

Statement prepared by the supervisor of Valentina Bagozzi
relating to their studies and dissertation entitled
„The Women’s Decameron as a legitimation of women’s
authorship“
submitted in 2023 at Germanic and Slavic Studies

In 2019/2020 Valentina Bagozzi launched a project dedicated to the work of Yulia Nikolayevna Voznesenskaya (Leningrad 1940 - Berlin 2015), a Russian poet, prose writer, human rights activist, and member of Leningrad's underground literary circles. The dissertation was designed to focus in particular on "The Women’s Decameron", applying feminist literary criticism to it.

During the first two years of her Ph.D. study, Valentina Bagozzi successfully completed all required courses and engaged in other academic activities. Her stay in Prague could not be realized due to the pandemic, but she attended online courses during which she was one of the motivated and well-prepared students. She fully demonstrated her ability to apply feminist criticism to chosen topics. Some of the publication activities, as well as contributions to academic or organizational activities relating to her topic were successfully fulfilled.

The candidate submitted the first version of her dissertation as scheduled at the end of the second semester of her third year of study. The result was somewhat questionable, revealing some problems, mainly related to the methodology and the structure of the thesis. Similarly, the new supervisor on the Italian side, Professor Emilio Mari, and the two external evaluators noted deficiencies in the composition, especially an excessive number of digressive topics and a less-than-coherent subject matter. All the evaluators came to the same conclusion: the theme should be formulated more organically. They stated the need for a critical and theoretical reassessment that would link the different topics. The candidate was told that the central question needed to be rethought and was

asked to find a kind of 'backbone' that would make the very essence of her text clearer and more convincing

At her request, Valentina Bagozzi was given additional time to revise and rewrite her dissertation. The new version was completed in September 2023. The final version shows clear progress. The candidate managed to avoid previous shortcomings of the text, such as the rambling of ideas and the multiplicity of topics. She succeeded in revealing the specificity of Voznesenskaya's book and in discussing it from clearer and more comprehensible methodological and interpretative perspectives.

Although a wide range of aspects are still applied, the final version of the dissertation seems much more homogeneous than the first draft. I also appreciate the inclusion of some archival material and documents from the Research Centre for East European Studies (University of Bremen) concerning textual variants. In terms of the formal aspect, some typos and minor formal shortcomings remained in the final version, but to a much lesser extent.

The separate sections of the thesis focus on the ideological and sociological background and on the interpretation and analysis of the book. The first area is, from my point of view, much better explored than the second. Both Russian women's writing and a specific conception of Soviet feminism differing from that developed in the West have been convincingly if briefly, portrayed, as well as Voznesenskaya's self-definition as a writer in her public statements and other related topics.

In the text-centric chapters, however, the dissertation deserves some further improvement. The sections devoted to narration and characters are too descriptive. Links to Boccaccio's Decameron have been discussed only very briefly. Also, the application of narratological terms is not always convincing, and the concept of Lanser's narratological study of the female voice is not, in my view, fully integrated with the interpretation. The following questions are intended as a stimulus to the dissertation defense:

1. On the manifestation of the femininity in the language, V. Bagozzi writes: "Helène Cixous and Luce Irigaray convey this idea through a large use of neologisms and puns in their experimental critical works; said the transformation of language on a lexical and syntactic level serves as a subversive tool, which intends to distance women's writing from the dominant male-centered discourse" (p. 41) What place do tools such as language transformation and stylistic experiments in general have in the book? And what relation to literary experiments applied in „male“ fiction can be found here?

2. V. Bagozzi speaks about "the identification of The Women's Decameron as a legitimation of women's agency and authorship" (p. 43). Are these entities only reflected in the thematic layers of the text or do they also affect its other stratas?

3. Some narratological terms seem to be used confusingly, or, more precisely, it is not declared which conception has been used: "The authorial and personal voice are generally intended as opposite categories, since the first is designated as the authoritative fictional narrator's voice (heterodiegetic) and the latter as the less authoritative character's voice, therefore homodiegetic." (p. 103) Is it possible to clarify this statement?

4. French feminists are convinced that writing (speaking) could and should serve as a starting point for women's self-awareness and a new formulation of femininity. In this respect, is it not surprising that the book is written in a rather traditional manner? Doesn't it paradoxically display a certain stereotyped narrative?

Despite all the abovementioned shortcomings, I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *passed*.

26 Oct 2023, Prague

Mgr., Hana Kosáková, PhD.