

## OPINION

by Prof. Hristo Petrov Manolakev, DSc

From St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo  
on dissertation work titled

### **Civic Values In Bulgarian Children's And Adolescent's Poetry (1878 – 1918)**

by Assoc. Prof. Ogniyana Atanasova Georgieva-Teneva, Ph.D.

from New Bulgarian University,  
School of Graduate Studies, Department of New Bulgarian Studies

For acquiring the scientific degree

„Doctor of Science“

The idea and the research enthusiasm behind the dissertation work "Civic Values In Bulgarian Children's And Adolescent's Poetry" by Assoc. Prof. O. Georgieva-Teneva, PhD are suggested by the adverb *also* in the very first introductory sentence of the work: "Our early children's and adolescent's poetry *also* sends civic messages". Behind "also" lies a gathered metatextual experience, which allows for highlighting the significance of the problem that is the object of the research. In other words, it is possible to approach a familiar and well-exploited theme from a new angle and reveal it in a new unthought actuality of the present day. That is why I would like to emphasize the following at the very beginning of my statement: raising awareness of and focusing on the topic of civic messages in the overall context of children's and adolescent's poetry is in itself already a valuable contribution.

In turn, "raising awareness" is already a reflection of the whole development of Assoc. Prof. O. Georgieva-Teneva, PhD as a scientist, researcher and professional. The work is a logical completion of the author's many years of research on children's and adolescent's poetry. Allow me to mention only two other books written by her: "Grazhdanski idei na detsko-yunoshestkata poezia (1878 - 1918)" (2014) and "Literaturno poznanie v grazhdanska perspektiva" (2020). At the same time, it is a consequence of the ongoing specific professional enrichment of her scientific views under the influence of her lecturing activities on Methods of Teaching Literature.

What I mean is the professional "defamiliarisation" (as by V. Shklovsky) that the methodologist adds to the standardized view of the literary critic. It is the "other" in her, the methodologist (and respectively the pedagogue), who while studying the diverse textbook discourse, has realized that literary reading misses something important in this type of poetry, i.e. that it also forms civic consciousness in its readers. Thus, over the years the stereoscopic complement of the two approaches has clarified the issues, goals and perspectives for the realization of one's own reading of works that others have previously avoided.

In the Introduction the author states the aims, purposes and structure of the research, its critical placement within the research tradition, the terminology and the operational apparatus. If we assume that so far the scientific interest in the theme has been focused on studying the artistic effect of children's poetry, now new issues are being discussed which have been neglected before. These are motifs that form the civic content of these works; attention is drawn to the ideological implication of the text - an unfamiliar territory in the world of children's poetry which ultimately is created to teach and educate. Therefore, with this improved understanding of the unity between emotional and ideological suggestion, our notion about the essence of children's poetry from the Liberation to the First World War is expanded and enriched. The explanation of the new approach to the known and the familiar, is a convincing argument for the rightfulness of re-reading this huge body of texts from a separate stage of the historical development of our national literature, undertaken by Assoc. Prof. Georgieva-Teneva, PhD. This is a proof that the topic is suitable for dissertation: a problem is presented, revealed in the dynamics of its formulation and it is convincingly proven that it plays an active role in shaping the image of children's poetry. This is one of the dissertation's contributions of major importance. Complying with the above understanding of the significance of the research task, the author has also developed the structure of the dissertation research.

The first and second chapters set its coordinates.

The first one, The Pragmatics of Civicity in Poetic Language, assumes the functions of an introduction to the research; the objective is to base it on facts, literary and historical arguments. The author starts from the hypothesis that mainly on empirical level, i.e. in an immense number of poetic works, most of which are practically forgotten or unknown today, there are sufficient grounds to distinguish the topic of civic values in Bulgarian children's poetry.

The perception and formulation of the topic shows that Assoc. Prof. Georgieva-Teneva, PhD possesses profound knowledge on the material not only as a factology, but also as a metatextual experience. These works are problematized in two ways under the traditional approach - in view of the patriarchal and moral values and attitudes and in view of national and patriotic ones. According to the researcher the major omission of traditional approach is not just the obvious inertia of interpretive thinking, but mostly forgetting about the special ambivalent nature of the poetic word, its ambiguity, its ability to transform and build meaning depending on the context. This is exactly what happened with the current topic - under new circumstances, with a different reception and analytical attitude, the *civic messages*, a new and hitherto outdated ideological dominant in these works, have become semantically significant. However, this was followed by a serious ordeal before the author, which she overcame with arguments. It was necessary to prove that what she noticed was not temporally limited or inherent in the ideological horizon only of one individual author, but used to be a trend constantly updated in accordance with the changes in public life conditions. In other words, it had to be revealed that the topic had its own literary and historical dynamics allowing it to be formulated as a problem for scientific debate. It is a positive point that the understanding of civic values is derived from the very content of the children's and adolescent's poetry. Its immediate reading reveals a stable bundle of motifs - freedom of will, rule of law, human dignity, resistance to humiliation, etc. - which are actively present in this type of poetry. The researcher summarizes that the motifs are an expression of modern awareness, a reflection of the aspirations of various institutions to form in adolescents values and attitudes other than the patriarchal ones in which they were brought up.

In the second chapter, "Civil society in the Dialogue of Children's Discourses", the author examines the role of institutions that help shape the young person into a modern citizen (p. 81). In my opinion, of great value here is the in-depth sociological analysis of the conditions which favoured the formation of the set of motifs and images of the civic content of children's and adolescent's poetry. The role and functions of the school in this process are clear and logical, fully in line with the traditional understanding of the overall change in public life after the Liberation: the school begins to purposefully educate and build people with active positions in public life. Here the great contribution of the research is in emphasizing the importance of chrestomathies and children's periodicals as the main core of this process. The analysis is based on a large-scale source material; the context is reconstructed through various publications,

textbooks and journalistic units. The authentic information extracted from them makes the conclusions solid and convincing. Please allow me to draw your attention to how successfully and ingeniously Assoc. Prof. PhD O. Geordieva-Teneva's activities of many years related with the questions of methodology and pedagogy complement the thought of the philologist: chrestomathies and reading books were an institution in so far as they offered an idea for education within a period of time when curricula did not yet exist. For example, there are a number of studies on Vazov and Velichkov's "Bulgarian Chrestomathy". But such an understanding of the functionality of this text, as proposed by the author, one cannot find. Perhaps it would be a good idea to make observations on this same topic and with similar thoroughness on the chrestomathies of Kostov and Mishev and Bozhan Angelov.

The real part of the research begins with the third chapter, "Personal freedom as a lyrical message." In this chapter the author deliberately provokes and overturns the established notions of reading and interpreting children's poetry precisely because the pedagogue supported the philologist. The repertoire of themes and motifs developed in children's poetry from the beginning of the 20th century, has been ingeniously interpreted through the semantics of two types of pedagogics, authoritarian and liberal, and hence the leading idea of the research - opposed to the common "ideal" of unconditional obedience stands the comprehension that the result of such educational approach is a prerequisite for the formation of a passive person. The idea is developed "in depth" on material from numerous collections of poems by most children's poetry authors from the period (K. Velichkov, V. Popovich, Ts. Kalchev, Ts. Ginchev and many others). As a counterpoint to this idea, the motifs "independence", "own choice", "love for freedom", "entrepreneurship", "play", etc. stand out, which are found in the works of P. R. Slaveykov, Stoyan Popov (Chicho Stoyan), Elin Pelin, St. Chilingirov and others. Thus rises the central opposition of the chapter - "obedience - freedom". Two conclusions can be outlined from the observations made. First of all, the reading interprets the material and does not describe it in a statement. Literary history has already played its part, valued authors and works, attached labels, both artistic and educational, and is over. However, Assoc. Prof. Georgieva, PhD shows us that under other criteria for analysis, the well-known material may become different quite unexpectedly when the body of works is consistently studied in the dynamics of its chronology. Hence the second conclusion: The "obedience-freedom" opposition has not been transferred as a pre-made operational mechanism, but has been derived from concrete facts. It was possible

because, along with the texts, their critical reception has been studied as well. In other words, the opposition is also a reflection of the metatextual consciousness of the time. The success of the contextual approach to the considered facts and phenomena of the literary process is based on the consistent application of this complexity of interpretation.

The fourth chapter - "Images of the Bulgarian state" and the fifth one - "Lyrical projections of society", outline the coordinates of a single problem area. The author shows with many examples that within the temporal range of four decades, the transformations in governance models and political practices are reflected in children's poetry, actively offering it material which affects its content and image system. It was found that such central figures of power as the "prince", "ministers", "law", "mayor" and other authority figures, are permanently present in children's poetry. The ideological development of these characters is in line with the social situation, either in terms of praise or moral neglect. However, these motifs so far have not been in the focus of research interests, apparently due to conjuncture considerations, regardless of who the author of the works is. By the way, here is another argument in favour of the dissertation's considered field of problematization - pages of the history of Bulgarian literature which have been crossed out are revived. Here I mean works that not only form the artistic and aesthetic attitudes of adolescents, but at the same time actively participate in the education of civic attitudes towards the institutionalized pillars of power. The "horizontal" extending of power to the next lower levels of government is also present in this type of poetry (Chapter Five). The poetics of negative images has a determining role for the impact of the works, the absence of civic virtues in society, i.e. in the everyday environment in which children live, is displayed with polemical sharpness. Here Assoc. Prof. O. Georgieva-Teneva, PhD highlights the importance of the fable for civic education through a series of negative images - lack of unity in society, passive social behaviour, hostility and social conflicts, etc. I am obliged to emphasize again that the added specialized information about the state of the curricula is a valuable complement to the philological analysis. I do so, since popular works of Bulgarian classics are discussed, texts that form important points of reference in the textbook canon. In other words, the question is about active reception, about direct participation in shaping the ideological horizon of the child.

