

OPINION

From Prof. **Amelia Licheva**, Dr. Habil., Sofia University, member of the scholarly board for award of the academic title ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in a competition announced by Kliment Ohridski Sofia University

Candidate: Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Kalinova

I. Overview of candidate's research work and activity

The candidate in the competition, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Kalinova is among the best known names in young Bulgarian literary studies. She is an active participant and promoter of various important academic literary and psychoanalytical seminars, and creative workshops for young critics and writers, as well as a member of organizations such as „the Bulgarian Society for the Study of the 18th Century and the Bulgarian Psychoanalytical Society. Her multiple publications testify to her active participation in prestigious international and national conferences, revealing the broad range of interests of the researcher.

It is important to highlight the work of Maria Kalinova as an editor in The Literary Newspaper and many fiction and non-fiction research books. Generally, she is a candidate with an easily recognizable profile, an authentic style, and tested capabilities in the field of theory and critique. And if a quantitative assessment of the proposed publications, participations in conferences and projects, and times cited is to be made, it will become clear that they are far above the minimum national requirements for the rank of associate professor.

II. Assessment of the scholarly and practical outcomes and contributions of the creative work submitted in the competition

The articles submitted for the competition by Maria Kalinova present important issues of literary studies of the 20th century, trace out key debates of literary theory in a skillful way, offer unexpected fresh perspectives of concepts and ideas assessed in a new way, identify non-conventional associations, and outline the personal contributions of Maria Kalinova. All of them have been included in prestigious publications and some of them have already been cited which, I would like to reiterate, is not just a sign of ideas at work but also a testimony of proven appreciation and recognition.

Since the most important of all for the competition is the habilitation work, we would focus on it in brief.

Exotopy: on the External Context of Discourse is an important work for several reasons. It is in line with what we could refer to as a return to ideas which originated in the countries of the former Eastern bloc in the 20th century. That trend is most visible in the writings of Galin Tikhanov in whose tradition Maria Kalinova fits in (although entering into a debate with it). She focuses on the theses and concepts of Bakhtin and his circle, viewing them from the fresh psychoanalytical angle of Freud and Lacan. Of course, Tsvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva recognized Bakhtin as a key figure earlier on but Maria Kalinova succeeds in finding her own perspective through the concept of exotopy and the diverse variations of otherness which she elaborates with regard to context, ideologemes, the subject, the author, and the reader. It is relevant to Bakhtin's ideas of monologism, dialogism, and polyphony. Moreover, this study has the potential to be expanded given the key importance of the issue of alterity in the 1960s and in the studies of authors like Emmanuel Levinas.

This work is significant also because of the skill to combine close and distant reading, to focus on and discern specific concepts, contextualize them and then put them together in twos or threes in the interplay of ideas, approaches, and theories. It comes as no surprise because the duality technique is something that Maria Kalinova has proven to have mastered. Part of this line is the projection of these issues in the context of modern theories of translatability (the idea of translation conceived in the categories of monologism and dialogism and as a projection of the mysterious and the inscrutable) and especially Emily Apter's ideas on untranslatability. Arguably, the approach of Maria Kalinova is an indirect visualization of what Apter suggests as her idea of untranslatability – a departure from the purely linguistic explanations in accordance with which each word needs endless explanation and context to be conveyed in another language. And it is also a defence of the way in which language is bound to the cultural context, to politics and philosophy. The interpretation of Apter leads to the important concept of in-betweenness which has its place in the works of authors like Homi Bhabha and leaves room for further deliberation.

Finally, another very essential aspect of this work is the indirect debate with Galin Tikhanov and the thoughts about the death of theory. Kalinova shows that today's world literature is not necessarily a product of market forces and mass distribution as it has spaces reserved for experiments and elitism without excluding them from the term "world literature". And the death of theory is not so certain.

Since the competition is for awarding the academic title of Associate Professor, it would be impossible to overlook the teaching contribution of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Kalinova. For many years now I have had the pleasure of working in a team with her and I can say that Maria is an incredibly well qualified and talented teacher who is highly appreciated by the students (as seen in the anonymous surveys) and succeeds in making them genuinely interested in theory. It is not accidental that her seminars and optional courses have always been well attended over the years.

III. Conclusion

Having regard for the serious work of the candidate, the depth and insight of her reasoning and argumentation and her overall work as a recognized researcher and university teacher, I vote with conviction for the academic rank Associate Professor in Theory of Literature to be conferred on Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Kalinova, and propose to the esteemed Faculty Board of the Department of Slavic Languages to approve her application.

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Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil.