

Examiner's Assessment

by Prof. Plamen Dimitrov Shulikov, PhD, (Member of the Academic Jury appointed by the order RD 31-705 of 13.12.2019 by the Rector of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia) of the materials presented by Senior Assistant Marin Hristov Bodakov regarding the selection procedure (State Gazette, issue 93 of 26.11.2019) for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional area 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Criticism and Critical Practice)

There are but few texts written with the purpose of academic promotion, which manage to preserve the emotional wholeness and the author's bias under the strict genre requirements and procedural constraints. They are rather an honest exception. One such text is Marin Bodakov's monograph (**M. Bodakov. Criticism and sincerity. The case of Jordan Marinopolski. Veliko Turnovo: Faber, 2019**). The author's own critical credo is so closely reflected in the first part of the title of the book that somehow naturally, without deliberate efforts, it is reflected in the phrase addressed to Marinopolski, to be tautologically confirmed in a completely possible reflexive extension – 'sincerely about the critical sincerity'. The claim that the author is reflected to some extent at his object of study, one does not need to resort to over-interpretative approaches (e.g. Marin B. writes about J. Marinopolski). While specifying the scope of his research, M. Bodakov himself noted the inevitable artistic incarnation into the object of study in such cases, the inevitable identification with it, calling it 'shy identification' (p. 8). It may contain the gist of Oscar Wilde's idea of the critic as an artist, (openly embraced in Bulgaria by I. Meshekov), contrary to the paradoxical claim that 'criticism is beyond sincerity'. There might even be echoes of its late methodological metamorphosis in K. Stanislavski's system. In M. Bodakov's work, however, the ability to incarnate himself is biographically determined as well. Both he and Jordan Marinopolski, as well as some other important characters (Zoya Stavreva, Kiril Hristov, Slavcho Paskalev, Dimitar Babev, Ivan Bogdanov, Nikolai Genchev, etc.), are from Turnovo, while others (Kiril Hristov and Boris Hristov) studied in Tarnovo. The possible suspicion that I am reproaching the author for his regionalist sentiment will be parried in advance, recalling an important historical fact, which, by the way, is bypassed in the book (probably for chronological reasons), although many of its pages are devoted to the blatantly asymmetrical relations between the capital and the province as the invariable and sadly antinomic topoi of our recent literary history. It was in Turnovo in 1934 that the Union of Bulgarian Writers from the Province was established. This 'separatist' act against the Union of Bulgarian Writers of 1913, oddly coinciding with the end of the political partisanship in Bulgaria for a decade, is a desperate attempt to at least partially restore the value equilibrium on the national literary map, to parry it, or at least to soften the fierce metropolitan literature-centrism. What is more, several years later, in the magazine 'Grebets', H. Borina praises the federal model adopted in the administrative system of Germany, declaring it the only counteraction to the 'disastrous 'in any respect centralization' (H. Borina). I hope it doesn't sound too pathetic, but in the context of the article this rapturous

praise might be conceived as a utopian longing for some sort of axiological federalism in literature. Here, I think, lie the real roots of Bodakov's biographical autoreflex. He chooses to focus on the iconic figure of Y. Marinopolski as a critic of the 'second order' (or 'magistrate', according to M. Walser), not so much to bring a filial contribution to the shaping impact of the native micro-context, but to initiate a debate on the historical fate of our criticism. The reason is well known - the elite value norm becomes a working, effective axiological criterion only when it is saturated by real codification of the so-called 'average' user level. That is the reason why M. Bodakov chooses an unconventional perspective on the interpretation of the norm - from the position of the despised periphery, where its most probable stochastic confirmations are scattered. The cognitive specialization of the author - a professional critic himself - resonates with a barely perceptible confession in the narrative, protected by the most appropriate genre choice in this case - intellectual biography. Quite separate, very meaningful and too broad is the question of why intellectual biography is a rare genre in our country. Is it precisely the actual approach to the still hypothetical native history of ideas that Nikola Georgiev dreamed of? However, his appeal to 'human writing' goes beyond the limits of stylistics; he can also be read as 'writing about someone's life', as a biography. This, in my opinion, is one of the significant contributions of M. Bodakov.

