



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 Professor Dr Assen Zlatarov University of Burgas
in the Sphere of HE 2. Humanities; Area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology
(Ancient and West European Literature)

Following Order № ПД 433 from 28.12. 2023 г. of the Rector of Professor Dr Assen Zlatarov University of Burgas 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 Literature)**, which was announced in the *State Gazette*, issue 97 from 21.11.2023 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 Elitsa Dubarova-Petkova, PhD, from Dr Assen Zlatarov University of Burgas. She is a Plovdiv University graduate as a MA in Bulgarian Philology (1999) and defended her PhD thesis on Novalis in 2009. Since 1999 she has been employed by the University of Burgas - initially as a visiting assistant (1999-2003), from 2010 on as an Assistant professor and since 2010 as a Senior Lecturer. Throughout this period of time she has been conducting lectures and seminars in Ancient and West European Literature

Elitsa Dubarova has submitted about 30 works in total: two monographs - a habilitation work, published as a book, a book, based on her PhD thesis, a significant number of scholarly papers and 1 course book. The scholarly output that the applicant has submitted

for the competition has three thematic nuclei – the monograph dedicated to Robert Musil's novel "The Man Without Qualities" and papers related to it, German Romanticism with special reference to Novalis, and the poetry of Petia Dubarova. Dr Dubarova has accumulated credits from her participation in a impressive number of diverse national and international projects.

Logically, it is the habilitation work that serves as the gravitational centre for the application, all the more so because a substantial part of the rest of the publication activity of the candidate is narrowly connected to the topic and the contents of the monograph. Focused on Musil's notorious novel, the habilitation work is an extremely ambitious project, the challenges to which start from the very choice of the research object. "The Man Without Qualities" presents a discouraging combination of the novel's appropriation by critics, and by Musil himself, of extraordinarily high acclaim, with its distressing, overwhelming unreadability. Turning this undoubtedly remarkable literary fact into the focus of respectable years of research and reflection is a display of professional heroism, behind which I am inclined, though not without a dose of understandable discomfort, to recognize the presence of a not insignificant amount of masochism.

The work is focused on the narrative techniques utilized in the novel. This choice is in conformity with the basic hypothesis, namely that "by expanding the possibilities of irony and essayism, Musil sets himself two other aesthetic goals, illuminating also the peculiar metanarrative of "The Man Without Qualities" – to make a powerful "discursive" pushback against skeptical views of man's future in a world of disintegrating forms and identities and to "reprogram" the narrative nature of irony and essayism into a spiritual experiment with medical (positive) implications from which man of the new time to come out prepared and open to all the possibilities taken from him by the imperious linguistic reality." The aim of the research is already to name the attempt "to correct one of the key aspects in the known critical paradigm of the novel [...] to perceive it as utopian, proving that it is "built entirely on the ironically motivated metaethical relativism", and the main narrative strategies – essayism and quoting, usually

“rationalized as procedures of discursive constructing Musil’s philosophical view“, to be rethought in view of with respect to their "supratextual and suprafictional validity" (see p.19-20). The more particular hypothesis around which the study is organized is the absolutization of the ironic perspective in the novel and its presentation as "method, mechanism and procedure at the same time" - "a comprehensive prism that organizes and compresses within itself all paradigms of thinking" (with the supposed ultimate goal of their destruction), "a procedure of a healing nature, the therapeutic functions of which are carried out (through the mediator principle) on the sensual-physiological and sensual-psychic beginning in the perception of reality and what is happening" (see p. 34-35).

Organized in three general parts, entitled in accordance with the titles given by Musil to the three parts of his novel - “A Sort of Introduction”, “Pseudoreality Prevails” and “Into the Millennium (The Criminals)”, the work is focused on the creative history and the critical reception of the novel (with emphasis on the Bulgarian respons); on the functions of irony in the novel and the defining of its determining discursive strategy, esseism and citation activity as its main instruments, subsequently qualified as metanarrative technics and declared as “unexplored” opportunities for the reading of “The Man Without Qualities” as a metanovel; and, in the third part, on the strategy of quoting, interrogating the most influential discourses characteristic of the time period, with emphasis on the anthropological-criminological and the mystical-mythological discourse. The exposition faithfully follows the originally set argumentative perspective, drawing on a vast number of available studies, either by drawing on them to support one's theses, or in the mode of revision or polemic. What stands out as defining is the impulse for originality and discovery, manifested both in the proposed alternative ideas and in the demonstrated critical idiolect: private neologisms, such as “deutopization“, unexpected, derivative forms of established terms, such as discursive quoting“ (p. 76), strange word forms absent from dictionaries, for example „поантираши“ (p. 182), puzzling formulations, for instance "irony as a tool of radicalization" (p.105), confusing, potentially pleonastic phrases, such as "transcending contemplation" (p. 83).

The same impulse often leads, unfortunately, to a deliberate complexity of thought and inhibition of speech with vague or problematic articulations as to the truth. Here is just one of a series of similar examples (quote in Bulgarian): „Функционирането ѝ (на иронията) в естетическата сфера е **опънато по въжето от езика до метаезика, от тропологията до теорията, от похвата до светогледа. Става ясно**, че в играта между **полюсите на различните дихотомии** ироническият дискурс...“ (p. 36) I will allow myself to object that nothing becomes clear, because not only any functioning cannot be „**опънато по въже**“, but also the unbridled metaphoricality of „**въжето от езика до метаезика, от тропологията до теорията, от похвата до светогледа**“ can hardly be accepted as a scientific argument. At least, because not each of the three named pairs can be categorized as a dichotomy, and because there are no poles in dichotomies, there is simply a pair of subordinate, mutually exclusive elements.

