chapter is seen as a separate song on the album, with its own tonality. In conclusion, the author proposes the idea that "J. Egan has constructed the novel as a synthesis of different types of ekphrasis interconnected into a coherent musical album", and the different characters practice the different types of ekphrasis: Lincoln the musical, Sasha the artistic, and Allison the digital.

The third chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the issues surrounding the genre of the novel fugue, which in turn necessarily requires a brief historicization of the birth of the fugue from the tradition of the canon with the repetition of voice

parts, as well as an overview of the tradition of the literary genre of the novel fugue itself with examples from Thomas Bernhard, Kauso Ishiguro, and others. The main attention is focused on Emilia Dvorianova's book *Passion or the Death of Alice*. The ekphrasis turns out to be both structurally defining for the novel's text and meaning-making in the construction of the characters' system.

Bach's music is interpreted by the PhD student as a centre that draws magnetic lines, and each of the characters is oriented towards it according to their assimilative musical potential - the musical Sebastian, Amalia and Alice versus the non-musical, the maid Yo and the investigator X. Musical and mnemonic expression provide the various independent voices in the construction of the novel precisely as a fugue.

The material-objective and the spiritual are delineated by the researcher as the counterpoint nuclei around which the plot unfolds. The interdependence between the characters is paralleled by the interdependence between the voices in the fugue (p. 112). An interesting point in Vesela Ganeva's interpretation is the observation on the similarity between the punctuation in the novel's graph and the note writing.

Relevant, according to the author, is also the division of the characters into "visual" and "auditory", corresponding to the division of materially and spiritually leavened characters. The apt term used by the doctoral student is "sensory counterpoints" (p. 122). Through this dichotomy, two distinct realities are formed in the novel, that of the house and that of the fugue (p. 123), and the correlation between their adjacent characters provides the fugal chase of their voices.

A very good reading is made of the different perceptions of the interior figures. The parallels between the novelistic text and the Gospel texts underlying J.S.'s two passions of Bach. The idea of deriving the novel's fugal orchestration through the title of the musical genre to the characters' desire for escape from the adjacent reality is also impressive.

A strong line of comparison is developed with Dimitri Shostakovich as the hero of Julian Barnes's novel *The Sound of Time*, whose opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk Province* was rejected by the Soviet authorities (let me just note parenthetically that it was staged in the presence of the man himself Shostakovich from the Ruse Opera under the title *Katerina Izmailovna* in 1965, before the ban on it fell in the USSR).

The fourth chapter is devoted to Zadie Smith's novels, which are rife with references to the various arts and are therefore grateful for interpretation in terms of ekphrasis. The novelist's handwriting has been directly dubbed "ekphrastic writing." Three of her novels: *White Teeth*, *On Beauty*, and *NW*, are discussed,

with a very interesting focus on Mozart's *Requiem* from the second book. Polyphonic counterpoint is highlighted as a very important element of the author's poetics. The researcher, in agreement with the author herself, stresses the connection with Edward Forster's aesthetic ideas and artistic practice. At the centre of the analyses naturally lies the ekphrastic diversity in Zadie Smith, but alongside this a number of her extra-musical problematic ideas - generational, generic, social, religious, racial - are brought to the fore.

The novels are read both synchronically and diachronically, with the distinctiveness of the third book highlighted, in which both the narrative and the author's language are radicalised from tradition with the organic use of both ghetto street slang and teenage slang. Chapters describing listening to Mozart in *On Beauty* and listening to Beethoven in Forster's *Howards End* are juxtaposed. With subtle flair, the researcher 'dismantles' the common music through the minds of the novel's listeners and stratifies them as resonant social types. The pictorial expressions, especially in relation to Rembrandt's work, are also analysed with the necessary height.

White Teeth's analysis highlights, albeit off-centre, the problems of British multiculturalism with regard to racial ancestry, religious and social affiliation, and musical predilections. Old-new, East-West, liberal-conservative, native-immigrant are seen as relevant oppositions in Zadie Smith's novel construction. The scene in which Samad and Archibald from *White Teeth* end up in a Bulgarian church during the war is also highlighted, and their reaction there is key to their characterizations constructed along the novel.

The part of the dissertation devoted to the novel *NW* is entitled "Postmodern Cacophony" and carries the idea of the full mixture of literary, colloquial and digital languages. North-west London is presented as a hub of "hopeless introverts in communication trouble" (p. 173).

The disjointed sentences, the abbreviations of words, the disfigurement of language are presented as a "deformed stream of consciousness" (ibid.). The gathering idea in the process of decay is for the characters to arrive at "a new version of their lives". The silence and suspension of time, the pausing of life, is the brief literary breath-taking for the characters, the moments of inner depth.

The PhD student's observation about the peculiar cinematicism of this novel is very accurate, where the narrative does not offer a complete film, but sporadic shuffled shots of film stock. And in this book, as in the others, the music is read as a way out, temporary, uncertain, sometimes unconscious, yet salutary for the characters. In "Conclusion," the author summarizes her main ideas. Vesela Ganeva's dissertation is a complete scholarly work with many merits. The author

presents herself as an insightful and interesting reader of literary texts. She reads them closely and deeply. She makes fluent use of literary-theoretical, musicological and general aesthetic terminology. Has a clear and formed literary thought. The text of Vesela Ganeva's scientific work fully meets the academic requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

6. Assessment of the publications and personal contribution of the PhD student

The presented publications on the topic of the dissertation are incorporated in the overall text. Many parts of the text have a definite contribution to research on that delicate territory where the perimeters of music and literature intersect. Vesela Ganeva's work will definitely enrich the sporadic results of Bulgarian observations in this difficult interdisciplinary area.

7. Abstract

The abstract corresponds to the content of the thesis.

8. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

Vesela Ganeva's future book could be used in seminar classes on Western European literature. It will also have readers outside academia who are interested in the processes of contemporary literature. In places the exposition is characterized by interpretive laconism, usually in the final subchapters. In publishing the text as a book, these places may be touched up slightly.

CONCLUSION

The qualities of the dissertation, which stands behind a future thorough researcher of the processes in contemporary English and Bulgarian literature, give me the necessary reasons to vote "FOR" the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science to Vesela Ganeva.

14.08. 2024.

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