

REVIEW

by **Professor Dr. Habil. Cleo Stefanova Protohristova, Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski**

on the materials submitted in application for the open position of
Associate professor at The Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv
in the Sphere of HE 2. Humanities; Area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology
(Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature)

Following Order № № P33-4139 from 25. 08. 2020 of the Rector of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski I have been appointed a member of the Academic Review Board for the academic position of **Associate professor at PU** in the sphere of Higher education 2. **Humanities**, area of professional qualification **2.1. Philology (Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature)**, which was announced in the *State Gazette*, issue 57 from 26.06.2020 and on the web-page of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literature at the Philology Faculty.

The **single** applicant for the open position is Senior Lecturer Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki, PhD, from Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski.

The application documents submitted by Dr. Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki as hard copies are in compliance with the Rulebook for the Development of Academic Staff at PU. They include the following:

1. Application as per requirements to the Rector of PU, stating the applicant's intention to take part in the competition for the open position;
2. European format CV;
3. Diploma certificate for his completed Master's Degree - an original with all appendices or a notary verified copy;

4. Diploma certificate for his completed PhD Degree - an original with all appendices or a notary verified copy;
5. List of scholarly publications;
6. Official note on meeting the requirements of the Philology Faculty in accordance with Article 65 (3) of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff at the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB);
7. Annotations of the submitted materials in accordance with Article 65 of LDASRB, including self-assessment of their scholarly contributions;
8. Declaration to the originality and veracity of the submitted documents;
9. Official minutes of records from the relevant to the procedure meetings at the Departmental, Faculty and Academic Council levels;
10. The *State Gazette* published announcement of the procedure (copy);
11. Certificate of labour/work experience record;
12. Documents pertaining to his teaching record;
13. Documents pertaining to his scholarly record;
14. Documents in accordance with the specific requirements of the Philology Faculty;
15. Other documents.

Mladen Vlashki has submitted 11 works in total: 2 monographs, 1 course book and 8 scholarly papers and studies, whereby 4 are on the topic of his habilitation work. Two of the scholarly papers are in German and were published in Vienna.

Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki has been employed by Plovdiv University since 1986 following his successful passing of an assistantship exam in Western European Literature. Throughout this decades-long period he has been conducting lectures and seminars in Ancient and West European Literature in a range of philological majors; he has also delivered numerous MA level courses among which Current Bulgarian Literary Critique, Regulatory Processes in the Media Space of Europe and Bulgaria, Culture and the Media, European Policies, Semiotics, Contemporary Bulgarian Culture. In parallel, he has been very engaged in working with the students, offering guidance and leadership in a number of diverse projects and educational internships. Besides his active pedagogical role at PU, he has also taught courses in its Haskovo and Kirdzhali branches, and at the University of Shumen. His international pedagogical profile is impressive: it includes lectures and academic activities in Germany, Austria, Spain, Russia, Hungary and Romania under the auspices of Erasmus+ and other programs for academic exchanges. In 2015 he defended his PhD thesis on the topic of “Literary and Dramatic Resonances of the Dramatic Output of ‘Young Vienna’ in Bulgaria before 1944”.

In the period between 1997 and 2001 he was a Member of Parliament in the 38th National Assembly and between May and December 2001 he was a member of the National Council for Radio and Television.

The scholarly output that the applicant has submitted for the competition has two thematic nuclei – the monograph “The Reception of Kafka in Bulgaria until 1989”, together with the publications related to it, and the book *‘Young Vienna’ and Young Bulgaria*. The course book in West European Literature and the scholarly essays on Eichendorff and the contemporary Bulgarian novel add to his rich and multifaceted profile as a scholar.

The monograph on the reception of Kafka is the result of Mladen Vlashki’s stable and productive interest in both the oeuvre of this extremely complex author and the theoretical dimensions of translation and critical reception as well as intercultural transfer. The study follows a clearly outlined conceptual framework, supported by a solid methodological foundation and executed by means of excellent contextual reconstructions. It is systematic and unproblematic in presenting and motivating the choice to study the Bulgarian reception of Kafka at the intersection of ideology, politics and literature, which in turn leads to the logical dominance of the literary-sociological method, more specifically with an emphasis on Pierre Bourdieu. In laying out the core tenets of the scholarly matrix, the work aptly notes something that is often neglected, namely that “a cultural analysis should also deem important the phenomena of rejection, of mental and cultural resistance, of non-reception or of much-delayed such” (p. 18), which to a great extent applies to the case of the Bulgarian reception of Kafka.

The author’s decision to arrange his study around the juxtaposition between the “initial situation” that discusses how Kafka became an author of world literature by elucidating the various bridges that ensure such a process in principle, on one hand, and the “host/reception situation” which forms the core of investigative interest, on the other, is aptly productive. Thus, the observations on the respective reception processes in Bulgaria acquire the comparative-evaluative perspective that is a must so as to render the study’s conclusions relevant. While the analysis of the “initial situation” is based on a well-developed research field, the analytical endeavour tracing the Bulgarian case called for chartering completely new routes since previous attempts in the area, duly cited by Mladen

Vlashki, were of limited utility value for the logic of his own hypothesis and research design. One of the indubitable merits of his work lies in its documentary precision, the diligent, competent and productive work with archival sources which assisted him in throwing light on processes that would have otherwise remained unidentified. Even higher praise is due for his skill in placing particular facts into their respective contextual frameworks, first and foremost that of the literary field. In this regard, the study offered by Mladen Vlashki surpasses its particular goals so as to offer a model for a wide circle of subsequent research projects, since the conclusions he has reached possess enviably stable validity and can be taken as a reliable beacon to follow.

