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„Literature of Case Studies“

Literature of Case Studies. From „Tobacco” to “Wolf hunt”. Instances from the Literary Field of the People’s Republic. Published by the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past and CIELA Press. Sofia, 2017, 372 p. ISBN 978-954-28-2279-0

The monograph is the first ever systematic presentation of Bulgarian literature from the NRB period in a series of cases. Through the methods of a new literary microhistory, events and problems centered around sign works are explored and investigated – the novel „Tobacco“ by Dimitar Dimov, the book „Poems“ by Konstantin Pavlov, the poem „South of Life“ and the story „Bread of crumbs“ by Ivan Dinkov, the book with epigrams and cartoons „Hot peppers“ by Radoi Ralin and Boris Dimovski, the novel „Face“ by Blaga Dimitrova and „Wolf hunt“ by Ivaylo Petrov.

These are seven cases that do not exhaust the wealth of significant case studies in NRB literature, but show situations of clash between exception and norm, complex relationships with censorship and the subordinate influence of censorship, moments of change in the historical rhythms of literature and the manifestation of individual choice of handwriting and behavior. The book shows how literary history can be a system of stories that solve riddles, and in doing so it becomes even more a science of the past of literature, but even more of literature itself.

The book outlines the possibilities of applying a microhistorical approach to communist-era literature. The literary microhistory pays attention not only to what and how the author writes, but also to what he does with the texts, around and about his texts, who reads and understands them, and in what ways they enter into other texts and contexts. Especially in the microhistorical analyzes of NRB literature, it is more important not the pursuit of the unachievable unity between words and works, between creation and author image, but the discrepancies, gaps between creativity and biography, between literary text and

sociocultural context, between the public language and the private speech, between fictional and non-fictional texts, etc.

The literary-historical case of the NRB era, as in other periods, combines the study of biographical versions of authors with biographies of texts and books and their interweaving in structural networks of official and unofficial readings, their relationships with institutions and their influence on political, ideological and power discourses. But in the era of the People's Republic of Bulgaria there is a marked increase in tensions over the problem of the lost autonomy of literature in politics. Such incidents occur as a test of the stability of the norm of socialist realism and as a test of handwriting and authorial presence. The pledge in the cases since then has to do with the individual choice of the writing person in the situation of withdrawn autonomy, in which the various genre texts are placed in explicit, hidden and semi-hidden levels. It is to these levels that the literary historian seeks, through the case model, to identify important incidents, to assess the impact of censorship, the role of self-censorship, bending of handwriting or resistance and playing with them, to trace receptive effects - whether amplified or muted, spontaneous or driven by analyzing the changing meanings of works and changes in the images of their authors.

The cases of „Tobacco“, „Poems“, „Hot Peppers“, or „Face“ describe the entire contradiction of the NRB literature. Each of them expresses in a unique way the norm of socialist realism and its exceptions, which both deny it but also confirm it, while continuing to deny it, confirm it, deny it, etc. It is shown how arbitrary the divisions between „official“ and „opposition“ literature between 1946 and 1990 are arbitrary, but also that the violations of the norm of socialist realism „from within“ by works pertaining to the doctrine exacerbate the reformation of the socialist realism, an alternative sector is gradually being formed in the literary field and the characteristics of an alternative canon by authors and works are outlined. It is precisely in the unraveling of individual cases that the dynamics of diffuse processes emerge in the literary field, where the official and alternative sectors sometimes overlap, and the meanings of the works and social gestures of one author sometimes do not coincide dramatically.

The book argues that the microhistorical approach and microanalyses of texts and contexts can change the interpretation of literature between 1946 and 1990.