

Evaluation of master's thesis by Kirill Shidlovskiy

"Heroes of new Russia: analysis of character archetypes in the works of Alexey Balabanov"

In his master thesis, Kirill Shidlovskiy has chosen four titles from the filmography of one of principal Russian directors Alexey Balabanov, in which Shidlovskiy follows the genesis of heroes of the new Post-Soviet period, classifies them in the system of archetypes and describes (although it would be more advisable to analyse) what qualities these heroes presented to the audience.

The thesis is well readable. The author is able to formulate ideas quite clearly and at first sight, the text is logically structured. Three chapters are set between introduction and conclusion: „Theoretical basis“, „Methodology“, „Analytical part“. When looking more closely, it is nevertheless a little bit surprising that in the chapter called „Theoretical basis“ we find, apart from the overview of the development of the theory of archetypes, also a historical excursion into early Post-Soviet period and detailed description of Balabanov's life and his family background. It would seem to me to be more appropriate to describe the first part as the material, to argue the Balabanov's specific position in Post-Soviet cinematography (preferably supported by comparable facts – box office results, fans' reviews, best movies audience polls – everything accessible also online) and not only by simple statements (“Balabanov's genre films that had most influence on the audience and created a cult following“ – p. 35) and afterwards to choose the means, by which the material (director's filmography) would be researched.

In the chapter called Methodology, an unclarity in terminology seems to occur, because what the author writes in his texts is usually not called by the term Content analysis but Thematic analysis, which of course also researches „the content“ but not in the sense of ordering material (as the content analysis does) but in the sense of its interpretation, which the thematic analysis deals with.

As the motive for writing this work the author mentions the feeling of certain one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness of views of the western researchers on the period of the Post-Soviet cinematography and Balabanov's role in this period due to non-sufficient knowledge of the cultural-historical context. Compared to it, Shidlovskiy is convinced that he is able to approach the topic more directly because he has his „own experience with Russian society“. I am not capable to judge, to what extent – given his age – the author really draws from his own experience with the social perception of the chosen set of movies shot in 1997-2005. Yet, characteristics of the reception of the particular movies are formulated very vaguely („Everyone could relate to Balabanov's character. Everyone felt familiar with the situations he portrayed“ – p. 14) and quite a few errors appear in them, when, for example, the author claims that „Prostitution was, however, a new and vastly unknown thing for the Post-Soviet Russia“ - p.60. This is nonsense not only because the Soviet movie *Interdevochka* from 1989 about foreign currency prostitute was seen by 41.3 million viewers only in cinemas. The character of the prostitute, even though not so dominant, of course occurred in the cinematography of the previous Soviet Era; let us recall e.g. the cult series *Mesto strechi izmenit nelzya* (1979).

Surprisingly, the context of the reception of the movies by critiques in the main scientific journals is also absent in this thesis and thus, Shidlovskiy is basically the only speaker of his nation. An exceptional reference to an article of the journal *Iskusstvo kino* (Gusiatinskii, 2001) is mentioned by the author only as a gloss and he entirely evades the main idea of the critic that the movie *Brat 2* is in fact the reanimation of the Soviet past. This is the exact opposite of Shidlovskiy's interpretation who interprets the film as a completely self-contained universum, representing the order of the new age. Polemics with authoritative sources would essentially enrich the work.

Without any doubt, the greatest contribution of the thesis lies in its third chapter. Shidlovskiy can describe dominant features of a character by pertinent remarks, to define their mutual relations, and to outline their difference from their western parallels. He is also able to argue for choosing one motif / character or another within the given classification of archetypes.

References to the secondary literature are formally correct; they pertinently prop mainly the theoretical parts of the text. In the conclusion of the thesis, the author surprisingly claims his own discovery of the analogy between Balabanov's movies and Western scheme: „New Russian hero is taking matters in his own hands, much like the righteous lonely gunman in the Western movies. Such similarity surprisingly is not spoken about at all in the theoretical texts about new Russian cinema or about Balabanov's work we have encountered for the purposes of this research“ (p.63-64); But already in the introduction (p.15) he cites Florian Weinhold: „For the combined purposes of reaching larger audiences and engaging with developments in Russian society, this meta-narrative combines two primary genres: the gangster movie and, to some lesser degree, the Western.“ The quote come from Weinhold's *Path of Blood: The Post-Soviet Gangsters, His Mistress and Their Others in Aleksei Balabanov's Genre Films*, a book that was surely decisive for the inspiration of this thesis.

The thesis is written stylistically well and the number of typing errors does not exceed the norms, although make impression of unintentional jokes, as for example . „Dogam-95“ (p. 25) or „a prostitute with the golden hart“ (p. 24).

Even though the thesis in question is not always consistent and it sometimes misses academic framework, it is very clearly marked by author's determined effort to fulfill the aim of outlining the specifics of Russian identity through the mirror of Balabanov's movies in the most methodical possible way. The above mentioned imperfections question neither the author's potential for constructive thinking nor the decent quality of his thesis, whose problematic points may be attributed perhaps mainly to the lack of academic practice.

I recommend to evaluate this thesis with grade B.

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