

Review

By Ognyan Borisov Kovachev – Associate Professor, Dr. in Classical and West-European Literature at Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”

For awarding Doctor of Science Degree in the Area of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Direction 2.1. Philology (Classical and West-European Literature)

Author: Diana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva, Associate Professor, Dr., Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

Dissertation Topic: Pastoral and Modernity

1. Subject of Review

By order No. RD-22-910 of 22.04. 2025 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski” (PU), I am appointed as a member of the academic jury for ensuring a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic “Pastoral and Modernity (Pastoral Worlds in European Culture)” for awarding the Doctor of Science Degree of PU “Paisii Hilendarski” in the Area of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Direction 2.1. Philology (Classical and West-European Literature).

The author of the dissertation is **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva** – Department of “History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies” at the Faculty of Philology of the “Paisiy Hilendarski” University.

The set of materials on paper presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva is in accordance with Art. 45 (4) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Plovdiv University, and includes the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of the Plovdiv University for the opening of the procedure for the defense of a dissertation;
- A CV in European format;
- A copy of the diploma for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”;
- Minutes of Departmental Councils related to the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;

- Dissertation;
- Abstract;
- List of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- Copies of scientific publications;
- Declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- Certificate of compliance with the minimum national requirements.

The candidate has attached seven studies, three articles and one monograph.

Notes and comments on the documents (if necessary).....

2. Brief biographical data

Diana Nikolova-Bagaleva graduated from Bulgarian Philology (with a second major in Russian) at the Paisii Hilendarski University. In 2008, she defended her doctoral dissertation on the topic *The Idea of Man in Ancient Greek Lyric Poetry (Archaic and Classical)* with the scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Kalin Yanakiev. The work was published under the same title in 2010. In 2018, she acquired the academic position of Associate Professor of Ancient and Western European Literature: Comparative Literary Studies, after winning a competition announced by the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. She participated in it with the monograph *Transpositions of the Pastoral in the Belle Époque* (Paisiy Hilendarski UP, 2018), eight publications in Bulgarian on the topic of the habilitation thesis, twelve other publications in the field of the competition and participation in author teams of twelve textbooks and student aids.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

The pastoral is a multifaceted phenomenon in European culture, originating in ancient Greek literature, passing into a number of other arts, and remaining a permanent presence in the cultural life of the Old Continent to this day. Its aesthetic, thematic, stylistic, rhetorical, and other parameters find expression in a variety of literary, musical, theatrical, and visual genres. The wide temporal scope and diverse forms of manifestation pose a serious challenge to efforts to define a sustainable conceptual status of the pastoral. Symptomatic of this are the definitions duly cited in the introductory pages of the dissertation: sometimes as a “pastoral mode”, sometimes as a “cultural code”, sometimes as a “modality”, as a “cultural reflex to reality”,

sometimes as a “stable philosophical concept, changing in separate cultural-historical periods, which clearly bears the traces of organic continuity”, etc. At first reading, this diversity may create the impression of disagreement and mutual denial between them. In view of the specific tasks that the work further develops, I believe that, quite the contrary, these definitions should be thought of as dialogical and mutually complementary, thus forming its dynamic conceptual grid. The theoretical flexibility and openness to potential changes of his model testify to the scientific vitality of the problem being developed and are a prerequisite for the scientific and applied effectiveness of the achieved results. The cultural-historical approach justifies the systematic presentation in the work of the manifestations of the pastoral and their perception and understanding in different temporal, social, aesthetic, etc. contexts. Such a combination of historicism and theoreticism, of diachrony and synchrony, allows not only to trace and model the phenomenon under study, but also to update it itself as a “cultural metamodel, present in different cultural-historical periods with many, but always relevant, faces, highlighting continuities and bright innovations” (Abstract, p. 4).

