

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Kamelia Svetlinova Spassova,
PhD, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

on the materials submitted in application for the open position
of Associate Professor at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv
in the higher education field 2. Humanities; Area of professional qualification
2.1. Philology (Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature)

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diyana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

Dissertation Title: Pastoral and Modernity

1. General presentation of procedure and candidate

Following order No. PD–22–910 of 22.04.2025, issued by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv I have been appointed as a member of the academic jury for the competition for the academic degree of Doctor of Sciences in the field of Humanities, Professional Field 2.1. Philology (Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature), announced for the needs of the Department of History of Literature and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Philology.

The sole candidate for this competition is Associate Professor Dr. Diyana Vasileva Nikolova-Bagaleva from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The submitted documentation fully complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at University of Plovdiv. The candidate's compliance with the minimum national requirements demonstrates professionalism and dedication to academic growth.

Dr. Nikolova's doctoral dissertation (2008) evolved into the monograph *The Idea of the Human in Ancient Greek Lyric (Archaic and Classical Periods)* (2010), which remains the most thorough, comprehensive and systematic study in Bulgarian on ancient Greek lyric. Her habilitation work, *Transpositions of the Pastoral in the Belle Époque* (2018), marked a new research trajectory, which has been significantly expanded in depth and scope in the present project for the degree of Doctor of

Sciences, *Pastoral and Modernity (The Pastoral Worlds of European Culture)* (2025). This monograph elucidates the diachronic trajectory of the idyllic mode, delineating its thematic heterogeneity and illuminating the multifaceted intertextual nexus between classical and contemporary literary practitioners. Furthermore, it meticulously scrutinizes the nuanced ways in which modern poets recontextualize and reconfigure the bucolic tradition, thereby offering a comprehensive exegesis of the genre's enduring relevance and adaptability across disparate cultural and historical contexts.

For the procedure, the candidate has submitted 15 significant citations and 10 impactful scholarly articles published in some of the most prestigious journals in Bulgarian humanities. The earliest of these, "The Song of the Cicadas and the Myth of the Poet" (2013), marks the genesis of Nikolova's intellectual curiosity about the idyll. This article examines both the ancient framework, referencing authors such as Hesiod and Plato, Callimachus and Longus, Theocritus, and Virgil. It observes the transposition of the pastoral in the Russian Silver Age with poets like Mandelstam, Khlebnikov, Kuzmin, Blok, Annensky, and Sologub. Already in this work, a bifocal research approach is established, exploring not only the Hellenistic origins of the idyll but also its adaptation within the Russian literary context of the 18th to 20th centuries. This broad focus aligns perfectly with the principles of comparative literature, as it traces the complex trajectories through which specific images, thematic clusters and topoi travel from antiquity through the Middle Ages and Renaissance to their reinterpreted forms in modern literary thought.

2. Relevance of the Topic

The topic of pastoral and modernity is highly relevant, as the idyll, in its negative framing, raises questions about the political, national and historical, while constructing a topos of the natural, the authentic and the pure. The idyll positions its characters not only outside urban spaces but also beyond political struggles for power and influence. The rustic landscape (*locus amoenus*) is not merely geographical but also temporal, existing outside the flow of history. Yet, precisely as a timeless topos, the idyll becomes a *dispositif* of modernity. In this vein, reflections by scholars such as Boyko Penchev in *Idyll and Modernity* (2010) and Boyan Manchev in *Modernity and Antimodernity: Bulgarian National-Exoticism* (2003) explore the intersections of genre, universality, nationality, the exotic, the counter-modern and ideology.

Dr. Nikolova recognizes the hidden depth of the idyll, where behind the simplicity of pastoral life lie aesthetic battles, engagements with predecessors and a complex interplay with tradition. This requires decoding the theatrical dramaturgy behind the idyllic backdrop, where the masks of shepherds reveal the faces of Hellenistic philologists and intellectuals and the leisure of

boredom connects to a modern literary sensibility. Due to its ability to naturalize the historical and aesthetic, the idyll emerges as the first modern genre. Its paradigm involves self-reflection, poetic mastery, technical skills and a virtuosic engagement with tradition. The core thesis of *Pastoral and Modernity* is that the pastoral space is a topos where song, literature and fiction generate, inevitably shaping the literary space itself.

3. Knowledge of the Problem, Methodology, and Contributions

Dr. Nikolova's approach to the pastoral can be traced through three trajectories: (1) as a specific Hellenistic genre, with a genealogy rooted in Theocritus and Virgil; (2) as a topos comprising characters, compositional structures, a stylistic regime (*humilis*), themes and typical settings, while simultaneously embracing experimentation and innovation, thus embodying a dialectic of tradition and modernization; (3) as a pastoral mode, implying a philosophical-aesthetic concept whose transformations can be traced across various historical contexts beyond the genre's narrow specificity.

