

EXAMINER'S REPORT

Concerning the Appointment of an Associate Professor of English Literature (Romanticism) and Cultural Translation at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria

- Area of higher education: 2. Humanities
- Area of professional specialization: 2.1. philology (English literature and Cultural Translation)

Examiner: Prof. Ludmilla Kostova, PhD, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

1. Information concerning the candidate

Dr Vitana Kostadinova is the only candidate for the above position. She received her first degree in Bulgarian and English from Plovdiv University in 1994. In 2002, Dr Kostadinova earned an MPhil from the University of Glasgow, Scotland, with a dissertation entitled *Romanticism and the Forms of Modernity*, and in 2008, having successfully presented and defended her thesis *Byron's Reception in Bulgaria*, she received her PhD. In 1995, Dr Kostadinova was appointed part-time lecturer at Plovdiv University. She acquired a full-time position in 1996, and was eventually promoted to Senior Lecturer in 2006.

Dr Kostadinova currently teaches Eighteenth-Century British Literature and British Literature of the Age of Romanticism to BA students of English and American Studies. One of the documents that she has submitted to the Examination Board is her syllabus for the course on Romanticism. The syllabus reflects her take on British Romanticism. It is well-designed and provides students with a clear understanding of the main objectives of the course. The bibliographical section is highly informative: it contains electronic databases, a list of holdings in one of the specialized libraries of Plovdiv University, as well as a selection of Dr Kostadinova's own publications. The candidate also teaches courses at MA level.

Dr Kostadinova has received research grants and has been on prestigious lecture visits to other universities in Europe. She has participated in local and international research projects. Dr Kostadinova is a member of several academic associations. Since 2011 she has been a valued member of the Executive Board of the Bulgarian Society for the Study of English (BSSE) which holds collective membership in the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE).

2. Description of the candidate's areas of research and her publications

Most of Dr Kostadinova's publications deal with the Bulgarian reception of Anglophone writers. Reception as an area within image studies (imagology) is her major area of research and expertise. Closely related to this area is the study of translation as a cultural practice. A number of Dr Kostadinova's publications explore translation and translatability.

Dr Kostadinova has authored 24 articles and a monograph entitled *Jane Austen Translated: Transformations Across Space and Time*. She has also done editorial work and translations of texts by other scholars.

Dr Kostadinova's monograph is concerned with the afterlives of Jane Austen's texts and the shaping of the writer's image in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Some space is devoted to the English writer's Bulgarian reception. A gap in Bulgarian and European reception studies is thus filled, and this is decidedly one of the book's assets. Kostadinova repeatedly draws attention to the distance between the fictional worlds of Austen's novels and the cultural contexts which she studies in her book. Taking her cue from Reinhart Kosseleck, she stresses the importance of *translation*, conceived as a socio-cultural practice which goes well beyond linguistic transfer, as a means of overcoming such historically conditioned distances and "transforming the unfamiliar into what is familiar" (p. 2).

Early in her book Dr Kostadinova demonstrates her awareness of the complexity of translation as a crucial form of intercultural mediation. She provides a much-needed survey of different conceptions of translation from the late eighteenth century to the present. The survey includes Samuel Johnson's entry in his famous dictionary, Roman Jakobson's important distinction between intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation, as well as more recent interpretations. Insofar as Kostadinova's concern in her book is with the *cultural* transformations of Austen's *oeuvre*, she also considers different definitions of *culture*, a term even more problematic than *translation*. In her choice of interpretations of culture and translation the author is motivated by the specific tasks which she sets herself as she analyses select aspects of Austen's reception in Bulgaria and worldwide.

