

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

by **Assoc. Prof. Kamelia Svetlinova Spassova,**

PhD, University of Sofia “St. Kl. Ohridski”

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

Following Order N PΔ-21-75 from 16.01. 2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski I have been appointed a member of the Academic Jury Board for the academic position of **Associate professor** at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the higher education field 2. Humanities, area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology (Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature), which was announced in the State Gazette, issue 96//17.11.2023 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 **Sonya Krasimirova Alexandrova**, PhD, from Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski. The application documents submitted by Dr. Sonya Krasimirova Alexandrova as hard copies are in compliance with the Rulebook for the Development of Academic Staff at PU.

It includes the following documents: Application Form; CV; Diploma – Master; Diploma – Doctor; List of scientific works; Reference – minimum requirements; Annotation under art. 65 of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff at the Republic of Bulgaria; Declaration of originality and authenticity; The State Gazette published announcement of the procedure; Self-evaluation of works and contribution Length of service; Documents - academic work; Documents – scientific-research work; Other documents.

1. General presentation of procedure and candidate

Sonia Alexandrova participated in the competition with 23 articles in Bulgarian and French, in addition to her monograph titled *Pre-modern Characteristics in the Work of Maupassant*. Her articles primarily focus on Maupassant's work, with particular attention given to the reading strategies employed by students to gain insights into his prose. Consequently, a practical dimension of the research profile of Asst. Alexandrova is to outline a face of Maupassant that fits well into the curriculum.

As a scholar, Alexandrova's doctoral monograph, *Western European Literature 1953/54*, aligns with the research trajectory established by Prof. Cleo Protohristova's theoretical program, which seeks to identify specific "literary years" as structural thresholds and significant turning points. In her articles, Alexandrova explores certain motifs and issues that are also examined and developed in her monograph on Maupassant, a literary figure that has been a focal point of her research for the past decade. Of particular note is her emphasis on the novel *Bel Ami* as a subject of revisitation and reconsideration. Another area of research focus for Alexandrova is the popular culture of serials as a reinterpretation of the sub-novel tradition. Additionally, she explores the figure of Petya Dubarova, attempting to situate her poetry within a broader European context.

Sonia Alexandrova is affiliated with the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literature at the Philology Faculty, PU, where she is successively a PhD student (2004-2007), Assistant Professor (2009-2011), and Senior Assistant Professor (2011-present). Her teaching focus correspond to the competition code and involve seminars in comparative literary studies. Furthermore, her PhD was completed and defended at the University of Artois, France (2005-2008), and published as an independent monograph in French. This experience is evident in her adeptness in working with French sources and navigating the secondary literature in French related to Maupassant. In addition, her extensive tenure at Alphonse de Lamartine - Alliance Française, Plovdiv (2000-2010) as an advanced French teacher reflects her enduring interest in educational practices.

2. General characteristics of candidate's activity

Pre-Modern Characteristics in the Work of Maupassant (2023) represents the first comprehensive monograph on Maupassant in Bulgarian. Skillfully composed with meticulous attention to contextual nuances, the study illuminates the French novelist's multidimensional oeuvre. A cogent thesis unifying the entire argument, fortified by a multi-layered understanding not only of Maupassant's work but also of his reception within French literary circles, spanning from the late nineteenth century to the present day. The study endeavors to capture the delineating features within the French novelist's oeuvre that set him apart from the realist patterns of the nineteenth century while simultaneously foreshadowing emerging literary trends. These distinctive attributes are identified as pre-modern characteristics, including the deliberate deployment of repetition, mirroring, empty imagery and ekphrasis as part of this unrealistic poetics. The study recognizes Maupassant's inclination towards stylization, characterized by elements of the grotesque, caricature and obscure. Thereby, he is positioned in a liminal state: not yet a modernist akin to Proust yet no longer comfortably classified within the established canon of great French realists and naturalists.

