

REVIEW

by Associate Professor Svetla Kirilova Cherpokova-Zaharieva, PhD, lecturer in the History of Literature and Comparative Literature Studies Department, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,
on the dissertation of the awarding of scientific degree “doctor of science” in the field of higher education,

Field of higher education: 2. Humanities

Professional field: 2.1. Philology (Classic and Western European Literature: Comparative Literature)

Author: Associate Professor Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki, PhD

Topic: “Bulgarian Images in Late 19th-Century Austrian Literature”

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By order of the Rector of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” RD – 22-1557 from 26.06.2025, I was appointed as a member of the academic jury for the awarding of scientific degree “doctor of science (D. Sc.)” in the field of higher education in professional field 2.1. Philology (Classic and Western European Literature: Comparative Literature). The author of the dissertation is Associate Professor Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki, PhD – a long-term lecturer in the History of Literature and Comparative Literature Studies Department of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

According to the requirements, I confirm that the set of documents and materials presented by the contestant for the purposes of the competition meet all set requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Guidelines for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv and all necessary documents are accounted for. Assoc. Prof. Vlashki has presented a thesis and a set of articles on the topic of the thesis, as well as other publications. The survey to establish whether the minimal national requirements have been met shows that the documents meet all scientometric indicators for awarding the title of “doctor of science.”

Associate Professor Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki, PhD received a MA degree in Bulgarian Philology in the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, where he also received his doctorate. He has another doctorate from the University of Vienna. He is a longtime lecturer at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in Classic and Western European

Literature and Comparative Literary Studies, as well as other disciplines related to critical and literary reception.

He also teaches lecture courses for Bachelor's and Master's students at the Plovdiv University branches in Kardzhali and Smolyan, and over the years, he has also taught at the Shumen University, New Bulgarian University – Plovdiv, and the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts. He has been a guest lecturer at more than eight foreign universities (Dresden, Humboldt University, Göttingen, Bologna, Budapest, Freiburg, Komotini, Athens, and others). He has written several textbooks and study guides. He is actively involved in the cultural sphere as a creator and editor of book series and magazines (e.g., *Stranitsa* magazine), and a member of editorial boards of academic journals (e.g., *LInC*). He hosts a radio talk show about literature and books on BNR-Plovdiv. He is a translator of both fiction and academic literature from German. He is a recipient of prestigious awards from "Portal Kultura," "Dabat na Pencho," "Osma Muza," "Sirak Skitnik," "Hr. G. Danov," and others.

2. Relevance of the thesis, its core point, and understanding the methodology

The research topic, "Bulgarian Images in Late 19th-Century Austrian Literature" is the result of over 35 years of work in the field by Associate Professor Mladen Vlashki, PhD. This is truly a fundamental work, very profound and the product of systematic engagement over time. I would call the dissertation a "magnum opus" as it summarizes Associate Professor Mladen Vlashki's research throughout the years. Undeniable contributions include the construction of a research matrix, the setting of research vectors, the proposal of productive typological similarities, offering a model for researching "forgotten processes," and the creation of a "complete image" of Bulgarian images in end-of-the-century Austrian literature. The dissertation is also a contributory text simply by constructing a research field that has been unstudied in this country.

It opens up new research horizons and presents a challenge for research directions that can be applied by scholars in their own research areas. I personally find the first part (the introduction and the first chapter) very useful as it offers a methodological framework for the research. There, anyone can find many useful things for their own studies, even if they are related to a different time frame but deal with a typologically similar subject.

Methodologically, the dissertation is well-structured as it applies interdisciplinary and comparative approaches. The author has a good command of modern scientific methodology, and the research builds its own research models that can serve as an example for other research practices.

3. Characterization and appraisal of the dissertation and its contributions

The dissertation is separated into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. It also includes two excursions. The introduction goes beyond the traditional “introductory words,” thoroughly acquainting the reader with the rationale and advantages of this type of research. Its captivating readability prepares the reader for the upcoming steps of the study. From “Viennese confectionaries” to Oriental and Viennese cafes, the reader can “taste” the sweetness of the subject matter.

In Chapter One, “Methodological Perspectives,” the discussion of the concept of “image” is particularly productive in light of comparative studies, intercultural hermeneutics, reception theory, and imagology. It also provides a key to analyzing the national distinctiveness of literature—a key that subsequently systematically “unlocks” and explains problematic thematic areas. Chapter Two, “Literary-Historical Models of Austrian Literature from approximately 1870 to 1918,” delves deeply into the subject matter, placing different processes in necessary contexts—literary, general cultural, historical, and political. Different “models of Austrian literary histories” (e.g. Herbert Zeman, Winfried Kriegsleder) are examined to finally form a definitive “framework of the end-of-the-century Austrian literature of Austrian literary-historical models,” with the problematization of concepts like “realism” and “naturalism” in the light of this unique framework being particularly interesting. Chapter Three, “Transfer, Reception, and Images of Fin-de-Siècle Austrian Literature in the Literary Field in Bulgaria,” focuses on specific manifestations of the images of end-of-the-century Austrian literature in Bulgaria. The specific investigative experiments are carried out by focusing on well-known figures from Bulgarian literary history: Ivan Shishmanov, Teodor Trayanov, Geo Milev, and Nikolay Liliev. The unique aspect, however, is that it presents unknown or insufficiently discussed aspects of their literary-historical being. Section 4.3. titled “Transfer channels of end-of-the-century Austrian literature and images influenced by them,” is especially valuable as it outlines the “channels” for cultural transfer—periodicals, theater, and publishing. This

section also offers an outline that can guide a future researcher of cultural transfers, not just along the Bulgaria-Austria line.

The conclusion once again answers the question systematically posed throughout the dissertation: “Why is the end-of-the-century Austrian literature of importance for today’s understanding of the world we live in?”. This answer, as it becomes clear, is not solitary, but seeking it is not without significance, both for the dissertation author’s own research efforts and for our current sense of a world that is constantly changing yet also firmly connected to the traditions of our predecessors.

4. Assessment of Publications, Abstract, and Personal Contributions

The articles presented prove the author’s long-standing and profound engagement with the subject matter. They are published in authoritative journals and meet the national minimum requirements.

The abstract provides an excellent overview of the dissertation's content. It contains all the necessary attributes and offers a high-quality summary of the dissertation.

Something important must be noted alongside the personal contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mladen Vlashki about his research practice in general, which I have had the opportunity to observe over the years and which is also reflected in his current work: he does not simply over-rely on what is said and written, but rather works with archives, manuscripts, compares them, and extracts their subtextual meaning with a view to the studied topic.

5. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no critical remarks about the dissertation or the materials provided alongside it. Instead, I would argue against a critical comment that arose during the internal discussion of the dissertation regarding the voluminous footnotes. For me personally, they were especially useful, as the vast body of authors, works, cultural and literary processes, and historical facts are not always known to the reader, even if they are a specialist in the specific field. The footnotes add substance to the text and, without creating a sense of overload or straying from the main task, inform and educate the reader.

I hope that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mladen Vlashki follows the same path, or even another one, but with the same depth and dedication, which I believe will happen.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the presented materials and analyzing their significance and the scientific and applied contributions contained within them, I find it reasonable to give my entirely **positive evaluation** for the awarding of the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences” to Assoc. Prof. Mladen Tsvetanov Vlashki in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional direction: 2.1. Philology (Ancient and Western European Literature: Comparative Literary Studies).

23.09.2025

Review by:

(Assoc. Prof. Svetla Kirilova Cherpokova-
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