

REVIEW

by Associate professor Diyana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva, PhD, at Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski,

of the materials submitted for the open Professorship position at Plovdiv University Paisii

Hilendarski in the Sphere of HE 2. Humanities,

Area of professional qualification 2.1. Philologies (Slavic Literatures)

The single applicant for the open Professorship position which was announced in the State Gazette, issues 31 from 12. 04. 2019 and on the webpage of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Slavic Studies at the Philology Faculty, is **Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Petrova Cholakova** from the Department of Slavic Studies at the Philology Faculty at PU.

1. General overview of the submitted materials

Following Order № P33-5010 from 04.09.2019 of the Rector of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski, I have been appointed as a member of the Scholarly board for the open competition for the academic position of Professor at Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski in the Sphere of HE 2. Humanities, Area of professional qualification 2.1. Philologies (Slavic Literatures) for the needs of the Department of Slavic Studies at the Faculty of Philology.

The documents and materials submitted in print and in electronic form by Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova meet the requirements of the Law for the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Rulebook for the application of LDARSB and the corresponding Rulebook of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski.

Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Petrova Cholakova has submitted 1 monograph and 18 critical essays, one of which has been published in a Scopus referred journal. The enclosed table of scholarly parameters clearly shows that Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Colakova does not simply meet the minimum national requirements but indeed surpasses them considerably.

2. Short biographical data of the applicant

Associate prof. Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova graduated from Slavic philology (Bohemian studies) at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in 1982. Her professional path as a lecturer and scholar began in 1984 when she was appointed to lead seminars and lectures in Slavic literatures and in Czech literature. In 1993 she defended her PhD thesis on Czech surrealism at Charles University (published by Praha: Karolinum, 1999). The enclosed list of citations convincingly shows the active reception of this monograph among Czech literary scholars.

Zhorzheta Cholakova was elected Associate professor by the Higher Attestation Commission in 2000. Her habilitation work “The Faces of Man in the Poetry of Czech Avant-gardism” is among the most valuable local studies of the poetics of the avant-garde and its reception among literary academic circles is attested by numerous published reviews and citations that have been described in the documents accompanying the application.

Associate professor Cholakova’s numerous academic visits to the Czech Republic, Serbia, Poland, France (as a guest lecturer at Aix-en-Provence and the Sorbonne, Paris 4) have contributed to her professional development as a specialist not only in Slavic literatures but also as a researcher in European cultural phenomena which underpins the comparative nature of her studies. Throughout the years Associate prof. Zhorzheta Cholakova has taken part in dozens prestigious academic forums in Bulgaria and abroad, in world congresses (three Slavic ones, three world congresses in Czech literature, in the 20th World Congress in Comparative Literature in Paris), which is evidenced by the full list of publications accompanying the application. In 2018, Associate professor Zhorzheta Cholakova defended her “Doctor habilitat” with a habilitation work entitled “Mythopoetic Genesis, Artistic Evolution and Contextualization of the Lake in the Poetry of Czech Romanticism”.

At different times she occupied positions of administrative leadership, such as Head of the Department of Slavic Studies, Vice Dean and Vice Rector. Her scholarly authority has been recognized in her capacity as a member of the Scientific Council of the University of Hradec Kralove and her participation in two international editorial boards – of the Polish journal “Bohemistika” and the journal of the University at Banja Luka “Philologist”. She has been a scholarly editor of three monographs, one of which was published by the Slavic Studies Institute at the Czech Academy of Sciences.

3. General characteristics of the applicant’s professional activities

The pedagogical activities of Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova are closely related to the development of the degree program in Slavic Philology (currently Slavic Studies), with the courses in Slavic literatures and Czech literature. She has developed a new curriculum for the major Slavic Studies and it was following her initiative that the MA program in Cultural historical Slavic studies, which she leads, was inceptioned. She has been a visiting lecturer twice so far: at Charles University in Prague and at the Masaryk University in Brno. She has also conducted lectures at these two universities as an Erasmus exchange lecturer as well as at the Sorbonne, Paris-4 and the Universities in Torun and Ostrava. Throughout her long career as a lecturer she has always been able to motivate her students’ interest in the subjects she is teaching and she has had dozens of successful MA thesis students. She also works dedicatedly with MA students in Slavic

Studies by stimulating their interests in the art of translation, as evidenced by the students' awards in poetry translation competitions, the best of which have been published in the journal "Slavic Dialogues" of which she is the editor-in-chief.

Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhiorzheta Cholakova has supervised three PhD students, one of whom – Jakub Mikulecký – was appointed at the Institute of Slavic studies at the Czech Academy of sciences in Prague in 2016 upon the successful completion of his dissertation.

The scholarly work of Associate professor Cholakova warrants respect. Her activities have been documented in two lists: one of them comprehensively presents her overall development as a scholar, while the other lists only the publications submitted for the current position. The latter includes a monograph and a number of critical studies which have not been used in other procedures. Out of the 18 essays submitted, 7 are in Bulgarian, the rest have been published abroad. There are no co-authored publications.

In her **scholarly work** Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova has shown durable interest in several thematic areas. The first one is related to modernism and its multifaceted manifestations in the Slavic literary context from the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century. The largest number of her studies discusses interwar avant-gardism. As a scholar of Bohemian studies Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova reveals a natural affinity towards Czech literature but also has important publications on the Polish and South Slavic literary context (on Zenitism, for instance), which she discusses either independently or in a comparative perspective. Her first dissertation is related to this thematic area, as well as her habilitation work, alongside the greater part of her scholarly oeuvre, listed in the full bibliographic appendix. Out of the publications submitted for this particular position, nine are dedicated to different aesthetic, literary and socio-cultural phenomena of avant-gardism (only one of them is in Bulgarian). Her critical essay on the transcendental philosophy of Otokar Březina is also related to modernism with its first symbolic-decadent phase. This offers a significant conceptualization pertinent to contemporary humanities' ontological categories translated into the terms of modern art. Here is the place to emphasize that Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova is a much respected translator of Czech poetry as well. She herself has translated nearly all of the poets she has written about, starting with "May" by K. H. Mácha in 1993 and including the works of O. Březina.

The second thematic node of Associate professor Cholakova revolves around the evolutionary movements and changes of the artistic image. This comes across clearly as early as her PhD thesis devoted to Czech surrealism, later on in "Faces of man in the poetry of the Czech avant-garde", and in her habilitation dissertation which studies the genesis and artistic dynamics of the image of the lake in the realms of literature, fine arts, aesthetics and philosophy from Antiquity until the

Romantic period, and now in the monograph submitted for this position. This approach is applied on a number of occasions in the current array of critical essays, including in the article about the image of Orpheus in Czech poetry published in Paris (2010). I would attribute the essay on Baroque to this thematic cluster as well, all the more so because from a genealogical perspective the Baroque period occupies a significant place in all her longer studies. The text with which Cholakova undertakes a reconstruction of the genesis and the conceptual modifications of religious melancholy by inscribing Kaminsky's novel "Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart" into the general European tapestry of the development of this idea from the age of Antiquity till the Baroque period can also fall within this rubric.

The third thematic area is Romanticism, which has commanded Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova's focus for the past decade – as related to the topic of her second doctoral dissertation and now with her habilitation work *The Poetics of Melancholy. Karel Hynek Mácha* (Plovdiv: UPH Paisii Hilendarski, 2019, 403 pp.). Taking into account her translation of Mácha's long poem "May", published alongside several interpretative texts by her as early as 1993, one can say there exists a pronounced "major plot line" in the professional creative path of Zhorzheta Cholakova.