In order to create a real critical portrait of Y. Marinopolski, he constantly searches for parallels, collects them, unfolds them, weaves them into an optimally consistent picture for the subject. One such example is the particularly successful microhistorical sketch for Marinopolski's sister, Zoya Stavreva, whose dissertation on compassion as the basis of Schopenhauer's morality will be reasonably interpreted by the author as a very likely impetus for the forthcoming critical 'escapism' of her brother towards ethics. Such is the curious parallel between the idea of the writer's sincerity in Boris Hristov ('Honest Cross') and the assumption that the thesis of the poet from Veliko Turnovo University is dedicated precisely to the apologist of critical sincerity Y. Marinopolski (unfortunately only a guess, though it can be verified). A similar indirect argument to the idea of the voluntary separation of Marinopolski from the feisty critical feast, M. Bodakov identifies in the unpublished translation of Thomas More's *Utopia* by Marinopolski (probably the first in our country). There the conviction that physical labor is the recommended moral refuge of the intellectual is in line with the position of Marinopolski himself with regard to the 'drowsy perception of physical labor by ... the intelligentsia' ("Clear Skies. To the Young"), which corresponds to the 'voluntary' asceticism in B. Hristov's poetry. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I will conclude the statement with a bypassing but exact analogy which M. Bodakov makes between the revealed by P. Slaveykov and Y. Marinopolski attitude towards compassion in Yavorov, on the one hand, and, the empathy of G. Gospodinov, which has acquired the status of substrate value in his work on the other. Here the parabola is concluded visually through the famous photographic embodiment of the new four writers from 1995, where G. Gospodinov replaced Yavorov.

Of course, in Bodakov's historical narrative are inevitable the updated perspectives on native criticism, since in general historical retrospections are almost never an end in itself or inspired only by a self-sufficient love for the muse of history. They almost always keep an eye

on the current, or at least are covertly motivated by it. P. Bourdieu argues that the most typical design strategies are those that, aimed at retrospective reconstruction of the past, are actually applied to present needs (P. Bourdieu. *Sociology of Social Space*). I would mention only one, but telling reference to our contemporary criticism. The author mentions the famous manifest texts of A. Kyosev (*Radical Manifesto*, 1989, and *With the help of a hammer. Towards a critique of guild ideology*, 2004) as illustrations of the once denounced by Marinopolski elitist skepticism of the artistic value of Bulgarian literature: ‘they [the skeptics - P. Sh.] seek ... to lower the price of everything that surrounds us, so that they may rise up in the eyes of others’ (p. 33). I will refrain from commenting on the matter of the apparently unfinished debate. I would just like to remind that in his second pessimistic manifesto A. Kyosev quotes M. Bodakov, who thinks that “Bulgarian literature is still to happen” (M. Bodakov. *Едри бележки към 90-те// Език и литература*, 2004, с. 35). A possible interpretation is that if it is yet to come, it is not yet available, at least in this sense A. Kyosev used the quote. Without underestimating the nature of the controversy, I will refer to the late N. Georgiev, who invariably welcomed any literary dispute as a symptom of literary vitality. Among the symptoms of the natural, free-flowing, unsteady literary life, the most inevitable, the most intrinsic (I completely agree with M. Bodakov) is the ‘will to power in the literary canon’ (p. 254). A sense of the possible literary transformations of the will to power (F. Nietzsche) is presumed in Zoya Stavreva, who worked on his immediate predecessor A. Schopenhauer. This keen sense in J. Marinopolski, who commented on the phenomenon, is quite visible. This is what, contrary to M. Bodakov’s opinion, Y. Milchakov and M. Enchev claim in one of their co-authored articles about S. Marin Paskalev’s close friend and associate of S. Marinovski (J. Milchakov, M. Enchev. *Slavcho Paskalev - the critic // Literary Thought*, 2010, Issue 2). If a truce is possible on this point, I would add that the ‘will to power in the literary canon’ is more a power impulse not of the rule-maker, but of the authority, of the arbiter elegantiarum in a conditionally distinct cognitive, so to speak, ‘meritocratic’ context, which fiction by definition should be. Anyone would like to make a recommended anthological summary of literary masterpieces on the basis of their own value criteria with the very probable intention of laying the foundation of their personal symbolic power through the ‘effect of theory’ (from Greek θεώρημα - appearance, spectacle , according to P. Bourdieu), that is, to impose his vision (P. Bourdieu). In our literature, M. Walser’s notions of ‘imperial judge’, ‘magistrate judge’ have far more than just metaphorical potential, as Dr. Krastev’s self-determination holds that he is a ‘judge of the current’ as a critic. A perfectly possible number of literary ‘legislators’ with a law degree, such as V. Vasilev, B. Delchev, T. Zhechev, somehow literalized the supposedly literary purpose of Walser’s ideas to cast doubt on their impartial coexistence (at least in the personal biographies of the critics mentioned) with the notion of the legal norm as an irrevocable imperative governing the value system of our native literature, so to speak, *de jure*, and the critical sanction (God forbid!) - as a judgment based on a kind of critical Penal Code. It is precisely the vague sense of danger (here I do not mean only the ‘shadowy literary criticism’ to use the words of N. Georgiev, or ‘Sicherungsbereich Literatur’) that accompanies the critical act, insofar as it is painfully understood as parasitizing on the body of art, as Zoil, the ‘rhetorical dog’ who cuts the flesh of the defenseless philanthropist author. And if this macabre picture of the literary field seems exaggerated, I hope there would be no objection to the more cautious formulation that the

