

REVIEW

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Review of the research output of associate professor Dr. Todor Hristov Dechev, applicant for the academic position “professor”, announced by Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Faculty of Slavic studies, higher education area 2. Humanities, professional strand 2.1. Philology (Theory and history of literature – Literary Theory) in issue 87 of *Durzhaven vestnik* (State newspaper – official legal bulletin), 19 October 2021.

Associate professor Dr. Todor Hristov is the only applicant for the academic position “Professor” in professional strand 2.1. Philology (Theory and history of literature – literary theory) announced by Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. The position requirements are fully met by the academic and educational profile of the applicant, comprising his professional accomplishments, his work as a university lecturer and research output.

Todor Hristov was born on 29 September 1973. He received his MA in Bulgarian philology from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in 1996. In 2002 he obtained a PhD in literary theory after successfully defending his thesis entitled “Borders of the literary in twentieth century literary studies”. In 2005 he defended a second thesis entitled “Social legitimisation of the state authority: value strategies for the management of social discontent” and obtained a PhD in sociology. He worked as an assistant (March 2002 to March 2003), a senior assistant (until May 2004) and a chief assistant (until March 2010) in the department of literary theory at the faculty of Slavic studies at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. In 2010 he passed a habilitation procedure with his monograph *Freedom and Sovereignty in the April Uprising* and is currently a full-time associate professor in the same department. He also held the position of assistant professor of cultural studies at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” from 2014 to 2018.

The exceptionally significant professional activity of associate professor Todor Hristov is systematically focused on academic work, in which he uncompromisingly asserts his wholehearted presence that also yields impressive results. Hristov’s academic and public work reveal his critical orientation towards the profound understanding of key, current and relevant, socio-historical problems. His entire oeuvre (consisting of eight monographs, six research articles written in English,

seventy-nine research articles and papers, plus fourteen chapters included in edited volumes) is “the opus of a human life” recreated in academic terms and distinguished by the methodological and theoretical originality of the expressed ideas, combined with the intensive development of analytical sensitivity towards social empiricism. It is a confirmation of a full-bodied fulfilment of life experience in which the concept of profession is rooted in the concurrence of exceptional sociological competence, perceptive capability of acquiring knowledge and the relentless searching for/finding of the profound personal meaning of one’s own scientific endeavours. To be a professional researcher in the field of humanities in our global modernity means to be a creator, architect and ambassador of new knowledge about humanity in its social context. Our mission is not to aim, albeit with unceasing persistence, care, patience, humility and attention, at what is socially acceptable and scientifically acknowledged and legitimate, but instead at what allows us to liberate ourselves from our own selves. How significant our “will for knowledge” would have been, how valuable the quest for knowledge, had it facilitated only the accumulation of knowledge without subjecting to scrutiny the one who knows, the knowing subject? What can be considered an essential part of the process of self-reflection in the humanities but the critical thought activity about thinking itself? And instead of legitimizing what is already known should we not aim to seek how and to what extent it is possible to think in a different way? “Experience” – a constantly changing test the self is put to in the truth games, and not a simple appropriation of the other for the purposes of communication – is the fundament of humanities on the clear condition that it is understood as an opportunity for conducting critical work on our own reasoning.

Todor Hristov has a calling to create new knowledge in the field of humanities by thinking creatively and constantly recreating himself.

Associate professor Todor Hristov meets the requirements set by the Republic of Bulgaria’s law for the development of academic staff, as well as the internal regulations of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski for the position “professor”: his application include research output of impressive volume and scope, published after his habilitation, which substantially exceeds the set normative criteria. His two monographs, *Tumult and Fury. Archaeology of the Domestic Brawl*. St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, Sofia, 2021, 302 p. and *Impossible Knowledge: Conspiracy Theories, Power, and Truth*. Routledge, London and New York, 2019, pp. 103 are accompanied by fifteen articles, papers and chapters, published in prominent Bulgarian and international journals and edited volumes. Practically all publications are firmly and unwaveringly integrated within the applicant’s personal research agenda, whose scientific value and originality are more than obvious. Furthermore, this agenda transforms

itself into an educational one because it shapes the courses taught by associate professor Hristov, which have been attended by numerous students at various university degree levels. Undoubtedly, he ranks among the most dedicated, respected and praised lecturers in the faculty of Slavic studies and in the Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski at large.

The ability to recreate systematically academic research into teaching material by fully modulating the relationship between the roles of a researcher and a lecturer through the key function of the researcher-writer is a challenge which assoc.prof. Hristov overcomes successfully by consistently matching these two professional roles.

The habilitation thesis submitted by assoc.prof. Todor Hristov *Tumult and Fury. Archaeology of the domestic brawl* is an up-to-date (regarded from the point of view of the historical origins of modern organization of everyday family life), important (from the point of view of scientific reflections on the social problem), original (from the point of view of the methodology applied and the selection of empirical data), well-grounded (in relation to the argumentation and evidence on which the author bases his conclusions) and contributory (from the point of view of the reliability of the achieved results and the validity of the conclusions) humanities research work.

First, why is the habilitation thesis considered an up-to-date research work? The conscious choice of social problem, its reflective formulation into a strictly scientific task and the precise setting of the framework of the analytical subject are among its undisputable and recognizable achievements. To think, comprehend and interpret the discursive mechanisms of the speech practices, of the “non-linguistic speech” of the domestic brawls through what is “impossible to be said” and what is presented as “noise, the remains of things said” as “voices, lacking meaning and phrases, lacking value”, in short, to set within the thematic focus of one’s research interest “the regimes of presentation and management” of the family conflicts means to reveal, explicate and justify key social conditions of our actual human togetherness as well as key cognitive conditions of the possibility of polemology of everyday life.

