



Book Review:

Евгения Панчева, Амелия Личева, Миряна Янакиева. *Теория на литературата. Новият век*. Издателство „Колибри“, София, 2021. [Evgenia Pancheva, Amelia Licheva, Miryana Yanakieva. *Theory of Literature. The New Century*. Sofia, Colibri, 2021.]

Borislava Ivanova / Борислава Иванова
Institute for Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Институт за литература, Българска академия на науките

Theory of Literature. The New Century is a study which main and contributing goal is defined in the preface: “linking literature and literary studies to the future”. Actually, questioning the future is an aspect of today's life that has been asked more in the last years of the pandemic and of rather digital life. Evgenia Pancheva, Amelia Licheva and Miryana Yanakieva precisely discuss these issues in the context of literature, going beyond the traditional and successfully presenting literary studies as a current and modern science that “lives in the new 21st century”. *Theory of Literature. The New Century* is a logical

and organic continuation of the published 2005 *Theory of Literature. From Plato to Postmodernism* that focuses on the problems that the humanities face today, as it is explicitly stated by the authors.

Yet the preface clarifies that it is now too obsolete to believe that the ideas of postmodernism still have a leading role today. And this is reflected in the first chapter of the study, entitled *After Postmodernism*. In this chapter, Amelia Licheva discusses the death of postmodernism, the preconditions of which are examined by various critics in numerous events and phenomena of the modern globalised world, but mostly in crises, starting with specific events (terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, for example) and ending with more general phenomena: terrorism, financial crises, refugee waves. Amelia Licheva considers several basic terms that compete to replace postmodernism, defining the new cultural logic that is imposed in the contemporary social realities, which at times intertwines with the digital space. Among them are the hypermodernity associated with the name of Gilles Lipovetsky and the idea of modernising modernity itself, and the pseudo-modernism in which the social is lost in the new culture of social networks until it turns out that the individual has returned to an infantile phase of existence. The line of “new -isms” continues with metamodernism, among which definitions strong impression makes this about the possibility of impossible possibilities, cosmopolitanism, introduced by Christian Moraru in his work *Cosmopolitanism: American Narrative, Late Globalization and the New Cultural Imaginary*, performatism and ecocriticism. Thus, this first chapter turns out to outline not just literary terms, but general trends in the development of modern society and the individual as its constituent unit.

The next chapter, *The Posthuman* (again by Amelia Licheva), deals with issues such as the relationship between humans and machines, the moral aspect of the boundaries between organic and inorganic, between technology and humans, which somehow logically move to the next chapter and the original question of the relationship between the Other and Self. It is discussed through the issue of the ethical turn and the construction of one's own identity through the Other and the interpretation of the I-Other relation. In this chapter, Miryana Yanakieva draws on the theories of Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas, looking for the source of values for the individual.

Biopolitics in its essence of referring to the political relations between the administration or regulation of the life of species and a locality's populations, where politics and law evaluate life based on perceived constants and traits is treated in the next chapter written by Miryana Yanakieva. She examines Foucault's and Agamben's understanding of biopolitics. Foucault sees biopolitical power not as repressive and centrist but as existing at different levels and socially inherent. Relating biology and political science,

biopolitics represents regulating populations through this biopower affecting all aspects of human life. Miryana Yanakieva goes into the debate flowing between the ideas of Foucault and Agamben. She represents Agamben's opposition to Foucault's concept of biopolitics to right (law), as he defines the state of exception, in *Homo sacer*, as the inclusion of life by right under the figure of ex-ception, which is simultaneously inclusion and exclusion resting on the distinction between *bios* (the life of the citizen) and *zoe* (the life of *homo sacer*), or the crucial difference between *qualified life* and *bare life* (and also the reduction of life to biopolitics). Extremely *vital* nowadays proves to be Agamben's statement emerging from the COVID-19 measures that lead to an existence relying on the physical survival, or bare life, which appears to be situated in a constant state of emergency.

In the next few chapters, the reader continues to dive deeper into the digital world, examining the place of new media, or post-media, the digitalisation of the humanities and arts, cyber criticism and the placement of text in cyberspace, the concept of possible worlds in literary theory.

Evgenia Pancheva continues the study of the 21st century by treating several important issues – trauma, affect and chaos. She follows the path of trauma throughout the 20th century, starting with Freud and the traumatic experiences on the battlefield, continuing with the allegorical perception of trauma through Cathy Caruth and the three strategies of cultural coping with the trauma of Kali Tal - mythologisation, medicalisation and disappearance. Literary readings of trauma, however, suggest a variety of approaches, with Evgenia Pancheva focusing on the collection *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. It turns out that the function of trauma varies from a pattern of writing and reading, through a constructor of historical narratives to its function of connecting cultures.

The next two chapters revolve around two other theories rooted in the 20th century – affect and chaos theory, again offering an overview of the main scholar studies on the matters. Questions from some kind of gothic origin arise in the chapter treating the spectral criticism. The psychoanalytical aspect of the ghost in literature, the act of reading situated somewhere between the being and non-being and the intertextuality perceived as spectral, e.g., hunted by the ghosts of an author's ancestors, evokes thoughts in the reader's mind regarding the conceptualisation of the spectral criticism in literary theory.

The book presents to the reader's attention a few more questions that proved to be constant topics of interest. Amelia Licheva observes the postfeminism trends and queer theories, while Miryana Yanakieva treats the cross-cultural aspects between literature and non-literature, e.g., imagology, anthropology, philosophy, the connection between literature and politics, literature in the digital medium.

The last chapter of the book treats world literature and the circulation of a work beyond its country of origin questioning the aspects of the national and global literatures, which might allow being thought about the placement of one nation in the globalised contemporary world, especially regarding smaller countries like Bulgaria. Through, the authors of the book present to the readers a scientific journey that traces the paths of literary theory today.