In the context of the shared observations, what stands out as particularly inappropriate is the unwavering categoricalness with which the defended theses are stated. I would dispute, for example, the claim that, like Socrates, who was the "genius of irony" of Antiquity, so is Musil for the twentieth century. Still, the question arises as to what makes Musil's irony more significant than that of, say, Joyce or Thomas Mann. Focusing on a single author is initially risky because it produces understandable jealousy and, by inertia, neglects consideration of the wider literary context. In the case of Musil, the situation is particularly critical, because seen in the context of high modernism, his work stands somewhat awkwardly, and the predictable explanation of "misunderstood and unappreciated genius" has no evidentiary force.

Indirect confirmation of the inappropriateness of such sweeping generalizations is given by the author's following stipulation: "During the period of my own work with this endless and complex opus magnum, I repeatedly reached conclusions, which each time at the moment of their solidification became blurred and run away, until I found that in fact hard characterizations and fleshed-out definitive "qualities" of a novel that absolutizes "badness" cannot and should not

be posited. Musil's irony indeed misleads, but also leads on a path on which lights and shadows dance masterfully, escaping but also clinging to anyone who wants to catch them" (p. 36, n. 1).

The specified waywardness of the exposition not only does not help to perceive it effectively, but also becomes an obstacle that makes reading difficult. The unfriendliness of the text is also contributed by the huge (apparently disproportionate) amount of quotes from the sources used, which, contrary to established practices, are presented without translation (in German, English and French) - a gesture that unequivocally states that the "implicit reader" of the study must be polyglot. The inclusion of French-language citations is somewhat disconcerting, given that the author herself, if we are to believe the professional biography attached to the competition documentation, is not a francophone.

Unfortunately, not all sources that are conscientiously and abundantly cited in the monograph have been successfully assimilated. In a number of cases, the argumentation related to one or another study to which it is referenced is problematic.

For example, summarizing a part of Kenneth Burke's definition of relativism, in order to bring out the relations between irony and relativism that interests her, the author presents the fragment in Bulgarian „Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all the terms. Hence, from the standpoint of this total form (this „perspective of perspectives“), none of the participating „sub-perspectives“ can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong“ with disturbing approximation as „Иронията използва всички „термини“ на всички гледни точки, с което се превръща в „перспектива на перспективите“, in stead of (with all the necessary reservations about the problematic nature of the proposed impromptu translation): „Иронията възниква при опит чрез взаимодействието на термини да се създаде постановка, която използва всички термини. Следователно от гледна точка на тази обща форма ("перспектива на перспективите") нито една от участващите "подперспективи" не може да бъде разглеждана като напълно правилна или напълно погрешна.“ Again, on the occasion of the foreign language quotations, the systematic spelling and language errors that appear in them make an unpleasant impression.

It is even more troubling when we come across blatantly inaccurate references, as is the case with the following passage: "By an overarching crisis I mean the simultaneous philosophical and literary "signals" of the crisis of values, respectively the metaphysical crisis marked by Nietzsche's God is Dead, the crisis of language "announced" by Hofmannsthal's letter to Lord Chandos, the crisis of knowledge by Ernst's philosophy Mach as the first harbinger, the crisis of human identity (and authenticity) in the person of Kafka." (p. 102) It is arguable whether Ernst Mach's philosophy allows such a significance to be assigned to it, but it is more disconcerting that "Hofmannsthal's letter to Lord Chandos" is cited as the harbinger of the crisis of language, because no such letter exists, just as the person to whom such letter could have been addressed is non-existent. The "notorious", as the author calls it, Hofmannsthal's "Letter to Lord Chandos" (p. 123), to which Dubarova's text insistently refers, is in fact a literary work published in 1902, and is an imaginary letter attributed by Hofmannsthal of a **fictional figure called Lord Chandos, dated 1603 and addressed to Bacon**. The only pertinent moment in the reference to the letter in question is relating it to the crisis of language, since the fictional author of the letter is a writer who has fallen into a linguistically presupposed creative impasse.

Regardless of the stated failures, however, in general, the habilitation work protects the aspirations of Dr. Elitsa Dubarova-Petkova for the announced academic position. Also, her numerous published works demonstrate her active role in academic exchange and their public exposure testifies to her research achievements. This is well illustrated by the reference and citation information that is included in the application.

It is customary for the participants in the scientific jury to share their personal impressions of the candidate, if they have them. 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. Elitsa Dubarova for many years. I was her teacher at the University of Plovdiv specifically in Western European literature and the supervisor of her diploma thesis. Subsequently I supervised her doctoral dissertation and as a member of the Specialized Scientific Council at VAK was present at her public defence. In the following years, although from afar, I followed with interest and

satisfaction her professional achievements, with which she accumulated the credits legitimizing her participation in the current habilitation procedure.

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 Elitsa Dubarova-Petkova, PhD, for the academic position of **Associate professor** at Professor Assen Zlatarov University of Burgas in the area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology, in the scholarly area of Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature, and in confirmation I will vote for this proposal.

March, 25th 2024

Reviewer:

Professor Dr. Habil. Cleo Protohristova