

REVIEW

by

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on the dissertation for acquisition the degree of Doctor

(professional field 8.3. " Art of Music and Dance")

by Vita Guhelli

on the following topic

"Symbolism in solo songs of Albanian Composers of the second half of the twentieth century" (title according to author's abstract in Bulgarian)

Research supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ermila Schweizer

I have not been provided with documentation on the biography and artistic career of doctoral student Vita Guhelli, so I proceed directly to the dissertation.

The dissertation submitted to me for review is 220 pages long, in a volume up to that of the Bulgarian standard.

The main aim of the PhD is stated in the title of the dissertation. At the internal discussion of the dissertation, I asked if she knew French - the answer "no" did not appeal to me for a subject related to Symbolism, a movement in the arts (especially in poetry), a reaction to materialism and naturalism (should I try to generalize), which arose in France...

...after Baudelaire's "Fleurs du mal", 1857 - and in particular his sonnet of correspondences (Correspondances) <https://fleursdumal.org/poem/103>,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200922052157/http://www.musee-rodin.fr/fr/collections/archives/les-fleurs-du-mal>, <https://fleursdumal.org/>, with his belief that there are secret connections between objects and phenomena in the world, complementing them, and between the senses of men..., whose intuitiveness and imagination are very important, and markedly in deciphering the hidden symbols in visible things (something extremely subjective), "aided" also by occult "knowledge", I add mysticism and eroticism as essential features of symbolism...

... and in Belgium at the end of the 19th century, and from there spread to certain parts of the world.

I share the understanding that in order to really, truly enter into a particular history and culture, one has to know the language to an adequate level - and on that basis, one can also comment on their effect. But in this case, let's also draw on the mythic connection between things and their intuitive feeling, aided by symbols - the hallmarks and essence of symbolism.

I'll recap the basics of "Symbolism" - it will become clear below why I'm doing this, and that might be useful for the PhD student as well. The term "Symbolism" itself was introduced later - its "godfather" was Jean Moreas with his "Manifesto of Symbolism" (Figaro newspaper, 18 September 1886). Symbolism also as the face of modernism ("the face of Bulgarian modernism", Yordan Eftimov, while the expressionism that followed it was the face of avant-gardism, according to the same author - respectively the influence of the French and Russian Symbolists and the German Expressionists: <https://kultura.bg/web/първа-френска-антология-на-български/>).

I do recall that in Bulgaria symbolism has been spreading since the early 20th century (I remind the names of Pencho Slaveykov, even as a forerunner, of Peyo Yavorov, Dimitar Boyadzhiev, Theodor Trayanov, Dora Gabe, Dimcho Debelyanov, Theodor Trayanov, Nikolai Liliev, Hristo Yasenov, Emanuil Popdimitrov). For

Bulgaria, Geo Milev (Georgi Milev Kasabov) in 1915 (in his dissertation on Richard Dehmel, which he actually wrote in Leipzig in the years 1912-14, in fact unprotected and even lost, discovered only in the 1970s in the library of the University of Vienna: http://geo.stzagora.com/pdf/Tom3_Prilozhenie1.pdf) writes about Symbolism ("...for about half a century this school or current spread...", translated by Lyubomir Iliev); he further defines it as "counter-realism, a new, modern art - an ever anti-realist current", "a non-representation and imitation of reality", stressing the conflation of the term "decadence" (which he explains as follows: "the complete surrender to the inner life of the soul, to the life of psychic phenomena, to the life of dreams, and apparitions") with the name "Symbolism". Already in Bulgaria, the critic Ivan Radoslavov first spoke of "Bulgarian Symbolism" in 1935, explaining that, "The movement of the Bulgarian modernists is sometimes defined as modernism, sometimes as spiritualism, and finally as mysticism and even individualism. It is fair and true, however, to leave it historically as symbolism. It contains all these definitions above..." (Elka Dimitrova <http://dictionarylit-bg.eu/СИМВОЛИЗЪМ>).

Paralleling the topics of Vita Guheli's dissertation, I recall the songs of Todor Popov, Lyubomir Pipkov, Konstantin Iliev, Ivan Spasov, Alexander Tekeliyev, Ivelin Dimitrov based on texts by Dimcho Debelyanov, Peyo Yavorov, Nikolai Liliev, Elizaveta Bagryana, various foreign poets...

I'll remind in the " Bulgaria / Albania " parallel: due to geographical and historical reasons, both countries / populations do not have in their history the European Renaissance, Baroque, Pre-Classical and Classical, Romantic...

