

## REVIEW

Of the application of Maria Kalinova Bajtosheva for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' at the University of Sofia "St. Kl. Ohridski" in professional field 2.1 Philology (Theory and History of Literature – Theory of Literature)

**By Professor Miglena Nikolchina, PhD**

Maria Kalinova Bajtosheva has submitted a total of 59 publications including 56 articles in scientific journals and book collections and 3 monographs, one of which co-authored. Six of these publications have been submitted for the present promotion, including her monograph *Exotopy: On the Outside Context of Discourse* (Sofia, 2020).

Maria Kalinova Baitosheva is a Senior Assistant Professor at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2013, where she was previously an Assistant Professor and part-time lecturer. She was a scholarship holder of the Center for Academic Research Sofia (CAI), 2016. In 2011 she defended a doctoral degree at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a dissertation on "Literary Publicity and the Construction of the Figures of Morality (from the Second Half of the 19th Century to Independence)".

Maria Kalinova teaches courses in Introduction to Literary Theory, Lyric Theory, Logic of Dissent in Language and Literature. She has participated in six research projects at university and national level and in numerous national and international scientific forums and conferences. She has won awards for her work in the field of philology. She is an editor of scientific collections and of the cultural weekly *Literaturen Vestnik*. Her participation in a series of interdisciplinary seminars is a notable aspect of her work as a scholar. In recent years her work has focused in an especially fruitful way on the monthly seminar "Literature and Psychoanalysis", organized jointly with the Association "Bulgarian Psychoanalytic Space", where she is a member. Before that, she worked in interdisciplinary seminars at the Faculty of Philosophy. Her work there resulted in a monograph co-authored with Vassil Vidinski and Kamelia Spassova *Chaos and Disorder. The Contingent of Language, Literature and Philosophy*, (Sofia:, 2018).

I emphasize this aspect of Maria Kalinova's work, since at first glance her scientific biography could give the impression of some delay in her productivity compared to the extremely large

number of publications that preceded her appointment as an Assistant Professor. The truth, however, is that the years that followed are marked by a thorough and innovative research in new areas and the opening of a wide front of original theoretical ideas, as well as the development of a powerful individual style, the result of which we can see in the publications presented for the competition. Here I will address in greater detail the monograph *Exotopy: On the Outside Context of Discourse*, where Kalinova's achievements have received a particularly vivid expression. Beyond the usual expectations for a habilitation work, this monograph is, I believe, one of the most interesting present-day theoretical works I have come across in recent times – and I am speaking not only of the Bulgarian context.

To begin with, the heuristics of the pairing of Bakhtin and Lacan should be emphasised both as providing a comparative study of the two thinkers and as a methodological basis for the problems that the book explores. This pairing is not entirely unprecedented. The early Western reception of Bakhtin takes place through the work of Kristeva at the time of the most intense presence of Lacan in the French theoretical and cultural context. This timing in itself enhances the visibility of the traits shared by the two thinkers and undoubtedly leaves a mark on Kristeva's work on Bakhtin. Parallels between Bakhtin and Lacan subsequently appear in other authors, whom Kalinova refers to, but it has not become a common place. With Kalinova, the pairing of the two thinkers is taken to a new level and amounts to a theoretical breakthrough. Between Bakhtin's concept of *vnenahodimost'*, Lacan's *extimacy*, and Tzvetan Todorov's "semi-translation" (as Kalinova defines it) of Bakhtin's term as *exotopy*, Kalinova crafts her own understanding of exotopy as simultaneously a continuation, critique and, so to say, the granting of volume to Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. The result is a new concept which has little to do with Todorov's applications and which Kalinova turns into a remarkably nuanced analytical tool.

