

EXAMINER'S REPORT

by Professor Dr. Alexander Vladimirov Shurbanov

on the materials submitted for participation in the competition

for the academic position of Associate Professor

at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

in the higher education area of 2.Humanities

professional orientation 2.1. Philology

academic subject English literature: Romanticism and Translation of Culture

The only candidate in the competition for associate professorship announced in Darzhaven vestnik No.31 of 12.04.2019 and on the webpage of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of English Philology at the Philological Faculty is Dr. Vitana Vasileva Kostadinova of the Department of English Philology at Plovdiv University.

1. General presentation of the submitted materials

With order No. RZZ – 2882 of 11.06.2019 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I have been appointed as member of the academic committee for the competition for the academic position of associate professor at PU in the higher education area of 2. Humanities, professional orientation 2.1.Philology (academic subject English literature: Romanticism and Translation culture) announced for the needs of the Department of English Philology at the Philological Faculty.

Documents for participation on the announced competition have been submitted by Chief Assistant-Professor Vitana Vasileva Kostadinova of the Department of English Philology at PU.

The hardcopy set of materials submitted by Dr. Vitana Vasileva Kostadinova is in agreement with the PU Statutes for academic staff advancement and it comprises the following documents:

- Application
- CV
- Diploma of Higher Education
- Certificate for the Educational and Scientific Degree of Doctor

- MA Certificate
- List of research publications
- Information about the fulfillment of minimum requirements
- Abstracts of publications
- Documentation of teaching activities

The candidate, Dr. Vitana Vasileva Kostadinova has submitted a total of 22 research articles, 2 extensive studies, 1 monograph and 1 book. Of these, 11 research publications are accepted for reviewing as being independent of the dissertation and the habilitation monograph, and can be taken into account in the final evaluation. 14 research publications, connected with the topic of the habilitation monograph, are left unreviewed, and so is, of course, the doctoral dissertation of the candidate, which has already been evaluated in the course of its public defence. The distribution of the listed research publications in the respective categories at home and abroad is as follows: 2 books, 2 extensive studies and 19 research articles are published in Bulgaria, and 3 research articles are published abroad. Dr. Kostadinova is also co-editor of 2 collections of essays included in the list of publications.

2. Short CV

Vitana Kostadinova was born in Plovdiv on 21.11.1970. She graduated from an English-language high school with a teacher's specialization and then completed successfully a five-year higher education course in the Bulgarian and English languages and literatures with a teacher's qualification at Plovdiv University. She received an MA Degree in the Literature of Romanticism at the University of Glasgow. In 2008 Kostadinova defended her dissertation on the reception of Byron in Bulgaria, earning the educational and scientific degree of Doctor at PU. Since 1995 she has been teaching English language and literature at PU and in 2006 was promoted to the rank of Chief Assistant-Professor. For a number of years she has taught six BA courses in English literature in the ages of the Enlightenment and Romanticism as well as methods of teaching literature. She has lectured in the English Philology MA programmes. Kostadinova is the author of teaching aids for the courses conducted by her. She has taken part in research projects and has presented papers at national and international conferences. She is member of the International Byron society, the Bulgarian Society for the Study of English and the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria.

3. General assessment of the candidate's activities

I am not in a position to offer an evaluation of the candidate's teaching activity, as I have not had the opportunity to get acquainted with it on a first hand basis. Her academic career, however, shows that she is an excellent teacher and guide in the research work of her students (a list of diploma theses supervised by her has been submitted with her other documents). I can judge about her research activity though, looking at the achieved results. Dr. Kostadinova concentrates her research interests predominately on English literature of the Romantic age and its reception in Bulgaria. She also deals with the introduction of the literary classics in the Bulgarian high school textbooks and in the academic literary histories. All her publications treating these problems evince solid knowledge, methodological certainty, a broad intellectual horizon and sensitivity to the specifics of the artistic text. In the submitted papers, 11 citations of her publications in authoritative international editions are listed. Her active participation in academic conferences – 28 in the last 18 years – is equally outstanding.

The monograph *Jane Austen Translated: Transformations Across Space and Time*, published by Plovdiv University Press in 2018, merits some more detailed discussion. It offers a thoughtful overview of Austen's reception in the contemporary world through the offices of interlingual, intersemiotic and intercultural translation across a number of national frontiers. The uneven history of the introduction of her novels to the Bulgarian readers, with its late inception and its sudden outbursts in the new age of vigorous globalization, is carefully traced and accounted for. But, far from being the only focus of the investigation, this national process is juxtaposed to the impressive accumulation of filmic and other visual adaptations proliferating in the English-speaking world. The author is particularly interested in the impact of these productions on the Bulgarian construction of the English novelist.

