

OPINION

by **Dr. Elena Slavova Getova**, Associate Professor at *Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv*

of the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the open academic position of **Associate Professor**
of *Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv*,

In: Field of Higher Education 2. Humanities,

Professional field 2.1. Philology, (**Bulgarian Literature – Renaissance Literature and Folklore**)

In the competition for Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette, **No. 96 of 11.11.2025**, and on the website of *Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv* for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology, **Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev** from *Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv* participates as a candidate

1. General presentation of the procedure and the applicant

By Order **No. PD-22-47 of 01.09.2026** of the Rector of *Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv* (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in a competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor at the University of Plovdiv** in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, (**Bulgarian Literature – Renaissance Literature and Folklore**), **announced for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology.**

Only one candidate has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition: **Chief Assistant Dr. Zdravko Trifonov Dechev** from *Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv*.

The set of materials presented by Zdravko Trifonov Dechev on paper is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv and includes the following documents: curriculum vitae, list of scientific publications, evidence for compliance with the minimum requirements, annotations of the materials with which he participates in the competition, self-assessment of the merit of the proposed habilitation work, evidence for educational work and references for research work.

The candidate Zdravko Trifonov Dechev has submitted a total of 16 scientific papers: one book and 15 research papers. The scientific papers submitted for review are outside the topic of his doctoral dissertation and have been taken into account in the final evaluation. Zdravko Dechev graduated from the bachelor's and master's programs in Bulgarian Philology at the University of Plovdiv. From 2004 to 2007 he was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literary Studies at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Plovdiv. He defended his doctoral dissertation in 2007. From 2004 to 2013 he was a part-time Lecturer in Renaissance literature at the same department. In 2013 he was appointed as a full-time assistant, and since 2015 he has been chief assistant. I have known Zdravko Dechev from the beginning of his scientific career to his current career advancement. For the last ten years he has been leading the seminars in Renaissance literature of all hybrid majors and my impressions, as well as those of the students in his seminars, have been very good. Zdravko Dechev was also an indispensable aide in organizing and conducting national and international events during my term as Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Philology (2015-2023). I owe him special gratitude for his participation in the preparation of the largest scientific event of the faculty – the *Paisius Readings* conference, which is held every year. He has also been a valuable help in the preparation and conduct of semester examinations, thesis defenses and scientific consultations with students.

2. General characteristics of the applicant's activity

Assessment of the educational and pedagogical activity and the preparation of the candidate

The candidate in the announced competition has prepared a completely new lecture course in the master's program of Contemporary Bulgarian Studies, gives lectures on Revival literature at the Branch of the University of Plovdiv in Kardzhali and conducts lectures on folklore at the University of Plovdiv. For the last 10 years, Zdravko Dechev has been conducting seminars on Renaissance literature for all hybrid majors and for the major of Bulgarian Philology, and in the current academic year he is fully engaged with lectures on folklore for all majors. He was the academic advisor of three graduates who have successfully defended their theses. For the third consecutive term, he is a member of the Committee of Accreditation Procedures and Quality Control of Education (CAPQCE).

Assessment of the candidate's scientific activity.

The publications with which the candidate participates in the competition can be classified into three categories, according to a thematically unifying focus. The first category includes five articles that focus on presenting an analytical overview of the current state of contemporary Bulgarian literature. The second category comprises of three publications tracing various functional aspects in the reception of Paisius' *Slavonic-Bulgarian History*, as well as the interest in the relationship between the oral and the written word, continued from his dissertation. Finally, the seven articles of the third category gravitate around the main research problem in Dechev's habilitation work, the manifestations of which are sought in L. Karavelov's fiction from the Russian period and in the poetry of the Bulgarian National Revival. One of all the articles proposed in the competition is published in an edition with an impact factor, and the rest - in national journals or as reports in proceedings of national scientific conferences.

3. Assessment of the applicant's scientific contributions

Even with his first book – the published dissertation, Zdravko Dechev declares a valuable for every researcher and very rarely seen and applied as a successful creative ability: the ability to design the research exploration along the lines of an unfolding plot, either literary (fictional) or scientific research plot. In both directions, we have grounds to describe it as Dechev's signature literary criticism. First, it is the ability to subordinate his scientific empirical material to a single storyline. Fortunately, in Dechev's case, it is not contrived, predestined and "filled" with literary finds. Dechev's research displays both respect for what his predecessors have done, and even more importantly – respect for historical and literary facts and for working with the originals. The texts of the Renaissance writers come to life precisely because they are laid in an analytical fabric that is historically adequate to their time and place.