Put in the simplest and most obvious way, this rendering "voluminous" of intertextuality – which is spatial, topological, but as the closing words of the work promise, also temporal - is achieved by the inclusion of context – called "outside" in the title, but it is precisely this outsideness that will be the problematic moment passing through the entire monograph. This outsideness is never just outside – it is a boundary and a refraction that folds ontological, aesthetic, psychological, political, and literary dimensions. It offers striking perspectives on the

potentialities opened up by the mutual illumination of these aspects and, in doing this, illuminates today's maladies of civilization. Thus, in the second chapter, the phenomenological concept of otherness, the psychoanalytical concept of seduction, and literary theory's concept of translation pass through Bakhtin and Laplanche in order to raise the question of incommensurability and untranslatability, the "dead point of translation" as constitutive for any creative work and as hence impervious to the logic of commodification and the market. Another striking example would be Kalinova's stance on ideology: both in her approach to the "surplus event of anxiety" – with reference, of course, to Nikola Georgiev's discussion of "anxious" literary theory; and in her fascinating reading of the conceptualization of "ideologeme" by Voloshinov and Bakhtin's circle, which postulates "elementary intersubjectivity as continuity between the external and internal contexts of discourse." (77)

Kalinova's exploration of literary subjectivity is central to her concerns and a major factor for her methodological choices. In the introductory words she states that "The question of the literary subject is a fundamental issue that goes beyond the capacities of both literary theory and psychoanalysis to approach it single-handedly. We offer here a possible dialogue between approaches; an attempt guided by the basic orientations of literary and psychoanalytic discourses, but this dialogue is far from complete. The study does not address any existing problem, on the contrary, in the course of its deployment it creates one." In the course of this deployment, moreover, it becomes clear that the question of the literary subject goes beyond even the dialogue between those two discourses. Of course, Lacan and Bakhtin in many ways facilitate such developments – after all, is not anxiety in literary theory inevitable due to its inherent predisposition to the proliferation of discourses? Whether with or without reference to Bakhtin and especially Lacan who is well known for his love of models, drawings, and schemata, one fascinating aspect of Kalinova's work is the ingenuity with which she employs concepts from geometry and topology in her analysis. I do hope she will continue her work in the direction of a "fractal" literary theory, as promised in her introduction. The meeting of the concrete and the highly abstract in this and other works by Kalinova is in itself an example of the "exotopicity" of her thinking and of her ability to articulate borders, external-internal interfaces, and multiple discursive refractions.

Last but not least, Kalinova's exquisite style must be emphasized, with her capacity, at key points of her argumentation, to bring out the conceptual out of the metaphorical in sharp breath-taking formulas. Her mastery of "semi-translating" the untranslatable is crucial to her strength in both the field of theory and in her work as a poet. Kalinova has always possessed this talent, but in *Exotopy: On the Outside Context of Discourse*, it is undoubtedly taken to a new level. In some ways, this aspect of her work makes talking about specific "contributions" difficult, in so far as her writing is constantly producing the utterance of something new, never conceived or formulated before; it tends to surprise us as an epiphany with each sentence. Of course, I do not mean to downplay the contributions which Kalinova highlights and which I have already mentioned in my review – the conceptualization of exotopy, the innovative approach to ideology, context, the incommensurability of literary theory, and literary subjectivity. Also, taken in its totality, Kalinova's study provides an innovative stance on the way we can think about literature and literary theory today, about their contemporary drama, about their past and future. I believe Maria Kalinova ranks among the most significant Bulgarian literary theorists and brings to this area a unique voice. I hope she will continue to work with the same depth and intensity, but also with more quantity.

And finally, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the citations of Kalinova's works are not only numerous, but also clearly show the impact of her work on other researchers.

### **Conclusion**

The documents and materials submitted by Maria Kalinova Baitosheva meet all requirements. The applicant has presented scientific publications of great quality. Her work contributes significantly to the field of literary theory and has received considerable response in the work of other scholars. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Maria Kalinova Baitosheva are beyond doubt. I give my positive assessment and strongly recommend to the Scientific Jury to promote Maria Kalinova Baitosheva to the academic position "Associate Professor" at the University of Sofia in the field 2.1. Philology (Theory and History of Literature – Theory of Literature).

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Reviewer:

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