

## **REPORT**

**by Dr Nadezhda Angelova Stoyanova – Associate Professor at Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”**

on the PhD thesis submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology Doctoral program: Ancient and Western European literature: comparative literary studies

**Author: Trayana Angelova Lateva**

**Title: *Representations of the 1920s in Literature and Cinema***

**Research Supervisor: Prof. Dr Habil. Kleo Stefanova Protochristova-Yambolieva**

### **1. General information about the procedure and the doctoral candidate**

By Order No. RD-22-1567 of 27.06.2025 of the Rector of University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU) I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the defence of the PhD thesis entitled *Representations of the 1920s in Literature and Cinema* in Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology Doctoral program: Ancient and Western European literature: comparative literary studies.

The author of the PhD thesis is **Trayana Angelova Lateva**, a full-time PhD student at the Department of the History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies, under the supervision of Prof. Dr Sc. Kleo Stefanova Protochristova-Yambolieva, University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”.

Trayana Lateva completed her philological education (BA and MA) at University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”. Between 2020 and 2023 she was a full-time PhD student, and since spring 2025 she has been employed as an Assistant Professor at the same university.

### **2. Relevance of the topic**

In the past century, interest in the culture of the 1920s has re-emerged periodically, usually provoked by socio-political circumstances in different national contexts. In Bulgaria, for example, the reception of this decade has been quite unstable and ideologically manipulated in the period after the Second World War. Only in the 1960s did the partial rehabilitation of authors and works begin, while the actual “rediscovery” of the 1920s took place after 1989, when, through the desire to revive interwar periodicals and through a series of literary gestures, an attempt was made to restore the continuity of Bulgarian cultural history interrupted in 1944. As

Trayana Lateva also notes, in recent years, since we once again found ourselves in the decade of the 1920s, albeit in the following century, the interest in this dynamic period has become current again (In a broader context, she designates the 1970s and the 2010s as boundary markers – see pp. 4–5). Frequently, however, it has a romantic-nostalgic or dramatic-popular flavour, encouraging readings that do not always carry an awareness of the depth and complexity of this cultural period. In the proposed PhD thesis the author consciously avoids sentimentality towards the past, and her text does not seek so much cultural-historical reconstruction as the mapping out of another field – that of metacultural reflection.

Although Bulgarian scholarship already contains a considerable body of research on the literature and art of the 1920s, scholars do not so frequently direct their attention specifically to the question of how the cultural memory of the decade has been modelled. Moreover, Bulgarian literary history has less often offered comparative readings of interwar Bulgarian culture in relation to British and American culture (which are the focus of the present PhD thesis) than in relation to other Slavic literatures, as well as to German and French culture. For this reason, the PhD thesis can serve as a solid basis for further comparative analyses, as well as for a broader contextualisation of the national literature in light of the contemporary orientation of literary studies towards the questions of world literature. For this reason, I assess the topic as relevant, timely and intriguing.

### **3. Knowledge of the subject**

The scope of the PhD thesis demonstrates very good preparation in terms of scholarly literature and literary and cinematic works. This is clearly traceable in four aspects of the work. First, the broad cultural-historical framework is successfully integrated into the specific analyses of the works. Second, the primary material is wide-ranging and diverse (literary texts and cinematic works), which is functionally included in the typology of the first chapter, but has also been carefully extracted into two appendices at the end of the thesis. Third, the secondary critical literature is used with measure and convincingly motivates the reasoning. Fourth, a sign of the thorough understanding of the subject matter is the focus and detail of the analyses of the works in Chapters Two and Three.

### **4. Research methodology**

The thesis employs methods from socio-cultural and literary history, as well as methods from comparative literary studies. These approaches allow for the development of different “double” perspectives on the examined works – with regard to their cultural context at the time of creation (in the 1920s and the years that followed, or providing an “inside” and “outside” view, as the author states – p. 6), their national characteristics (American and British), and their means (literary and cinematic). The result is a comprehensive, intercultural, and interdisciplinary view of the subject matter, and it should be noted that, in this form, it is sufficiently dialogic, flexible, and open to be complemented with readings of other works that have remained outside the

immediate research focus, as well as to be tolerant of different interpretations of the literary and cinematic works under consideration.

## **5. Characteristics and evaluation of the PhD thesis and its contributions**

The thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, two appendices, and a bibliography, with a total length of 272 standard computer pages.

The topic is productive but undoubtedly challenging, as it requires a review of extensive and heterogeneous material, presenting different perspectives (shaped both by the relevant cultural-historical context and by the author's own interpretation) on a period that is inherently multifaceted and unstructured. It is difficult to speak of a homogeneous cultural profile of the 1920s, even if the cinematic works or books share a common cultural or ideological basis. In this regard, the caveats made in the introductory words of the thesis, concerning its specific focus and approach to the works, are well justified, and the choice to propose a thematic typology of the works is both appropriate and functional.

Moreover, as Trayana Lateva comments on the cinematic techniques employed in the works, it should be noted that similar characteristics can also be observed at the metatextual level, because the focus on specific issues in the works in Chapter One creates the effect of a kind of selective illumination. The same applies to the directing of the "lens" towards particular works of literature and cinema in Chapters Two and Three. The very selection demonstrates sound scholarly judgement, literary taste, and also research inclination (in the best sense). The thematic emphases established in Chapter One are maintained and developed in Chapters Two and Three, ensuring the conceptual and methodological coherence of the thesis.

