

## REVIEW

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**Regarding:** Selection procedure for the academic position of Associate Professor, Professional Field 2.1. Philology (English Literature after the Second World War and Translation – English), “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia; announced in the State Gazette, No 103/12.12.2023.

### 1. Selection Procedure

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Angel Mikhailov Igov is the only candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 2.1. Philology (English Literature after World War II and Translation – English Language), announced in State Gazette, No 103/12.12.2023 for the needs of the Department of English and American Studies of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia. By Order № RD-16-223 / 02.12.2021 of the Rector of “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia, I have been appointed member of the Academic Selection Committee for the procedure. At its first meeting of 26.02.2024, I was assigned to write a short review (*stanovishte*) on the publications submitted by the candidate. The analysis of the scientometric data included clearly demonstrates that the candidate meets all the necessary criteria as per the minimum national requirements under Article 26, par. 2 and 3 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria:

**Group “A” (min. 50 points):** Defended doctoral dissertation on *Fictional Models of the City in the Contemporary British Novel: Ian McEwan and Martin Amis*, 2012, “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia – **50 p.**

A revised version of the dissertation has been published under the title *How to Make a City* (St Kliment Ohridski UP, 2023).

**Group “B” (min. 100 points):** The monograph *Flags and Keys: Poetics of the Epigraph*, Zhanet-45, Plovdiv, 2022 – **100 p.**

**Group “Г” (min. 200 points):** *How to Make a City. Fictional Models of the City in the Contemporary British Novel: Ian McEwan and Martin Amis.* St Kliment Ohridski UP, 2023.) Papers published in non-peer reviewed journals and collections – a total of **202,5 p.**

**Group “Д” (min. 50 points)** – citations in monographs, co-authored volumes, non-peer reviewed publications – a total of **50 p.**

There is no evidence of plagiarism in the monographs and the shorter publications submitted by the candidate.

## **2. Academic Biography of the Candidate**

Dr. Angel Igov was born in Sofia in 1981. He graduated from First English Language School in 2000 and obtained his BA degree in English philology from Sofia University in 2005. In 2007 he earned his MA degree in literary studies and in 2012 defended a doctoral dissertation on the fictional models of the city in the novels of Ian McEwan and Martin Amis at Sofia University’s Department of Literary Theory. While writing his doctorate, he specialized at the University of California. In 2012 he won a competition for the position of Senior Assistant Professor at the Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University. Since 2012 he has been teaching seminars in translation and the literature of Romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism in the BA degree program of the department. He has also taught the lecture courses *Literature and Film: The British Postmodern Novel*, *Literature and Adaptation*, and *Literature of the Twenty-First Century: Rewriting and Recreation* in the MA programs *Communication: Language, Literature, Media* and *Language and Culture*. Since 2023 he has been conducting the lectures of the mandatory BA course *English Literature: From Modernism to Postmodernism*. Dr. Igov has authored the monographs *Flags and Keys: Poetics of the Epigraph* as well as a significant number of shorter scholarly publications.

In so far as the nomenclature of the present competition involves translation, I would like to especially highlight Angel Igov’s achievement as one of Bulgaria’s prominent contemporary writers and translators of prose and poetry. He has written three novels and two collections of short stories. In 2016 his novel „Кротките“ (*The Meek*) earned the prestigious Hristo G. Danov National Award; in 2020 its German translation received the Award of the House of World Cultures (*Haus der Kulturen der Welt*). Angel Igov has translated fifteen books, two of which have won the Main and Special Krastan Dyankov Translation Awards of the Elizabeth Kostova Foundation

respectively. He has participated in several international literary festivals and has attended several literary residencies, including the International Writers' Program in Iowa, USA (2022) and the Landis & Gere Foundation Residency in Zug, Switzerland (2023). Dr. Igov's experience also includes working as a journalist, literary critic, radio host, and a TV show literary commentator. He has published over 200 reviews in literary periodicals and has participated in the committees for multiple literature awards, such as "Vick", "Elias Canetti", "Ivan Nikolov", "Krastan Dyankov", etc.

### **3. Submitted scholarly publications and original scientific contributions**

Angel Igov's submissions for the present competition comprise: fifteen publications (including two monographs), a co-authored study, and twelve articles in academic journals and collections. Since the monograph *How to Make a City* is a revised version of the candidate's doctoral dissertation, which has been extensively reviewed, and considering the generic limitations of the short review, I would concentrate on the habilitation monograph and then briefly comment on the rich problematics of the articles included in the selection.

