

Review

by

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Department

regarding participation in the selection procedure, published in the State Gazette No. 93 of 26.11.2019, for the academic position of Associate Professor in the following higher education field: 3. Social, economic and legal *sciences* , division 3.5. Public communication and information science (Criticism and critical practice)

Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University

**Information about the procedure:**

One candidate has submitted an application for the position of Associate Professor advertised in the State Gazette No. 93 of 26.11.2019 – Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Marin Hristov Bodakov. This appointment aims to meet the needs of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication for a faculty member with a habilitation in this area. All submitted paperwork is in compliance with the relevant requirements. The candidate also duly meets the National Benchmarks.

**Information about the candidate:**

Marin Bodakov has made a name for himself as one of Bulgaria's foremost literary critics. There is hardly a Bulgarian author of note on whom Marin Bodakov has not published or whose books he has not analysed in a most perceptive and professional manner. What is more, he has always exhibited a penchant for more marginalised authors and literary phenomena, in an attempt to cultivate a certain normality for this domain. Over the years, this has made him

an authority in his field and a critic whose opinion is valued and sought after. This fact becomes evident from his work for outlets like “A Bulgarian Monthly”, “Kultura”, as well as “K.”. I lay greater stress on this point because Marin Bodakov’s experience and empirical work informs his theoretical research, lending it wider applicability and a practical dimension. Such a quality is indispensable in the field which he has chosen for his academic development and teaching career.

The statement above receives support from a number of prestigious awards which Marin Bodakov has received, including “Hristo G. Danov” and “Knight of the Book”, as well as the numerous citations of his publications, his editorial work on a number of fiction books, or various invitations to moderate book launches, etc. This is essentially a candidate with his own unmistakable persona who has carved out his own niche.

### **Research content and contribution:**

For the purpose of this selection procedure, Marin Bodakov has presented a habilitation monograph entitled “Criticism and Sincerity. The Case of Yordan Marinopolski“, as well as 10 scholarly papers published in peer-reviewed journals. I would like to focus mostly on the monograph, since this is the main requirement for being appointed to the position of Associate Professor.

The monograph “Criticism and Sincerity. The Case of Yordan Marinopolski” at first glance appears to focus solely on the Bulgarian tradition, exploring major topics and debates in the history of Bulgarian literature, and above all, Bulgarian criticism. But there is more to it than appears on the surface. Even though there are no direct claims to this effect or references to contemporary theories, Marin Bodakov’s survey fits in with leading trends in current literary studies. Those include the deeper exploration of the marginal(ised) and the alternative introduced in cultural and post-colonial studies, as well as the desire to reassess

values and canons, turning hierarchies upside down. This work likewise follows the line of thinking of history through narrative, through the history of language, as done by researchers like Reinhart Koselleck or literary theorists like Paul Ricœur or Umberto Eco. For Bodakov, interpretation and language are the essential evidence which can help reconstruct the historic. Last but not least, Marin Bodakov's study has been influenced by the principles of New Historicism, more specifically the idea that texts should be contextualised, whereas contexts should be textualised in order to determine what amalgams and absorptions define the literary and fictional. More generally, this work is situated within Foucault's tradition, which explores the knowability of historic processes without "taking detours" to the marginalised. All of this makes Marin Bodakov's research modern and up-to-date, making a contribution to Bulgarian literary history, which for the most part still tends to follow the line of "grand narratives".

I shall not comment on the concrete literary image of the time outlined in the book, though it most certainly brings to light plenty of fresh details about the debates and the scandals from the first decades of the twentieth century, in this way giving us a more complete picture of the genesis and lifecycle of Bulgarian Modernism. All of this will undoubtedly concern the historians of Bulgarian literature who choose to go back to that period in time. Instead, I would rather comment on the references to criticism and the critic's work which those debates bring to the fore, as this is a topic that has not received much attention in the literature so far. In order to illustrate these issues, Marin Bodakov has chosen the topic of sincerity, which, it is important to note, for a while now has featured in his wider output, including book reviews in the popular press. Focusing on the person, output and objections of Yordan Marinopolski, Marin Bodakov poses the question of the possible directions criticism can take – it can either be authoritative, sometimes morphing into self-promotion or a way of settling old scores; or it can be genuine and sincere, aiming to stay true to personal

preferences and not to transgress the bounds of ethics. Singling out those two possible pathways does not mean that authoritative criticism is necessarily dishonest and wrong or that sincere criticism is necessarily good. Neither does it mean that Marin Bodakov is trying to discredit Dr. Krustev as a critic; rather, he is trying to present the point of view of one of Krustev's contemporaries regarding his figure, exploring how it reverberated, what objections were raised, etc., thereby enhancing literary history and giving a voice to the marginalised.

But the question of sincerity has a number of further dimensions – what compromise is allowed, does sincerity always elude winners, can the critic's life coincide with the life of the person, is Roland Barthes right to point out (a claim also indirectly made in Bodakov's study) that the critic often reads in order to write his or her own texts without being interested in what he or she is reading, whereas a reader reads for fun and is therefore always true to the book. However, one cannot ignore the fact that in our modern world, where everyone thinks they are an author, where readers lightly dismiss classics on Goodreads because they find them dull and stupid, the idea of sincerity turns out to be rather problematic. Still, it should be pointed out that Bodakov's text makes a plea for another type of sincerity, namely professional sincerity which should guide all writing.

Finally, a central topic in Marin Bodakov's monograph, which is directly related to his teaching, is the coverage of literature in the media and the transitions from there to literary history, including the very structuring of texts, mixing various genres and experimenting with fragments, welding together the documentary and fictional, making use of critical texts, including letters and memoirs, and all of this with excellent knowledge of the "grand" literary narrative.

The articles which Marin Bodakov has submitted for the selection procedure testify to his abiding interest in the cross-pollination of media and literature, demonstrating close and careful reading of the work of various Bulgarian

writers, showcasing the author's skill to apply both "close" and "distant" reading.

**Teaching:**

I have had the pleasure to directly observe Marin Bodakov's teaching, as he used to teach a course in the "Translation and Editing" MA programme which I coordinate; moreover, students of his also join the programme almost every year. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Marin Bodakov is a well-liked teacher who really manages to help students learn, giving them a chance to thrive and fostering talent. Neither would it be too far-fetched to suggest that many professional journalists today would identify as "his students".

**Conclusion:**

In view of the quality of the submitted publications and Marin Bodakov's public image, as well as his teaching and his work as a journalist, I am fully convinced that Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Marin Bodakov rightly deserves to be appointed Associate Professor in the following higher education field: 3. Social, economic and legal *sciences*, division 3.5. Public communication and information science (Criticism and critical practice), to meet the needs of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University.