

STATEMENT

by Prof. Dr. Miglena Ilieva Nikolchina on the participation of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Reni Racheva Yotova in the competition for professor in professional field 2.1. Philology (Contemporary French Literature), published in State Gazette No. 87 of 19.10.2021.)

In the competition for professor in professional field 2.1. 87 of 19.10.2021 there is one candidate - Dr. Reni Racheva Yotova, Associate Professor at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Classical and New Philology, Department of Romance Studies and University of Paris 10 - Nanterre. Reni Yotova's candidature is based on her extremely rich and versatile scientific, research and cultural activities in the field of French-language literature and culture, as well as on numerous scientific works, including two monographs in French published by a Swiss publishing house and articles in Bulgarian and French. I will also mention here the active contribution of Reni Yotova to the development of African studies.

Before turning to Reni Yotova's other accomplishments, I will focus on the major publications she contributed to the competition. These are the monographs *La Trilogie des jumeaux d'Agota Kristof* (Genève, 2011) and (co-authored with Sara de Balsi) *Trois pièces d'Agota Kristof* (Genève, 2016). The first of these studies deals with Kristof's fiction, in particular her *Trilogy of the Twins*, and the second with her dramaturgy. Both monographs are part of Yotova's more general research interest, which finds expression in a number of her articles and concerns the impact of exile and bilingualism on writing and literature, but also on the worldview, psychological and biographical dimensions of creativity. This interest necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that involves the intersections of linguistics, philosophy, and psychoanalysis in literary analysis. Selecting Agatha Kristof for this kind of analysis is interesting in itself.

Agata Kristof (1935-2011) is an internationally acclaimed, award-winning Hungarian writer who lived in Switzerland and wrote in French. She is therefore a model of intersecting identities, in a sense redoubled by Reni Yotova's exploratory gesture as a Bulgarian woman who writes in French and often finds herself acting in diverse francophone circles. While - as Yotova points out - we could not define Kristof's position as feminist, she certainly offers a critical perspective on the status of women, and this is another theme that preoccupies Yotova in her other explorations. Yotova's two monographs enter through different entrances into the analysis of the complex overlays of exile, bilingualism and sexuality in Kristof's writing. As a victim of the political events of 1956 in her home country, Hungary, which she was forced to leave, Kristof is a representative figure of the life of an exile who could find a home nowhere and who used her work to expose the regime that led to the division of Europe in the twentieth century. As Yotova points out, assessing Kristof's work requires situating it simultaneously within the vast field of Francophone literature, within the field of exile literature, and finally within the context of so-called "women's" writing. (*La Trilogie des jumeaux*, p. 85) Within these tasks, the monographs explore the author's style, whereby her language is assessed as enriching the French language and subverting the stereotypes associated with it. "The language of the exile is almost devoid of adjectives, Yotova notes, almost devoid of adverbs. The author handles the French language like a scalpel, but in a minimalist style. Without great stylistic effects, but with very effective simplicity. An almost childlike simplicity that strikes with its dryness..." (*La Trilogie des jumeaux*, 16). Insofar as the universe of Kristof's works is still connected to the country of her origin, the uninformed reader might imagine that he or she is reading translations by the Hungarian author. This bilingualism and bi-

territoriality at the heart of Kristof's work finds expression in the re-writing of the Romantic theme of the double through the figures of the twins, something that aligns Kristof with seminal twentieth-century figures such as Beckett.

Reni Yotova's theoretical writing could be described as both analytically distant and empathizing with Kristof's work's melancholy, nostalgia, sadness at uprootedness, its emphasis on witnessing, and its anxiety about political catastrophes, all of which fit into - or perhaps have their source in - those darkest impulses that Kristof's characters embody. The pedagogy of monstrosity to which Kristof's strange twins are subjected is examined as an expression of the universal and trivialized violence of war. In delving into these issues through Kristof's work, Renny Yotova continues to expand on her interest from her previous research in the corporeal, sexual and intimate manifestations of the social and political. The Swiss writer of Hungarian origin offers the Bulgarian researcher an opportunity to reflect on the nature of power, freedom of action and human conscience; on the disastrous consequences of totalitarian rule. The monographs explore the ways in which Agata Kristof seeks to represent the unrepresentable, especially in her approach to human violence in its various forms: theft, murder, and the slow physical and psychological destruction of the other. The victim thus becomes the focus of attention - but also the victim's ability to devise strategies of survival and rebellion.

While much of Yotova's research is conducted in French and in a Francophone context, her contribution to the reception of French-language literature in Bulgaria, to Bulgarian philosophical and literary debates and to the cultural milieu, is serious. The highlights of her work on Christophe - the exile experience, the mother tongue and the foreign language, multiple identities, violence, sexuality, femininity, the victim - have found expression in articles, conference appearances, public discussions, the compilation of special issues, and live cultural series not only in French but also in Bulgarian. The range of these appearances extends from the reception of classical French-speaking writers and philosophers (with an emphasis on those of Swiss origin) to contemporary authors who fall within Yotova's prism of interlingualism (among them Julia Krasteva, Tsvetan Todorov, Ruza Lazarova, Nancy Houston, Milan Kundera, etc.). The scale of this multifaceted activity is impressive, combining scientific, pedagogical, popular and artistic facets, to which Reni Yotova's translations offer a natural complement. If the mobility, the crossing of borders, the blending of languages and traditions are Yotova's object of research, they are also the form and element of her own inspired work, in which she often takes on the role of organizer, including a number of international conferences. The same cross-border character also characterizes her teaching activities, which take place in different countries and continents.

In conclusion: Yotova's candidature is based on significant contributions to literary scholarship, university teaching, and cultural transmission. Both the level of Reni Yotova's scholarly writings and her work as a teacher, organizer, translator and mediator between different languages, literatures and cultures fully meet the requirements for professorship. I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the position of Professor to Assoc. Prof. Reni Racheva Yotova.

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