

# **REVIEW**

**By Ass. Prof. Yordan Efftimov**

**New Bulgarian University, Sofia,**

**on a dissertation**

**“Detectives, intelligence, Cold War:**

**criminal and spy literature in a comparative perspective”**

**by Maurice Fadel**

**for the award of the scientific degree “Doctor of Science” in the scientific specialty 2.1.  
Philology at the New Bulgarian University**

The dissertation “Detectives, Intelligence, Cold War: Criminal and Spy Literature in Comparative Perspective”, presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maurice Fadel, has a volume of 192 printed pages and consists of four parts: “Classical Criminal Literature”, “About a failed genre”, “Successful Stories of Communism” and “Irony and Ideology”. Each of the parts comments on a different side of the dissertation and poses different theoretical problems.

Studies of Bulgarian literature and culture from the era of the People's Republic of Bulgaria are a major scientific field in the activities of members of the Department of New Bulgarian Studies at the New Bulgarian University, where Maurice Fadel has worked since 2005, habilitated in 2010 and headed as its chairman since 2020. Within these studies, various problem focuses are set, most often commenting on the ideological work of fiction, its institutions, the relationship between artists and power, genre changes in the diachronic plan, the development of specific topics, the relationship of literature with other arts and with the literatures of other socialist countries.

Usually, however, conferences and other scientific forums and projects of the department have developed research on the so-called high literature, and respectively studies of popular literature were on their periphery. Not for Assoc. Prof. Maurice Fadel, who has been working in the field of the so-called criminal literature. In his dissertation he chooses as the main object of study the development of the criminal and intelligence-adventure genre in Bulgaria after 1944 and although the dissertation aims to unravel broader theoretical problems, the

main focus is on the study of the artistic process in Bulgarian literature during the socialist period.

Among the first particularly significant ones of the work is that “crime and spy literature are different in value.” A very important thesis, as it distinguishes the genre of socialist writers from the era of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and their Western prototypes (the writers and works from which they draw).

The first part of the dissertation is dedicated to the presentation of classical crime literature. This is necessary because the main characteristics of the genre, its connection with modernity and the market, its relationship with the main literary-historical processes of the late 19th and early 20th century, some general characteristics of the world depicted in crime literature and the image of detective as a structural center of the literary work of this type, must be clarified in advance in order to be used as tools for analysis and interpretation in illuminating the literary historical processes in Bulgaria, which are the main subject of research. The most important thing here is precisely the emphasis placed on the connection of the genre with the market, and hence with the liberal capitalist society. Without the private detective, the classic criminal narrative is impossible, insists Assoc. Prof. Maurice Fadel.

But the connection with modernity also runs through the role of travel, technology and, in general, the complete victory of rationality and scientific methods. One of the paradoxes revealed in the dissertation is that of the always insufficient rationality of science, its inability to be total, in the end – the fact that modernity is a process that never manages to end. Another paradox is the behavior of crime literature on a high-low scale – subordinate to the market and seeking the attention of a wider audience, it works to establish itself as a serious genre and insists on being part of elite culture (as far as always talks about power and new social and political realities, the innovations in the administration and the application of scientific discoveries in real life practices), although the most exciting and fashionable part.

As for the origin of the genre, the author believes that it has two sources. The first is represented by the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which diligently seeks to destroy the traditional model of aesthetic impact by identifying the reader with the world described in the work and replacing it with a purely rational solution to mysteries. The second source is represented mainly by the French-language literature, in which the repulsion from the aesthetic impact is not so radical and an attempt is made to reconcile the rational with the sensual. This is an excellent platform for genre analysis, because it was Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, on the one hand, and Maurice LeBlanc, Gaston Leroy and Georges Simenon, on the other, who achieved their exemplary achievements.

The central image in the classic criminal narrative – the detective – is examined in detail. His strangeness and loneliness, melancholy and irony are discussed. And something not usually talked about – his asexuality, as well as staying out of the flow of city life – the detective appears on stage when he is called to solve a logical mystery that requires his intuition based on closed, mole and statistical work. Intuition is never just intuition.

