

## REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stoycheva

on the dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maurice Name Fadel "Detectives, Spies, Cold War: Crime Fiction and Spy Literature in Comparative Perspective", presented for the degree of "Doctor of Science" in doctorate program "Theory and History of Literature", professional field 2.1. Philology

The work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maurice Fadel on criminal and espionage literature is respected in several ways: with its literary depth, with the high degree of problematization of the topic, with the tireless change of views on it, with its original approaches, at first glance, may seem distant, but able to reveal fundamental aspects of the analyzed object; with its unexpected associative connections, significantly expanding the context of considering a single genre. In addition, Fadel again (as in his previous works) shows how scientific research (in the style of the subject) can turn into an intriguing scientific story, self-provoking and provocative, self-surprising and surprising: both theory and story, but without having to do with the conspiracy theory, seen both as a narrative and a theory on page 141. And another distinctive feature of the author's handwriting: similar to his esteemed Jacques Dubois, he also prefers to derive broader theoretical topics on the basis of narrow disciplinary topics (what was said about Dubois: "Criminal literature was chosen so that the era could be debated.", p. 19) - especially in the part dedicated to the Bulgarian criminal and spy narrative, where it unlocks the theme of the Cold War.

The comparative perspective announced in the title of the paper has a dual use: on the one hand, a comparative distinction between criminal and spy literature (starting from the introduction); and, on the other hand, a comparison between the two versions of a Cold War spy novel, the Western and the communist (in the second part).

The first part is devoted to the classical criminal literature, the theoretical starting point of the work, against which all kinds of genre deviations stand out convincingly. Maurice Fadel knows how to immediately grab attention: "Criminal literature is a literary-historical paradox." - the beginning of the first paragraph, which ends with the statement about the total discrepancy of this literature with the direction of the whole literary movement." (p. 15) Having barely comprehended this comparison, the real paradox is presented to his reader: "At the same time, however, it turns out to be more modern than literary modernism and literature in general at the time." (p. 15), in unison with capitalism and the capitalist market, but not the typical "mass culture". Thus, from the very beginning it is clear that nonrestrictive definitions will be sought,

but rather, contradictions and different testing of the genre. The study of the theory on it is also a test - Siegfried Krakauer, Jacques Dubois, David F. Bell, Carlo Ginsburg, Luc Boltanski, Yuri Eisenzweig are the main authors with whom Fadel dialogues, reading them very carefully (in the "sharp" reading of foreign texts he is really very good). In his dialogue with them, the special "behavior" of the genre stands out: its simultaneous manifestation as "high" and "low" culture, its dual behavior of an extremely rational genre and its potential to offer global truths, its "speed" structure. But the most discussed in terms of crime literature is the modern-premodern relationship. Although the scales prevailed over the examination of the criminal literature in the field of modernity, Fadel continued to problematize this topic through to the end of his work, apparently realizing all the contradictions with which it was charged.

"The Two Origins of the Genre" is a particularly valuable chapter in deriving the typology of English and French crime fiction through analytical observations on specific patterns. Reading a single passage from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Stolen Letter* as a "theory of English-language criminal literature" (p. 27) requires a truly high deductive level of thinking. The comparison highlights the poetics of the genre, which I will not dwell on. In English prose, the emphasis is on the anti-aesthetic "order," which melts the reader's emotional empathy at the expense of his aroused rational curiosity about the mystery. In French prose, aesthetics is not undermined, which complicates but ultimately hinders the reader's "sinking" into the text, as Fadel puts it. The statement is beautifully demonstrated by a quote from the beginning of Georges Simenon's *"Yellow Dog"*. The atmosphere of the Frenchman's novels is conveyed with an artistry that I would call the suggestion of shared reading: (...) The atmosphere is sticky, it is difficult to breathe... The outside world enters only through the windows... “, p. 35). It is also interesting to understand the impact of such an atmosphere on the reader: “His expectations of beauty and harmony will undoubtedly conflict with it [the atmosphere]. However, insofar as we are attracted by the disorder and the declining, the identification with the texts about Megre is also predictable. As for the (non) identification of the reader and the text, this question is of serious concern to the author, who is aware of his special place in revealing the characteristic features of the genre.