I also emphasize explicitly what I learned over 10+ years ago from my fellow French musicologists at the "Center for Baroque Music" in Versailles: that there were active French missions in Albania (including in the line of French Catholicism and its culture), attendances, respectively active France-Albania interactions, which was the essential reason for them to visit Albania for work in our time. (Correspondingly,

their disinterest in coming to Sofia and Bulgaria in general.) So it makes sense that questions about symbolism in Albanian culture are interesting and full of meaning.

The PhD student points out that the issue of symbolism as spirituality in Albanian music has been very poorly advocated so far, there has even been a lack of publications on the topic, in particular on solo songs by Albanian composers - this proves the relevance of the dissertation topic and was the main motivation for PhD student Vita Guheli to do her research. As well as her personal and professional engagement with these songs. The symbolism in Albanian professional music of the second half of the 20th century had similar characteristics to those of Europe and other countries around the world, but it also had its own distinctive qualities.

I add straight away: 'Symbolism' is of course fundamentally alien to the materialism of the socialist era, and also due to the alienation of 'Symbolism' from social (communal) problems, yet it is no less alien to the cynical primitive pragmatism (if I may venture such a generalization) of today. Nor do I think is the second half of the 20th century characterized by a particularly influential presence of "Symbolism" anywhere in the world.

The dissertation of the PhD student Vita Guheli is structured as follows (I have consulted its text as it is written in English, but I quote its contents from the abstract in Bulgarian):

Abstract

Introduction

1. Origins

1.1 Historical Overview of Symbolism

1.2 Symbolism in the Art Music

1.3 Symbolism in solo songs

2. Stylistic deviations

Symbolism and symbology

2.1 Symbolism vs realism

2.2 Symbolism vs expressionism

3. The text-music relationship in Symbolism

4. Comparative methodology

4.1 Symbolism in art songs in world music literature and in Albanian music of the second half of the twentieth century

4.2 Distinctive features of symbolism in solo songs by Albanian and Kosovar composers

5. Analytical methodology

6. Research methodology

6.1 Which stylistic trends influenced the emergence of the symbolic spirit in 1944-1991?

6.2 What was the influence of geopolitical circumstances on the work of Albanian composers of the second half of the twentieth century?

6.3 Did symbolism enter Albanian music as a result of its natural stylistic development or as a reaction against the communist regime of 1944-1991?

6.4 Did the Russian National School influence the professional and stylistic formation of Albanian composers of the second half of the twentieth century?

6.5 Can symbolism be defined as a musical thought? 6.6 Did the development of the symbolist spirit continue after the communist era?

7. Conclusions

8. Contributions

Bibliography

And speaking of the abstract in Bulgarian, I cannot restrain myself: the difficulties, the problems of translation - of any translation from one language to another - are well known. From one language and mentality to transfer information and emotions (in different proportions, depending on the type of text and author - in this case a dissertation abstract) into another language. The PhD student is Albanian and I don't know if she understands Bulgarian - I rather assume she doesn't. The text in the abstract in Bulgarian has ambiguities, interweavings of meanings and/or even naivety.

The reference to Claude Debussy as 'the impressionist composer' is also inaccurate. (In general, the issue of working with 'labels' is very complex...) Indeed, there is a quotation on pp. 30-31 which discusses Debussy in a multifaceted way.

"...*Maxim Gorky. His novel A Mother (ed. Citadel, New York, 1992)*" (p. 13). :))) I ventured a little reviewer-applied "symbolism" (actually symbolicity), Y.K., because the novel was first published in 1906 in Russia.

"The dissertation includes analyses of works by some Albanian composers of the second half of the twentieth century that deal with the main theme..." - ? (Y.K.)
And further: *"The listening of the audience is divided into two distinct stages, which are linked together in a close temporal relationship"* (p. 39) - ? (Y.K.)

I personally wouldn't let a PhD student of mine to do the defense with such an abstract.

"Turning to the wider relationship between music and literature in Albanian literary creativity, we see that it is the Albanian language that, as no other language, is considered mostly as a sung language in the non-spoken sense". (Vasil Tole, "Kadare dhe Muzika", Media Print, Tirana, 2019, p. 41)." pp. 21-22 of the

abstract. And further, *"Considering the proximity of poetry with Albanian composers, could the inner intonation of the Albanian language and its melodic character be the reason for this connection with poetry? We notice that the aesthetic and stylistic taste naturally coincide with the symbolist character"* (ibid.). Personally, as a reviewer who does not know Albanian, how am I to judge the veracity of this statement? (I'm not disputing it, am I?) By listening to something in Albanian language, such as music?

It would have been good if the PhD student had provided us at least with sound recordings of Albanian composers' works, on which she comments in her text - how can we judge her reasoning when we do not know them and have not even listened to them?

I note that excerpts of notes and texts are included in the dissertation itself.