Following a storyline in scientific research also provides that chance for both the author and the reader to fall into the parameters of the literary and thus find themselves between fact and fiction. In the current, second book of Zdravko Dechev *Around the Dead Body* the course of research on the one hand literally specifies the find "around", thematizing, of course, the dead body, but retaining a certain territory of observability of the research object from a distance. The "plot" in Zdravko Dechev's writing relies on the "happening" – this sometimes-imaginary appearance – around the dead body and its corporeality articulated in the word. On the other hand, the study exteriorizes this indeterminate "around", giving it a metaphorical meaning as well. Titles and subtitles in the book – for example, *On Nayden Gerov's poem "Stoyan and Rada"...*; *On Petko R. Slaveykov*; *On motifs from "The Life and Sufferings of the Sinful Sophronius"...*; *On Botev* – not only semantically, but also functionally as a research choice, are burdened with polysemy. Such decisions in the titling create the perspective of gravity unfolding around the meaning – and perhaps a refusal to remain in its unambiguous center of gravity, but to look for the indirect path to the message of the texts. An example of this is the final thesis in the annotation of the book, "But the end of the book turned out to be postponed..."

Here it turns out that the writing is not only about what is observed and happening around the dead body, but also about what may happen around writing about it, around the study and theorizing of its investigative *telos*, and around its postponed completion. That is why the research, meaning the writing about, remains unfinished and without the expected ending.

Certainly, there is another explanation for this phenomenon. Zdravko Dechev has a long and successful career as an observer and analyst of the most recent Bulgarian literature (this is evidenced by many of the publications with which he participates in the competition for associate professor). Therefore, we can assume that this scientific strategy is a natural consequence of the in-depth knowledge of Bulgarian fiction in the last two decades. The truth is that it is the ability to plot that makes the book very intriguing to read and not only for the tempted specialist.

When the topic of the competing book is about death, and not about dying itself, as Zdravko Dechev specifies, but about the phenomenology of the mortal body and the corporeality of its existence, and when unexpected threads are woven in to unify the topic and the author's narrative (in the sense of a written text), then it is quite natural to assume that at the present moment of the announced competition, the traces of the book *The Gardener and Death* by G. Gospodinov, which definitely says so much about death, cannot but be noticed. It is quite natural that he (as an author) and it (as a book) cast their shadow on such a research text as that of Zdravko Dechev's. What do I mean and where do I see the manifestations of this synchrony between literary reality and research style – a thesis with which I began my opinion: first of all, in the multi-layered metaphorical nature of the construction of the compositional elements of the book (titles, content, arrangement of emphasis solutions at the beginning, the statement about the instability of the thematic focus at the end, etc.); secondly, in the playful constitution of the logical course of writing on this plot itself. Furthermore, let's point out that the plot is configured in the direction of both literary and folkloric research (the possibilities of layering multidimensional detailed observations in the two research fields and the two dialogizing scientific paradigms have not been missed).

When we look for the shadow (or *among the shadows* according to Z. Dechev) of a certain artist and his book, manifested discreetly, of course, in the construction of a scientific text, we can also come across very obvious evidence of this assumption. For example, the sincere feeling in the worlds of the "characters" from the Renaissance literature who participate in the scientific research plot. There is hardly any need to prove this statement to anyone familiar with Zdravko Dechev's book. The fragmentary nature of the presented research facts and the choice of titles and authors, which does not follow a chronological sequence, also help us to imagine this unsought and not tendentious structural "anatomy of Renaissance sadness", if we allow ourselves to paraphrase Georg Gospodinov's title. My second example is related to the brilliant decision for the end of the book. A finale that does not aim for not seeks this effect in a focused way, is reminiscent of the typical finalization in the novels of the most recognized and authoritative Bulgarian novelist.

This is an open finale, with the intention for future plans, with the articulation of noticeable omissions, with the brilliant rhetoric of the inexhaustible research directions on the topic. Thus, not only does the scientific writing not close, but it is given a chance to be continued, and in very clearly objectified directions – by indicating authors and specific titles that will be woven into the body of the book in the future, instead of gravitating *around* it. "The Labyrinth of Meaning" is to be supplemented with new ornate thematic branches and literary theory challenges through the cobblestones of Bulgarian Revival literature. The incompleteness of the book presupposes and requires this.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by Zdravko Trifonov Dechev meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (DASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on DASRB, and the corresponding Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The candidate in the competition has submitted a sufficient number of scientific papers published after the materials used in the defense of his doctoral degree. Having been acquainted with the materials and scientific works submitted in the competition, in the aspect of analyzing their significance and the scientific contributions contained in them, I find it justified to give my positive assessment and recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report proposing to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology to elect Zdravko Trifonov Dechev for the academic position of Associate Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the Field of

Higher Education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology (Bulgarian Literature – Renaissance Literature and Folklore).

March 2, 2026

Author of the opinion:
(*Signature*)

Associate Professor Dr. Elena Getova,
(*Academic position and degree., name, surname*)