authentic appearance would be, to put it mildly, innocently idyllic, similar to ordinary communication, in which any viewpoint seeks supremacy. Is this the reason why the desire of the very young K. Krastev to play the role of V. Belinsky is considered by his classmate T. Vlaykov strange; or why Marinopolski sees in K. Velichkov's review for A. Strasimirov's 'Troubled Time' 'boasting and haughtiness' (p. 59)? From a similar standpoint to the defining nature of communication, even 'hard-hitting' critical practices, otherwise justifiably disturbing with their reluctance to speech admissibility, appear somehow within the norm. What about Dr. Krastev himself, who in his crusade against literature tendency becomes a measure of tendency, albeit critical? In short, as much as it resembles eristic polemics, critical controversy should not cause ethical obstruction if it does not go beyond the limits of specific arguments. Thus, behind Marinopolski's opinion that "the import of literary theory in our country must know and respect the local literary practice" (p. 6), transpires the calm impartiality of academic literary studies from the end of the 19th - beginning of the 20th century, recognizable in A. N. Veselovski's undisputable claim the 'theory depends on the material'. However, Marinopolski's painful perception that "critics are the gatekeepers to the literary journals" (p. 33) is clearly directed against nonspecific, value criteria - geographical (capital / province), group, product placement, native advertising (e.g. Strashimirov writes a self-review in 'Prag', p. 47; P.P. Slaveikov asks Marinopolski to write a 'review' for him, to recommend him to the teachers, p. 189), etc. It is this discrediting touch in the portrayal of our former literary-critical manners that intensifies both the pathos in M. Bodakov's historical narrative and the hypothesis that appears between his lines that these manners are projected on our present literary situation. His tensions (not to call them scandals) rise, at least lately, largely as a consequence of either group confrontations or attempts to predetermine results of significant literary competitions, or the pursuit of control of specialized media, or of publishing or broadcast favoritism, or else out of frankly political allied feuds. The real axiological criteria are subjected to severe external to literature pressure, and even if some sober-minded interpreter tries to rehabilitate them, they are now accused of either 'parental control' or 'academicism', most often from circles with a dubious notion of correct ethical 'Homeland' and with even more doubtful dislike for the symbolic prestige of academic titles, but in the same time without much interest in the difficult promotion procedures for their legal attainment. In such a context, the literary critic's ethical thesis of critical integrity, critical sincerity, congruence (or simply speaking, unity of words and deeds) has the power of a lightweight weapon directed against massive artillery fire. At the same time, M. Bodakov's thesis about critical sincerity is a precise definitive hit, as far as the literary motivation of J. Marinopolski is concerned, with his constant seeking of support in ethics. It is from this position that Marinopolski is perplexed by the otherwise human inclination of Dr. Krastev to favor, "praise some people at the expense of others" (p. 101), with a moral resistance to take on Procrustean evaluation sins. Marinopolski is also defenseless in the face of the too human Pencho Slaveykov's, "split between the critic who loves to strike and the man who loves to caress, to encourage" (p.212). It is difficult for him to understand the competitive attitude of P.P. Slaveikov to Yavorov, quite calmly and impartially interpreted later by M. Arnaudov (M. Arnaudov. The story of a ballad. The folk song motif of Pavleta Delia and young Pavletitsa in P. K. Yavorov and P. P. Slaveikov // Prolom, 1923, vol. 5-6). Finally, ethical temptations influenced by Rousseau lead Marinopolski out of the field of operative literary criticism.

Perhaps this outcome is quite natural, at least such a hypothesis outlines O. Wilde's belief that 'criticism is above sincerity' - not insincere, not underestimating sincerity, but, so to speak, 'over-sincere', i.e. masterful, striving for technical skill as the authentic essence of art (τέχνη), which skill is in fact the very interpretive criticism practiced by "the literary critic [who - P. Sh.] is the second poet" (p. 42). These are indeed the words that Marinopolski used.

In conclusion, I think it is fair to admit that I would have a hard time concealing my formalistic biases, especially to the question 'how?' (e.g. "How is Gogol's *Overcoat* made" or "How are verses made?") as the most emblematic explicator of the true value criteria in literature. I hope that this candid acknowledgment will be seen not as an obstruction to the proposed interpretive approach, but simply as a humble personal contribution to the ethical thesis of critical sincerity.

On the basis of the monograph presented by the author, the sufficient number of his publications on the topic, from his previous qualification procedure up to now, the fulfilled administrative criteria under this procedure, his academic professionalism in the field of literary criticism, demonstrated through many years of critical practice with profuse production, I propose to the Honorable quorum that Senior Assistant Professor Marin Hristov Bodakov be awarded the Academic Position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Criticism and Critical Practices).

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