4. Knowledge of the specific topic

The broad temporal and territorial scope of the dissertation work – from Hellenism, through the Middle Ages, the Western Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment, Russian literature and culture of the 18th and 19th centuries, to Modernism and the beginnings of the Avant-Garde in the first decades of the 20th century – implies in-depth knowledge on at least three levels. The first one – of pastoral works in diverse arts, the second – of their thematic, stylistic, rhetorical, compositional, ideological, etc. aspects, and the third – of the impressive volume of scientific texts in the relevant subfields. In my opinion, the work of Assoc. Prof. Diana Nikolova meets these expectations on all three levels. The author focuses on representative authors and works from different eras, makes specific comments and analyses of them, or traces interactions between works that are close or distant in time, between works that are similar or contrasting in certain respects. In carrying out these tasks, it relies not only on the thoroughly identified corpus of artifacts, but also on their carefully studied research archive. For example, in relation to the bucolic poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, the genealogy and rethinking of the notion of “simplicity” of the lyrical text are traced by commentaries by late antique philologists such as Aelius Donatus and Servius Honoratus, in which the view of “simplificate”

of expression and style is promoted, through the Renaissance philologist Martino Filetico, for whom “simplicitate” is already “cultivated naturalness”, and the avant-garde, for whom the concept means a return to the primal and “wild”, to scientific monographs by William Empson and Raymond Williams, from the first and second half of the last century, respectively.

5. Research methodology

It is difficult for me to define a central and overarching method of work in such a large-scale scholarly endeavour with such a heterogeneous and yet clear object of the researcher’s desire. The notion of the pastoral as a *cultural metamodel*, mediating the transfer and transformation of values and meanings from Antiquity to subsequent eras, testifies to methodological continuity between *Transpositions of the Pastoral in the Belle Époque* and the present study. Unlike the previous work, here the diachronic plan and the heterogeneity of the object are much more developed, which is why I would focus on the formula of a comparative cultural-historical approach. It includes components from literary history, the history of painting, architecture, music, theatre and other performing arts, sociology, horticulture, linguistics, intertextuality, intermediality and many other fields of knowledge. The perspectives they present are successfully combined, thanks to the skill and intuition of the researcher, into an intriguing narrative. Given such multiplicity, the analogy between the methodology of the dissertation and the earliest definition of the discipline of Philology, made by its creator Friedrich August Wolf at the very beginning of the 19th century, would not be far-fetched. The diversity of the topic and approaches is organized into a seemingly traditionally coherent historical narrative, following the sequence of the explored phenomena. Upon careful reading, however, the impression of such a chronological order gives way to a more complexly constructed exposition, such as that provided by the genealogical approach in Michel Foucault's terms, although not explicitly named in the text. As its manifestations, I would point out numerous temporal cuts and transpositions in the narrative – interruption, jumping forward and backward in the narrative flow, drawing out thematic, conceptual, etc. threads, as we can see in the example with “simplicitate” above, etc. Such threads “spun” key concepts for the pastoral such as *otium* (ὄτρυς), *locus amoenus*, *Et in Arcadia ego*, accents on new meanings or variations (conceptual connotations) of the pastoral in changed historical, aesthetic and/or semantic contexts. Genealogies do not displace or break up,

but rather complement, highlight details, and condense the cultural-historical narrative, taking it out of the mainstream of the traditional “grand” historical narrative.

The described narrative doubling has a possible conceptual basis in the author's decision to use the pastoral not only as an object of study, but also as a cultural metamodel. I believe that what is crucial for this metadiscursive use is its understanding not only as a concept, theme, aesthetic category, etc., but also as *a world*, as implied in the subtitle “The Pastoral Worlds of European Culture.” *Worldliness* here is much more than a spectacular critical metaphor. On the one hand, it is the code that sets the level and degree of integrity of the study, and thereby consolidates its gestalt. On the other hand, it justifies the heterotopic character of the pastoral – the potential multiplicity of its worlds, which the researcher's observation, interpretation, and imagination can (re)produce.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation has a loosely symmetrical structure. Its central place is occupied by Part I, devoid of its own title and dedicated to the problem of the pastoral in European culture, and the more voluminous Part II: “The Pastoral Worlds of Russian Culture”.

The introductory part Προλεγόμενα, titled either seriously, with respect to the classical academic tradition, or playfully, in view of the split manner of presentation that I indicated above, contains two subparts of unequal volume. In the first, the author introduces genre names, notions, concepts, ideas and interactions generally accepted in the field of work, as well as her own new ones, such as a “cultural metamodel”, although without explicitly defining it. In the second subsection “Modernity and Modernities”, starting from Prof. Bogdan Bogdanov's view of Hellenism as the era in which “the ancient world attempted to be modern” (p. 38), Assoc. Prof. Nikolova begins to build her original hypothesis about this period as the time of the first of a number of pulsations of the aesthetics and ideology of modernity, which she traces in European social and cultural history. Each of these “modern times” is accompanied by a revival of the pastoral tradition – its rediscovery, transformation, rethinking and the birth of works in new genres and arts. These cyclical coincidences or pairings give reason for conceptualizing the pastoral as a cultural metamodel, as well as examples of its actual manifestations.

