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EVALUATION OF ALEKSEI LOKHMATOV'S PhD DISSERTATION

A lot of effort has gone into this dissertation; its author demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of the field and has conducted ample research, including work in the archives, interviews, etc. The sheer scope of the submitted text is rather impressive. I can thus wholeheartedly recommend a solid “magna cum laude” (1.0).

Having said this, I am aware that the dissertation may well be seen by specialists in the field as not entirely original in terms of its contribution to existing knowledge, or indeed in terms of its overall interpretation of the most important public debates that took place in Poland during the first post-war decade (1945-1956). What follows are some

recommendations, some of which must be heeded before the dissertation is finalised; others could be reflected upon as the candidate turns the dissertation into a book.

The dissertation would benefit from indicating more directly where its novelty lies. At present, it often reads as a summative account of existing research, and it is sometimes difficult to ascertain how much of what is said is new, and how much relies on other scholars' accounts of the debates under consideration (and there is already, as Lokhmatov aptly demonstrates, formidable research on each of the strands of Polish intellectual history examined in the dissertation).

Similarly, I think the methodological part ought to be further developed in order to hone a more distinctive approach. Lokhmatov is right to voice dissatisfaction with 'contextualism', but a lot of the dissertation continues to move in the same methodological bedrock. The approach that draws on 'epistemic virtues' is promising, but in the dissertation, it is often diluted by traditional explanations that rely on the primacy of the political; "political epistemology" is not in essence a novel approach, it is a mere revival of the significance of the political horizon for how one interprets developments in Central and Eastern Europe. It is also important to see the debates that were unfolding in Poland at the time as *cross-disciplinary* rather than "interdisciplinary" (which is how they are considered in the dissertation). 'Cross-disciplinary' strikes me as a more accurate description of the nature of these debates, not least because they were not conducted so much (and certainly not solely) within or between established disciplines but across, and often also beyond, disciplines. This brings me to another vital point.

Lokhmatov is absolutely right to underscore, time and again, that the journals and magazines in which all these texts appeared (in the second half of the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s) were deliberately targeting an audience also outside of, or beyond, academia. One needs to take this finding to its logical conclusion and ask the question: in what capacity, and in what public role, did all these scholars participate in these debates? Lokhamatov begins to deliver on this when he promises, with reference to the conversations amongst Polish Catholics, to refer to them “episodically” as “intellectuals or public intellectuals” (p. 23), but this approach should be implemented across the dissertation, and not just “episodically”, because the public significance and relevance of these debates was such that they would actually recast those contributing to them into publicly engaged and committed figures. The prism of ‘history of science’, or even ‘history of knowledge’, would not do here. Once we acknowledge that many of these people were writing as scholars – but also as citizens and public intellectuals, we are able to address the more complex reality of overlapping and, at times, also conflicting ‘virtues’ – epistemic, but also civic and moral. A dissertation that attempts to offer a fuller differentiation of these different ‘virtues’, and of the different stakes the participants in these debates had – intellectual; institutionally-academic; political; ethical, would be even richer and could begin to refine, perhaps even challenge, the currently prevalent dichotomous account, according to which the intellectual history of the Central European Soviet-bloc countries was marked by continuity embedded in the reproduction of the pre-War intellectual and/or civic habitus, on the one hand, and by politically induced caesuras, on the other. The goal, however, is to go beyond this dichotomy by identifying the constantly re- and de-constructed discursive texture that enabled the

public life of ideas at that time. Lokhmatov's thesis holds the potential to do so if it makes sure that the different voices in which the participants in these discussions spoke, often simultaneously (as scholars, citizens, politicians, and public intellectuals), are discerned and brought to bear on how the respective positions are interpreted. Ultimately, the phrase "public debate" can only be lent proper historical reality if the changing statuses, identities, and stakes of the various participants are investigated in detail (a very good example that could be multiplied across the dissertation is Lokhmatov's nuanced discussion of Chałasiński's changing roles and views).

