

REVIEW

of the dissertation of Associate Professor, PhD, Maya Gorcheva, entitled “The Price of Reality and the Possible Worlds of Literature: Conrad, Kafka, Camus”.

*Field of Higher Education: 2 Human Sciences. Professional area: 2.3. Philosophy.
Scientific specialty: Aesthetics.*

Reviewer: Professor, DSc Ivanka Stapova

The dissertation presented for discussion is situated at the crossroads between two indisputable, yet opposed spheres: reality as we know it vs. the possible worlds constructed in the categories of the imaginary and fictional, which is the proper territory of art and, concretely here, of literature. The focus of Gorcheva’s research is the opposition between, on the one hand, the conventions of art as a home for a possible other world, other possible worlds, subtly woven by the skillful intervention of imagination and fantasy, and, on the other hand, the status of the real world. While the concept of “possible world, possible worlds” is situated on the territory of logical construction and upon a cogent philosophical-methodological foundation, the joint collaboration with imagination, in using the instrument of language, crafts a new value perspective that is applicable to the second reality – that of art.

Administrative status of the dissertation

With regard to the administrative requirements, the dissertation is presented with several elements: 411 printed pages, 271 bibliographical sources divided into sources related to art, literary sources (78) and scholarly sources (193)

The dissertation consists of a “research framework” containing an explanation of the purposeful choice of topic, the goals, tasks, methods applied to the study, the object and theme; Introduction; Section I, containing two chapters, and Section II, containing four chapters. **Section I, Chapter 1** presents the history of the fundamental, for this research, concept of “possible world” and, starting from the concept’s theoretical construct in the logic of

philosophy, its concrete application in aesthetics. In Chapter 2 of Section I, the concept is developed through social reflection and aesthetical appropriation of the real, newly discovered worlds. Thereby, the dissertation articulates social and axiological projects for the isolated space of an island, in which the concept is actually coupled with a social project and the assertion of values. The *Second Section* discusses concrete aesthetical concepts regarding the construction of a possible world. It consists of *three chapters*, each of which is devoted to a writer and his social project: Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka, and Albert Camus. The concluding, *fourth chapter* in this section offers a comparative discussion of the anthropological themes common to the three authors. Within this research structure are developed the text's ***central concepts and points***. The author builds the core meanings that unite the possible worlds and indicate the relevance of these possible worlds to our understanding of many critical problems of real societies in history (justice and the judicial institutions; the stranger, etc.), which are topical for our times as well. The *conclusion* gathers together the results of separate analyses and changes the perspective by pointing out the contribution that the idea of possible worlds makes to our understanding of reality. In arguing the social importance of literature for the communication of ideas, the author leans on the “cultural philosophy” of Karl Mannheim as related to the democratization of modern society.

The summary (40 pages) briefly presents the content of the dissertation and objectively points out the fundamental elements in the construction of the text.

Also part of the administrative presentation is the description of the ***contributions***; the author assesses five such, related to the robust applicability of the concept of possible world, particularly its definite engagement with aesthetical reality. The author has taken into consideration the remarks of colleagues and has presented a more concise summary, has reduced the list of contributions, and has included new scholarly units.

The author has ***seven publications*** on the topic of the dissertation; evidently, it would present no difficulty to prepare other publications on the basis of this large text. There is also a detailed description of the ***indicators*** and the authorial matches, presented here in connection with the requirements of NACID.

Creative achievements of the author:

1. An interesting viewpoint presented through the dissertation topic. The price of reality, viewed in the focus of aesthetical reality through its three components: author, work, perceiver.
2. The text demonstrates knowledge of philosophical, logical and literary-criticism sources.
3. The work is easy to read and written in a crisp, comprehensible but also colorful style.
4. The administrative framework of the dissertation is convincing and exhaustive: the summary is detailed, the list of contributions has been abridged, and the NACID criteria have been presented faithfully.
5. The study of the correlation between real and possible world enables the author, taking into consideration the characteristics of the two worlds, to seek various value dimensions.

Some questions and issues of disagreement:

1. Based on what principle have the literary sources been selected? Based on the author's personal preference, or has she found some unifying motif and component between the three writers? I may assume that what unites the three is an interlacement between the real and the fantastic that produces a new world and defines a new range in the concept of possible world. Here I can propose many literary texts that would legitimate the author's basic thesis even more strongly.
2. Does the author distinguish between the concepts of *possible* and *alternative world*? Is every world built through the imagination only a possible world, or is it also an alternative world, or is it the latter only at times?
3. Does the author see a work of art as a second reality, an artistic reality, and does she believe this second reality is identical with a possible world? Co-experiencing, as the aim of artistic creation, shapes the world of many perceivers; hence, many possible worlds.
4. The actual alternative worlds appear in works that describe anti-utopias and imaginary worlds. These represent either "impossible possible worlds" or

complete, irrevocable destruction. That is why I asked the first question: based on what principle have the writers been chosen.

5. Aesthetical works also create a reality – a possible reality through which the assumed to be self-evident historical and social reality is reconsidered and reinterpreted. I do not think that aesthetical reality can bring about a change in the real world; through it, one can indeed reinterpret actual reality, and a change can be brought about in terms of a substitution of values through the mind. Perhaps that is why the term “artistic convention” was previously used.

Conclusion

The dissertation presented by Maya Gorcheva, and entitled “The Price of Reality and the Possible Worlds of Literature: Conrad, Kafka, Camus”, testifies that the author is an intelligent and erudite researcher. Regardless of the questions arising, the problematic theses, the creative disagreements, the work has qualities that allow me to recommend that the honorable jury award the scientific degree Doctor of Science to Assoc. Prof., PhD, Maya Gorcheva.

June 2022

Reviewer: Prof. DSc Ivanka Stapova