The subject of the first main part of the work is the emergence and formation of the European pastoral tradition in the literature and culture of Hellenism and Ancient Rome, as well as its

development and transformation from the Middle Ages to Romanticism and early Modernism. A central theme in “I. 1. The First European Modernity and the Pastoral” is the emergence of bucolic lyric genres as a result of a synthesis of previous ones, but also as a conscious innovative gesture on the part of Hellenistic poets. Among them, the most prominent place is rightly given to the idyll and the contribution of Theocritus. The idyll is characterized by the author not only as one of the new genres, but also as the most complete expression of the new understanding of literature. She puts down and comments on numerous factors that determine it. Some are extraliterary: changes in the composition and structure of the Hellenistic polis, new cultural institutions, such as the museum, the libraries in Alexandria and Pergamum, librarians-philologists, the growing importance of the book and reading, respectively, of the individual as a reader, but also as a hero in the literary (not only lyrical) work, etc. Among the intraliterary ones, the poets' attention to the materiality of the genre stands out: the song form, the manner of performance, the musical instruments, the dialogues between shepherds; to the play as a genre dominant – the play between mimetic and antimimetic, real and fictional, erudite and ignorant, between verbal and visual images, centered in the ekphrasis, etc. Both types of factors give reason to define the idyll as a *metagenre* in the context of the ancient bucolic tradition. Another reason is its protean character, which begins to acquire generic status, associating and distinguishing it from the Roman eclogue.

I have focused on the first chapter in more detail because, in my opinion, it lays the true conceptual foundation of the work. The work of the genealogical cuts and transpositions (see point 5) also contribute to this effect through comparisons with similar phenomena and reception in the 18th and 19th century Russian culture. Among the other fundamental for the pastoral tradition phenomena throughout the centuries, the beginning of which is highlighted and analyzed in this chapter, I would highlight the topos (and motif) of “Arcadia”, the adventurous-gallant novel, and the so-called Figurative poetry, which is a relatively marginalized form in Antiquity, but has periodically been revived over the centuries since. The brief **Second Chapter** covers medieval and pre-Renaissance pastoral genres and works. In my opinion, the place devoted to the Carolingian Renaissance is of particular value, given the limited research on it in our Literary Studies. The tracing of the variations of the eclogue, which acquires a religious-allegorical character, continues, a well-known example of which is the Christianizing interpretation of Virgil's Eclogue IV. Original comparative observations on specific works of the

Provençal lyric poetry also deserve mentioning. The **Third Chapter** sets the extremely ambitious task of encompassing a huge number of pastoral phenomena and processes: from the eclogues of Petrarch and Boccaccio, the novel *Ametto* and the narrative poem *The Nymphs of Fiesole* by the latter, dating from around the middle of the 14th century, to works by European modernists from the Fin de siècle and the first decades of the 20th century, in various arts and schools. Undoubtedly, the information collected and processed here has many merits: meticulous study of a huge number of artifacts from many arts and eras, and accordingly – of the research work devoted to them, attention to their comparative consideration, tracking of imitations, adaptations, appropriations and other interactions between literary, musical and pictorial works, themes and motifs, indicating important temporal landmarks, for example the appearance of the first collection of eclogues in the vernacular (*volgare*) in the Italian Renaissance in 1482, of the first pastoral drama in 1480, of the opera art in 1598. I would also add that the reliability of the research conducted and the authenticity of the presentation both in this chapter and in the entire dissertation are beyond doubt for me. Along with them, however, the overwhelming effort to combine comprehensiveness and brevity in the presentation produces unexpected and undesirable effects. This will be discussed in the appropriate place.