The book's first chapter is mostly concerned with Austen's Bulgarian reception. Like a number of other Anglophone writers, Austen arrived "late" in Bulgaria. The lack of temporal synchrony between the appearance of a body of literary texts in a particular cultural context and their importation into other milieus is no longer viewed as a "disaster" either for the texts and their author(s) or for the receiving context(s). On the other hand, it cannot be denied that *a sense of "belatedness"* shaped the Bulgarian reception of a lot of canonical western European and North American literature and led key cultural figures, such as Ivan Vazov and Konstantin

Velichkov, to adopt the compensatory strategy of compiling and publishing an anthology. Let me stress that the emphasis which I lay on the Bulgarian intellectual elite's *sense of cultural belatedness* distinguishes my view from, among others, the conception of Georgi Gachev of the development of Bulgarian culture as "belated" and therefore "accelerated and condensed" (p. 37). Gachev's representation of Bulgarian culture rests upon the outdated view of literature as an entity of "fixed categories" (Nomoianu) automatically transferred from one context to another against which I warn in my Introduction to Dr Kostadinova's monograph. Fortunately, there are few traces of Gachev's influence in the candidate's monograph and this distinguishes it from some of her earlier texts, most notably, her article "Meaningful Absences: Byron in Bulgaria" (2011), which, in my view, is one of her more problematic publications. Gachev's interpretative model is nevertheless mentioned in the monograph in conjunction with that of Alexander Kiossev in which the main emphasis is on Bulgarian "self-colonization." Neither of these models is discussed in the monograph; instead readers are referred to Roumen Daskalov's critical commentary upon them. For me, that is one of the weaknesses of Dr Kostadinova's text: a discussion would have been in order as well as a brief evaluation of the two models.

The first Bulgarian translation of Austen's best-known novel *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1980, but as Dr Kostadinova demonstrates, knowledge of the writer and her texts predated the translation's publication. It is very much to the candidate's credit that she pays due attention to familiarity with Austen's work among English language specialists in Bulgaria from the late 1930s onwards. She provides a list of Austen holdings in the Library of Sofia University, the first Bulgarian university in which English was taught as a degree subject, as well as of literary-critical texts in English and other languages dedicated to her.

Dr Kostadinova examines the specific conditions under state socialism in which the 1980 translation of *Pride and Prejudice* was produced before considering the dramatic change in the English writer's status in the 1990s as post-socialist Bulgaria partook of world-wide Austen mania. Apart from new translations being produced in the 1990s and the twenty-first century, film adaptations of the novels reached Bulgaria and "England's Jane" started acquiring a following of Bulgarian fans. The outline of Austen's reception is followed by an analysis of two translations of *Pride and Prejudice*: the 1980 one and a later rendition which came out in 2007. Dr Kostadinova's observations show her to be a competent reader of both the English original and its Bulgarian translations. The chapter closes with an assessment of a 2012 internet adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* entitled *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Chapter Two concentrates on *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, which were first translated into Bulgarian in 1992, thus widening the literary horizon of Bulgarian readers by

increasing their knowledge of Austen's novelistic output. Dr Kostadinova stresses the need for translators to be familiar with the distinctive features of an author's cultural context as a *conditio sine qua non* for the production of an adequate and coherent translation. She pays due attention to explanatory notes which may in principle enhance the receiving audience's knowledge of the translated text's background and bridge the gap that separates them from it. Dr Kostadinova continues her exploration of the socio-cultural background of Austen's work by focusing attention on eighteenth-century rhetoric as exemplified by the use of the verbs "persuade" and "convince" in Austen's last completed novel *Persuasion*. She considers the dilemmas that the translators of the text's two Bulgarian versions must have faced in attempting to find adequate equivalents for the verbs, given the absence of a similar Bulgarian rhetorical tradition. In the chapter's closing section Dr Kostadinova concentrates on Austen-inspired film adaptations.

Chapter Three is devoted to *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*. Dr Kostadinova's reading of the former includes a discussion of concepts which played a key role within late Enlightenment moral philosophy such as sense, sensibility and sympathy. The author next undertakes an interpretation of *Mansfield Park*, the Austen novel which is most concerned with the issue of nationhood and, albeit indirectly, with the politics of empire. The chapter again closes with a critical appreciation of film adaptations.

Chapter Four leads us into the area of narrative theory as Dr Kostadinova addresses the issue of free indirect discourse (FID). FID is discussed both within Austen's novels and their Bulgarian translations.

