

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Nikolay Aretov Aretov,
Professional field 05.04.02. Bulgarian literature
Institute for Literature, BAS
on the academic output for participation in a competition for the academic position of
“Associate Professor” in Professional field 3.5. Social communications and informatics
sciences (Criticism and Critic’s practices),
promulgated in State Gazette no. 93/26. 11. 2019,
by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of journalism and mass communication
with sole candidate Marin Hristov Bodakov, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor Marin Hristo Bodakov, PhD is born in 1971. He graduated in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” with a degree in Bulgarian philology. In 2014 he became PhD in Professional field 3.5. Social communications and informatics sciences (Journalism – Culture in mass media) with a dissertation entitled “Politics of presenting Bulgarian literature in the printed media, during the 1990s. Some problems of self-reflection of criticism”, later published as a book entitled “Who ‘Killed’ the criticism?...” (Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2019)

M. Bodakov is a lecturer from 2006, an Assistant Professor in the Departement of Press and book publishing in the Faculty of journalism and mass communication. I am only indirectly acquainted with his activity as an explant university lecturer, very popular among his students. In the meantime Bodakov worked as editor in the periodical “Bulgarski mesechnik” (1997-2000), in the newspaper “Kultura” (2000-2018) and in its successor “K” (2018-2019), he is also co-owner in the “Tochica” publishing house. Between 2006 and 2009 he was an adviser on cultural issues in the Desk of the Speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament. M. Bodakov is also an active literary critic, author of several collections of poems, compiler of some critical and journalistic anthologies; he is honored with several prizes for poetry and criticism.

For the competition, M. Bodakov presents his monograph “Criticism and Sincerity. The case of Yordan Makariopolski” (Veliko Tarnovo: Faber, 2019) and 13 articles (some of them, in fact, reviews and essays). The list that he offers shows 6 quotations in monographs and scholarly reviewed collections of text and more than 10 in other types of publications.

Bodakov’s articles’ and his critical activity as a whole demonstrate a good taste for literature, goodwill and a clear hierarchy of values. I do not share all the principals of this hierarchy – the axiomatic distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, and also his longing for

a great national cultural space in which media play an essential role (an idea proclaimed by many others). It is interesting to read now the newly published book “Who ‘Killed’ the criticism?...”, dedicated to the 1990s and written probably in the next decade, in order to look for the trends analyzed in it, to check what really happened with its implied fears and prognoses. For me, subjectively, it was very interesting also, who are the authorities in criticism that the author follows or rejects.

The main text with which M. Bodakov applies in the competition is the monograph “Criticism and Sincerity. The case of Yordan Makariopolski”. This book is without any doubt an interesting, valuable work that offers a floor for a debate about different problems, connected not only with the evolution of criticism but also with the different notions about Bulgarian culture as a whole. Despite that Bodakov striving to write more as journalist and essayist, distinguishes his work from the traditional presentation of the life and work of his object, he nevertheless succeeds to build an interesting portrait of Yordan Marinopolski an even, to a certain degree, to infect at least some of the readers with his own admiration towards the critic. Including some information about the sister Zoya Stavreva Marinopolska is useful for the study, and the personal drama of the critic is presented discreetly (maybe too discreetly). The narration follows the universal (romantic) myth about the unacknowledged genius, about the marginal artist, enters a battle with the great figures. However, unlike the lesser brother in folk-tales or like Biblical David Marinopolski did not win in his clash with the lawgivers in literature in his time – Pencho Slaveykov and Dr. Krastyo Krastev.

The scholar aspires to read “the center through the affirmations of the periphery” and through the eyes of those who lose the battle. (p. 4) This is an idea intensively launched by postcolonial criticism for some decades. Also useful is the applying of the opposition ‘Imperial judge – local judge’ offered by Michael Walzer. On the other, hand the problematization of some critics (not only Krastev but also Al. Kyosev, Pl. Doynov, etc) paralleled with the complete approval of the thesis of some others (from V. Belinsky to Sl. Ivanov) may generate some objections. The same is true even in a greater degree for “Who ‘Killed’ the criticism?...”, where, except the easy to guess opinions for a dissertation and for an editor in a periodical, the book follows some ideas, not always original, from authors, such as N. Ivanov, M. Petrova, M. Kostova-Panayotova, L Stoyanova.