As for “PART II: PASTORAL WORLDS OF RUSSIAN CULTURE”, I will refrain from a detailed comment on its content and scientific contribution. I am confident that among the members of the academic jury there are colleagues more competent in this field than me, whose judgment I will unreservedly trust. I will briefly share my general impression. Here, no less profound and detailed knowledge of artistic artifacts and the corresponding theoretical and critical set of publications is evident. The way the pastoral entered and spread itself in Russian culture is traced through two lines of interaction – diachronic with ancient lyric poetry and synchronic – with contemporary European literatures. This double reception is a persistent feature and a fundamental difference of Russian culture as a whole from the European reception of previous eras and phenomena. In the 18th century, Russian pastoral retained its imitative character. The first attempt to assert originality is present in the debate about the author's idylls of Baron Delvig. However, the leading criterion in it is not literary, but ideological: the opposition “Antiquity” - “Russianness”. Evidence of a more organic incorporation of the bucolic lyrical model into Russian poetry is the idyll “Cyclops” by N. Gnedich, which parodies a translation of Theocritus' idylls. The parody, together with its accompanying commentary, can be

defined as a metagenric work. Gnedich's next step is “Fishermen”, a “Russian folk idyll”, as he himself defines it, situated in a contemporary context. Further on, the study moves to pastoralism in painting (the Venetsianov School) and traces thematic motifs borrowed from European Baroque and Enlightenment culture. And only in the turn-of-the-century projects of the modernists belonging to the Silver Age (including the first decades of the 20th century) can one see a release from the “anxiety of influence” (in H. Bloom's terms). Assoc. Prof. Diana Nikolova-Bagaleva analyzes them with confidence, in-depth knowledge of both the artifacts and the research works available on them, tracing processes related to the pastoral model that led not only to emancipation, but also to the leading presence/influence of Russian artists in European literature and visual arts, on the ballet and theater stage, etc. On the other hand, one can meet a digest of information already available earlier in the text, as well as passages unrelated to the central topic of the pastoral model – parts of the text that could easily be omitted or shortened. Overall, the study impresses with its broad scope and depth, as well as its voluminous text. It undoubtedly deserves to be positively evaluated, but at the same time it raises questions and comments, which I will be elaborated on in section 13.

7. Contribution and significance of the research for science and practice

The significance of the dissertation work “Pastoral and Modernity (The Pastoral Worlds of European Culture)” is due primarily to the chosen subject and the comparative cultural-historical method of work, but its unusually large volume also contributes to it. We can see the contributions mainly in the aspects of the study of the pastoral – separately and in parallel – in two main cultural and temporal zones: the European one, from Antiquity to Modernism at the beginning of the 20th century, and the Russian one, from the 18th to the first decades of the 20th century. Specifically, it is worth highlighting the thesis about the synchronously increasing manifestations of pastoralism and symptoms of modernity in the same cultural periods; the tracing of thematic, genre, aesthetic, conceptual, etc. lines in and between the two zones; the expanded contexts and original new interpretations of works from Russian culture, as indicated in the Abstract. The heuristic nature of the work is also beneficial, thanks to the potential for further research it offers.

8. Assessment of dissertation publications

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Nikolova-Bagaleva appends ten of her publications related to the topic of the dissertation, all in Bulgarian. Three of the articles were published in volumes 60 and 61 of “Academic Works of the Paisii Hilendarski University”, and in *STUDIA PHILOLOGICA*, 2023, Volume 42. The earliest one is “Theocritus’ First Idyll (*Thirsis* or *Song*) and the Construction of the Metagenre” from 2022, followed by “The Modernity of the Pastoral – Adam de la Halle and the Projects for Renewal of the Russian Theater” (2022) and “Pastoral Zoomorphic Images in Modernists and Early Avant-Garde Artists” (2023). All three are included in the presented dissertation work. Their titles are headings to parts of its body text, and the writing have been significantly revised – restructured and enriched. In “The First Idyll of Theocritus” an added layer of analysis is evident. In “The Modernity of the Pastoral” more space is devoted to contextual circumstances, such as the concept of “Starinnyi Teatr” and the pursuit of a new synthesis, which determined the modernist interpretation of the medieval work. The chapter dedicated to zoomorphic images has been enriched to the greatest extent. This finds expression not only in the significantly larger text volume and in the added illustrative material, but also in the study of new artists and works, in the comparative analysis of zoomorphic, landscape and pastoral imagery in the canvases of European (mainly French) and Russian artists from the second half of the 19th century.