The monograph *Flags and Keys: Poetics of the Epigraph* (Zhanet-45, 2022) explores an under-researched field of the literary – paratextuality, or the texts (per Gerard Genette) situated on the periphery of the literary work. The study focuses on one of its often-neglected manifestations – the epigraph, in its functions of a commentary, pointing out of and/or into the text. To describe their dynamics (which recalls Northrop Fry's analysis of the centrifugal and centripetal forces in the literary text), Igov uses the metaphors "flags" and "keys" respectively. In this case, the terminologization of "key" is quite predictable. Less obvious is the choice of "flag" in reference to the centrifugal force inscribed into the epigraph but as the reader gets gradually involved, through fine rhetorical means, into the author's reasoning, this choice, too, begins to sound sufficiently convincing. Further in the text, the dichotomy is used productively, determining the overall structure and thematic range of Igov's book.

The introductory chapter "Why study the epigraph" outlines the premises and parameters of the ensuing analysis. In it, the author makes the important qualification that the flag-key dichotomy shall be used heuristically, as some specimens of the epigraph may be positioned beyond it. At this point, the question of whether the observation does not relate to all epigraphs seems to arise, as this paratextual mini genre by default tends to involve both gravity towards and a networking thrust away from the specific text.

The next chapter, titled “The epigraph in English literary tradition” justifiably employs the historical approach to contextualize diachronically the main goal and object of the study, i.e., the close reading of the epigraph, especially in its modernist and postmodernist literary uses. The earliest registered instance is the citation from Book One, 15 (“Poetry is immortal”) of Ovid’s *Amores* (available in Bulgarian in G. Batakliiev’s rendition and erroneously referred to as “Ovid’s elegy *Loves*”, p. 15) on the title page of Shakespeare’s poem *Venus and Adonis*. Angel Igov mentions the deliberate literariness of the motto as well as its use as a generic marker. It could also be added that Shakespeare reproduces not only a narrative from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (X. 503-559) but also its *form*, creating his own short epic, or *epyllion*. Suggestive of the conspicuousness of the poetic imitation and of the literary self-fashioning through the epigraph is that a couple of years later Francis Meres should refer to Shakespeare as “our English Ovid”. Still in the same context, the definition “lyrical poem” used in the analysis needs a reconsideration – like all *epyllia*, *Venus and Adonis* is a short narrative poem instead. For the same reasons, the reading of its epigraph mostly as a “marker of prestige” and “a signal aimed at a specific audience” (p. 21) is incomplete: the citation seems to function mostly as a bid for generic and aesthetic affiliation.

Still speaking of Shakespeare, Angel Igov comments on the absence of epigraphs to his dramatic works. As Shakespeare, however, created his plays for the stage and wasn’t particularly keen on publishing them, critical speculations on the subject seem to lose their relevance. Moreover, later in his study, Dr. Igov himself would highlight the obvious connection between the epigraph and the printed book.

Rich in valid and intriguing observations, the following pages of Igov’s overview trace the establishment of a distinct English tradition in the use of the epigraph – from Congreve with his arbitrary (offering comments on the specific forms of this arbitrariness would have been quite worth the while) and/or ironic epigraphs through Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, George Eliot, and T. S. Eliot to John Fowles and the modern English novel. The analysis outlines the gradual establishment of the epigraph from English sources, adequately defined as a “gesture rearranging the (existing) hierarchies”. It also maps other noteworthy tendencies and subgenres such as the composed epigraph, the frivolous epigraph, the combination of different epigraphs in the same paratextual space and the effect of their juxtaposition, and, eventually, the gradual transformation of the epigraph into a textual key.

This chapter’s construction of a microhistory of English literature through the uses and abuses of the epigraph serves not only to contextualize

the ensuing analysis but also to familiarize the reader with a methodology based on the scrutiny of this mini form and its dynamics, to the extent that the literary universe seems to be mirrored in a drop of dew. Igov's analysis impresses the reader with its competence and its author's ability to gracefully reside in different literary periods, across a range of national literatures.