Chapter Five reveals Dr Kostadinova's knowledge of the wealth of illustrations, screen adaptations and sequels inspired by *Pride and Prejudice*. The chapter's opening section explores a succession of illustrations produced over a lengthy period of time, from the 1833 Bentley edition to a 2009 comic-book version of the novel. The second section approaches screen adaptations as cinematic *translations* of the novel. Dr Kostadinova finds the majority of such *translations* wanting as they fail in presenting the unique combination of romance and irony which characterizes their background text. The final section of the chapter presents sequels to *Pride and Prejudice* such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Mr Darcy, Vampire*. Latter-day sequels can be said to combine ingenuity with irony at the expense of a book that has attained the status of a literary classic.

Overall, *Jane Austen Translated* testifies to Austen's secure place within the contexts of both "high" and popular culture. What makes the book different from other studies of the writer's novels and their diverse "spinoffs" in literature, film and other areas is the attention

that Dr Kostadinova devotes to “England’s Jane’s” Bulgarian reception. As already remarked, this fills a gap in Bulgarian and European reception studies and is among the book’s major assets. In addition, *Jane Austen Translated* provides ample proof of its author’s erudition and high level of scholarship insofar as it brings together different strands of inquiry, ranging from genre criticism and narratology, through translation theory, to reception studies, imagology and history, and this, together with the fresh insights it introduces into Austen criticism, is also among its indisputable merits.

Some of Dr Kostadinova’s other publications are also concerned with aspects of Austen’s work. They apparently prepared the way for the production of her monograph. A number of her articles deal with the representations of foreign authors in Bulgarian schoolbooks. For me this is an important area of research and it is to the candidate’s credit that she has engaged with it. Dr Kostadinova has authored texts on P. B. Shelley’s Bulgarian reception while also continuing her work on Byron in Bulgaria. The quality of the candidate’s submissions is somewhat uneven: for instance, her 2001 essay on images of America in the Bulgarian National Revival context appears dated in comparison with more recent work in this area.

In principle, I accept the idea that absences can be very meaningful but Dr Kostadinova’s arguments in her text “Meaningful Absences. Byron in Bulgaria” are extremely problematic. For one thing, she bases those arguments on a decidedly Eurocentric model of Bulgarian culture: for instance, we are told that “the National Revival period is chronologically delayed in comparison with the European Renaissance” (p. 220). The implication is that Bulgarian history belatedly reproduced all the key processes of western European history. Besides, in her reading of Byron’s Turkish tale *The Giaour* Dr Kostadinova does not acknowledge the fact that critical attitudes to the Turkish tales changed dramatically following the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the rise of postcolonial criticism. Earlier critics tended to look down on the tales, but ideological and narrative complexities were uncovered in *The Giaour* in particular, from the 1980s onwards, by critics who approached it from a Saidean, or post-Saidean, perspective. And last but by no means least, Dr Kostadinova’s assumptions about the Bulgarian lack of appreciation for *The Giaour* or about Byron himself as a “Trojan horse” are not based on any specific Bulgarian interpretations of either the poem or Byron’s biography and his role in the Greek War of Independence.

Leaving this rather problematic publication aside, I have to say that the majority of Dr Kostadinova’s other texts contain many valuable critical insights and show her to be a competent and conscientious interpreter of literary texts and their cultural contexts.

3. Originality and innovative nature of the candidate's publications

For me Dr Kostadinova's monograph is her most mature and most innovative publication. It provides numerous examples of her analytical skills and erudition. I am sure that in due course it will attract the attention of other scholars in Austen studies. The importance of her contribution to the study of literary reception within pedagogic contexts was already noted. As stated earlier, she should be commended for engaging with this field. Certain weaknesses were likewise mentioned but it should be borne in mind that the merits of the candidate's publications by far outnumber any flaws in them.

4. Conclusion

Dr Kostadinova's research and teaching are entirely consistent with the national and international requirements for an associate professorship. Her record of research is impressive, and so is her contribution to Plovdiv University's programme of teaching. Through her conference attendance and contacts with colleagues from other countries she has made a valuable contribution to her *alma mater's* international standing. Overall, I strongly support the case for the appointment of Dr Vitana Kostadinova as Associate Professor of English Literature (Romanticism) and Cultural Translation at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

9 September 2019
Veliko Tarnovo

Prof. Ludmilla Kostova, PhD