Second, what makes the habilitation thesis valuable? It demonstrates well-rounded, coherent and detailed knowledge of the critical reflection through which the analytical progression of the discussion unfolds, as well as the current state of research in the field that forms the thematic constellation of the accumulated knowledge within the area of the matter considered. The qualitative variety of the considered philosophical works, scientific monographs, medical texts, literary works and empirical resources (court cases, psychiatric records, medical prescriptions, opinions expressed by teachers, views of health officers’ arguments, comments by therapists, everyday conversations) constructs

rigorous prerequisites for interpretive understanding of the historical incommensurability and social layering evident in the modern functioning of various “modes of knowledge” (male domination, abnormal subjectivity, the functions of family members and “deviant” behaviours, in short, the models of dysfunctional family meta-communication and the different types of family brawls management) and provides a firm basis for the precise definition of the scope of the aims, the determining of the level of reliability of the expressed hypotheses and the maintaining of the degree of validity of the results.

Third, why is the habilitation thesis original? It applies the poly-paradigmatic analytical approach extraordinarily well: a consistent methodology is built and adapted according to the qualitative specifics posed by the subject matter by means of a progressing process of observation, enrichment and correction of the critical theory, the discursive analysis, the pragmatic paradigm and the cultural examination. The conjunctive re-working and consistent homogenization of the notions of discursive dramatics expressed by Michel Foucault, the post-signifying semiotics of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Stanley Cavell’s passionate utterances concept not only construct cognitive tools for their relevant application in specific speech occasions in order to provide an adequate explanation of their discursive economy but also create the prerequisites for the possibility of original scientific contribution: the precise method, the concrete ways in which speech acts transform the participating subjects through linguistic, conceptual and cognitive improvisations for achieving the articulation of “impossible utterances”.

Fourth, why is the habilitation thesis a well-grounded research project? From the point of view of the level of argumentation and the degree of justification its conclusions are valid and trustworthy, that is, they fall within the circle of truthful knowledge. They are reached by means of a unitary analytical process consisting of three steps: first, the deconstruction of discursive mechanisms as relation between utterances in an associated field, constructed by a specific constellation of conjunctive, disjunctive and negative relations, combined with connections of implication, constituting paradigmatic, syntagmatic and negative functions, whose elements are recognizable either in constant or variable values; second, the reconstruction of discursive entities and the rules determining their formation within the correlative field consisting of relations between functions which articulate notions, objects, modalities, effects, formulae and figures, subject positions; third, the construction of discursive production within an additional field of relations, connecting the “utterance” to knowledge, power, capital and desire, truth or right, tactics and strategies, organized in a discursive economy which determines its value, usage, borders and limits.

Fifth, why is the habilitation thesis a valuable contribution to the field? The reflective choice of an unusual analytical subject, the application of a poly-paradigmatic methodological approach and the selection of adequate empirical material set the conditions which enable the adaptive reworking of a new scientific notion: the “passionate utterance” as a relevant cognitive instrument for the critical examination of the discursive dramatic – the ways in which speech acts transform the speaking subjects. The passionate utterance has its own peculiar form of rationality through which the specific mode of its usage can be read: its stake is not the truth, justice or knowledge, but the successful improvisation with conventions; it is a direct challenge posed to the other who is unable to remain shrouded in silence or to freeze with a smile on his face; he must respond, in that precise moment, and the response must be filled with a reciprocal intense passion; the passionate response by the other would act as a recognition of my right, but not of my righteousness, to speak precisely in that manner and no other; furthermore, my speech act would change not only the specific situation, it would change me and my interlocutor too – at least in situations in which the central mode of functioning of the passionate utterances in domestic brawls applies, where it produces symmetrical rights, reciprocal responses, questioned righteousness and mutual acknowledgment – because together we become the creators of one notion of truth which originates from both of us; truth, which cannot not be a fact because it will be dependent not only on the trace left by my act on the other, but also the trace left by his act on me; we have mutually constructed ourselves as subjects of passion in this intersubjective situation.

The most significant contribution – and with inner conviction and academic honesty I acknowledge the original authorship of all contributions formulated by associate professor Hristov – of the habilitation thesis is: the approbated cognitive toolkit developed on the basis of the notion of passionate utterance can be applied methodologically in discursive analyses of social problems concerning situations other than everyday family life: social conflicts, public rows, political debates, legal disputes, civil unrest, activists’ acts of resistance, cult followings, conspiracy theories; this scope has been comprehensively demonstrated in the research publications submitted by the candidate for the present review.

Conclusion: On the basis of the premises, argumentation and evidence outlined above, I am firmly convinced – and with intellectual pleasure declare – that associate professor Dr. Todor Hristov Dechev is a researcher with exceptional professional achievements and an outstanding university lecturer. Hristov’s entire research output, teaching, publications and public service stands in support of his application for the academic position “professor” in professional strand 2.1. Philology (Theory

and history of literature – theory of literature) at the Faculty of Slavic studies at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. As a member of the academic jury my vote will be an unconditional “YES” for the choosing of the candidate for this position.

25 February 2022

Sofia

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