

## REVIEW STATEMENT

by **Professor Dr. Habil. Cleo Stefanova Protochristova, Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski**

on the materials submitted in application for the open position of  
**Associate professor at The Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**  
**in the Sphere of HE 2. Humanities; Area of professional qualification 2.1. Philology**  
**(English literature: Romanticism and Translating culture)**

Following Order № P33-2844 from 10.06.2019 of the Rector of Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski I have been appointed a member of the academic review board for the open competition for the academic position of **Associate professor at PU** in the sphere of Higher education 2. **Humanities**, area of professional qualification **2.1. Philology (English literature: Romanticism and Translating culture)**, which was opened for the needs of the Department of English Studies within the Philology Faculty.

The single applicant for the open position, announced in the *State gazette*, issue 31 from 12.04.2019 and on the webpage of the University of Plovdiv Paisii Hilendarski, is principal lecturer Vitana Vasileva Kostadinova, PhD from PU.

The applicant is a graduate of the University of Plovdiv, where she studied Bulgarian language and English, then studied at Glasgow University, where she received a master's degree in English Literature with a specialization in Romanticism. In 2008 she defended her PhD thesis on the Reception of Byron in Bulgaria. Since 1995 until the present she has been teaching English literature (The Enlightenment and Romanticism) at the University of Plovdiv.

For the purposes of the open position the applicant has submitted a habilitation work published as a book, two longer studies and 22 critical essays which present Kostadinova as a scholar with a distinct profile.

The habilitation work entitled "*Jane Austen Translated: Transformations Across Space and Time*" is a result of Vitana Kostadinova's long-standing efforts in studying the oeuvre of Jane Austen, complemented by her deepening research interests in Reception studies and the complex terrain of intercultural translation, fields in which she has convincingly defended her professional competence. With a sense of intrigue contained in Austen's diverse and varied readings from the end of the past and the beginning of the present century, the researcher undertakes a precise and insightful analysis of the irreducibility between the historically specific reality fictionalized in her novels and the cultural contexts that determine the reception of the same novels over the centuries

that followed Austen's period. Aptly, the primary focus falls on the Bulgarian reception of Jane Austen that is marked by revealing symptomatic disproportions. The analytical observations evident in the study however go far beyond the scope of this primary goal. These are impressively wide-ranging and not only encompass the entire temporal frame from the age of the writer until our present but also, and in parallel, focus on the historical transformations of contextual frames and the specific manifestations deriving from those different cultural contexts, be they English, Bulgarian or American. Thereafter, Kostadinova's research project unfolds impressive multiple perspectives, taking into account the complex reconceptualization of Austen's six novels in positioning the works within an oppositional grid: local – global, textual – visual, ironic – romantic. In this way the researcher's gaze constructs an admirably complex optics that serves to elucidate the multifaceted correlation between the different versions, derivatives of intercultural translation, of different levels of textual solutions, of paratextuality, rhetorical conventions, epistemological orientations and ideological constructions, of narratology and parody, as well as along the lines of transitions between different systems of signification – verbal and visual.

The professionalism with which Vitana Kostadinova identifies the critical points of intercultural transfer of particular novels – at times recurring, at others revealing of incongruity – warrants respect. Her pertinent observations are undoubtedly grounded in the applicant's stable methodological competence that the work relies on. The fine-tuning of the content embedded in the two key concepts – translation and culture, is a result of examination of an impressive corpus of theoretical formulations and the recognition of those moments of cultural rationalization that correspond to the problems of translation, as well as of situations in theorizing translation which have a bearing on the sphere of culture. Besides the unmistakable competence thus revealed, there appear a number of other, characteristic of the author, merits of her work – filigree precision of the analysis, demonstrations of subtle sensitivity to semantic nuances, her remarkable critical idiolect, disciplined, yet recognizably characteristic, and, last but not least, the enviable rhetorical effectiveness of the exposition. These qualities mark each of the parts of the book but are particularly strong and convincing in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, where the different approaches – culturally historical, literary and more generally humanitarian, come into a remarkably productive cross-fertilization. I would also like to highlight Chapter Five, in which the author demonstrates an extraordinary sense of and flair for the intricacies of inter-semiotic translation, combined with an awareness of most diverse spheres that commands respect, including spheres such as the historically dynamic conventions of clothing, hair styles, behavioral and speech etiquette. Alongside the core chapters of the study, this one could – even to a greater extent – contribute productively to the educational process by applying it in different university courses, not just in those that specifically address Austen's oeuvre or Romantic literature, but also in more

general such, like courses in Comparative literature (in the module “Cinema and literature”), Semiotics, Cultural and visual studies.

As another important achievement of the study, I would also point out the risk of ignoring the boundary between “high culture” and aesthetic practices pertaining to the sphere of mass and trivial. The secondary versions of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, such as the contemporary online adaptation *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the parody *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith and the treacherous continuation of the novel *Mr Darcy, Vampyre* by Amanda Grange, which are recruited to the purposes of the analysis, offer new, different and otherwise inaccessible perspectives on the issues the study discusses and they clearly and undoubtedly reveal the impossibility of correlating certain diverse contexts.

Having acquainted myself with the materials and scholarly publications submitted for the purposes of this position, I am convinced of their importance and scholarly contributions they contain, therefore I find it expedient to confirm my overall 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 Vitana Vasileva Kostadinova, PhD for the academic position of Associate professor at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the Sphere of HE **2. Humanities**, area of professional qualification **2.1. Philology (English literature: Romanticism and Translating culture)**, and I would gladly vote for the confirmation and in favor of this proposal.

August 2019

**Reviewer:**

Prof. Cleo Protohristova, Dr. Habil.