

OPINION

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on the materials submitted for participation in a contest

for the academic position of Professor

in the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

professional field 2.1. Philology (Theory and history of literature – theory of literature)

In the competition for the position of ‘Professor’ as announced in the State Gazette, No. 87 as of October 12, 2021, there is one candidate applying: Assoc.Prof. PhD Todor Hristov Dechev of the Chair of Theory of Literature at the Faculty of Slavic Philologies of the University of Sofia. To the application documents, he has added 17 scientific works published in the period after his habilitation in 2009, namely, two monographs, one article published in a periodical indexed in the SCOPUS database, and 14 other articles and chapters in collective monographs published in other prestigious scientifically reviewed periodicals. The monograph *Impossible Knowledge: Conspiracy Theories, Power, and Truth* (2019), as well as three other chapters in collective monographs, have been published in the prestigious publishing house Routledge, London and New York, in the period 2019–2021. The works of Assoc.Prof. Hristov have a total of 53 documented quotations, of which 12 are in world-known databases. The attached note of scientometric data demonstrates that these works considerably surpass the minimal national requirements for occupying the academic position of ‘Professor’ and they also witness his strongly internationalized scientific production. In the author-produced Annotation of his scientific works, his contributions are formulated precisely and correctly.

Associate Professor Todor Hristov whom I also know as a colleague in the Chair of Sociology and Human Sciences of the University of Plovdiv (where he was Associate Professor in Cultural Studies in the period 2014-2018) is an eminent researcher and teacher in an interdisciplinary field including theory of literature, cultural studies, critical theory, historical sociology, sociology of everyday life, pragmatics. He is present in this field with his remarkable erudition, and with the establishment of clearly recognizable problematics and his research style as an author. In the works selected for the contest, a new and original area is

outlined that unifies his studies in the period after the habilitation – the so-called polemology of everyday life, proposing a conceptual network for the analysis of knowledge, power desire, and everyday struggles for truth, through the instruments of a micrological archaeology of discourse. My opinion will focus on one of the two monographs submitted for the context – *Sound and Fury. Archaeology of the Household Scandal* (2021) which is representative of the scientific contributions of the author in this field.

Archaeology of the Household Scandal is a study that takes us to the world of the most familiar, the scenes of life at home, to skillfully make this life sound like something most alien and, by that, to help us appropriate it back, understand it, understand one another. By a rich and finely elaborated network of theory, empirics and analytics of speech situations, Todor Hristov translates the painfully lived ‘sound and fury’ of household scandals into a cognizable passion, grasping the pathos of speech in multi-layered formations of logos. The sophistication of the study is due, in my view, to the author’s erudition and talent to work with an enormous pool of knowledge of human relations, of heterogeneous origins (literature, pedagogy, sociology, psychiatry, public hygiene); to change registers between ordinary, literary and scientific knowledge, dramatizing the struggles for their ‘true value’; to meticulously develop the methodological instruments by which one can do an archaeology of discourse inspired by Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze and the theory of speech acts but going beyond them, an archaeology that succeeds in proving itself as uniquely adequate to its object. The sophistication of the study is also due, in my view, to the fact that in the course of uncovering profound layers of linguistic and extralinguistic formations of meanings, knowledge, desires and powers, the authors never tires of taking the challenges of newer and newer fragments of ‘said things’ (extracted from literary, everyday, clinical etc. sources) to transform them into symptoms and plots. This is how Todor Hristov actually invents the specific analytic text, i.e. the ‘protocol’, of a quasi-clinical or pre-clinical discipline as the ‘archaeology of the household scandal’ could be. The study orchestrates many voices with virtuosity: his own and voices of others, past and present, male and female, powerful and subjected, but it first of all focuses the attention to the ‘noise’ in passionate speaking, i.e. to those linguistic fragments that are ‘at the very edge of meaning’ (p. 9). For the author, they are simultaneously ‘empty’ and ‘overloaded’ phases that are the secret register by which ‘relations between utterances, visible things, knowledges, desires, uses are formed and transformed’ (p. 191). By the very saying of something that cannot be said (p. 191), they represent, if I allow myself to use a phenomenological language here, that ‘wild meaning’

(Merleau-Ponty) and that ‘pushing to be said’ (Richir) which, in a painful search for expression, reveal the linguisticity itself as a phenomenon.