This brings me to my next point. I do wonder whether it may have been better to organise the dissertation around the personal and institutional biographies of two or three carefully selected key participants in these debates. Stefan distinctive, I think, would have been a very strong candidate. Not only because there is as yet no biography of Żółkiewski in Polish or any other language that I am aware of, but because he is a central figure in the post-war transition, including the period of Stalinisation (I'd actually prefer the term 'Sovietisation'). He held key positions of power (including as Minister for Higher Education and, before that, as founder of IBL [Instytut Badań Literackich] at PAN), and he is also crucial for understanding the role French culture played in post-war Poland (Żółkiewski was a Marxist, perhaps at times even a Stalinist, who later began introducing French Structuralism and semiotics to Poland; but even as a Marxist he believed, from the start, in a more integral culturalist explanation of literature). The current structure of the thesis facilitates a more *panoramic* approach, which is laudable in itself because of its breadth, but it tends to suppress the potential originality of the dissertation by forcing it to

rely too much on existing research and interpretations. Inevitably, when such a panoramic perspective is adopted, it is easy to get various details wrong. Let me adduce some examples.

The dissertation twice (n. 315 and p. 93) refers to Opoiaz as the “first formalist group” (1916), whereas the first one was actually the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1915 by Jakobson and his associates. When Żółkiewski refers to the “old Formalists” (quote on p. 92 in the dissertation), he does so not to disqualify them, but because they really were “old” for him in two important senses: 1) Because there have in the meantime been new developments in literary theory, such as Prague Structuralism, of which he was aware, and 2) Because in 1945/46 Żółkiewski was writing as someone who had already encountered the work of the Russian Formalists back in 1934-1939, in the context of the so called Wilno and Warsaw Circles, which already considered the Russian Formalists excellent but one-sided, for some of the participants in these two circles (especially those associated with the Warsaw Circle) would seek to marry Formalism and Marxist literary sociology. All of this is particularly visible in the 1930s articles of Żółkiewski’s friend, Dawid Hopensztand. Also, when Żółkiewski positions Russian Formalism alongside developments in the West, he does so because already in the 1930s scholars such as Manfred Kridl (the leader of the Wilno Circle) or Tadeusz Grabowski (at Poznań) would consider Formalism to be a wider European phenomenon, with its roots in German aesthetics and art history, later radicalised by the Russian Formalists. So the quotes from Żółkiewski would begin to make sense and be interpreted differently in this larger context of continuity with Polish literary studies of the 1930s. There is an English-

language book by Andrzej Karcz (“The Polish Formalist School and Russian Formalism”, 2002), which talks about some of this, and which should be consulted and added to the bibliography (I am also ready to help with important articles in Polish that discuss these matters). As Karcz reveals, the translations of articles by some of the Russian Formalists published in 1946-47 in “Kuźnica” and “Życie literackie” were not actually a new development; they, in fact, originated in an anthology of Russian Formalism that was ready back in 1939 but the printed set was destroyed in the War, and the translations could thus only be published after 1945. The suggestion in the dissertation that Polish literary scholars may have been unaware of the attacks against Formalism in Russia is not borne out by the facts: already in 1936, Czesław Zgorzelski (member of the Wilno Circle, later at Toruń University, and eventually at the Catholic University in Lublin) had published an article on these attacks in “Pion”.

Later in the dissertation (p. 248), Tynianov’s translated article “Tematyka komedii ‘Bieda s tym rozumem’” is introduced (“Kuźnica”, 1947, No. 40, pp. 7-8; Lokhamtov should perhaps have added that the title in Russian is “Siuzhet ‘Gore ot uma’”, and that the article was published posthumously in 1946, severely abridged in its 1947 Polish version). The accompanying comment reads: “Yury Tynyanov who, only two years earlier, had been characterised by Żółkiewski as an ‘old Formalist’ from the 1920s, explained to the Polish reader the literary tricks of the Russian poet and diplomat Alexander Griboyedov (1795-1829) in his prominent satirical poem ‘Woe from Wit’. Thus, the representation of the Soviet Union in the public sphere of post-war Poland became a self-representation”. To begin with, in the light of what I wrote earlier, the

