**Opinion Statement**

**from Prof. DSc Valeri Stoilov Stefanov,**

**member of the scientific committee in the competition**

**for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the scientific field of "Humanities", specialization 2.1. "Philology" (North American Literature - English Language),**

**Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology,**

**Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",**

**announced in the "State Gazette", No. 96/17.11.2023.**

**Competition Information**

The competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in North American Literature, announced for the needs of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, is in accordance with the regulatory requirements. There have been no violations during the procedure. Only one candidate has applied for the announced competition - Galina Nikolova Avramova. She has submitted the necessary documents and meets the national minimum requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor".

**Candidate Information**

According to the attached documents, Galina Avramova graduated in English Philology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Since 2002, she has been working as an assistant at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2014, she obtained the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" after successfully defending a dissertation on the topic "Issues of Identity and Features of Postmodern Narrative in Timothy Findley's Works". She is the author of two books, studies, and articles thematically and problematically related to the field of the competition.

**Description of Scholarly Works and Contributions**

As the primary scholarly argument for the academic position, the candidate presents the monographic study *Images of War: American and Canadian Novels about World War II*, published in 2023. Her other book, *Children of Darkness: The Novel 'Pilgrim' by Timothy Findley*, was published in 2019. It contains the text of the successfully defended dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor." Several articles and studies are also presented, the majority of which are related to the themes and issues addressed in the two books.

Naturally, the focus of the current opinion statement is the monograph titled *Images of War: American and Canadian Novels about World War II*. This comprehensive, conceptually developed study helps draw conclusions about the scholarly interests and research abilities of the candidate.

The topic of war and its literary representations has been extensively discussed in critical literature. World War II, due to its scale and dramatic nature, is a privileged subject for artistic interpretations and critical analyses. War itself is a complex anthropological knot, a conflict that allows creators to discuss a wide range of social, psychological, moral, existential, and other issues to the fullest extent.

Galina Avramova has embraced the challenge of researching and summarizing the perspectives of several of the most renowned American and Canadian novels dedicated to the "war" theme. Her choice has fallen on *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, *Midnight Clear* by William Wharton, and *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje. The arguments for this selection are provided at the beginning of the work and appear entirely acceptable. These are texts with proven aesthetic values, contributing to the historical development of the "images" of war, and with an existing Bulgarian reception of the discussed novels.

The work consists of six parts, two of which contain the introduction and the conclusion. A more appropriate compositional solution would be for the introduction and conclusion to be integrated within the chapters themselves.

The introduction accurately outlines the broad spectrum of issues surrounding the theme of "war and literature." Drawing on various studies, the author effectively delineates the image of war as a complex social phenomenon and an expression of humanity's age-old aggression, driven by turbulent destructive instincts. War raises fundamental questions about self and other, about the near and the distant, about the inevitable image of the enemy, about arenas of self-examination, about the power of emotions... Beneath the layers of millennia-old culture and amidst the lengthy processes of civilization, there continues to lurk a person with traits of a prehistoric savage. War is not simply a series of crisis situations and clashes of interests; it is an anthropological case, a symptom of atavisms, a forum for profound frustrations.

What truly impresses in this work is the desire to present the complex interaction between historical realities, memories of the past, amnesias, paths of survival, and the overwhelming proximity of death... War does not have a singular image; it has many images that form a field of clashes, conflicts, and interpretations. The role of literature is not simply to create one or another image of war but to generate nuanced knowledge about it. Knowledge based on personal biographical experience, on accumulated wisdom, on participation in the dramas of humanity.

In light of the problem field formulated in this way, the individual parts of the study are meaningfully oriented. The second chapter examines war as a monumental crisis event, as conceptualized by the novels under consideration. War as a "slaughterhouse" operates in a specific manner, and the works manage to provide the reader with knowledge about its peculiarities. On one hand, it maximizes human resilience, the ability to endure in crisis. On the other hand, it degrades humanity, reducing it to the level of the physical, the animalistic. And here lies the important contribution of the discussed works – the defense of humanism, the belief in humanity, even when it has panickedly flown to another planet like Billy Pilgrim from *Slaughterhouse 5*. Without being didactic, these novels uphold the horizons of a universal human cause, advocate for corrections in society, and stand behind moral principles. Their expositional pathos is duly noted and accurately commented on by the author.

The third chapter deals with the army as an institution, which is a key tool in the slaughterhouse. The author reads the novels through the lens of questions about power and obedience, fear and courage, problematic identities, lies, violence, and absurdity. The army is seen as a machine for legitimizing violence, for recycling human foolishness and cruelty. Somewhere in this context are also the issues of identity, some of which are discussed in the author's first book dedicated to Timothy Findley's novel *Pilgrim*.

An important aspect in the overall discussion of the study is the analysis of the narrative strategies themselves – the manipulation of irony and parody, grotesque and absurdity, the complex composition of narrative time, etc.

The fourth and fifth chapters delve into the novelistic visions of alternatives to wartime reality. These include reminiscences of the world before the war, dreams of a new world after the war, as well as a whole array of crisis transgressions from "the slaughterhouse" such as escapism, madness, simulations, and numbness... Of particular interest are the pages dedicated to gender roles and male stereotypes, which become particularly pronounced in such crisis situations. Here, it is worth noting the author's skill in composing her issues by segmenting them into well-considered and logically arranged thematic nodes.

From the other works presented at the competition, it is worth noting the significant contribution made by the study *Children of Darkness: The Novel 'Pilgrim' by Timothy Findley*. As mentioned, this is Avramova's doctoral dissertation, in which interesting ideas about the postmodern narrative are developed. Findley's novel is analyzed in a profound and nuanced manner, primarily through the use of intertextual strategies and numerous symbolic layers. This is indeed a valuable piece of work that deserves to have its own international scholarly reception.

The articles proposed for consideration delve into issues closely related to those discussed through the books in the monograph. They mainly focus on the works of two renowned writers - Timothy Findley and M.G. Vassanji. Avramova interprets their work through several key theoretical concepts such as postmodernism, intertextuality, cultural memory, personal and collective identity, politics of difference, stereotypes, and prejudices, among others. I would highlight as good examples in this direction the articles "Problematising History in 'Famous Last Words' by Timothy Findley" and "Between Memory and Desire: The Novel 'No New Land' by M.G. Vassanji."

A more generalized view of the outlined issues can be found in the articles "Canadian Cultural Identity: In Search of the Literary Canon" and "A Different Kind of Racism: Canadian Multiculturalism in the 21st Century." Here, the author again demonstrates her knowledge and precise orientation in the problematic field of contemporary humanities. An example in this direction is the intriguing plots developed concerning the formation of the Canadian literary canon. A young nation must delineate and position itself within a complex multicultural map, in areas where the local, national, and global intersect. Identity and the very formation of the canon imply reflection on two fundamental questions - how to recognize oneself and how to evaluate oneself. It is precisely in relation to these questions that the researcher provides her answers.

The presentation of the contributions is appropriately done and aligns well with the content and scholarly merits of the referenced texts.

**Teaching Work**

I don't have direct and specific impressions of Galina Avramova's teaching work. However, the problematic focus of the studies discussed earlier is interesting enough, and for me, this is evidence that they engage the interest of her students.

**Conclusion**

The reading of Dr. Galina Avramova's scholarly works demonstrates that she is a serious researcher with her own problematic territory and proven abilities to navigate the complex narratives of world literature. I give my positive vote for the candidacy of Assistant Professor Dr. Galina Nikolova Avramova for the position of Associate Professor in North American Literature, as announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Sofia

March 2, 2024

 **Prof. Valeri Stefanov**