

## **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 № РД-21-75 from 16. 01. 2024 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 96 from 17. 11. 2023 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 Sonya Krassimirova Alexandrova-Koleva, PhD, from Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski.

The application documents submitted by Dr. Sonya Krassimirova Alexandrova 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;

Sonya Alexaandrova has submitted one monograph, published as a book and titled "Pre-modernist characteristics in the work of Maupassant", 10 scholarly papers on the topic of her habilitation work and 13 articles on different topics. Outside the competition, two editions of her dissertation are submitted – in Bulgarian (Западноевропейската литературна 1953/54-та година. Пловдив: УИ „Паисий Хилендарски”, 2012), and in French (*L'année littéraire 1953-54 dans la littérature européenne*. Berlin: Éditions universitaires européennes, 2019), as well as 11 papers on the same topic. Eight of the articles have been published in international editions. Five of the papers are co-authored.

Dr Sonya Alexandrova is a Plovdiv University graduate with a BA in Bulgarian and French. In 2008 she defended her doctoral thesis prepared under a joint doctoral programme (*cotutelle de thèse*) of Plovdiv University with the University of Artois in Arras (France) on the topic “The West European Literary Year 1953/54“. She has been employed by Plovdiv University since 2008 lecturing and conducting seminars in Ancient and West European Literature in a range of philological majors. She has also delivered a couple of MA level courses. Dr. Alexandrova is established as a competent and highly effective teacher who enjoys the respect of the college and the students.

After her doctoral defense, the candidate has participated in 29 scientific forums, 13 of them international (10 of the participations were co-authored) and worked on four scientific projects (one national).

The good public effectiveness of the candidate's publications is evidenced by the list of citations attached to the documentation, where 6 citations are indicated.

Predictably, the most decisive role for legitimizing the candidacy is assigned to the habilitation thesis dedicated to the work of Maupassant - an author in whom Sonya Alexandrova shows a lasting and deep interest. The main hypothesis around which the study of the private problems included in the monograph is organized is that pre-modernist characteristics are present in Maupassant's work. The main argument used to prove this hypothesis is that in Maupassant there are deviations from the practices of social realism and naturalism, characterized as "tactical applications of traditional literary concepts with non-traditional goals".

The very choice of Maupassant as the subject of the study has its merits, since despite the constant stream of publications on his work - mainly in France, but also - albeit rather sporadically - in other countries, his name does not appear in the privileged repertoire of current literary studies. The decision to analyze Maupassant's work as a kind of anticipation of modernism is also a success, because the established understanding of him is more like a finishing stage of social realism in France that followed the crisis of naturalism.

Favorable prerequisites for the reliability of the analytical observations are the high degree of command of the French language that the author has, and also their provision by the impressive volume of studied critical studies on Maupassant, as well as by their good assimilation. With a high degree of certainty, it could be assumed that Sonya Alexandrova is the best prepared Maupassant specialist in Bulgaria.

The book is organized into a neat, well-thought-out outline of an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. The first two chapters have an introductory character, they specify the theoretical and literary-historical orientations of the study. The third sets the leading methodological optics, defined by the focus on repetition as a defining mechanism in Maupassant's work. In this way, the route was traced, along which the further, essential studies, conducted mainly in the mode of close reading, are carried out. In this case, the approach in question should be understood only as "close reading" but not as "narrow" as the original term is usually understood, because the analytical procedures carried out in the work

are subject to consistent consideration of diverse contextual frameworks – the development of the fine arts relevant to Maupassant's work, the aesthetic practices of art nouveau, the traditional French church naming trends, the fashionable floral interior design of the time, reconstructed with the help of comprehensive expository tours of various aspects of the culture of France in the late nineteenth century, relevant to the writer's creative pursuits.

Some of the extensive explanatory deviations are not completely defensible as a ratio between volume and functionality, but without disturbing the compositional stability of the text. The overall impression that the exhibition creates is of a calm mastery of the problem field and a stable informative security of the research moves. As an additional merit, I would point out the sense for original, provocative aspects in which to present the defended leading hypothesis.

As extremely productive, I would point out the idea that the insistent textual repetitions and self-citations characteristic of Maupassant should be interpreted as manifestations of autotextuality, because such an approach makes it possible to establish the non-accidentality of specific peculiarities in his writing, analyzed mainly with a focus on individual works of his. and, accordingly, their larger scale validity. It can only be regretted that the analysis of the selected examples is not in line with the theoretical and methodological possibilities provided by Radosvet Kolarov's exemplary study on autotextuality.