If this successfully realized project allows for some critical observations at all, they are mostly in the direction of a slightly skewed balance among the separate components of the study because the part that is dedicated specifically to the Bulgarian reception of Kafka amounts to 34 pages in a book of 170 pages, while the “initial situation” is developed in 50 pages. Irrespective of the fact that the facts employed just as their interpretation offer a solid enough basis for the conclusions reached, some additional details in the case studies would contribute even more fully to the integrity of the study. Without insisting on “by all means” additions in this respect, I would mention that, for instance, the question of the translations of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* by Dimitar Stoevski and Ventseslav Konstantinov is also of relevance to the scope of this project. Stoevski published his translation in the “Bulletin of Bulgarian Writers” in 1974 after which he deposited it together with several other short stories by Kafka for consideration at Narodna Kultura Publishing House, but the volume in question appeared only in 2003. (Франц Кафка, *Метаморфозата*, С., Фама, 2003) Meanwhile, Ventseslav Konstantinov, who was most likely encouraged by the published volume of Kafka’s letters, submitted to Hristo G. Danov Publishing House his own selection of short stories by Kafka, among them “Преображението” [Transfiguration], which was published in 1982. The comparison between the two translations is desirable even simply at the level of the “argument” as it were between the different titles „превъплъщение“, „преображението“ and „метаморфозата“ [transformation, transfiguration, metamorphosis] as equivalents of choice for *Die Verwandlung*. But this case study is also quite curious for its clearly mythogenic potential

largely due to an interview with Vera Gancheva conducted in 2008 when she stated that she recalled how at the time when she was the Editor-in-Chief of Narodna Kultura Ventseslav Konstantinov visited her and told her his translation of Kafka had been “buried” in some safe never to see the light of day. Then she continues in the same interview that she barely believed him but he was of course right and how they naturally “published a beautiful volume of Kafka’s work in a print run of at least a hundred thousand and it literally disappeared in a matter of days, bought by countless multitudes that had besieged bookshops across the country...”. After this Vera Gancheva makes the following comment: “This significant “revolutionary” step was followed by others, even more decisive. Our hard work/dedication made a breakthrough in the citadel of the then Press Committee where we, by the way, encountered not only backlash but also support, so that we could get permission to publish more world writers who were up till then unknown or downright “taboo” for the Bulgarian reader. This, however, was not an *ad hoc* matter; it was organized and strategically thought through. We had something to step on, who to consult and we continued enthusiastically thereafter.” (Cf. Marin Bodakov. Вера Ганчева - издател с вътрешно горене, Kultura Newspaper - Issue 24 (2507), 27 June 2008) The problem is that such a volume published by Narodna Kultura, at least according to the results yielded after my inquiry, doesn’t exist. A further confirmation in this vein comes with the reliably exhaustive bibliographic record of Bulgarian translations of Kafka that accompanies Vlashki’s book. The closest example to the description V. Gancheva offered is the collection *Austrian Storytellers* which was published in 1981 and which was compiled by V. Konstantinov. But the editors of Fama Publishing House claim that the “buried” translation was in fact that of Dimitar Stoevski (See <http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=114390>). It is quite obvious that the above-mentioned mismatch of information also adds a vignette to the reconstructed socio-historical context in the book with its ideological, political and literary dimensions.

The other work submitted with the application of Mladen Vlashki is his book ‘*Young Vienna’ and Young Bulgaria* which for the most part presents his dissertation work defended in 2016 but in the interim he has thoroughly reworked and expanded the text and has added new emphases in its content. It is important to note here that in this way his study

has acquired that conceptual solidity which not only turns it into a fact to be reckoned with in the field of Bulgarian reception studies but has rendered it a valuable contribution to the studies in cultural transfer on the Austrian side. That in particular has been guaranteed by presenting considerable parts of this study in German at international academic forums and their respective publications. The significance of this book is in fact also evident through the published reviews of the manuscript written by Maya Razboinikova-Frateva and Boris Minkov.

Overall, Mladen Vlashki's published works demonstrate his active role in academic exchange and their public exposure testifies to his research achievements. This is well illustrated by the reference and citation information that is included in the application. Moreover, it is pertinent to emphasize the impressive number of prestigious awards which Dr. Mladen Vlashki has received for his publications and other activities that are not included in the package here. Among those are the National Award Hristo G. Danov for Criticism and "The Oak of Pencho" for his book *Romanologiya li?* [Novelology?].

The documents and accompanying materials submitted by Senior Lecturer Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki, PhD, **meet all** the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff at the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Rulebook for the Application of LDASRB and the corresponding Rulebook of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski. They meet the quantitative indicators of the criteria for the position of Associate professor at the Philology Faculty.

The applicant has submitted a sufficient number of scholarly works, containing original scholarly contributions whereby a significant number have appeared in journals and academic volumes published by national and international academic outlets. His pedagogical, academic and scholarly record corresponds to the specific requirements of the Faculty of Philology, adopted in accordance with the Rulebook of PU for the application of LDASRB.

In my capacity of lecturer at the Philology Faculty of Plovdiv University I have had the opportunity to observe directly the academic presence of Dr. Mladen Vlashki for many years, first when he was a student and then as a colleague. At the same time, I have

immediate experience of his multifaceted activities not only as a lecturer and scholar but also as a literary critic, as an initiator and editor of journals and publications, as an author of media programs and as a public figure that have all merited from his talent, imagination and hard work and which he has also infused with his “contagious” enthusiasm that has recruited many followers and collaborators. The repertoire of his creative intellectual activity is stunning for its sheer scope and diversity; it exceeds the requirements for an applicant-associate-professor by so much that the occasion feels like an oddity.

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 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 Senior Lecturer Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki, PhD, for the academic position of **Associate professor** at Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski in the area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology, in the scholarly area of Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature.

November, 4th 2020

Reviewer:

Professor Dr. Habil. Cleo Protohristova