

PEER REVIEW STATEMENT

by Professor Dr. habil. Georgi Theologov Kapriev
for the open Professorship position in the Sphere of HE 2. Humanities,
Area of professional qualification 2.1. Philologies (Slavic Literatures),
announced in the *State Gazette*, issue 31 / 12 .04. 2019

1. General overview of the procedure and the candidate: The single applicant for the open position is Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova. She has been teaching at the University of Plovdiv since 1984 and was promoted to the position of Associate professor in 2000. In 2018, she successfully defended her Habilitation dissertation and has held various leadership positions at PU throughout. The procedure for the open competition has observed all the requirements and all the necessary documents have been provided with the submission. I have not noticed any instances of phenomena that fall under the classification of “plagiarism”. Associate professor Cholakova is applying for the position with her monograph *The Poetics of Melancholy. Karel Hynek Mácha*. University Publishing House Paisii Hilendarski: Plovdiv, 2019 [ISBN 978-619-202-445-1], 403 pp., as well as 18 scholarly essays which have not been submitted in previous application procedures. The latter are written in Bulgarian, Czech, French and German and were published in Sofia, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad, Veliko Turnovo, Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, Moinești, and Hamburg. Associate professor Cholakova’s workload amounts to 570 in-class academic periods for the BA and MA level programs at Plovdiv University; she has supervised numerous MA and three PhD theses and has been guest lecturer and visiting researcher at prestigious universities. She has led and participated in a number of academic projects.

2. Evaluation of the habilitation work: Beyond any doubt, the submitted monograph possesses innovative characteristics and original contributions. There has been no precedent study into the poetics of melancholy of Karel Hynek Mácha (1810-1836), the founder of modern Czech poetry, either in the Czech scholarly tradition or in any other. Refusing to think of literatures as geographical “hollows”, Associate professor Cholakova discusses “the remarkable organic of Mácha both as a poet and as a cultural phenomenon that absorbs and refracts human culture in its entirety” (p. 230).

In terms of historical specificity, she renders his oeuvre in the wide-ranging context of European Romanticism. It is within this context – she argues convincingly – that melancholy becomes for the first time a valid worldview. Romanticism manifests itself as the age of melancholy. Its identification as the pain of existence that characterizes the Romantic creative personality turns it into an iconic sign of Romanticism – the feeling of despair and striving after absolutism, of social isolation and creative predestination (p. 9), leading to the romantic “subjectivization of the Logos” (p. 374). In transcending, personality moves closer to the world of ideas than to reality. This leads to the emergence of the image of the poet-prophet, casting his gaze into the invisible secrets of eternity, who experiences his

difference vis-à-vis the social and moral conventions and norms as an agonizing but necessary drama (p. 162). Melancholy is articulated as a philosophy of being – experienced as a personal fate and as human fate in general (p. 132).

The argumentation of this position calls for both synchronous and diachronic tracing of melancholy and its conceptualization, the manifestations of the “historical dynamics of the concept and the existing transpositions of melancholy” (p. 8). The centuries-old uses of this concept, the author insists, are not coincidental. The persistent presence of melancholy in creative consciousness as well as in its creation reveals its inalienable essence of *the idea of the world as a world of absences* (p. 373). In this respect, the work charts in detail the views of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the early modern times. The emphasis falls on the developments at the beginning of the 19th century. The scholarly gaze is cast in the direction of both philosophy (Schelling, Schiller) and the entire sphere of arts, especially literature. Mácha is regarded through a series of productive parallels with other European authors, not all of them confined to his age and time.

The author is convinced that “the significance of anyone’s oeuvre possesses superhistorical value”, in the “trajectory of which we find projections of the mind energy that has been accumulated through preceding literary experience and which transforms into a new literary reality” (p. 122). The work convincingly fleshes out the Universalist discourse of Mácha in which poetry is conceptualized as the suffered-through knowledge that all that is sublime is doomed (p. 187). It shows how Mácha’s reconceptualization of the melancholy worldview as an ontological answer to global questions about man and his world has been completely alien in the Czech context up to that point (p. 157).

Associate professor Cholakova is a methodologically experienced scholar who manages to distance herself from both the particular case in point and the abstract general picture. With her focus on the particular (in Hegelian terms), the author not only blazes the path of considering in-depth dimensions of Mácha’s poetry and of the Czech literature that follows him. She, in practice, creates the first thorough and systematic monograph on melancholy in the Bulgarian language. Indeed, the topic has been rendered extensively in an international academic context (this fact is reflected in the bibliography of the book that spreads over 22 pages). Any subsequent discussions of melancholy in Bulgarian science would be amiss if they do not take into account the study of Associate professor Cholakova.

Even a cursory look, given the constraints of time, over the rest of the submitted for consideration publications clearly reveals that both the methodological and the substantial approach in them is identical to the one laid out in the study. The texts are revealing of research choices that do not fall within the well-trodden trivial paths of scholarly pursuits; the approach to the subject matter is particular but placed in a wide-ranging cultural context; the results are innovative. As far as I can judge, I can claim with certainty that the same approach is evident in the teaching aspect of Associate professor Cholakova’s work as well as in the projects which she has led or participated in. Hers is an

academic presence that powerfully combines teaching and research and gives substance to the profile of an actual university professor.

3. Conclusion: The monograph and the critical essays of Associate professor Cholakova *contain scholarly, theoretical and applied results which show her original contribution to scholarship* and **fulfill all requirements** of the Law for the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Rulebook for the application of LDASRB and the corresponding Rulebook of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski. The submitted materials and results **fully** correspond to the specific requirements, deriving from the Rulebook of PU for the application of LDASRB.

The academic activity of Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova gives evidence of in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional capabilities by displaying high quality ability for conducting research that accomplishes original and significant scholarly contributions and at the same time feeds into the academic study process.

In view of the above, I firmly give my *positive evaluation* for her activity, for the accomplished results and contributions, and *suggest to the esteemed scholarly board that Associate professor Dr. habil. Zhorzheta Cholakova be awarded the academic title Professor* in the sphere of Higher education Humanities, professional qualification Philologies (Slavic literatures).

03 July 2019

Peer reviewer: