

REPORT

On the application of associate professor Todor Hristov

For the academic position of

Professor of theory and history of literature, code 2.1

There is only one applicant for the position, I verified the papers and found out that all necessary requirements are fulfilled.

The candidate ass. prof. Todor Hristov is a well-established scholar, who has an original contribution to the field of literature and social sciences. He is the author of numerous publications in prestigious Bulgarian and foreign journals. The two PhD degrees (in theory of literature and sociology) attest the large scope of his scientific interests. Hristov's lectures are appreciated by the students; his participations to conferences always provoke serious discussions. My excellent personal impressions are due to our common work within the network of cultural studies, to which he contributes.

The typical research method of Hristov is to approach important social, political or philosophical problems through the analysis of semi-forgotten literary or para-literary discursive archives. He thus turns the text into an anthropological fieldwork. Examples of such an approach is his study on the "vulgar novels" of Hristo Kalchev, largely read in the 90s, but forgotten today: they allow him to reflect on the emergence of the conspiracy theory thinking during the transition period. Another article deals with the fear of freemasonry in the Bulgarian judiciary, based on press publications. The works of Aleko Konstantinov are an occasion to analyze the relation of Bulgaria with the world. One of the major themes of Hristov has been announced in his first PhD: the limits of fictionality, i.e. the necessary self-reflection needed, when using texts as fieldwork.

The monograph, presented for the present competition, is entitled "The sound and the fury. Archeology of the family scandal" (2021). It applies the described method to a completely new material: the relations within the couple. The author uses different types of texts: prose and drama, journalism and letters to the editor, counsels for good family life and dated scientific theories. This vast research corpus constitutes the first element of the

monograph: an impressive reconstruction of family relations in Bulgaria from the national renaissance to the socialist period, seen through the micro-crises between spouses.

The family scandals represented in the texts are linked to masculine domination, which remains unquestioned in the patriarchal society. The discursive roles of the genders are not questioned: the man imposes the norm, whereas the woman cries, resists and is finally tamed. The conflicts emerging from their relation are seen as funny, most often part of the entertaining part of the newspaper.

With the process of modernization at the end of the 19th c., society starts to approach family crises more seriously. Public institutions intervene to appease the relations and this plays an important role in the improvement of the position of women. In the first half of the 20th, under the influence of the West, the relations within the couple start to be medicalized. The “sound” of the conflicts (the irrational part of the quarrels) is being ascribed to mental derangements like neurasthenia or hysteria (relevant to psychiatry then), alcoholism or hereditary problems.

Marxist literature sees the reason for the inequality between genders in the social conditions. A woman can be equal to the man only if she has a job that makes her independent. If for the bourgeois science the working woman is a reason for family conflicts, now it is the opposite - a dysfunctional couple is where only one (the man) is working. But even if the situation of the woman has seriously improved, Hristov argues that conflicts within the family remain. A telling example is Blaga Dimitrova's novel “Detour”, where the “love revolution” of the female protagonist goes against social conditions and good-intentioned counsels of friends. The notion of freedom to which she aspires seems to imply a paradox: she aspires to be free from the other, but also free with him.

Based on this historical reconstruction of family scandals the author develops the second line of his study: the theoretical elaboration of what he calls “passionate speech” that characterizes every human relationship. “Family scandals are more than conflicts... they produce something that cannot be said. They do not have the value of truth or right... they are under the threshold of meaning, being made of sighs, moaning and fury” 192.

Hristov refrains from trying to “translate” passionate speech, as he could have done following the psychoanalytic tradition. The doubling of rational language with a passionate flow of emotions, gestures, silences, etc., for him, is part of any human interaction.

Passionate speech is beyond truth: it is a performative act, valid as far as the speaker has the right to perform it. But such right is not predefined in family relations: it is improvised, that is, produced in the very act of addressing one's passionate speech to the partner. Its goal is not to produce knowledge or truth, but to compel the other to respond by passionate speech in his/her turn (209). This makes the author conclude that the sound and fury of family scandal shows the essentially political aspect of everyday life: the permanent fight for the right to speak and thus exist for the other.

For everything above, I heartily support the application of ass. prof. Hristov for the position of professor. He is a brilliant scholar of vast culture and original ideas, who will be of great use to Sofia university.

Sofia 21 02 2022

Prof Ivaylo Dichev, d-r of sociology