

REVIEW

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On the competition for the academic position of professor at the University of Sofia

Research field: 2.1. Philology (Theory and history of literature - literary theory)

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Assoc. Prof. Todor Hristov is the only participant in the competition for the academic position of professor at the University of Sofia, research field: 2.1. Philology (Theory and history of literature - literary theory). The educational and research profile of the candidate is adequate to the competition.

The documents submitted by the candidate for the competition comply with the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria and with the regulations of the University of Sofia. They represent adequately the research of the candidate. The enviable output described by Assoc. Prof. Hristov for the current competition consists in a weighty list of publications: two monographs one of which published in English; an article in a peer-reviewed and indexed academic journal (in English); ten articles in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes; four chapters of collective monographs (all in English).

The focus of this review will be not the volume but rather the contents of this serious research that I am going to discuss in two perspectives.

Firstly, my lense will take a distance so as to take a picture that will portray the more general picture and make visible the links between the diverse publications that is probably not readily discernible. If one is reading through them, particularly in a short period of time, their thematic diversity is striking: conspiracy theories (this is perhaps an exception as it obviously represents a stable interest of Todor Hristov), family quarrels, online dating, Jediism as a

neoliberal religion etc. Such a diversity of topics can leave the impression of an disorganized, perhaps even erratic research. I will claim however that this impression is misleading. In order to see that, one needs to read carefully Todor Hristov. His style is inimitable as it combines the diligent, even meticulous, attention to the empirical research data with the talent of a writer who literally weaves his narrative link by link to bring about a final result that is amazing as a whole. If I am allowed to use one of his metaphors, I would say that as a researcher Todor Hristov has his feet on the ground, and he does not rely on "celestial" theories. Because of that, he is making use of authors and research paradigms (among which I would mention Foucault, Garfinkel, Austin, Lacan) that he transforms into instruments for progressively "thicker" account of research data drawn from life itself. However, taking into account the formal requirements of review, let me rephrase this more rigorously: the alleged lack of thematic focus is actually the texture of Todor Hristov's basic research object which is everyday life. If I am allowed a witty reference, then everyday life is the "supreme" research object of Todor Hristov, and he returns to it again and again, by any of his surprising topics.

Secondly, I will move my lense closer to capture in detail the main piece of research submitted by the candidate for this competition. To speak straightforwardly, "The Sound and the Fury: An Archeology of the Domestic Quarrels" has been a pleasurable read; although not because it is an easy read. The book is challenging as it is multilayered, intricately structured, involving fine-grain analysis of the empirical data, based on a vast and heterogeneous archive. The task of the study is impressive: to attempt a discourse analysis of the so-called "passionate speech", "the attempts to say the unsayable" (p. 238). "Passionate speech is felicitous," if one is able to make the other "respond here, now and in kind"; (...) "then the act achieves something beyond the transformation of the situation, it transforms the subject of the act, it brings forth a truth born between the subject and the other; a truth irreducible to facts as it emerges out of the trace that my act leaves in the other; and it is precisely for this reason that the act constitutes me as a subject of passion" (p. 239). The problem is of crucial importance and Todor Hristov has found a remarkable solution. Yet I am tempted - quite briefly - to extend his thoughts by transposing them in a different conceptual paradigm. Passionate speech needs to affect the other, to touch the other, even though the touch is "a strike", "a slap" or "caressing", "embrace" and so on. In any case, touch is embodied, it implies a limit, an "in-between" space at the limit at which myself and the other are indistinguishable. Words in

themselves, says Alenka Zupančič, are not insulting, they turn into insults because of the mode of their enunciation (just like a famous patient of Freud, still a young boy, yells at his father: "you, lamp, you, an old towel, you, plate"; and we can hear: "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!"). I think that it is impossible to discuss passionate speech without taking into account the body. I am considering those remarks as a promise and expectation of a productive debate in the future.

I find it important to add a few words about Todor Hristov as a colleague and a teacher that I have known for years. I am finding an amazing coincidence: the tact and respect to the research object that he demonstrates matches the tact and respect with which he approaches his colleagues. So it is probably unsurprising that he is a favorite teacher of many students.

In conclusion: the quality of the research and the teaching are unquestionable and, building on that, I would recommend to the honorable academic jury to vote for affording the academic position "Professor" to Todor Hristov.

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