I also note the introduction into the Bulgarian language of neologisms such as "larpurlartisme", deriving from the French "l'art pour l'art" (art for art's sake), which exists in other languages (e.g. Hungarian).

I am comforted by the following lines of evaluation by the anonymous reviewer of the PhD student Vita Guhelli's paper "Stylistic directions that influenced the arrival of the symbolic spirit in Albania during the years 1944-1991" (NBU, Young Scientific Forum... Conference, 2020):

"The stylistic directions under study are not convincingly substantiated by their reception in Albanian music. Their nature is discussed through the works of researchers of Albanian music, but only their general observations are cited, which they certainly build on serious musicological literature in French, German, English, and only a few examples of Albanian composers are included without elaboration. But my main impression is that the author's thesis remains unclear, symbolism (Debussy) and symbology (socialist realism) as concepts are blurred, aesthetic and philosophical characteristics and compositional techniques are mixed."

I myself (Y.C.) see contradictions in (the utterances of) conceptualizations and terminology. "Symbolic", "symbolist"... (at least as it appears in the Bulgarian version of the abstract). Indeed, if we conflate the idea of Symbolism (described at length above) with Symbolism - Symbolicity in its broadest sense of using symbols as indications and/or signs of ideas, states, actions, propaganda and influence, circumventing ideologies, slipping through censorships, etc. Correspondingly in religious movements and institutions, and in ideological and organizational-political concepts and practices. We also come to the use of symbols - "symbolicity" - in the so-called "socialistic realism" of the era, within which the PhD student explores Symbolism in the works of Albanian composers (here this conflation is controversial). The expression of ideological disagreements with the ideology and the life governed by it in Albania in the period 1944-41, the struggle against censorship I could hardly consider as Symbolism. I would hardly give any synonymy to Dissidence and Symbolism. Can we make sense of, accept, Dissidence as counter-realism (a basic, essential characteristic of Symbolism) or "decadence"? Hardly.

Not to mention that a scientific research (as any dissertation should be) must be based on demonstrable scientific experiment(s), the results of which must be processed in scientific ways to arrive at genuinely scientific reasoning and conclusions. Paralleling: an arts history thread on symbolism in music... But these are problems of arts science in general, and rest on when and to what extent it can be taken as a proper science.

However, in the end I would like to give a positive final opinion on the thesis. At least on the basis of the musical works that the PhD student has studied and presented in her research, which professionally and practically justifies to a great extent the essence, and therefore the purpose of this EDUCATIONAL and scientific degree of Doctor of. Prior to that, she has gone through (read) a number of reflections, respectively made her own: on history, arts, aesthetics...

The bibliography of Vita Guhelli's dissertation consists of 90 sources (if I am not mistaken in counting), all in Latin - English and Albanian. Books in print, materials on the internet. I see a need to fine-tune their transcriptions. I will not invest the considerable time and effort required to check that they are all mentioned in the text of the thesis itself.

I accept that the doctoral student has a good knowledge of the situation of the issues, in accordance both with the verbal and music literature and other reference sources used as well as her knowledge and experience as a performing musician. Thus, in my good faith, I sought out and found these video recordings of Vita Guhelli as soprano: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLj92KoRGL5BqTpCKig2byQ> - nice singing!

Against the background of the remarks and disagreements expressed so far, I can only conditionally accept the contributions of the thesis as outlined by the doctoral student as a whole. The material used in the study should be reliable (personally I have not seen the commented texts - on top of that in Albanian, which I do not understand, sheet music, recordings, etc.). The material used in the study is supposed to be trustworthy (I personally have not seen the commented texts, on top of that in Albanian, which I do not understand, sheet music, recordings, etc.). I accept that the research is the personal work of the doctoral student.

Accordingly, I should accept that Vita Guhelli's dissertation and contributions demonstrate that she, as a doctoral student, has a historical-theoretical knowledge of her specialty as well as the ability to conduct an independent academic research.

The abstract (50 pages) sufficiently reflects the dissertation. The citations in it should be in the original and not in translation (to illustrate: it should be 'June Emerson, 'The music of Albania'. Publisher: Emerson Edition Ltd. Ampleforth, North Yorkshire, England, 1994, p. 1". 1"). In fact, in the abstract the quotations are partly in translation, partly in the original language...

Publications of the PhD student Vita Guhelli in relation to her dissertation have not been provided to me, not even any data on such. She participated in the NBU Music Department Conference ("Young Research Forum for Music and Dance") in 2020, to which paper is the anonymous reviewer's opinion quoted above.

On the basis of the above, despite the comments made, I am in FAVOUR of awarding the degree of Doctor of Education and Research to Vita Guhelli.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Konov', written in a cursive style.

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Sofia, 19 October 2021