The monograph ranges across a vast area of problems, at times plunging into parallel close reading of original and translated texts, and in other parts taking stock of large-scale literary developments. I would like to single out what, to my mind, are its most successful aspects and its most important contributions to the chosen topic. The section "Lost in Translation" in Chapter 2 considers Austen's delicate differentiation between the closely related notions of *persuasion* and *conviction* in the novel entitled *Persuasion*, demonstrating how essential this differentiation is for the characterization of the heroines and for the overall philosophy of the book. Against this background, we are offered the picture of many inadequacies of rendition depriving the Bulgarian translations of the novel of these suggestive touches in the narration. Some of the said inadequacies are obviously due to the lack of a similar

well-established pair of notions in the Bulgarian language, and thus they appear all but inevitable, but in the majority of cases the author discovers at their root insufficient sensitivity and linguistic competence on the part of the translators. Thus, the discussion revealingly combines theoretical and critical concerns.

A similar problem for translators arises from Austen's treatment of another pair of related notions, *sympathy* and *compassion*, underlying the philosophical and narratological framework of another of her novels, *Sense and Sensibility*, dealt with in Chapter 3. Dr. Kostadinova examines the ways of preserving this distinction between proximate types of sensibility with characteristic consideration. And yet another binary, that of romance and irony as the two inseparable components of Austen's novelistic art, ensuring in combination her appeal to generations of readers, is highlighted in Chapter 5, only to reveal the unsettling of this fine balance of attitudes in most of the modern visual adaptations, such as book illustrations, comic strips and films, as well as in sequels and spin-offs of the novels.

I cannot but agree with the commonsense appraisal of these modish re-writings of Jane Austen's work expressed by the author of the study in the following mature yet categorical way: "Culture is in crisis indeed if Austen's novels 'are now deemed too difficult to appeal to the common taste' without the mediation of vampires and zombies." And I wonder if she truly believes in what she says in conclusion, or she is just trying to wind up the chapter in an upbeat fashion: "The upside of spin-offs and sequels, even if oversimplified, is that they provoke an interest in the original and new generations of readers go back to Austen's novels." My own impression is that these newfangled products of our age only make subsequent generations less and less able to appreciate Austen's high artistry and drive them away from the achievements of civilization.

The most valuable contribution of Dr. Kostadinova's monograph, however, is perhaps contained in Chapter 4, devoted in its entirety to the consideration of *free indirect discourse* (FID) as Austen's characteristic manner of narration and its resuscitation in Bulgarian translation. The author shows in a number of examples that more often than not translators opt for renarration as a device presumably best suited to rendering the effect of FID. This choice, however, is delusional, for renarration is incapable of containing the multiplicity of voices and their interplay the way FID does. It collapses the multiplicity of attitudes into a discourse privileging the voice of the narrator and effectively eliminating the voices of the characters, thus forfeiting their representation. The author is quite right to suggest that linguists ought to explore the correlation between FID and non-evidentiality in principle. There seems to be a serious problem in the rendition of this basically Anglophone device into Bulgarian, which is due to the structural asymmetry between the two languages, but also to the disparity of their literary

traditions. Dr. Kostadinova concludes that translation should not so much rely on renarration as on the use of modal verbs and futurity for the preservation of the characters' perspectives in the flow of narration. She also warns translators of the detrimental impact that any simplification of Austen's syntax has on the FID complexity. I truly admire this section of the book and I do hope Dr. Kostadinova will continue her fruitful explorations in this direction.

The monograph being so all-inclusive and many-sided inevitably creates at times a sense of disunity. Chapter 3, for instance, is entirely focused on Jane Austen's own pursuits and does not so much as touch on the general problem of translation. On the other hand, the sections of the work dealing with the problematics of Bulgarian translations necessarily have to offer quotations in both languages, English and Bulgarian, and by doing so, make parts of the text unintelligible to an international audience of the book, rendering its addressee uncertain. This insuperable difficulty is, of course, inherent in all publications concerned with translation into languages of limited diffusion, but the overall orientation of the monograph at hand is unrestricted by national specificities and this imposes a certain duality on it. Lastly, as is often the case in academic works of this kind, the Conclusion is disproportionately short, consisting of a single page and shirking its normal task of summing up the results of the study.