In the first chapter of the dissertation, Dr. Nikolova meticulously examines the genealogy of the idyll through precise philological work with Greco-Roman culture, focusing on Theocritus and Virgil as key figures in defining the genre's repertoire. Building on Hellenistic-Roman texts and their commentaries, she outlines the idyllic topos, including the locus amoenus (perfect gardens, meadows, forests, streams and shaded retreats), pastoral life, love songs, poetic contests (agon) and the bucolic landscape. The techniques associated with the genre include dialogic forms, intertextual interplay with tradition, pastoral masks, repetitive refrains, allegories, ekphrasis and a broader principle of intermediality that translates musical or visual works into verbal art. This commitment to exploring the idyllic in visual (referencing mosaics, sculptures, frescoes and paintings) and musical spheres is evident throughout the monograph.

Dr. Nikolova's expertise in ancient Greek lyric informs her analysis of the inseparable link between text and music. The history of musical instruments like the aulos and syrinx forms part of the idyllic arsenal. The dissertation examines transpositions between the visual and musical in figured notations (*Ars subtilior*), as well as modern adaptations of music and the pastoral mode in Russian opera, ballet and instrumental interpretations by composers like Satie, Stravinsky, Debussy, or in visual and pastoral elements in modern painting. Thus, the idyllic discourse, as interpreted by Nikolova, inherently involves interplay with literary works and ekphrastic translations of musical or visual creations, reinforcing the thesis of the idyll's modern nature through its "work-within-a-work" structure.

Conceptually, Dr. Nikolova draws on Russian literary scholar L. M. Batkin's assertion that "rural simplicity and the natural become signs of simplicity and naturalness, i.e., signs of culture" (p. 4). Behind Theocritus's idyllic shepherds lies a complex intellectual web, presupposing the receptive horizon of an educated private reader in a Hellenistic cosmopolitan context. Thus, the idyll as a meta-genre operates dually: as a supra-genre mode of engaging with art and a tool for constructing fictional worlds. It can also be considered a meta-genre in the sense of metafiction (as introduced by William Gass in *Philosophy and the Form of Fiction*, 1970), which consciously conceals its fictional nature. Experimental techniques, deliberate commentary and theatrical reenactments of scenes, works, and techniques from literary history are presented as enigmas for the reader horizon of expectation. Consequently, the pastoral demands tracing the history and transformations of this meta-genre, a task to which Dr. Nikolova's *Pastoral and Modernity* is dedicated. The study's two main chapters focus on the idyll in the context of ancient and West European literature and the pastoral in Russian culture.

Much can be learned from this investigation. Dr. Nikolova demonstrates exceptional precision in analyzing details, with exegetical dedication and a deep knowledge of scholarly literature. Her philological sensibility radiates in connecting diverse temporal and cultural contexts, whether analyzing the song of the cicadas, Virgil's three styles, the idealized space of Arcadia, the concept of leisure (*otium*), the ballet *Afternoon of a Faun*, the idea of the Golden Age, or the functions of the *locus amoenus*. With zeal and patience, she gathers literature around specific topoi, examines their uses and historical development and engages with secondary literature, key commentaries, and exemplary cases. Her method is neither deductive—imposing a conceptual framework—nor purely inductive, assembling a mosaic of related motifs. Instead, it aligns with the paradigm or network, as derived from Plato's *Sophist*, analyzing specific examples to form the historical paradigm of the idyll.

Beyond its analytical depth, *Pastoral and Modernity* draws on a vast array of literary, musical, and visual material, sparking new ideas and demonstrating generative potential—a crucial quality for a dissertation aspiring to the degree of Doctor of Sciences. It not only masters its academic field but also sets a research direction for future scholars. Dr. Nikolova's generosity is evident in the 739 pages of the monograph, which include 1,666 philological notes, many of which are miniature hypotheses that inspire potential future projects. The investigation convincingly argues that there is nothing simple or natural about the pastoral—it is a matter of conventions, reworking traditions, techniques, innovation and competition with predecessors. Dr. Nikolova persuades us that the idyll is a complex philological game.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the materials submitted for the competition, analyzed their significance, and evaluated the scientific and applied contributions contained therein, I confidently provide a positive assessment. I recommend that the Academic Jury prepare a report proposing to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philology at P Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv to award the academic degree of Doctor of Sciences to Associate Professor Dr. Diyana Vasileva Nikolova in the professional field of 2.1. Philology, Ancient and West European Literature: Comparative Literature.

Date:

20.07.2025

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamelia Spassova