The first chapter opens with an examination of the socio-cultural transformations that took place following the Great War, considering some of the main identifications through which the 1920s of the 20th century are recognised: the "Roaring Years," the "Jazz Age," the development of mass media, the vogue for cinema and dance entertainments, the emancipation of women, the democratisation of art, and so on. Although to varying degrees, it appears that in both British and American culture the leading themes in interpreting the decade are social division and a postwar crisis of values, as well as the transformation of human existential experience caused by the technological achievements of civilisation. The attention to the automobile as an image, readable as a metaphor for progress and the collapses of modernity, is particularly perceptive. The discussion of cinema—both as an object of literary works and of film productions of the 1920s, and of its influence on techniques in these works—is especially productive. The figure of the "American in Paris" also constitutes an interesting research focus, as literary and cinematic interpretations of this character reveal the encounter of cultural layers and bring out different ideological dominances in shaping the profile of the modern person.

In Chapters Two and Three, the doctoral candidate directs her attention to specific works representing the 1920s respectively through the American and British perspectives. True to the principle of the necessity for a broader contextualisation of the literary and cinematic material,

Trayana Lateva begins her analysis with a commentary on the socio-cultural circumstances, which naturally leads to a discussion of the social reflection present in the authors' works. The selected works are those that have been well established over the years and/or created by widely recognised authors. The predominance of works written specifically in the 1920s suggests that the readings of "contemporaries" continue to dominate and even shape all subsequent interpretations.

In the second chapter, the focus is primarily on *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, on the popularity of the novel, and then on the author's social critique, interpreted through references to the post-war context and the issue of the increasingly assertive standardisation of human priorities imposed by mass culture. Particularly valuable are the reflections on the musical code in Fitzgerald's work. This perspective is further developed in the commentary on Toni Morrison's *Jazz*. Some of the most productive sections of the thesis are devoted to the thematic analysis of music and the influence of specific musical patterns on the conceptual, imagistic, and structural construction of the novels (pp. 120–135; 136–150).

In the third chapter, the doctoral candidate begins her analysis with Evelyn Waugh's satire in *Vile Bodies* (with insightful commentary on Stephen Fry's 2003 film adaptation) and *Decline and Fall*, in order to show how time gradually begins to heal the "wound" of the 1920s and to moderate social reactivity through the melancholy and nostalgia in *Brideshead Revisited*. As the candidate points out, the dramatism of time forms the foundation for the metaphorical and allegorical imagery in Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* and predisposes the psychological vulnerability of the characters in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. One of the strengths of the thesis lies in Trayana Lateva's ability to attend to detail and to interpret its literary function both at the level of the whole work and at the level of the cultural-historical narrative she herself constructs.

The conclusion of the thesis synthesises and further substantiates the propositions advanced. The candidate's skill in summarising and the measured nature of the conclusions once again demonstrate her developed competence in scholarly writing. The carefully prepared appendices at the end may serve as a basis for future academic research.

It should also be noted that Trayana Lateva's language is refined – clear and precise – and her style can be described as moderately expressive, as well as elegant.

## **6. Publications and personal contribution of the doctoral candidate**

The candidate has submitted four articles related to the thesis. One of these is published in a Web of Science-indexed journal, and three in journals included in the National Reference List of the National Centre for Information and Documentation. Three articles concern literary works that are further analysed and developed in the PhD thesis; the fourth examines the Bulgarian reception of the 1920s in Hristo Karastoyanov's novel *One and the Same Night*. The publications once again confirm the perception of the author's independent scholarly thought, her insightful thematic approaches to the works, and her diligent and conscientious efforts as a literary scholar.

## 7. Abstract

The abstract is 32 pages long, including bibliography and list of contributions. It presents the thesis's observations and conclusions accurately and fully. Six contributions are listed, reflecting the main scholarly achievements of the thesis.

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

To the best of my knowledge, there is no current and more extensive study in Bulgarian scholarship examining the ideas and realities through which the profile of the 1920s is constructed in Western European literature and cinema. In this regard, I would recommend that Trayana Lateva publish her research so that it becomes accessible to a wider audience. It seems to me that in her future work she could further develop her observations on film adaptations of certain literary works—for example, *The Great Gatsby* (to which references are already made in this thesis, see p. 124) and others—building on the material already compiled in the appendices.

## CONCLUSION

The PhD thesis by Trayana Angelova Lateva, *Representations of the 1920s in Literature and Cinema*, is an original scholarly work demonstrating in-depth knowledge of the subject, independent and analytical thought, and interpretative competence. It offers valuable conclusions based on persuasive argumentation and precise literary evidence.

The submitted thesis **fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), its implementing regulations, and the rules of University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”**.

For these reasons, I confidently give a **positive assessment** of the research presented in the PhD thesis, abstract, results, and contributions, and *propose that the esteemed scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Trayana Angelova Lateva* in Higher Education Area 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology **Doctoral program: Ancient and Western European literature: comparative literary studies**.

07.09.2025

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Assoc. Prof. Dr Nadezhda Stoyanova