As I have said, I shall leave undiscussed the fourteen essays which deal with the problems of the monograph on the basis of much the same material. Nonetheless, I have no doubt that these publications, each of them focused on a single narrower, well-defined topic, and addressed to a different audience on a different occasion, have been very useful in sharing Dr. Kostadinova's findings and views with the academic world at large.

The remaining ten essays will be considered in thematic groups. Four of them testify to Dr. Kostadinova's continuing interest in Byron's presence in Bulgaria, a topic which she had chosen for her dissertation. "Byron as an Institution in Bulgarian Histories of Western European Literature" (2013) discusses the English poet's introduction in textbooks for the high schools in the 1970s and 1980s and considers the changes in the curriculum after the collapse of state socialism in 1989. It then turns to an examination of his treatment in the histories of Western European literature written for university students. Byron's place of eminence in these surveys does not seem to have been affected by the political changes. Another receptionist essay, "Meaningful Absences: Byron in Bulgaria" (2011) speculates about the causes for the exclusion of Byron or specific works of his from the translation of Western European literature in Bulgaria in particular historical periods, starting with the National Revival and going on to the early twentieth century and to the socialist period. "Reception across Borders" (2009) compares the representation of Byron's life in nineteenth-century British biographies and in late twentieth-

century Bulgarian writings. “The East as an Island and Inspiration” (2009) discusses Byron’s personal acquaintance with the Orient and goes on to trace instances of how the West meets the East in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, and *Don Juan*, suggesting that for the English poet the ambivalence of these encounters was inspirational and had a definite impact on his constructions of identity and self-identity. The author argues that Byron’s contacts with the East expanded his horizon and challenged the tendency for stereotypical thinking of the other.

Two closely related essays, the one in Bulgarian and the other in English, entitled „Сърце на сърцата: Шели в България“ (2009)/ “Shelley’s Heart of Hearts in Bulgaria” (2015), consider the different constructions of the poet’s image by early Bulgarian modernists and socialists respectively at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the first translations of his poetry into Bulgarian and the poems dedicated to him by Pencho Slaveikov and, somewhat later, by Teodor Trayanov.

“Myth and Ideology: British Romanticism in Comparative Literature Textbooks” (2009) returns to the examination of the two basic histories of Western European literature for university students, written during the socialist period and after it, this time opening up the focus to an overall consideration of the introduction of English Romanticism as a whole. What transpires from this study is the undiminished vitality of a deeply inculcated canon. And the centrality of Byron is once again writ large.

The remaining three essays do not deal with English literature, but, while expanding the field of the author’s studies, still focus on a permanent interest of hers, the reception of foreign literature and culture in Bulgaria, a process in which translation plays a major role. One of them, “Images of Amerika [sic] or the American Presence in the Bulgarian Revival Period” (2001) overviews the different facets of this significant foreign presence in the formative age of a resurrected nation: the representation of the New World in the press, the educational activities of the Protestant missionaries in the Balkans and the first literary works in translation appearing in the country. The other two essays – „Един цар в училище – между мита и трагедията“ (2010) and „Античната драма в училище като превод на култура“ (2013) – are devoted to a study of the presentation of ancient drama in textbooks for the Bulgarian high schools and pose the question of compatibility between the moral codes of two disparate civilizations.

Most of these essays have something new to say – above all, about the reception of international literature and culture in Bulgaria during the last two centuries. Those dealing with Byron as a follow-up of the author’s doctoral dissertation, reveal new aspects of the overt and

concealed policies of the poet's presentation to the Bulgarian readers in different historical periods and their contexts. The ones about the response to Shelley's poetry and politics focus on the virtually undiscussed *heart of hearts* myth created around him and providing a lasting theme in Bulgarian critical thought and poetry. The essay on the presence of America in the Bulgarian National Revival has some important observations to offer on this interesting and still insufficiently researched topic. And, last but not least, the four critical studies of the ways in which English and Ancient Greek literatures are introduced in educational editions open a much needed discussion of these important problems, generally solved in closed administrative circles.

Taking into account the indisputable merits of Dr. Vitana Kostadinova as an experienced researcher and teacher, I propose to the respected academic committee to accept her application for the position of Associate Professor in English literature: Romanticism and Cultural Translation.

9th September 2019

Prof. Dr. Alexander Shurbanov