

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Sylvia Emilova Borissova – Spassova (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

for dissertation thesis:

THE PRICE OF REALITY AND POSSIBLE WORLDS OF LITERATURE: CONRAD, KAFKA, CAMUS

by Assoc. Prof. Maya Stoyanova Gorcheva (UniBIT),

for obtaining the scientific degree ‘Doctor of Sciences’

in Professional Field **2.3. Philosophy,**

Scientific Specialty **05.01.06. Aesthetics,**

at Culture, Aesthetics, Values Department – Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian
Academy of Sciences

1. Formal characteristics of the application for the scientific degree ‘Doctor of Sciences’ and the dissertation thesis

After successful internal defense of the dissertation thesis of Assoc. Prof. Maya Gorcheva at an extended seminar at the Culture, Aesthetics, Values Department, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences on March 22, 2022, within the opened with Decision No. 2 of the Scientific Council of IPHS, Record No. 6 of April 26, 2022 procedure for obtaining the scientific degree ‘Doctor of Sciences’, Assoc. Prof. Gorcheva has presented a proper set of documents and materials according to the Regulations for Application of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Development Act, Art. 39(4), and the Regulations of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – BAS for the conditions and the order for obtaining scientific degrees and for holding academic positions, Art. 10(1).

The dissertation has a total volume of 411 printed pages and consists of an introduction, two sections, a conclusion and a bibliography. For its part, Section I is divided into two chapters, and Section II – into four chapters, and a list of the cited sources is given after each of the chapters. The general bibliography includes 271 titles, of which 193 are scientific literature (humanitarian and social research and essays), and 78 – fiction (of which 43 are primary fiction for the purposes of the dissertation and 35 – additional literature). The bibliography contains titles in English, French and Bulgarian.

There are 7 publications on the topic of the dissertation, including 2 studies, 3 articles, 1 report and 1 published monograph on the topic of the dissertation – *Albert Camus. The Possible Worlds of Literature* (2022). The publications are relevant to the professional field and the scientific specialty of the procedure, as well as all they have an interdisciplinary stake and relevance to other scientific fields such as 05.04.01. Theory and History of Literature and 05.04.06. Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Modern Western European literature).

Assoc. Prof. Maya Gorcheva has collected **a total of 440 points with the required 350 points for the minimum national requirements for obtaining the degree ‘Doctor of Sciences’**,

which fully covers them, and indicators D and E exceed them, as evidenced by the presented scientometric table with described activities.

2. Content of the dissertation thesis

The research field of the dissertation *The Price of Reality and Possible Worlds of Literature: Conrad, Kafka, Camus* focuses on the question of the limits of world-making and aesthetic practice as a generator of imaginary worlds, respectively on the search for primary ontological relations of ‘co-experience’ between the realms of the autonomy of aesthetic works and the socio-historical reality.

The main *objective* of the research is to make sense of the imaginary worlds, created in the aesthetic act, through the logical-semantic concept of possible worlds. In this sense, the central *object* of research is the conceptual construct of ‘possible world’, embodied as a cultural construct through its concretization in literature, a special case of the aesthetic practice of creativity and perception. The main author’s *hypothesis*, the confirmation of which is sought in the course of the development of the dissertation thesis, is that it is in the perception of fictional narratives as constructing a possible world that lies the essential reason for their strong influence, and that the latter carries out the role of literature as a medium of socio-ethical and humanitarian, incl. aesthetic values. From here, the main *tasks* of the research are derived:

The central task of Section I of the dissertation thesis, *Theoretical Scope and Concretizations of the Concept of a Possible World*, is the systematic derivation of the genealogy of the concept of a possible world: specifying that its conceptualization in the 18th century occurs in parallel with the discovery and conquest of distant geographical lands, with the romanticization and aestheticization of the approach and co-experience of the new. For its part, Section II. *Building Possible Worlds as an Aesthetic Concept. Philosophical-Anthropological and Social Dimensions of the Imaginary Worlds in Literature* follows the task of contextualizing through three emblematic – not only according to the canon of modern literature, but also at the world level in the field of philosophy, sociology and journalism – writers: Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus.

For the purposes of the research, an interdisciplinary *approach* is logically applied, including the fields of philosophical anthropology, aesthetics, axiology, philosophy and sociology of literature, theory and history of literature. *The topicality and the scientific-applied perspectives* of the research work are recognized in the systematic and content-aesthetic derivation of the concept of possible world as a tool for understanding the aesthetic creation and the opening of the artwork to the social reflection and values.

The unfolding of Section I takes as a starting point the general history and genealogy of the concept of a possible world and its transfer from the field of philosophical logic to more specific uses in aesthetic theory and practice (I.1. *Possible Worlds – Referential and Constructed*). Then, on the basis of the preliminary research in the first chapter, the author puts the topic of Chapter I.2. *The Hieroglyph of Island. Social and Axiological Projects for the Isolated Space of the Real/Possible Island*. Let me pay attention to this chapter: it illustrates in an exemplary and contribution way the general methodological framework that Assoc. Prof. Maya Gorcheva has laid in the first chapter, while at the same time – through the symbolic example of the creation of the world through the space of the island – it highlights the heuristic potential of the methodological framework itself.