This study defends Maupassant's pre-modernist poetics on three levels: theoretical, contextual, and analytical. The general theoretical framework introduces mimetic concepts through the legacy of Plato and Aristotle in their Bulgarian reception. Tracing the ancient mimetic concept is clever and conscientious. Aristotle's lineage is important, with its emphasis on "creative autonomy", the complex notion of "plausibility" and the possibility of transforming rather than reflecting reality (p. 20). However, a key opportunity was missed. Aristotle's *Poetics* served as a point of departure for prominent 20th-century French thinkers to ground their poetic or narratological approach, such as Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, etc. Their conceptual tools regarding discursive practices, the diegetic-mimetic relationship, functions of presentation and narration, intrigue and performativity, as well as point of view and the narrator's role seem pertinent for examining Maupassant's poetics.

Instead, a rather reduced understanding of realism is introduced at the second theoretical step, tending towards mimetic referential reflection of the extraliterary world. It would have strengthened the framework to briefly engage debates around realism and note

its non-referential conceptualization. Barthes' article on the "reality effect", demonstrating realism as a discursive rather than referential phenomenon produced through metonymic detail accumulation, citing examples from Hellenistic ekphrasis to Flaubert, illustrates how the realistic is likewise linguistic. This would demonstrate how not only "the fantastic is language" but also the realistic is language. While not practically impacting precise analyses, such elucidation would render the theoretical framework more robust. Ultimately, insightful and meticulous examination of Maupassant's poetics remains.

The second level through which the study unfolds is the historical-contextual narrative. The introduction of Baudelaire's aesthetic modernity is executed with skill and persuasiveness. Through numerous intriguing and specific subtleties, the author describes Maupassant's milieu, his elective affinities, and his partial identification with certain literary phenomena. It seems valuable to me that Maupassant's method is introduced once through his own self-reflexive observations and a second time through the prism of his near contemporaries' views of him. Consequently, the figure of Maupassant is constructed as a writer of rupture and transition. Sonia Alexandrova's concrete analyses within the book are engaging and captivating, consistently finding peculiar details through which to illuminate the readings. Particularly successful is the section titled "Autotextual Repetition - The Way to the Image", wherein the subtle juxtaposition of three narratives aligns Maupassant's fantastic aspect with Tzvetan Todorov's notion of the strangely fantastic. It is within this section that the study's central thesis crystallizes more vividly: "Repetition is for Maupassant both an attempt to hold on to tradition and an anticipation of the new to come; an expression of his premodern stance which, though particularly emotionally nostalgic for the past, is clearly aware of the exhaustion of classical representational technique" (p. 159). Given my personal scholarly inclinations, I would appreciate further development of this non-realist modus within Maupassant's stories, especially considering the promising list of works provided in Appendix 1, many of which receive limited commentary or remain on the periphery of the book. The appended list, however, strikes me as a potential site that might generate future research.

Pre-modern Characteristics in the Work of Maupassant is a good philological book that delights in working slowly and carefully over texts. It exemplifies how, amidst an era of relentless acceleration, the philologist's discerning eye for detail yields observations, narratives, and fortuitous connections, all while relishing in the gratification of "small

textual encounters”. I firmly believe that select chapters from this book should be recommended as essential reading for university studies on Maupassant. Despite occasionally occupying a peripheral position within 19th-century literary studies, this book convincingly demonstrates that Maupassant is a writer capable of surprising us with his prose.

Critical comments and recommendations

- When delving into autotextual repetition, it is crucial to engage with Radosvet Kolarov’s book, *Repetition and Creation: Poetics of Autotextuality*, particularly focusing on the concept of the “generating matrix”.
- The absence of a definition for “ekphrasis” raises doubts regarding the notion of “pseudo-ekphrasis”. Thus, as cited by Basilio on page 114, suggests that “pseudo-ekphrasis” pertains to a form of ekphrasis involving real or imaginary impressionistic paintings. However, later in the text, ekphrasis is assumed to exclusively refer to existing paintings, while “pseudo-ekphrasis” encompasses imaginary ones. This inconsistency also extends to the broader concept of mimesis, which at times connotes referentiality (“classical mimetic representation”) and at other times non-referentiality (mimesis as a technique yielding verisimilitude). Notwithstanding this conceptual observation, the exploration of the interplay between literature and painting is commendable.
- While the distinction between social realism and socialist realism is evident, it is advisable to employ the term “realism” instead of “social realism”.

CONCLUSION

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 **Sen. Asst. Sonya Krasimirova Alexandrova, 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.

24th March 2024

Reviewer: Kamelia Spassova