

OPINION

by Associate Professor Dr. Darin Voinov Tenev,
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regarding the Associate Professor habilitation procedure at
the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",
in Area of Higher Education 2.1. Philology (English Literature after WWII and
Translation – English Language)
announced in *Darzhaven vestnik*, No. 103/ December 12, 2023

Angel Mihaylov Igov is the only candidate in the associate professor habilitation procedure in professional field 2.1 Philology (English Literature after WWII and Translation – English Language), announced by the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in *Darzhaven vestnik*, no. 103/ 12. 12. 23. The candidate has submitted for procedure 18 scholarly publication, including two monographs, one of which is the main habilitation thesis, one study written in co-authorship, and fifteen articles (two of which are in English), published in the period 2011-2023. The presented publications and academic activity meet the legal requirements of the position of Associate Professor at the University of Sofia.

Angel Igov has participated in various scientific projects and has presented papers at numerous conferences. He was the supervisor of six graduation theses. He has edited with his colleagues an important literary study collection. He has given lectures and seminars in six different disciplines at the bachelor's and master's level.

Angel Igov is an important figure in the Bulgarian cultural space, both with his teaching and research activities, and as a writer and translator. In his own work, these activities do not remain unrelated, on the contrary: on the hand, translation and writing help him to deepen his literary studies, and on the other hand, literary studies contribute to the development of translation and writing skills. His long-term work as a literary critic should also be mentioned, as he is one of the very few operative critics in Bulgaria, who for more than fifteen years monitors what is published and carefully draws the map of literary life in his invaluable reviews, the number of which is huge (over two hundred).

Even just on the basis of what has been said so far, I can say that the candidate meets the formal requirements for the competition. This is obvious also in the form with the points required

for the habilitation procedure. Personally, I also have impressions of Angel Igov from the time when he was an MA student in literary studies at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" and over the years I have had the opportunity to follow his development, to listen to his papers at conferences, and to read his texts. I was impressed not only by his capacity for work and determination, but also by the purposeful construction of a recognizable research profile, something rare and valuable in the scientific circles.

The main habilitation monograph, *Flags and Keys: The Poetics of Epigraph*, is a literary study of the functions of the epigraph in English literature. The study combines three aspects that are skillfully interweaved in the text. First, as the subtitle suggests, there is the question of poetics, or in other words, the *literary-theoretical conceptualization* of the epigraph. Second, the theory is not left to stand abstractly, but is developed in terms of *literary history*. The book traces the use of epigraphs in iconic works of English literature. Finally, attention is paid to the logic of the epigraph in Bulgarian literature, and in this way a direction for development from the perspective of *comparative literature* is outlined.

In terms of composition, the monograph is structured in an interesting, non-classical way, but this has its basis in the logic of the exposition. Typically, studies begin with a chapter devoted to a theoretical discussion of the problem at hand, and then move on to the material for analysis. In *Flags and Keys*, however, after the short introduction there follows a chapter on the history of epigraphs in the English literary tradition, and only after that the theoretical part is introduced. This shows a maturity of the researcher, aware that the consideration of theoretical propositions and questions should not start in an abstract way, but should be rather refracted through the data provided by the object of analysis. The theoretical part is followed by the two chapters dedicated respectively to the two main functions of the epigraph, which Igov discovered. The last chapter examines the use of epigraphs in Bulgarian literature in a comparative perspective.

From the very first chapter one can see Igov's extensive knowledge of English literature from the Renaissance to postmodernism. (It is worth noting that the articles submitted, as well as other texts by Igov not submitted for the procedure, demonstrate a thorough knowledge also of the most contemporary English literature that could be defined as coming after the late postmodernism of the 1990s.) In conversation with Gérard Genette's work on intertextuality and the epigraph, Igov

literary how the British epigraphic tradition had a logic of development different from the French one.

In the theoretical chapter, Igov discusses various approaches and theories on the epigraph, mainly in the vein of intertextual criticism, and then introduces his own understanding about the two main functions, namely keys and flags. In the study, these two words are initially introduced as metaphors only to be turned to thematic concepts for the description of the two principal directions of the epigraph. On the one hand, key-epigraphs are oriented inwards, towards the text, and help to interpret elements of the work itself. Flag-epigraphs, on the other, are outwardly oriented, their task is mainly to locate the work in a wider context, which also includes the intertextual network of other literary works, in relation to which the work places itself.

Following the logic of the argument, the next two chapters are devoted to the analyses of cases representative of the two functions of the epigraph. Igov turns again to the history of English literature and deepens his interpretations. Here one can find insightful observations of important and influential works by iconic authors, including Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, George Eliot, T. S. Eliot, Lawrence Darrell, etc. The last chapter offers interpretation of the uses of epigraph technique by Bulgarian authors such as Stoyan Mihailovski, Vazov, Debelyanov, Geo Milev and others.

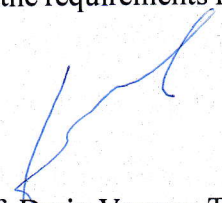
It should be noted that Igov's intertextual study also has its own Bulgarian context of theoretical-critical discussion of intertextual connections in literature, and *Flags and Keys* not only knows this context, but also actively addresses it. The book takes up and discusses the views of Nikola Georgiev, Kleo Protohristova, Radosvet Kolarov, Alexander Kiossev, Yordan Eftimov and other Bulgarian researchers. This attention to what is happening in our country and scientific correctness are inherent in the way Igov works and can be found in his other texts as well.

I would like to point out that in view of the theoretical setting of *Flags and Keys*, there is a question that remains open. Having considered the characteristics of the epigraph's two functions, Igov reflects on the principal functionality of each epigraph and writes: "And while there are epigraphs that tend to lose functionality, it would be difficult for me to name a completely pointless epigraph." (p. 79) Where does this difficulty come from? Is it not that the moment a researcher begins to interpret, as a reader, he tends to find a kind of functionality where the functionality could be different or even lacking? This question concerns the position of the reader in relation to the role of the epigraph and can be formulated as follows: is the function of the epigraph immanent to

the text, or does it depend on the reader (respectively, the context, cultural attitudes, etc.)? It seems most logical to take both possibilities into account at the same time: the role of an epigraph depends on both the text and the reader; but then should not one account for this double optic which the epigraph implies? Furthermore, shouldn't a distinction be made between the function that the epigraph performed in the initial context of its appearance and the one which it may be charged with later? For example, Mihailovski's flags (pp.164-168) may prove to be keys to his interpreters, even though this was not their original function. And there are contexts that allow multiple readings – and some epigraphs, as Igov shows, play with this state of affairs.

Finally, I would like to note how the impressive breadth of Igov's knowledge of English and Bulgarian literature is presented in the monographs and articles in an extremely concise and readable manner with a style that allows academic pursuits to find a wider audience without losing its depth.

In conclusion I will say that on the basis of the above I believe that the academic activity of Angel Mihailov Igov is of a high academic level and meets all the requirements for a habilitation. I will vote in his favour in the Habilitation jury.


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Sofia