The next chapter theorizes the fictional status of the epigraph between texts, with an emphasis on its oscillation and "holding on to the edge". It also features a will to taxonomy according to source and function, a glass bead game to which the reader can hardly remain indifferent. Beyond it, the central metaphors of "flag" and "key" are further substantiated with Genette's classifications and definitions, which are also the main theoretical inspiration of the book.

The analytical chapters "Keys" and "Flags" form the core of Angel Igov's monograph. Following the constructed theoretical model, the former discusses T. S. Eliot's epigraphs in the context of what Igov refers to as his self-ironic poetics, a thesis supported by the prevailing role of Eliot's epigraphs as keys despite his well-known insistence on literary tradition. At this point, the question arises again as to whether the emphasis on the binary opposition employed couldn't possibly blur the critic's perception of the fine exchange between its members. Having resulted in a productive Harold-Bloomean reversal of traditional hierarchies, it also entails a certain mixing of the levels of fictionality (as in the argument that an epigraph could belong to a fictional persona, Prufrock in this case, rather than the author, p. 86). But then, we have been warned of such risks. Whether we shall be willing to embrace them together with Dr. Igov or not, such problematizations showcase an original interpretive stance.

The chapter titled "Flags" traces the centrifugal drive the epigraph can exert on the text introduced by it. It maps the sources of such epigraphs and the trends in their choice during the different periods of the development of English literature. The analysis confirms the opening thesis of the gradual establishment of English tradition as a source of epigraphs, elaborating on their later political, ironic, and self-subversive uses by modern novelists. Another contribution is the outline of possibilities for future research in the field, highlighting the prospects for contrastive studies of large corpora of epigraphs by means of digital analysis, a *terra nova* for comparative literature.

The last chapter of the monograph discusses the uses of the epigraph in Bulgarian literary tradition. It tests the productivity of the theoretical model constructed in the preceding chapters, further elaborating and enriching it with new finds. A contribution of the analysis is the conclusion that there is a preference for epigraphs borrowed from folklore in the studied corpus.

Considering the nomenclature of this competition, I would like to especially mention Angel Igov's impressively fluent style. When it comes to the translated excerpts, however, there are certain problematic choices. Thus, the line "With the old Moon in her arms" is rendered as „със старата луна в ръцете си“ instead of „в прегръдките си“ (p. 109), "grand old ballad" – as „внушителната стара балада“ rather than „великолепната стара балада“, "This night ... will not go hence / unrous'd by winds" – as „тази нощ ... не ще премине оттук насетне / несмущавана от ветрове“ instead of „не ще си тръгне оттук, / непробудена от ветрове“ (p. 110). On p. 112 "Hence, viper thoughts" is translated as „И така, мисли усойници“ instead of „Вървете си, мисли усойници“. "And am I wrong to worship" (p. 145) reads as „И греша ли, ако се черкувам“. The Old Testament "I am that I am" (Exod. 3: 14) on p. 147 is rendered as „аз съм си аз“ instead of „Аз съм този, който съм“ (or, should we follow the Synod version of the Bible, as „Аз съм вечно Съществуващият“). Such instances, together with a few technical issues (the missing line on p. 110, the changed order of the lines on p. 145), suggest that the text would have benefited from another edit of those parts.

The shorter submissions could be categorized as: papers related to or elaborating on different aspects of intertextuality („Паратекстът като мрежа“, "Thresholds and Windows", „За кожата на един епиграф“, „Цитирацията модернист“, „Рецепция чрез хипертекст“); papers addressing the subject of the second monograph, i.e., the construction of the city in the contemporary English novel as well as the broader issue of the construction of possible and fictional worlds ("A Day in the City", „Фрагменти от възможни щати“, "Possible Worlds in Historical Fiction"). Some of them („Царкиня в градината“, the intertextual essays listed above) reproduce and amplify the ideas of *Flags and Keys*; others venture into new critical territories („Апология на излишното“, „Върху жанровото понятие „историографска метафикция“). All of them, however, relate to central critical issues such as the thresholds of the literary, the nature of fiction and its relation to "reality" and history, the exchange between texts and their interpenetration. Here, as in his monographs, Angel Igov is not only a competent and resourceful literary scholar researching problems he has a lasting interest in but also an eloquent and highly readable author of critical texts.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the above observations on the teaching experience and research activity of the only candidate in the competition, I am pleased to endorse Dr. Angel Igov's application for the academic position of **associate professor** in the Area of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology (English Literature after the Second World War and Translation – English).

14 April 2024

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