

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Nevena Asparuhova Panova, PhD, Department of Classical Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, member of the Academic jury in the competition for the position of Associate Professor in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia – Western European literature), announced in State Gazette, issue 105 /11.12.2020

Kamelia Svetlinova Spassova, PhD, Chief Assistant Professor of Ancient and Western European Literature at the Department of Theory of Literature at the Faculty of Slavic Studies, the only candidate in the announced for the needs of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia competition, applies with the monograph “The Modern Mimesis. Self-reflection in Literature” (Sofia UP, 2021, 327 p.), as well as with a total of 20 articles and studies. In view of the presented publications, as well as on basis of the other groups of criteria, K. Spassova fulfills the requirements of the relevant Bulgarian legislation in the academic sphere, as shown by the complete competition documentation.

Both the publications and the many public academic activities of K. Spassova, which I have been following for a long time with interest, outline the profile of an engaged and serious researcher and lecturer, working interdisciplinary, dialogically and with perspectives for new projects.

The monograph “The Modern Mimesis. Self-reflection in Literature” is the result of a number of long-term activities on the subject and is undoubtedly a significant contribution clearly and convincingly defended in the author's reference too. The wide chronological horizon is declared already in the title – from antiquity, when the concept of mimesis was born, to modernity, when mimesis appears much more as a self-reflexive than as a representational ability, although self-reflection, definitely, can be found even in Homer. The interest in the genealogy of (self)reflection on and of literature can be primarily traced in K. Spassova's dissertation monograph (“Event and example in Plato and Aristotle”, 2012). The topic and sources of the habilitation project are expectedly different, but the careful study and contextualization of the ancient sources remains the basis of K. Spassova's developed and enriched research approach.

In its separate parts, the present monograph uses and expands the tools and conceptual apparatus of at least several areas: history and theory of literature, philosophy, history of ideas and history of concepts, culturology, even art history and history and theory of translation. The leading approach, of course, is that of the literary theorist and historian, but also of the true philologist, who not only (slowly and closely) reads and analyzes texts, but constantly defines questions related to their context. This is how the historical, social and ideological implications and motivations behind a key concept (in this case the concept of mimesis) can be identified and understood in its individual uses and realizations. Another direction of contextualization is also decisive for the success of the study, which can be called linguistic or, more extensively, philological-

philosophical. The attention to the history, logic and translatability of both one's own working concepts and those by other scholars that have been commented on (from παράδειγμα to unheimlich), as well as to the neologisms that “The Modern Mimesis” also offers, is not just an act of scholarly correctness and does not arise only from the fact that *re-conceptualization* is one of the three leading operations in the present study, but also a result of the need for multiple reconstructions of conceptual layers and specific uses.

The approach outlined above is applied to an impressive volume and content of primary and secondary material (including both exemplary works and theories and “unexpected” case studies), which is not only referred to, but is also incorporated and focalized in the entire text. Thus, at first glance, the individual chapters seem independent insofar as they relate to many different epochs, genres and cases, but nevertheless the conceptual and discursive integrity of the work is preserved; more importantly, the focus and aim of the study are preserved – beginning with particular examples, from which paradigms and larger models and networks are derived, the double (modern) mimesis, functioning both externally referentially and auto-referentially, is outlined as fully as possible.

Undoubtedly, the complex use of ancient starting points (both texts and text fragments, as well as works of art, mental attitudes and cultural realia) contributes to the distinguishing of some original internal analogies and anomalies (to refer to one of K. Spassova’s leading operative dichotomies) – both intertextual and found between the heritage of Greece and that of Rome, sometimes neglected even by narrowly focused specialists. The importance of the First Chapter, dedicated to the libraries of Alexandria and Pergamum, should be highlighted here, because Hellenism, a period that produced a number of key turns, as also demonstrated by the work of K. Spassova, remains insufficiently studied in the Bulgarian humanities.

Thus, by constantly observing and applying techniques of assimilation and differentiation, splitting and doubling (of concepts, images, figures, of the mimetic itself and its deviations), but also by constructing its historical paradigms by anomaly, “The Modern Mimesis” stands out as an important, and engaging, study; through the reading of the theoretical and artistic stakes of micro-narratives, it builds macro-models and conceptualizations, and manages to present and substantiate the thesis of the non-linearity of literary history, which should be thought of as a set of sections, critical thresholds, starting points, interruptions and reversals, that is, as a set of καιροί (according to both Plato and Benjamin), which are genealogically instantaneous mimetizations, but with paradigmatic and self-reflexive potential, and thus it becomes possible to meet (for example) the ancient sophist and the modern automaton.

The other twenty single authored publications from the last six years, also presented as part of the candidate’s application in the competition, some of them earlier versions of chapters of the monograph, illustrate K. Spassova’s long-term scholarly commitment to the development of the idea of mimesis and its various dimensions, and their careful reading shows the steps that have been taken to form the basic approach (and the network of operations for its implementation) of “The Modern Mimesis”. Therefore, I will only add here that K. Spassova successfully turns her closer research into an example of the creation of a really modern humanities academic input and,

in particular, a contribution to literary theory and history, which erases the boundary between the study of Ancient and of Western European literature rather than emphasizing it.

This can also easily be said about the participation of K. Spassova in numerous forums, where some specific and/or key issues related to the mimetic have been presented precisely in their form as work in progress, often influenced by previous discussions. K. Spassova actively and fully engages with the academic discourse in our humanities today, and this is not without connection with the context of the competition, because an active research portfolio is important for the spirit of the University to be preserved and kept alive. That is why it is not surprising that in “The Modern Mimesis”, in the discussion of separate Bulgarian contributions and debates, regardless of whether it is in relation to the research and stances of Isaac Passy, Todor Pavlov, Nikola Georgiev or Boyan Manchev, Darin Tenev and Kristian Enchev, they are positioned dialogically in the environment that activates them. Here we can add the role of K. Spassova for the compilation of edited volumes and other initiatives in honor of prominent scholars, or summarizing the Bulgarian theoretical contribution on individual topics and legitimizing its updated debate.

Due to my affiliation with another faculty, I do not know K. Spassova's teaching work directly enough, but I have attended some of her seminars, and my impression of her communication with the audience is very positive – not only in terms of the delivery of her lectures, but also as guiding, provoking and inspiring the independent work of students and developing their research potential, with already visible results. And a final note: K. Spassova herself since her student years often works successfully in a team with colleagues with shared interdisciplinary methodology, focal scholarly interests, as well as academic commitment. This is important because the high original academic achievements, such as the present monograph, should not remain isolated, but instead be produced and shared in an environment that could evaluate them dialogically and contribute to the future development of their author.

In conclusion and on the basis of all that has been said, given the high research and teaching qualities and achievements of Chief Assistant Kamelia Spassova, PhD, I strongly vote for her to be awarded the academic position of Associate Professor in the area of Western European Literature, in the professional field 2.1. Philology.

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