I find the sixth chapter - "Children's poetry under the epaulette" - to be the most valuable one of the dissertation. Here the literary and historical contribution is at the level of sources and themes. At the risk of being bibliographically inaccurate, I think that Assoc. Prof. O.

Georgieva-Teneva PhD is the one who for the first time in Bulgarian literary studies links "war" and "poetry for children" in one problem. First of all, noticing the problem is in itself praiseworthy. And this in turn is evidence of the in-depth knowledge of the studied corpus of works. Furthermore, the interpretation is convincing that the question is not about an isolated phenomenon, but about a stable thematic line, whose emotional and ideological curve used to shift in accordance with the change in public attitudes towards the country's participation in the three consecutive wars. It is difficult to find an "image" or "incarnation" of war in the child's mind, which have been missed by the researcher: from upbringing in the spirit of patriotism, to imitative reflections in children's war games (marching, riding an imaginary horse, etc.); from enthusiasm and hopes for the realization of the national ideal (during the First Balkan war) to suggestions of tragedy and anger caused by the collapse after the Second Balkan War and the First World War. Death, grief, catastrophe, but also peace as a complete negation of war - children's and adolescent's poetry takes a serious and responsible view on children's upbringing. To the comprehensiveness of the motifs repertoire we should add the valuable clarification concerning the reception - during the wars reception horizon points of children and adults visibly meet. Thus, the topic is presented in dynamics as a completed ideological whole chronologically and substantively exhausted.

In the last chapter - "Poetic language for the word" - the author discusses issues that are more traditional in the study of children's poetry for the time period in question. It is about the purpose of words. The researcher, in accordance with the already outlined interpretive paradigm, reconsiders the purpose of words to express truth as a fundamental civic value. And the author has ingeniously managed to find new viewpoints for new interpretations of what is known and familiar in two problematization aspects: "mythicisation of language" and "debasement of language". Behind the two typologemes is an illustrative material very well known from some of the examples: "Hymn of St. Cyril and St. Methodius" by St. Mihaylovski, "Balgarskiyat ezik" by Iv. Vazov, "Lazhlivoto momche" by Ts. Ginchev, part of the civic fables by St. Mihaylovski. We should be aware that they were first published in textbook type editions, i.e. that their intentional addressee was the younger generation. At that time, works like those were analyzed in connection with the issues of intolerance of lies in the public sphere, debasement of language and its use for impure political purposes, etc. These are all questions that are reflection of our notions of intolerance, civic conscience, civic education. In other words,

they are questions that build the backbone of the dissertation. Therefore, although familiar and repeatedly discussed, they inevitably had to be broached, even in order to round out the research field of the dissertation. In the aspects of this familiarity I find it suitable that this chapter should compositionally complete the dissertation.

The "Conclusion" contains a summary of the aspects of the research. In general, they are three - the stated topic expands the knowledge of the motif richness of children's poetry from the period after the Liberation to the end of the First World War; the topic enriches the research subject of children's poetry; in their intersection, these two interpretive possibilities outline interesting projections for further continuation of the work, to the next stages of our literary development.

The bibliographic reference apparatus consists of two parts. The "Appendix" includes the studied documentary sources (personal children's poetry collections, collections and anthologies, alphabet books, reading books and other textbooks, periodicals) in a total number of 136 units. The "Bibliography", numbering 175 items, includes studies of general theoretical nature, as well as specialized literary and historical research on the topic. In retrospect, all leading and fundamental analyzes on the issue are covered. In terms of information, the bibliography, in addition to being comprehensive, can also be considered representative of the topic under discussion.

The "Abstract" (presented in computer version) is 32 pages long and has been prepared in accordance with the academic requirements for this mandatory "genre" part of the defence procedure. It analytically presents the main points of the dissertation; the main contributing moments of the research are noted in 7 points; the leading publications (7 in number) on the topic of the dissertation are noted as well.

In conclusion, I would like to summarize my observations as follows:

1. The dissertation work "Civic Values In Bulgarian Children's And Adolescent's Poetry" by Assoc. Prof. O. Georgieva-Teneva, PhD introduces a new problematization perspective in the study of Bulgarian children's poetry - the "civic values" of children's poetry. The question is formulated and developed for the first time as a complete scientific literary and historical problem, which is the main heuristic contribution of the research.

2. The problem is clearly outlined, thoroughly and analytically developed on the basis of extremely detailed research of a huge body of documentary sources.

3. It is a modern, thorough and complete research having the contribution of a separate monograph.

4. The valuable and contributing moments emphasized at the beginning, give me reasons to evaluate the work "Civic Values in Bulgarian Children's and Youth Poetry (1878 - 1918)" expressing high opinion of it and to propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award Assoc. Prof. Ogniana Georgieva-Teneva, PhD the scientific degree "Doctor of Science".

Sofia, June 7th, 2022

(Prof. Hristo Manolakev, DSc.)