Also noteworthy are the observations on the "average" style of storytelling intended for the "average" person (p. 35), which, according to Fadel, crime films cannot capture (the transformation of the "quiet literary version" of cinema deserves more attention). Comparing the rapid change of episodes in *"The Yellow Dog"* with watching a modernist film (p. 32) leads me to the question of whether this makes the *"Yellow Dog"* a modernist work?

The Letter chapter examines the genre through the philosophy of language (especially the late Paul De Man, very well known to Fadel). The delving into the semiotics of the "letter" aims to show its deep anti-referential and anti-figurative character, which, so to speak, "materializes" ("literalizes") in guessing the criminal mystery and unambiguously naming the killer. Interesting is the attempt at the end of the chapter from the same angle to understand the reason for the unquenchable "urge" to read crime stories: to meet the object itself, with a clear reality beyond representation. (p. 47)

No less interesting is the comparison of reading a crime with reading a text in Arabic or Hebrew, the structure of which also complicates aesthetic perception. or identification with the text, requiring an interpretive attitude. According to Fadel, the power of the letter is especially significant in cultures "that have not developed a concept of 'mimesis' and do not try to explain the world through classifications, divisions and oppositions" (p. 49). It would be interesting to extend, so to speak, the perimeter of the letter to the Chinese character (which would once again connect the criminal literature with the Orient - the author's original thesis!). Ancient Chinese short stories about the strange, shaped as a genre in the Tang era (7th century), often take the form of bloody crime stories, but more important is the hieroglyph's involvement in solving the crime, completely repeating the function of the letter according to Fadel. The Chinese detective is the storyteller, a former high-ranking Mandarin, a current Taoist, who accidentally shows up at the crime scene and often guesses the killer's name through the hieroglyph's "tools." It is known that the combination of features in a hieroglyph can form, but can also hide meanings. The mystery is coded in itself (like Fadel's letter) and in its correct reading consists in the discovery of the crime.

The Orient logically leads to the classics in the genre - "Murder in the Orient Express". Maurice Fadel offers his analysis of this metacriminal novel, along with archetypal references to Tales of 1001 Nights. Here (as in the whole work) there are shared theses and questions that provoke him, sounding debatable and deliberately sought, such as: "Laughter is the way in this literature to talk about death. (...)... It is a form of misunderstanding." (p. 56); In fact, death is plot-related to the Orient. (p. 57); "Does it mean that the novel is machismo when the woman is first suspected?" (p. 58), etc.

The development of the image of the detective as a projection of modernity, but also as a carrier of premodern motivation, and specifically the image of Sherlock Holmes, is another contribution to the work: the detective as a personification of absolute ration, as an allegory of public order, but far from and their ideological cover, bastard, Baudelaire's flannel, "Sociable Lonely" (one of the inner titles), melancholic, latent homosexual or asexual, clown... The

question is completely justified: "Is Holmes two people?" (p. 65) another archetypal image of the mismatch between body and mind, aesthetics and morality, beauty and virtue in the Old Testament David seems a little surprising to me. Rather, here I see the comic-parody potentials of the character, which the author talks about elsewhere. The affinity with Don Quixote also seems debatable to me - do the correspondences between the two outweigh the disagreements? Don Quixote is, after all, the first romantic hero, and the crime literature does inherit "a few features of Romanticism" (p. 76). Can it really be said that "The Detective is the avenger, Don Quixote", since his role is to reveal? Considering the riddle a mystery to the reader, without even being clear about its nature, is an interesting touch to the image of the detective.

The conclusion of this part about the very plastic nature of crime literature with its mimeticism and non-mimeticism, modern and premodern elements, approaching and pushing away from mass culture puts it in a universal layer of world culture, which has its manifestations in Bulgarian, considered under the intriguing title "About a failed genre."