appellation “old Formalist” is not a disqualifier and cannot be used as such in order to set up an opposition between “two years earlier” and “now”. Secondly, Tynianov’s article is not a piece of Formalist literary scholarship, strictly speaking; Tynianov wrote this article much later in his career, and in content and spirit its connection to Russian Formalism is rather mediated, nay tenuous. Crucially, Tynianov’s article is about Griboyedov, and it would be difficult to find in it evidence of ‘representation of the Soviet Union’ either way (because there isn’t an overtly political current in the article, and because it doesn’t address Soviet life as such). As for Polish readers’ knowledge of Russian literature after 1945, the somewhat random information provided in the dissertation should be supplemented with the valuable data contained in an early article by Maurice Friedberg (“Russian Literature in Postwar Poland: 1945-1958”, in *The Polish Review*, 1959, Vol. 4, pp. 33-45).

Similarly, Donald Rayfield has demonstrated that Marr’s father, despite the Scottish sounding surname, was actually English (p. 94). More importantly, Alpatov’s book, on which the dissertation relies, has been overtaken by more sophisticated interpretations of Marr’s work that reveal its significance not for historical linguistics or language typology as such but for cultural theory and history, and precisely from a para-Marxist perspective (especially Marr’s theory of stage-wise evolution of culture, whose different stages are sedimented in language). As a matter of fact, Dawid Hopensztand does quote in one of his pre-war articles (on Krasicki’s “Satyres”; published only in 1946) from Freidenberg (a follower of the Marr School), and he refers, tellingly, to her book on plot and genre which is not a piece of linguistic research as such but a much broader essay in the theory

and history of culture (I stand by to provide references that would help improve the discussion of Marr's work and its reception).

There are some other minor inaccuracies. It is perhaps not entirely justified to refer to Lukács in 1948 (the time of the Wrocław Congress) as “betrayed of socialism” from a Soviet perspective (p. 250). This qualification would come a few years later when Lukács would be accused of revisionism; in 1948, his standing was not yet as controversial. On him, n. 839 should either refer to the standard English-language biography by Kadarkay (or comparable works in German or Russian), or simply be deleted as the article in question does not furnish an overall examination of Lukács's life and work. The reference in n. 923 is very dated and needs to be replaced by recent research on the anti-cosmopolitan campaign (e.g. Kostyrchenko and/or others); the same is true of n. 1023: there is an excellent recent monograph on the Chinese-Soviet split (also from Princeton UP), and the reference to the 1962 book ought to be replaced accordingly; ns. 1083 and 1085 are identical, and one of them could easily be cut (the same is true of ns. 132 and 254 which are completely identical); n. 1148 may be seen by many readers as redundant; the explanation of the campaign against Alexandrov and the History of Western philosophy (p. 282: “rather a sign of the changes in Stalin's moods after the war”) is somewhat puzzling and one-sided, as is that of the existence of freedom of opinion within the FCP (p. 213: “the French did not have an administrative resource for unifying the opinion of all Party Members” – which flies in the face of the ‘basic virtues’ approach adopted by the dissertation); in ns. 794 and 796 Soviet historian Boris Porshnev is inexplicably referred to as ‘Mikhail Porshnev’; in the Bibliography, Karol Modzelewski's

surname is misspelt ('Modzielewski'); one wish one could find in the bibliography the very revealing interviews with Modzelewski and Werblan on 'Polska Ludowa' (2017). These minor errors come to suggest, along with several incomplete sentences, many typos, misleading word usage, missing page numbers or incomplete references, that the dissertation has been submitted in some haste; had the candidate been able to take an extra week or two to edit the text, most of this could have been easily avoided.

Still, none of this should detract from the fact that Lokhmatov has submitted a very knowledgeable, well-structured, and comprehensive examination of Polish intellectual life during the first post-war decade; as such it fully deserves recognition and praise. I greatly look forward to reading the book that will grow out of this dissertation.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G. Tihanov". The signature is written in a dark ink and is centered on the page.

Galina Tihanov (PhD; DPhil)

George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature

Queen Mary University of London