Section II embarks already on private micro-studies of the aesthetic and axiological aspects of fiction creative work and the broader authors and personal position of Conrad, Kafka and

Camus. In summary, the chapter on Conrad (II.1.) focuses on the social dimensions of literature – from the creation and development of an idea through the plasticity of social world to the accordingly discovered opportunity for social impact and reception of imaginary worlds. In Chapter II.2., examining Kafka, the main subjects are imagination and ‘anti-literature’, expressed through a peculiar aesthetics of silence and ‘illogicality’, expressed through the opposition of language and logic. The natural center of Camus’, Chapter, II.3, is “the possibility of creation as a ‘correction’ of reality”, as well as the aesthetics of happiness.

Here I would like to highlight another point of the dissertation, which has a contribution beyond the stated by the author herself, as well as the potential for a wider future research and systematization – the examination of the circus space, the ‘profane spectacle in Kafka’s and Camus’ readings and its parallellizing with the democratizing world and art: “In Naomi Ritter’s *Art as a Spectacle* (1989), which again contains the first quoted essay on Kafka and circus play, along with other specific analyzes, one can find an overview of the emergence of circus or circus artists in the art of modern times, as outlined by the metaphor of the artist as an acrobat or clown, for example in Baudelaire or Nietzsche; the circus as a ‘metaphor for historical reality’” (p. 260).

Chapter II.4. *Between Darkness and Light: The Worlds of Conrad, Kafka and Camus in the Dual Optics of Social and Metaphysical Sense (Parallel Readings)* gives a comparative reading of the philosophical-anthropological themes common to the three authors and in particular of the cores of meaning of the three for constructing a possible world; of the function of these constructed possible worlds during a real crisis of values (such as with regard to justice and the court institution; of the foreigner, etc.).

The Conclusion emphasizes the axiological pledge and charge of the possible worlds considered in the course of the whole research, in their capacity as an ontological node of the communication between creator and receiver, to make sense of reality.

The Dissertation Abstract adequately and correctly reflects the content of the research work presented.

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The research work is an original and heuristic explanation of the creative beginning in the creation of a world, while the antimimetic and above all the autonomous side of the aesthetic act of creating a possible world is defended. The dissertation thesis rehabilitates the idea of the creative beginning, which has faded due to the thesis about the author’s death, which has been maintained for decades in a postmodern and structuralist spirit. Although the author does not explicitly step on Gadamer’s hermeneutic-aesthetic theory, in her search analogous structures can be found in assigning a deserved leading role to the ‘reconstructor’ of possible worlds, to the creator of art as well (this is essentially the concept of congeniality in Gadamer in *Truth and Method*).

All three authors or research are immersed in the negative-value – in distrust of the world and the social. At the same time, however, they are also presented as affirming a *minima moralia*: by exposing the absurdities of this world, while still not succumbing to nihilism, they manage to ‘assemble’ the world and give it integrity – in terms of the possible, in terms of asking new and new questions, as well as unfolding corresponding new aesthetic forms.

The balance of the research in the end is that reality wants us to pay it with the ethos of creation (cf. Camus – man is doomed to “paint the void”, doomed to be a creator): but despite the constraints of man and his abilities recognized by Conrad, Kafka and Camus, the authors manage to emphasize through their stories that man can still be happy.

I have no general disagreements and misunderstandings regarding the argumentation of the set theses, questions, objectives, tasks, approaches and decision regarding the linguistic stylistics

of the dissertation as resonant to the studied authors. My only recommendation when preparing the paper for publication is Assoc. Prof. Maya Gorcheva to do some work on the homogenization of the philosophical categorical apparatus by compiling an initial terminological grid or scheme – thus some purely technical inaccuracies and logical discrepancies in conceptualization of possible worlds and aesthetic creativity would naturally drop off the text.

3. Scientific contributions of the dissertation thesis

In principle, I agree with the contributions formulated by Assoc. Prof. Gorcheva to the dissertation research, as I have two notes and one question:

- (1) Contributions 1 and 4 represent in practice one contribution;
- (2) Contribution 2 can be derived as a contribution in essence, if its *differentia specifica* is explicit in relation to the specific dissertation work. A number of authors in philosophical aesthetics defend the thesis of creativity as an autonomous act of construction (Schelling, Kant, Schiller, Badiou, Rancière, Harman...), as well as the non-mimetic nature of the immanent constructive ability of the imagination (Wilde, Kandinsky, Reverdy, Adorno, Iser, Bohrer, Menke; in places Lukács...). What is specific here in the creation of a possible world?

4. Conclusion

Based on the materials and scientific papers submitted under the procedure, and in particular – the dissertation thesis, given its novelty and importance and the above summary of its scientific qualities, I give my positive assessment and recommend the Scientific Jury to award **Assoc. Prof. Maya Stoyanova Gorcheva** the scientific degree ‘Doctor of Sciences’ in the Professional Field **2.3. Philosophy**, Scientific Specialty **05.01.06. Aesthetics**.

June 24, 2022
Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Sylvia Borissova