Critical reinterpretation of the circle ‘Misal’ and the problematization of its place in the evolution of the Bulgarian culture is an actual task and M. Bodakov undertakes with it with ambition, and excellent knowledge, especially about Marinopolski. The main conclusion is that

the four members of the circle, more precisely P. P. Slaveykov and Dr. Krastev have become an object of a sometimes-apologetical interpretation for several decades. It is possible, of course, to widen the context of the conflicts in literature from the 1890s and of the early 20th century. ‘Misal’ not only legislated but was also challenged by many writers, not only by Iv. Vazov, but also by S. S. Bobchev; outside of the narrow circle there were other important critics, not only Marinopolski. The text mentions the important figures such as St. Minchev, V. Pundev, Alb. Gechev; one more expanded presentation of their work will offer a more complicated picture of the period. Especially Minchev had a different approach towards ‘cultural transfer’ (in fact, about the 19th century) and his ideas are now adopted by the literary scholarship.

The ‘imported’ character of the Bulgarian modernism, especially the ideas launched by P. P. Slaveykov and Dr. Krastev, is a very interesting problem, discussed by many scholars. M. Bodakov is looking for a different approach towards it, sometimes he is inclined to overestimate the ‘foreign’ character of the modernist’s ideas that have to do with the ‘individualism’ and especially their relations with German literature and philosophy. These relations are well known and openly proclaimed. Nevertheless, one could ask if they are something specific ‘German’ (and opposed to the ‘Russian’) or something universal. On the other hand, some of the concepts of the circle are highlighted and even generalized. It is true that Slaveykov and Krastev proclaimed *l’art pour l’art* and uttered slighting words about the readers and the ‘beans-eaters’. And these words are quoted precisely by Bodakov. Still, do they are the whole through about the attitude of Slaveykov and Krastev towards the literature and the public. Bodakov does not miss the opportunity to comment carefully on some other statements of the authors of ‘Misal’ and especially the contradictions in their words; nevertheless, he too often goes back to their proclamation of *l’art pour l’art* and the full rejection of the popular poet. As the author justifiably remarks: “The whole Slaveykov’s conception is marked by a discreet layer of nationalism.” (p. 127) And, also with a good reason: “How a person who wants to be alone is a part of a group? “ (p. 138) Not without arguments but slightly exaggerated is in my eyes it the accent on the Krastev’s ‘will to power’. Also debatable is to what degree and when Petko Slaveykov was “openly a power figure” (p. 150). It seems to me that the ideas extracted from “Rameau's Nephew” fully correspond with the concept of Denis Diderot.

For me, the most interesting in the Bodakov’s interpretation of the circle ‘Misal’ was the problematization of its ‘modernity’, the revealing of the ‘traditional’ and ‘national’ in it. (Something that, as Bodakov notes, contradicts the idea of *l’art pour l’art*.) Not less interesting are the observations on one problem with which literary history deal very cautiously – the internal

tensions in the circle and especially the specific place of Yavorov in it. Another appealing issue, marked in the book, are the complicated relations in the Krastev's family.

The obvious contribution of the monograph is the in-depth analysis of the Marinopolski's work – not only his criticism but also his essays journalistic articles and personal letters. Especially valuable are the letters that are an object of interpretation for the first time. They reveal curious details of how Marinopolski thinks and acts. Most impressive is the letter to Yavorov: “With my fable forces I enter a battle with Dr. K and Pencho. But I am afraid that someone could think that I am in the camp of Ivan Vazov and Kiril Hristov who I disdain.” (p. 93) However, despite that titanic clash (one could as about the psychological complex behind it) he nevertheless is published in their periodical.

The oeuvre of this author has not been analyzed so precisely yet. Bodakov is acquainted with the whole literature on that topic and refers to it (in the first place the highly valued by him Sl. Ivanov), but also argues with some of the existing theses of Iv. Bogdanov is close to the leftist's ideas. (As Bodakov reasonably notes, the aim was to ‘rehabilitate’ Marinopolski; on the other hand, distinguishing Marinopolski from these ideas and *narodniks* also has to do with its context.)

Based on the highly evaluated ideas of Marinopolski, Bodakov launches his notion about criticism as a specific cultural activity (in the benefit of the society). According to him, one main merit that he traces in Marinopolski's texts is the ‘sincerity’. Probably this is a precondition but hardly a suffusion condition for serious criticism. It is also probable that ‘meta-criticism’ (meaning critic of criticism) is some sort of higher form of the genre, but it seems to me that in it predominate text with easy to guess conclusions and the articles that follow the political trend of the time.

There are some exaggerated or not poorly founded statements. Such as: “in other words “Misal” is imposible without “Zvezda” (p. 78).

Conclusion

Assistant Professor Marin Hristo Bodakov' application fully corresponds to all requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and its and Rules and Regulations. I appreciate high the critical, journalistic and scholar's activity of Marin Bodakov, PhD. The researches presented in this competition and his successful works as a university teacher fully convinced me to give a positive assessment of the candidate's

academic activity and ask Academic Council at Sofia University to award him the title of professor.

30 March 2020

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