The second part of the dissertation is already on the development of the Bulgarian crime novel. Until September 9, 1944, the crime genre was known to Bulgarian readers mainly

through translations from English and French. Bulgarian authors try their hand at the genre timidly, especially if they are recognized and included in the literary hierarchy. The experiments are mostly performed by young authors who publish under quasi-English pseudonyms. According to the dissertation, the first original Bulgarian book, sustained in the traditions of the genre, was published in 1947 – this is the novel “Blue Sunset” by the very young author Pavel Vezhinov. Criticism is not very kind. It is always based on ideological grounds imposed by the new government. That is why it is natural for Maurice Fadel to set aside pages from his dissertation to show the notions of the socialist state and citizens developed in Vladimir Lenin's “State and Revolution”, because that is where the roots of the proclaimed worldview lie. Hence the origin not only of the “correct” relations in the exemplary socialist criminal literature, but also in the legal documents of socialist law. The basic idea of Leninism is that in socialist society there is no economic basis for the emergence of crime, and therefore the preventive functions of the state must gradually die out. This utopian projection leads to many essential characteristics of the criminal genre in the era of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, as it is assumed that the new socialist man cannot commit crimes and then they are caused either by his insurmountable bourgeois past or by external forces – from the western capitalist world. As there is no official private property, there can be no private detective practice, but it is also unnecessary for well-developed state bodies to fight crime, which should die out. A series of paradoxes caused by communist ideology. Crimes are covered up because they do not seem to exist to the same extent as in bourgeois society, but the fight against them is a new chance to praise the state. The state that affirms arbitrariness, gossip and self-mutilation.

A careful analysis of Vezhinov's novel and the reactions to it explains well how the book is not built in accordance with the requirements of the party, and therefore the socialist critical machine prefers to slap the young writer, and thus block attempts to develop a genre not established in native Bulgarian literature.

But the socialist literary system is not radically different from the capitalist one, and the genre is necessary, as is all popular literature (yet it is sought after by readers), so it comes to inventing a convenient option for the regime – taking the criminal out of the socialist world. This leads to the “intelligence-adventure novel”, a variant of the well-known spy novel in the West. But the novel can no longer be described as “spy” because “spies” can only be enemies, while “ours” are “intelligence”.

The third part is dedicated to the best representatives of the party-directed socialist crime novel: Andrei Gulyashki with a series of novels about Avakum Zahov and Bogomil Raynov with a series of novels about Emil Boev. In one case we are talking about counterintelligence, insofar as the detective exposes foreign spies in our country, while in the other case we meet with the intelligence practice of the Bulgarian special services abroad. The main thesis defended by the author of the dissertation is that in the case of the “intelligence-adventure novel” there are significant changes in the structure of the criminal narrative. While in the classic crime novel the unraveling of the mystery is motivated by the universal idea of justice, in the case of the spy novel it is the universality of justice that is called into question. Good is what is “ours” and “evil” is what comes from outside. Thus, it turns out that the definition of a crime is relativized to the extreme – what we should call a crime depends on the norm by which we measure it.

The last, fourth part of the dissertation is entitled “Irony and Ideology” and analyzes the main characteristics of the image of the world built in the adventure novel, as well as the main characteristics of the character. It is stated that he actually has all the basic features of a detective from the classic crime literature – a lonely lonely melancholic who comes to life only when he encounters another difficult mystery. Of particular interest in this part are the detailed analyzes of the various elements of the image of the world with which the scout heroes relate – the hostile but exotic West, the world of entertainment, hotels and travel, various food and drink, women and their unknown to the socialist world. behavior. Attention, of course, is focused on the series about Emil Boev, whose action takes place in the West, inaccessible to the socialist reader. The main thesis of the author is that Bogomil Raynov consciously seeks to build an ideologically sound image of the West, showing that “there” is worse than “here”. And hotels, food and women only illustrate the complete degradation of consumer society. And their knowledge is due to the life of Bogomil Raynov in Paris, as well as to the knowledge of French literature and humanities. Here Maurice Fadel offers bold hypotheses such as that the favorite dish of the socialist inspector Emil Boev – “steak with french fries”, is taken from the article of the same name by Roland Barthes, describing trends in consumerism. This tendency is most pronounced in the analysis of Boev's attitude towards women. On the one hand, it is strongly macho, but on the other hand, women are shown mainly as predatory females, which aggressively get their way from the seemingly passive and susceptible man. However, this applies more to women identified as a continuation of the tentacles of “foreigners”.

As for the image of the protagonist, the author of the study cites irony as his main characteristic. It is a natural consequence of the above postulate that there is no universal notion of good and evil and that it all depends on the norm by which we measure it. But the irony is also related to the achievements of the craft in the French and American crime novel, known to Bogomil Raynov. Bogomil Raynov builds the image of Emil Boev in the likeness of Philip Marlowe.

## **Conclusion**

Given the importance and relevance of the dissertation, the innovative approach and in-depth study of scientific sources on the topic, as well as the full presence of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maurice Name Fadel as a literary and cultural researcher, I suggest the members of the esteemed committee to award without hesitation the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor of Science”.

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**Ass. Prof. Yordan Efftimov**