The main ideas of this intriguing, but also intricately constructed, multidisciplinary study, rely on a good number of original achievements and contributions that can also be regarded as emblematic for the overall research style and choice of thematics of Assoc.Prof. PhD Todor Hristov. Among those, I would like to highlight the following:

A) An original delineation of the research area of ‘polemology of everyday life’ which is located in the intersection space between critical theory, cultural studies, sociology of everyday life, gender studies, and discourse analysis. In this monograph as in the other works submitted for the contest, Todor Hristov shows with theoretical profoundness, empirical inventiveness and analytic virtuosity with regard to the ‘molecular’ level of social life, that: ‘everyday life is a political phenomenon [...], it is formed by silent but incessant struggles for the right to speak, think, act, live in this way, for the limits of meaning, for the limits of the sensual’ (p. 239).

B) An original tracing – by relating Bulgarian literary knowledge of the household scandal and disciplinary knowledge produced in the dispositive of ‘family therapy’ – of the historical transformations of the home field in the period since the late 19 c. to the end of the 20th c. The transformations can be recognized in such power conjunctures as ‘male domination’, ‘anomaly’, ‘family disfunctions’, ‘hidden reasons’.

C) Constructing discursive archives for the polemology of everyday life with an emphasis of the specific ‘true value’ of literary knowledge against the background of other registers of the knowledge of everyday life.

D) Developing an original methodological set of instruments for the archaeology of discourse that is uniquely adequate to the field of polemology of everyday life. The study takes up and transforms ideas of Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze, Louis Hjelmslev, John Austin, Stanley Cavell and Jacques Lacan, which culminate in an analytic of the so-called ‘passionate speech’, and in such a way that the concepts acquire their value from their testing in the endogenous analysis of living speech rather than from exogenous generalizations. This is an original methodology aiming at the ‘individualization’ of the said. It presupposes not the knowing of the truth of a scene of conflict but its overdetermination by ‘a complex tissue of relations to the already said, the unsaid, that which can or cannot be said, to mechanisms of power, desire, capital’ (p. 20). The instruments as developed in Chapter One outline three

levels of explicitation of this overdetermination – ‘associated field of said things’, ‘correlative field of functions’ and ‘additional field of relations connecting the said to knowledge, power, capital, desire, organized into a concrete discursive economy’ (pp. 48-9). This set of instruments is made more complex by adding the analytic of ‘passionate speech’ (Chapter Six) that takes up the concept of Stanley Cavell, complementing it very originally with Lacanian motives, proposing a change of emphasis from pragmatics to dramatics of speech acts; thus at the final of analysis one can decipher the conditions of felicity of passionate speaking – not merely making the other respond with passion to me but the impossibility of her not answering, and answering precisely in the moment now (p. 208).

With regard to this extremely deeply thought and ‘passionately’ practiced methodology that opens wide research possibilities, I would allow myself to ask three optional questions that emerge in me as a possible dialogue with my own endeavours:

- 1) When we speak of passionate speech which, as Todor Hristov emphasizes, not only changes the situation but changes myself because it promises to generate truth precisely in an interstice (see pp. 238-9), isn’t it more correct to speak of ‘speech events’ (or ‘interstice-events’, as current phenomenology proposes) instead of ‘acts’, as far as the latter term continues to bear an egological accent that is, rather, a secondary effect of ascription? It seems to me that this is not merely a matter of naming but a substantial emphasis of the primordial responsiveness and passivity of passionate speech.
- 2) Does not the analytic of passionate speech still require (despite the author’s self restriction to study not ‘the nature of passion’ but its ‘discursive effect’ – p . 13) and a more explicit analytic of its embodiment, which would take into account the affective bodily modalities or specific somatizations of the household scandal?
- 3) Could the archaeology of the household scandal abstract itself from those key categories of ‘repartitioning the sensory’ as are the public ad private space, and how far actually the household scandal could be a symbolic matrix that produces these ‘political’ categories of everyday life?

These questions are undoubtedly just a sign of commitment and confirmation of my evaluation of the extraordinary scientific qualities of the studies of Assoc.Prof. PhD Todor Hristov.

To conclude: after becoming acquainted with the materials and scientific works submitted for the context, analyzing their importance and the scientific contributions they contain, I have all reasons to give, with full conviction, my positive evaluation to the respected Scientific Jury and propose Assoc.Prof. PhD Todor Hristov Dechev to be elected to the academic position of '*Professor*' in professional field 2.1. Philology (Theory and history of literature – theory of literature).

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