

OPINION

For awarding the educational and academic degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Film Studies, Film Art and Television", 8.4. "Theatre and Film Arts", candidate Zlatina Dimitrova Valchanova from Prof. Dr. Ivo (Ivan) Ivanov Draganov; Sofia, Neofit Rilski Str No 61

The candidate Zlatina Valchanova offers for consideration a dissertation entitled: STREAMING PLATFORMS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION SERIES.

Dear colleagues,

The theme of television series has been important since television existed. The television program has two supporting segments in prime time – news and TV series. TV series perform important tasks of a socio-cultural nature, which no other media can perform in the volume and range of the audience in which television makes them. For this reason, the problem of the complex relations between creative techniques and technological evolution, whose /un/predictable development affects the dramaturgical structure, I do not know that it has been analyzed in our country so far, and which the candidate Zlatina Valchanova presents to us, deserves serious attention. Especially when they are in such a complex relationship. And I will immediately declare that she has done a very good job with the posing of the problem, with the statement and analysis of the existing facts and with the conclusions that this analysis imposes.

Zlatina Valchanova already has a long and versatile practice, and I can say that she knows the subject she writes about. Her creative biography includes important professional positions as a reporter, journalist, editor, editor-in-chief and author. This experience is contextualized in her practice at serious newspapers, magazines, publishers, and websites. Several publications support her attempts to make theoretical sense of her professional experience. Due to all this comes the result of her research, the work "STREAMING PLATFORMS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION SERIES", which she has brought to our attention. Again, I will repeat that the truth, verified in practice, shows that in the so-called prime time the two obligatory program segments are the news and TV series. Rarer is a stand-alone film. There is no television and no

program director who can build his television program without the television series. That is what makes this dissertation important and timely.

What is the structure of work? It contains an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion, a bibliography, filmography and appendices which are arranged as follows:

- **The introduction** presents the topic, object and subject of the scientific work. The rationale for this scholarly study, which analyzes technological development as a factor in changes in dramaturgy, is clearly stated. Its thesis to the problem is set out and the framework of the aesthetic matter it explores is outlined.

- **In the first chapter** a historical overview of the development of serials as the most prominent form of mass culture and viewership phenomenon is presented, the definitions that are imposed in scientific works are noted. The dramaturgical evolution, the emergence and development of streaming platforms and the complex relationships with target viewer audiences are explored. The PhD student notes quite correctly that the matter also includes the psychology of perception, which is an important emphasis in the topic. The fact is that technology further fragments viewers, creating a new viewing mode. The difference between download and streaming is discussed. Also noted is the VOD service, which (in my opinion) is a harbinger of streaming platforms. From my point of view, I am practically puzzled by the hypothesis expressed on page 40 ..." For example, if a viewer has started an episode of their favorite TV series at home but is late for work, they can continue watching on their smartphone while traveling to work and finish on their work computer." It's funny to imagine a busy man rushing to work to watch a series on his work computer and how his boss would look at it.

- **In the second chapter, the author** analyzes the different types of streaming platforms. I remind you that the types of monothematic channels have been known since the advent of commercial televisions in the United States, and after 1989 in Europe. Data on viewer attitudes, production of TV series, their viewership are attached. However, I am more cautious in some assessments. I agree with the thesis, that streaming platforms are changing attitudes, but the big question is what audiences. Back in the 1970s, Hollywood bosses agreed to target their production at teenagers and began filming comics. In my opinion, streaming platforms are also aimed at such an audience, and this also has an impact on dramaturgy. I write this without underestimating the new possibilities for personal choices, but I give a sign of

attention that almost every novelty somehow lowers the level of quality. The fact that the concept of TV series is still in circulation reveals the sustainability of traditional television. The chapter abounds with many statistics, mainly in the United States.

- **Chapter three** examines the main problem of the PhD thesis, namely the transformations in contemporary television series through specific examples of series. Included in this section are interviews of professionals that shed light on the complex environment in which the television industry is evolving in light of new technologies. They are very interesting and curious and present an important, if narrow, professional perspective. These interviews reveal the views of key professionals in series production for streaming platforms. I would like to note here that branching dramaturgy is characteristic of the game books that appeared in the late seventies in the US and the eighties in England, and in the nineties in Bulgaria. For children and those a little older they are fun and the screen modification predictably arouses interest. The problem is the cheapness of producing this kind of series...

- **Chapter four** includes and analyses interviews with professionals in the field of streaming series. As a rule, they all analyse their work and highlight its peculiarities. In fact, they support the thesis of the dissertation. Attention is paid to genres. In starting a business (as producing a series is) there are three mandatory conditions: an empty market niche; low start-up capital and very good management. In the film and television industry, the niche market is the genre. This should be well known. And it's a key choice when starting a TV series business. One remark. In these interviews, sometimes expressions like "cool" from Diconchetto (p.134) sound rather newspaper-like.

Attention is paid to streaming viewing (bing-watching). In my opinion, it has a very high dependence on the level of dramaturgy. I can't believe that a series on "The Brothers Karamazov" could be seen in one breath or "The Forsyte Saga". In a nutshell, the dramaturgy of the commented bing-watching requires (to put it mildly) a very understandable and distinct dramaturgy.

In the conclusion Zlatina Valchanova comes to the conclusion that streaming platforms change the way of film storytelling in TV series. She also proves this with the interviews in the "Filmography" section. This is an inevitable trend and it manifests itself in all the novelties in film and television technology. They change the language of cinema at every stage of its development. In modern times, streaming platforms are just such a trend.

I agree that the classic series will have an increasing relationship with single films. An example of this was the series between the Air Force and

Swedish television "Wallander" with Kenneth Branagh or "Midsomer Murders". The main character is the same, but the stories are based on books written by different authors.

As you can see, honourable members, the topic referred to in the title is covered within its general framework and specific manifestations. And quite naturally, it is here that we find the main scientific contributions of this work. A detailed overview of the significant facts and events from the history of TV series on streaming platforms is presented and for the first time a quantitative and qualitative analysis with high scientific and applied value is made. Analyzing the problems of the transformations in the dramaturgy of TV series for streaming platforms, the PhD student has answered the essential question that I define as the most important: *What happens to their dramaturgical features and ways of perception?* Issues that have an important aesthetic, sociocultural and marketing aspect and are related to changes in viewers' consciousness, digitalization, mass commercialization and changes in the way of perception of socio-cultural and commercial messages that are developing around the world. We are likely to witness a complex convergence (especially with the advent of artificial intelligence) that only talented writers, directors and producers will be able to balance as common, but fine dramaturgy in the interest of the viewer. This will be a new perspective that will impose a deep imprint on the artistic solution of streaming series. Whether the streaming series will be imposed massively remains to be seen. The talented will cope and turn the disadvantages into an aesthetic advantage. This is the future, concludes the author. We live in a crazy tech race and we're all in it especially film and television art and audiences.

With the above **positive assessment** of the qualities of the scientific work "STREAMING PLATFORMS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION SERIES" I have no critical remarks, but only some recommendations. In some places, there is a qualitative discrepancy between the author's scientific-analytical text and the purely informative statements of some colleagues, and this, to some extent, unbalances her interpretation in the overall structure of the dissertation.

Because of all the above, in **conclusion** I would like to highlight once again the scientific achievements of the candidate and the specific contributions of the dissertation paper considered. I am convinced that they fully meet the high requirements provided for in the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. That is why I recommend the Scientific Jury at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS to accept **positively** the

candidacy of Zlatina Dimitrova Valchanova and to award her the educational and scientific degree **DOCTOR**.

05.04.2024г. Reviewer:

(Prof. Dr. Ivo Draganov)