Sonja Alexandrova's findings about individual cases of incorrect, sometimes even compromising the meaning, translations of Maupassant into Bulgarian, based on her analyses of one or another of his works on the occasion of the study of individual problems, deserve to be highlighted as an undoubtedly contributing point. In all these cases, she has suggested edits that are relevant and productive in order to prove the defended theses. Periodically renewed, sufficiently systematic observations on established inconsistencies form an additional research plot that produces, along with the articulated main conclusions, also the implicit deduction that a new, updated translation of the writer's work is extremely imperative.

As it becomes clear from what has been said so far, my general impression of Sonyai Alexandrova's habilitation work is positive. In general, the text speaks of solid professionalism and an enviable knowledge of the studied material, qualities that legitimize it as a convincing application for habilitation.

At the same time, individual moments in it cause reservations or disagreement. The most important among them is the characterization of anti-mimeticism as an indisputable distinguishing mark of modernism – a position on which the leading idea of the exhibition is practically based. It is pertinent to bear in mind that the problematization of mimetic representation has a significantly earlier beginning and is embedded in the aesthetics of Romanticism. So when the study speaks about "shifting the mirror as a metaphor for realistic writing" (p. 328-329) and about "the flow of artistic energy in the direction from the author to the world" (p. 329), it is inadmissible to ignore the fact that even the Romantics opposed the mirror, a traditional metaphor of mimesis, to the "spotlight", that imaginative power which radiates from the creator, independent of whatever to be a "reflected" preset reality (let me at least mention M. H. Abrams' christologically inescapable study of 1953 "The Mirror and the Lamp").

I am also inclined to show some skepticism towards the qualification of the observed idiosyncrasies in Maupassant's work as anticipatory, pre-modernist characteristics. The question logically arises why, if indeed, as Alexandrova's statement insists, Maupassant's work is presented as some kind of damaged realization of modernism, modernists lack a clear interest in him, while at the same time they all, without exception, recognize him as their inspirational predecessor and teacher the same Flaubert, from whom his immediate student Maupassant persistently strives to emancipate himself.

I take the liberty of being extra discerning about the way the theoretical and critical sources are used in the work. In general, there is consistent and comprehensive citation of them. However, as I have already pointed out with regard to the internal discussion of the work, to one degree or another the text refuses to specify with sufficient clarity the extent to which its own exposition is indebted to previous research and where the personal contribution begins. Confusing, for example, is the reference to Julie Mestrot's reading of "Bel Ami", argued solely on the basis of a refusal to use the term *incipit*, common in French literary

studies, but the analysis of the novel's introduction follows disturbingly closely that of Mestre, who identifies in the introduction the pattern of the character's future development. Similarly, the otherwise correct citation of Josette Ricot's study of the role assigned to Madeleine in the novel fails to mention something extremely important - that it is Rico who parallels the toponym "Madeleine" with Madeleine Forestier's name, a parallelism on which Alexandrova's own thesis of the "doubling of Madeleine's image" is built.

I am aware, of course, that in making such claims I am trying desperately to counter a style of handling other people's ideas and ideas that is becoming more and more prevalent, and is obviously implied by the new information technologies (it is more than certain that with the valuable help of artificial intelligence we will end up compromising the criteria for authorship). But I continue to believe that the defining virtue of a scientific endeavour, alongside the effort, intellectual ability and talent invested in it, is its impeccable moral purity.

In view of the requirement to include personal impressions of the candidate in the review, I can state that I have known Sonya Alexandrova for a long time. I was her PhD supervisor, and subsequently we worked as a team as lecturers in Ancient and West European Literature, as well as in various other disciplines at undergraduate and graduate level. I would especially like to emphasize her extraordinary teaching qualities, which have enjoyed both a remarkable track record of student achievement and their recognition and sympathy.

The documents and accompanying materials submitted by Senior Lecturer Sonya Krassimirova Alexandrova-Koleva, 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. Her

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.

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 Sonya Krassimirova Alexandrova-Koleva, 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 and I will be happy to vote in favor of this recommendation.

March 11th, 2024

**Reviewer:**  
**Professor Dr. Habil. Cleo Protohristova**