In all her dissertations, habilitation works and in a number of her critical essays Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova has demonstrated a particular affinity towards fine arts that have become an indelible presence in the artistic realm of the cultural phenomena she has analyzed. Her current monograph entitled *The Poetics of Melancholy. Karel Hynek Mácha*, submitted for the open position, is also characterized by such interdisciplinarity. This is a highly professional study, offering significant contributions not only to the immediate field of professional specialization of the author – Slavic literatures. Zhorzheta Cholakova has undertaken an exceptionally challenging task to research a concept that has had centuries-long history in European culture and to see it, given the focus of the book, i.e. the poetics of melancholy of K. H. Mácha, as a conceptual synthesis of romantic philosophy of the subject and being. The scholarly precision and perfectionism of the author, as well as the interdisciplinary approach chosen by her, dictate that she commence her study with the hard task of going to "the source", i.e. the early Antiquity (with its humoral theory) and subsequently trace the dynamics of meanings which have filled in this concept (religious, ethical, aesthetic, philosophical, social) in European culture until the 19th century. From the position of my own scholarly area of expertise (which is Antique and Western European literature) I can say that this is a truly difficult research task which in this case has been accomplished highly professionally. This is the first in Bulgarian scholarship wide-scale and in-depth study of the concept of *melancholy*, positioned in a wide-ranging European context, and, in

turn, reading the poetics of Mácha through it. I estimate very highly the contemporary comparative approach adopted by Cholakova, in which a given national literary context is placed within the entire encompassing grid of its cultural environment, i.e. Europe, and the interpretation of the phenomena does not remain confined within the particular national and historical context. These have been reflected upon as significant elements of the overall dynamic sociocultural network, they are read through the other arts that reflect the same mentality. Such an approach steers away from traditional typological studies that delineate differences and resonances (typological or contact-based) in the dialogue between cultural epochs, national literatures, authorial voices. It strives to see cultural processes as a complex and dynamic system in which there meet incongruous at first glance elements that partake in the building of different mental fields and poetics. They can be spatially and temporally very distant, sometimes not necessarily presupposing a visible dialogue between the respective national literatures and authorial worlds. As a result of this, the ensuing observations on the “lyre of Ronsard and Mácha”, on Villon and Mácha, the “dialogues” between Pope and Mácha (among others) are truly interesting, stimulating and innovative. These observations ring convincing and present a strong case for the appropriateness of Cholakova’s approach. In this way there is another intentionally avoided by the author pitfall of interpretative aptitude – the over exposure of the unique, “original” and specific in a national culture, which in turn generates nationalist discourses. Zhorzheta Cholakova’s monograph has chosen a less trodden research path that poses “hard” and undiscussed questions, that sees the “faces of man” – in this case through the lens of the concept of melancholy. The study strolls with artistic finesse different times and cultural epochs – from Antiquity to Romanticism, from the “fields” of Hellenic mythopoetic texts to the artistic worlds of K. H. Mácha. Without losing sight of its “center” and being fully complete and framed, it has an air of an expanding universe in which new thematic nuclei and research perspectives open questions for further study quests.

4. Assessment of the applicant’s contributions

The applicant has submitted a sufficient number of scholarly papers published after the materials used in previous procedures. They all contain original scientific and applied contributions which have been met with national and international approbation. The theoretical discussions possess practical application; some of them are directly geared towards the academic study process. Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Petrova Cholakova is undoubtedly a highly qualified scholar and lecturer.

5. Critical observations and suggestions

I have none.

6. Personal impressions

Over the past 30 years I have had the opportunity to accumulate numerous personal impressions of Zhorzheta Cholakova's work as a lecturer and scholar. I can firmly state that these testify to her invariably high quality professionalism as a lecturer, scholar and colleague.

CONCLUSION

The results achieved by Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Petrova Cholakova in the pedagogical sphere and the sphere of scholarly research fully correspond to the specific requirements of the Faculty of Philology, adopted in accordance with the Rulebook of PU for the application of LDASRB.

Having acquainted myself with the materials and scholarly publications submitted for the purposes of this position, having analyzed their significance and the contributions entailed in them with regard to their theoretical, scholarly, and pedagogical merits, I find it expedient to confirm my **entirely positive** assessment, as expressed above, and to recommend to the Scholarly board to prepare a report proposal to the Faculty Council of the Philology Faculty for the selection of **Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Petrova Cholakova** for the academic position of Professor at Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski in the area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology (Slavic literatures).

09.09. 2019

Reviewer:

Associate prof. Diyana Nikolova, PhD

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