

R E C E N S I O N

by Prof. D.Sc. Svilen Stefanov for the competition
for the academic position position of Associate Professor in 8.2. Fine Arts (poster, graphic
design of a book, calligraphy),
announced in SG 65/12.08.2022, with a single candidate
Assistant Professor Damyan Krasimirov Damyanov
(Department of Fine Arts, NBU).

The documentation submitted by the applicant contains the necessary information. The scientometric table of assistant professor Damyan Damyanov covers all the necessary indicators for participation in the competition. In it, all scientific and artistic achievements of the candidate are very clearly described and synthesized.

The theoretical part of the habilitation work of assistant professor Damyan Damyanov is on the topic "The visual translation of a literary text. Means of Expression and Figurative Language in Book Cover Design". Reading what he called an "extended summary", it is reasonable to assume that this candidate has a very serious practical and theoretical attitude to the relation of vision and text, to their interaction, shifting places and unexpected morphing.

What does "visual translation of a literary text" mean? We'd probably take it as a clever title with an obvious, deliberate gaming metaphor. But the more the reader progresses through the text, the more he realizes the accuracy of the metaphor used. Because, strictly speaking, the image cannot translate the word, and the reverse is a great pain (ask the art critics). But the masters of book cover design seem to be getting it.

Such a theme (word and image) is not new to the candidate, as I have been following his professional activity for years, and I also have a relatively recent memory of his dissertation defense, which was devoted to the interrelationships between text and image in poster art from the second half of XX century

However, this is primarily about the design of a book body (codex). The habilitation thesis contains the chapters: "First we see, then we read", "The clothes of the book as a historical character", "Graphic synthesis of the literary text", "Semantic presentation of the content", "Typographic solutions. The Letters That Paint' and 'The New Clothes of the Classics'.

The candidate's interests are primarily related to the problems of modern graphic design and its relationship to trends in cultural trends in the past and in the present. He clearly states that the examples discussed are drawn from his experience and accumulations in his

work over the past fifteen years. The habilitation text is clearly composed as a content and the names of the individual chapters legibly define the direction of research.

In the chapter "The clothes of the book as a historical character", assistant professor Damyan Damyanov clarifies some main historical moments of the history of the development of the book, starting from the appearance of the folded cars of the book (codex). And so to the book in modernity, where I would note that the role of Soviet constructivism is overexposed, in the sense that we can see an earlier avant-garde typography in futurism in Italy even before the First World War.

In the "Graphic Synthesis of Literary Text" part, the main thesis is that "genre, plot and various literary elements determine the graphic stylistics and techniques in the artistic design of a cover, rather than the same means of expression being imposed on the visual interpretation of a given literary work". An important author's addition to the claim that a book cover is an artistic work of literature is that a book cover is not, or rather should not be, an illustration of the content. Here, Assistant Professor Damyan Damyanov makes an interesting differentiation between illustrating a book and creating a book cover.

In the next chapter, "Semantic Representation of Content", it is clarified that the cover should not narrate the content, but rather synthesize it, not explain the text, but rather imply and offer an opportunity for reading by the viewer. The author gives examples from his work, both in the direction of deliberate semantic minimalism of the image, and through the accumulation and complex combination of different images. He rightly notes that organizing this type of composition into an aesthetic artistic whole is a challenge on several levels. All approaches are possible, since the cover is not a decoration or adornment of the book body, but an artistic work inspired by the author's text and should dress it visually through the use of appropriate means of expression.

In the chapter "Letters that draw" the principles of graphic synthesis between letter and image are systematized. Here, Assistant Professor Damyan Damyanov examines not only the cases when the letters are the only elements that graphically make up the cover, but pays special attention to the examples when they themselves become an image and thus fulfill both their role as signs of speech and the role of images. About his work in this direction, he writes: "In the cover for "Metamorphosis" I used almost entirely only letters. The book is a collection of the best stories of Franz Kafka, but in the artistic decision I decided to work with the most famous of them - the story of Gregor Zamza, who after a restless night wakes up to find that he has been transformed into a huge, flailing helpless leg in the air an insect. The composition is dominated by the two initials of the author's name - letters F and K. The free writing of their shape with a soft brush and their specific endings create a strong association for the shape of a wriggling cockroach. The rest of the typography is solved by a rational serif font, and in addition, a rough texture of gray paper is used for the background, which recreates the feeling of misery and helplessness not only in this story, but in the entire work of the great Czech writer." Thus, in the work of Damyan Damyanov, there is a systematization of the methods of working with the font, the ways of modification and deformation, the transformation of the letter from an abstract sign into a concrete image.

As. Dr. Damyan Damyanov illustrates his reasoning with specific examples from his work, which I will not list here, because they are in all references and applications to the habilitation, and because they are respectably numerous. But I will note that it is a real pleasure to look at the attached "Evidence" containing the most interesting of the applicant's work in the field of book design. In it, the recipient encounters a complex combination of interesting visual finds and ideas and thoughts, built with respectful visual skills and typographic culture.

In the conclusion of his habilitation thesis, Associate Professor Damyan Damyanov quite rightly notes: "The role of the book cover changes in its various historical stages. First, she is a protector - during the years when the book was the most valuable material possession, capable of kindling a fire in both hearts and minds. Then she becomes connected to the content and draws from it images that add an extra layer to the experience of the book-reader interaction. The cover then also becomes a conqueror of the reader's insatiable minds and eyes and expands both the means of expression of which it is composed and our perceptions.

These days, a book cover is probably all of these, or rather a bit of all of these. And on top of that is the supreme challenge that the design of the book gives additional value to the work and is not just packaging, but content in itself."

There is no way to disagree with this, and in conclusion, it can be reasonably claimed that habilitation papers are presented here, containing significant facts. The candidate's presentation is correct and valuable as a scientific interpretation and presented artistic evidence. Therefore, I strongly suggest to the respected scientific jury to award Assistant Professor Damyan Damyanov the academic title of " Associate Professor in 8.2. Fine Arts ".

Prof. Ph.D. Svilen Stefanov

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