Many of the seven studies are supplemented and integrated in a similar way in the dissertation. In “The Song of the Cicadas and the Myth of the Poet” (2013), the author compares the use of the mythologem “cicada” as a lyrical motif in the work of authors from Antiquity and the Silver Age – from Homer and Hesiod to Vyacheslav Ivanov and Velimir Khlebnikov. Particularly intriguing and productive is the interpretation of the motif in the perspective of its etymologies, resemanticizations, translations, and intertwining with notions of lyrical creativity, the construction of *otium*, and the singing poet. Two more studies on the pastoral “in the mirrors” of Russian culture of the 18th – 19th centuries (2017) and the 19th century (2017), as well as “Pastoral Worlds in the Culture of the Silver Age” (2020), have been revised in the relevant parts of the dissertation. They can be said to form the conceptual backbone of Part II of the work. “The Artistic Scene of the Silver Age” can be defined as the most immediate mediator between *Transpositions of the Pastoral in the Belle Époque* (2018) and the present work. I will conclude my review of these publications with a commentary on “The Unfortunate Luck of the Pastoral in

Bulgarian Culture” (2021), because it contains (even its title) answers to the question that inevitably accompanied my reading of the dissertation. Why pastoral themes and motifs have place in national literature, in musical and theatrical works, and in other cultural forms, but remain unnoticed, neglected, otherwise defined, and even rejected? Some of the answers may not be far from mind: centuries-old distance from the pastoral tradition, lack of aristocratic class and culture, understandings of realism, nationality in art, native art, to which pastoral is unadaptable, nationalist ideology and socialist realist aesthetics, the politicization of art. But the analysis of Assoc. Prof. Diana Nikolova, based on numerous examples and specific observations, creates, despite its reasonably pessimistic coloring, a clearer image of the hidden pastoralism in Bulgarian culture, and hence – an opportunity for its new interpretation and full-fledged understanding.

9. Personal involvement of the author

The personal participation of the dissertation candidate in this work is one hundred percent; I find no reason to allow the unlawful use of other people's works. I believe that all contributions contained in the work and formulated in this review are original author's achievements.

10. Abstract

The abstract accurately and completely summarizes the structure and content of the dissertation, mirrors the main emphases, the methodology used and the results achieved. The contributions of the research are well-formulated.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

As far as I have critical remarks about the peer-reviewed work, they are mainly related to the need for a better balance between the volume of scientific information and the way it is organized and presented. The author's desire to say as much as possible is understandable; and the imperative to say it as clearly, concisely, and productively as possible is palpable. But the reader, caught between these Scylla and Charybdis, dares to share some opinions and doubts, humbly hoping that they will be accepted not as a complaint, but as a recommendation, in view of the book that is to come. The excessive size of the text is obvious. In it, the European and Russian pastoral traditions are only seemingly given approximately equal volume, since the time

span in the first case is 23 centuries, and in the second – 2-3 centuries. But such a disproportion leads, for example, to the sacrifice of a large portion of English Renaissance pastoral. Faint attention has been paid to the eclogues from Edmund Spenser's *Pastoral Calendar* and notes on the genre in Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poetry*, his novel *Arcadia*, and Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*. In the deep throat of Charybdis, however, the sonnets of Spenser and Sidney, the poems *Venus and Adonis*, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, and other works by Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, etc. disappear without a trace. A disclaimer in a note on p. 247 indicates that the omission was deliberate, since Walter Gregg has been exhaustive on this issue. But can such an argument be convincing? Another consequence of the textual imbalance is the appearance in Part Two of memory-refreshing summaries (pp. 464-465) of what has already been written in Part One.

On the other hand, in the course of reading, ideas for additions occurred to me, which, in order not to contradict myself, I will spare here.

12. Personal impressions

I know Assoc. Prof. Diana Nikolova-Bagaleva as a colleague and lecturer, albeit from a different university, in the discipline of Classical and Western European Literature. I owe my impressions mainly to reading her works, as well as to participating in the jury of a second competition in which she is a candidate. In both cases, my opinion is excellent.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation *contains scholarly, scholarly applied and applied results that represent an original contribution to academic knowledge and meet all the requirements* of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADSRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADSRB and the relevant Regulations of the Paisii Hilendarski University. The presented materials and dissertation results fully comply with the minimum national requirements adopted in connection with the Regulations of the Public Prosecutor's Office for the implementation of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The dissertation work shows that Diana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva *possesses* in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the academic discipline Classical and Western European Literature: Comparative Literary Studies, *demonstrating* qualities and skills for conducting research with the production of original and significant academic contributions.

Due to the above, I confidently give my *positive assessment* of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and *I propose to the esteemed academic jury to award the academic degree “Doctor of Science”* to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva in the Area of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Direction 2.1. Philology (Classical and West-European Literature: Comparative Literature).

20.07. 2025

Reviewer:

(signature)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ognyan Kovachev