

Opinion

from Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil., Sofia University, Literary Theory
Department,

regarding

selection procedure for the position of professor, advertised in the State Gazette
No. 87 of 19.10.2021 in 2.1 Philology (Contemporary French Literature);

candidate: associate professor Dr. Reni Yotova

Overview of candidate's research work and output

Associate professor Dr. Reni Yotova is the only candidate in this selection procedure for the position of professor of Contemporary French Literature. All required documents have been made available, and the file demonstrating compliance with the minimum requirements confirms that the candidate by far exceeds the minimum points required.

I have the pleasure of knowing associate professor Dr. Reni Yotova for many years, so I have been able to follow her overall career path in the field of literature and culture, including in her role as a lecturer.

I have chosen to single out the above fact because Reni Yotova is a public figure and she has made a significant contribution to the development of French-Bulgarian relations in cultural affairs, including championing the francophone cause all over the world, and in Bulgaria in particular. Dr. Yotova has been involved in a number of conferences, in special issues of the Literary Gazette, and a special edition of Sofia's international literature festival, where she has been instrumental in the participation of major French-language writers, as well as making a number of important translations of authors such as Gérard de Nerval,

Bernard Comment, Ágota Kristóf, among others.

I have had the opportunity to collaborate with Dr. Yotova in the instruction of students of hers whose work I have reviewed, and I have been able to observe her work directly in the MA programme on “Literature, cinema and visual culture”, so I can confidently assert that she is a well-loved lecturer who is also looked up to by students. It is worth putting special emphasis on this last point, when it comes to selection procedures for which teaching is no less important than the candidate’s scholarly output.

**Assessment of the scholarly and practical outcomes and contributions of
the academic work submitted for the selection procedure**

For the purposes of this selection procedure for the position of full professor, associate professor Dr. Reni Yotova has submitted two monographs and a large number of articles on a variety of topics; however, the following are recurrent themes in all of her output – the idea of world literature or the literary world, the topic of exile, migrant literature, culture dialogues, as well as building certain types of cultural identity, at least double, but often also multiple, identities. And, of course, there is the idea of language – the interactions between one’s native language and the language of the recipient culture, colonial practices, non-native writing, the embodiment of desired languages, the question if there exist any “language thieves”, and if so, who they are, what it means for a language to be universal, and much more. All of this makes the core of Dr. Yotova’s output exceptionally relevant, because it tackles the questions of the uneasy relationship between us and them, offering “fresh insight into human diversity”, as well as addressing and redefining concepts such as patriotism, nationalism or racism. Last but not least, the candidate indirectly raises the question of rethinking the canon, or rather, the canons.

Among the many authors who, for various reasons, have chosen or have had to live in a foreign language, thus shaping their signature style, we should single out Ágota Kristóf, since both monographs Dr. Yotova has submitted for the selection procedure are dedicated to her. Yotova examines her work through various perspectives – political (totalitarian anti-utopias) and imagining the past, through fascinating shifts of roles and character incarnations, the topic of exile and matters of cross-cultural dialogue, as well as research into women's writing, the so-called women's language and its links to freedom. Reni Yotova analyses Ágota Kristóf as a universal, i.e. global, writer, and, which is no less important, as one of those authors who can restore our faith that literature has a purpose, its role being to resist the modern world obsessed with the idea that everything should be entertaining. Some interesting light is shed on the question if it makes sense to think of Kristóf in terms of nationality, and if so, what nationality that would be – the country where she was born or the country whose language she has adopted in her works.

It is worth highlighting the subtle analyses of the author's language, which is seen through the prism of foreignness and the figures of exile – destructivity and the palimpsest. An attempt has been made to detect a possible feminist commitment on the part of the author, even though Kristóf tends to deny feminism in her statements. Such attempts are mostly based on the subject matter of her novels, which, as noted by Yotova, raise a number of questions concerning the status of women, constantly demonstrating a refusal to put up with the discriminatory attitudes of some men towards their wives.

Last but not least, the candidate's work on Ágota Kristóf is relevant because it indirectly chimes in with cultural and post-colonial studies, which insist on the hybrid nature of literature and culture, on contextualising literature and the ways in which it can absorb the social and political within it.

Conclusion

In view of the candidate's public profile and teaching activities, of the large amount of impressive output and in-depth analysis, exploring her own threads in writing, it can be amply demonstrated that associate professor Dr. Reni Yotova is an eminent scholar, so it is with conviction that I vote in favour of conferring the academic title of PROFESSOR of Modern French Literature upon associate professor Dr. Reni Yotova. I hereby propose that the esteemed Faculty Council of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Languages approve her application.

Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil.