

# OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodora Stoilova-Doncheva

On the dissertation of  
Zlatina Dimitrova Valchanova on the subject:

## **STREAMING PLATFORMS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION SERIES**

For acquiring the educational and scientific degree Doctor

### Description of the dissertation

The dissertation entitled "Streaming Platforms and Transformations of the Contemporary Television Series" by the PhD student Zlatina Valchanova consists of 311 pages and the text follows the classical structure: introduction, four chapters, conclusion, bibliography, filmography, appendices. The work represents the first study of its kind in Bulgaria on this topic and is a contribution to Bulgarian film studies.

### Content aspects of the dissertation

The introduction clearly, precisely, concisely but comprehensively introduces us to the issues of the text. The main hypothesis is stated: "video streaming platforms are not only changing the way series reach their audiences and influencing not only viewing habits but also lead to transformations in the way television works are created and structured". The specific subject and object of the thesis is also stated. The specific examples (in this case series) on which the PhD student has focused her attention are specified. Mention is also made of the analysis of statistical data, which in the circumstances I find very important, as it proves the dynamics and therefore the relevance of the processes about which the PhD student writes. Attention is paid to the interviews, which turn out to be crucial for clarifying the processes about which Zlatina Valchanova writes. I am confident that the high value and practical applicability of these interviews will be demonstrated in the subsequent dissemination of Zlatina's dissertation.

The structure of the dissertation is classic. I would like to note that each of the chapters, and almost each of the sub-chapters, begins with an introduction to the topic and, if necessary, a definition of the terminology which the author used.

The thesis, thus well organized, makes the scientific text easy to read, which I find as an advantage.

Chapter One, "Television Series, Streaming and Interactivity," begins logically with a brief but sufficiently informative and meaningful historical overview of the development of the television series, followed by the crucial definition of what a television series is. The difference between a series and a serial is clarified, as well as what exactly a television series is. The entire first chapter is notable for its precise definition of the terms that the PhD student will be using. The first contribution of her dissertation can also be noted here.

The "clarification" of the conceptual apparatus is of great importance, since most of the words used are foreign and their loose translation often leads to misunderstandings. For this reason, defining concepts such as 'convergence', 'streaming', 'interactive television', 'interactive series', 'multiscreen', etc. is very timely and essential.

As the title of the second chapter, "Streaming Platforms and Transformations in Audience Attitudes" suggests, it is devoted to streaming platforms, and here again, quite appropriately, it begins with a brief introduction to their origins and to their geographical spread, focusing on streaming platforms in Eastern Europe and specifically in Bulgaria. It also touches upon a serious problem that is a regular practice in our country - piracy, in the sense of prohibited (and free!) use of audiovisual works. Here, the PhD student could draw attention to the fact that among the main reasons for the high percentage of visits to illegal movie and TV series viewing sites in Bulgaria, there is also the mentality of the population, its habits of consumption of cultural products (such as movies and TV series) and the ways in which it provides them, and not only the possibilities of access, which are also discussed in more detail in chapter four.

Among the most valuable sub-points in Chapter Two are the sub-chapters "Changing Consumer Attitudes" and "Shifting Traditional TV to Streaming", which outline the changed habits of TV viewers. It is reported here that in 2021, video streaming officially displaces traditional TV channels as a viewing percentage. The changes in viewer habits are discussed in detail and the statements are backed up with sociological data. I'm a little short on specifics here in terms of viewers in Bulgaria, but obviously, this would suggest a specific study.

The analysis of the so-called binge-watching is important, and its contrast with the less popular "savor watching". By the end of chapter two, other features characteristic of streaming television, such as 'branched dramaturgy', are briefly mentioned and analyzed.

The third chapter, “Transformations of the Contemporary Television Series,” is devoted to specific examples, examining the TV series *Twin Peaks*, *Lost*, *Twin Peaks: The Return*, *Shame* and *Shame: Austin*, *Mosaic*, *Black Mirror*, *Bandersnatch*, and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs the Reverend*. Analogies are also made to older series. All the titles cited as examples are discussed at length, focusing on their particularities, from their content to why they appear as examples in the thesis. In terms of comprehensiveness, the information "from the source", i.e. the interviews with the people who were among the creators of the mentioned series, is of great importance. I also consider this chapter to be very important, as it essentially reveals the transformation patterns of the serials and traces them conscientiously and in detail.

The whole fourth chapter “Transformations of the TV Series Through the Eyes of Professionals from the Field of Streaming and Television” is a contribution to Bulgarian film studies and adds to the practical significance of the dissertation. The doctoral candidate's original research contains a wealth of empirical material, which is published for the first time in Bulgaria: here are analyzed the interviews conducted by Zlatina Valchanova with foreign and Bulgarian professionals who worked on the series given as examples in the dissertation text. In other words, here is concentrated information directly from the creators, from the people implementing the new trends discussed in the text. The inclusion of some of the most successful contemporary experts working in the world's most successful series is an impressive achievement of the PhD student Zlatina Valchanova. She has clarified the way in which the interviews were taken, what her personal approach was to each of the interviewees, and how she has systematized the way in which they were included in the thesis. An interesting analogy has emerged between the fact that the interviews talked about streaming platforms, while the conversations themselves were predominantly conducted through online conversation platforms such as zoom. I believe that separating the main points made in the interviews into a chapter of their own is appropriate and works well to systematize the considerable amount of material. I also think that the inclusion of Bulgarian representatives among the interviewees, such as Dimitar Noykov from (HBO) and Vanya Dimitrova (Neterra) is appropriate, even though they are not direct participants in the process of series realization, but they are important for the comprehensive analysis of the issues. In fact, it is also not possible to include Bulgarian representatives who are in any of the production positions in series showing modern transformations, as there is no practice of such realizations in Bulgaria. But the inclusion of interviewed specialists from Bulgaria is important, because if there is any delicate lack in the present text, it is precisely regarding the Bulgarian situation.

Through her work on this chapter, Valchanova has managed to outline the general directions of change in contemporary television series, which is one of the main objectives of the interviews. Important issues such as the redefinition of the term 'television series', practical changes such as the duration, the number of episodes, and the preferences of contemporary viewers are also addressed here.

In the conclusion, the Ph.D. student states, “The research presented in this dissertation confirms the scientific hypothesis that under the influence of streaming platforms, transformations are occurring not only in the way television works reach audiences, but also in the way they are created.” I absolutely agree with this statement. The basic hypothesis of the study is well founded and fully defended. The conclusion once again briefly points out the trends described as well as the transformations the text addresses.

The dissertation “Streaming Platforms and Transformations of the Contemporary Television Series” is of exceptional relevance. In practice, streaming platforms are becoming the main distributor of film content, so the research Zlatina Valchanova is not only timely and adequate, but also of great necessity. Besides all the merits listed so far, it should be noted that the dissertation has a high educational value.

I fully accept the attached contributions to the dissertation. Overall, the text has a contributory character.

Apart from the very minor remarks mentioned above, I have no major criticisms of the work of the doctoral candidate Zlatina Valchanova, and I consider her work to be excellently done.

In conclusion, based on the whole set of documents presented by the PhD student, as well as based on my excellent impression of the activities and personal qualities of Zlatina Valchanova, as well as of her scientific activities, I propose to the members of the scientific jury to award her the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and I vote with full conviction YES.

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