As the Bulgarian samples appear in more recent times and in other contexts, in parallel with them the criminal literature is presented in its second stage, called "noir". The representative work here, of course, is "Blue Sunset" by Pavel Vezhinov from 1947. The emphasis in the "noir" is on the psychologization of the characters, in contrast to classical crime fiction. According to Fadel, the use of the *discours indirect libre*, typical of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, tells in a third person what the characters think, "fills the epic form with lyrical content" and "disguises the subject as an object." (p. 89). Perhaps rather the object is disguised as a subject. I am not convinced that the subjectivity of prose must necessarily be seen as 'lyricization'. Such a technique, used by Dostoevsky to convey the thoughts of Raskolnikov and the investigator, does not feel like lyricism. Rather, it is a gimmick to the irony that Fadel captures in the next paragraph: "Like any true representative of the noir, *Blue Sunset* is a parody of the classic crime novel." (p. 89).

Vezhinov's early experience (the novel in question) is seen by Fadel as his best achievement, unencumbered by the critical criticisms that followed. The ideological "crushing" (his expression) of "Blue Sunset" is symptomatic of the non-realization of the classical criminal genre in Bulgarian literature. To explain the ideological reason for this, the author turns to Lenin's basic text on subsequent social engineering, *The State and the Revolution*. The thesis that is directly related to the crime novel under socialism is that with the demise of the state, crime will die. This predetermines the mimicry of the classical crime genre into a political-criminal one with the weight of the first ingredient, or as the author calls them, "Crime stories in a world without crimes". Here he opens a number of Bulgarian short stories and novels: the

collection "Three Meetings with the Inspector" by Bogomil Raynov, "Snuff Box" by Pavel Vezhinov, "The River of Parting" by Yanko Stanoev, "The Girl and the Traitor" by Kostadin Kyulyumov and Vencislav Diavatov (Stefan Gechev) to show how the ideological dominant remodels the genre.

The chapter entitled "Successful Stories of Communism" examines the most widely circulated works on criminal intelligence (St. Igov) in Bulgarian literature and cinema, sustained in the paradigm of socialist realism and disguised as "philosophical-criminal" (Panteley Zarev) - Fadel explains very well what philosophy he is talking about. In order to understand this success, which is still remembered to this day, the author includes in the circle of his analysis Bogomil Raynov's monograph "The Black Novel" (1970), the most serious study of the genre at that time. The semiotic reading of the "avant-garde cover" returns to the significance of the letter as representing the anti-aesthetic nature of crime literature and highlights the clash with the position of the author of the monograph (Raynov), presenting himself as a guardian of the genre's psychology. (Of course, the reasons for this collision are explained).

Fadel connects the success of the genre with the mass attraction to conspiracy (the myth of the lurking enemy - with "a variety of notions of the enemy." p. 101) combined with utopianism. The focus is on the novels of Bogomil Raynov for the foreign intelligence officer Emil Boev and of Andrei Gulyashki for the internal intelligence officer Avakum Zahov. The Cold War between the two main political camps created an almost mirror image of their opposition, but also required a change of language. On the east side of the Iron Curtain, the spy novel is now called "adventure-intelligence" ("spy" acquires a "capitalist" pejorative connotation). According to the author, disguising him as "criminal" is the result of a new understanding of crime under socialism, according to which the political culprit is a criminal, a victim of recurrences of the capitalist past.

Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that the film versions of the series about Emil Boev do not contribute anything to her "artistic qualities" or her popularity. It is worth noting the image of the Bulgarian spy: "Boev's irony does not seem to lean on anything positive, on any cause, on any value. It is a mystery how this inner emptiness, this radical skepticism, is combined with its fidelity to ideology." (Abstract, p. 15) I wonder if Fadel thought of a certain self-reflection (alter ego?) in the construction of this image by Bogomil Raynov.

The parallel between the Western spy novel (John Le Carré's novels) and the intelligence-adventure reading in socialist literature beyond ideology surprisingly brings them

together: the suggestion of both versions is ultimately common: skepticism about reality and the Other.

It is noticeable that nowhere does Maurice Fadel "hastily" call crime literature "crime" - its theoretical and literary-historical provocative potential, revealed in the work, completely rejects the condescending attitude to the genre.

I will conclude briefly: the scientific audacity shown by the author in the research and the maturity of the results achieved in it are more than enough for me to warrant award of the full degree of "Doctor of Science".

31.05.2022 Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stoycheva