

OPINION

of Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil., Sofia University,
member of the academic board for awarding the academic
title ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in a competition
announced by St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

Candidate: Senior Assistant Prof. Dr. Kamelia Spasova

I. Overview of candidate's research work and output

The candidate in the associate professorship selection procedure 2.1. Philology (Literatures of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia – Ancient and Western European literature) senior assistant professor Dr. Kamelia Spasova is one of the most outstanding scholars in the young generation of Bulgarian literary theorists. It would be fair to say that she is a researcher whose academic output has ensured her a unique place in the fields of the theory and history of literature. Kamelia Spasova's writing is characterised by the originality of her ideas, a high level of analyticity, conceptually-driven theorising, as well as readiness to engage in dialogue.

Kamelia Spasova is moreover an exceptionally active literary scholar – she has organised a great many conferences and seminars (some of them on her own initiative), in addition to participating in numerous national and international forums. It should likewise be noted that she was a lecturer of Bulgarian language and literature at the Slavic Institute at the University of Cologne, which ensured an even greater visibility for her work.

Kamelia Spasova's teaching merits special mention, as well. For years, she has been a favourite teaching assistant of the students reading for a degree in Bulgarian Philology. Kamelia doesn't just teach; she offers students specially tailored seminars in which she engages the best and gives them opportunities to thrive. In recent years, she has been one of the driving forces behind the interest in the MA programme in "Literary Studies", as well as in the PhD programmes offered at the "Theory of Literature" Department.

Kamelia Spasova serves as an editor at the “Literary Gazette”, where she has been a long-time staunch advocate for the place of literary theory, working hard on special issues and actively engaging her students in the preparation for publication. Some of the issues she has edited can be used as “mini textbooks” by students of literature.

In sum, Kamelia Spasova is a recognisable candidate with her own distinctive style and indisputable merits and contributions to literary theory and the study of Ancient and Western European literature. And should one make a quantitative assessment of her list of publications, participations in conferences and projects, including citations, it quickly becomes clear that they are far above the minimum national requirements for the position of associate professor.

II. Assessment of the scholarly and practical outcomes and contributions of the work submitted for the competition

For the purposes of this selection procedure, senior assistant professor Dr. Kamelia Spasova has submitted a monograph entitled “Modern Mimesis”, as well as 20 articles published in acclaimed outlets, some of them international and refereed. Most of Spasova’s articles reflect her sustained interest in the various interpretations of the term mimesis, though some of them hint at other aspects of her scholarly pursuits, including international authors such as Borges, an examination of Bulgarian literature, more specifically Kiril Krastev, through the prism of world literature, or an investigation of the heritage of Bulgarian scholarship in the humanities, in particular by Miroslav Yanakiev, Nikola Georgiev and Radosvet Kolarov. This theme is also clearly present in “Modern Mimesis”.

In what follows, however, I shall outline some of the merits and contributions of this habilitation monograph, since it is the main publication submitted by Dr. Kamelia Spasova for this selection procedure.

It is fair to say that Kamelia Spasova's most recent monograph remains focused on Antiquity, including the close inspection of the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, as well as the application of the method of examples; however, "Modern Mimesis" builds on these ideas and makes tangible progress, enriching the terminological apparatus, even more skilfully intertwining theorising and research into the historical background, even more boldly penetrating the various periods and modernity, demonstrating the astonishing maturity of its conclusions. Even more salient are the (direct or indirect) allusions to Michel Foucault's ideas on problematising "grand" narratives and working on smaller narratives, borderline situations, or turning points, which shapes a myriad of storylines in the book, including a number of historical paradigms and cross-sections. Fortunately, what remains unchanged in Kamelia's writing is the bright originality of her ideas.

This research makes a significant contribution to Bulgarian literary studies, since there hasn't been a separate book-length theoretical examination of this concept, and what is more, Bulgarian literary scholarship has so far tended to view mimesis in a rather one-dimensional way. By contrast, Spasova discusses this concept by taking into account what it might be informed by or refer to, including how it explains itself; in other words, we see here a creative interpretation, rather than just a reproduction. What is more, Spasova discovers this modern reflective potential of mimesis even in the ancients. The author often refers to major studies of mimesis which she knows well; she fits perfectly in the traditions which she dutifully follows in one way or another, but she also makes a case for the individuality of her own work, namely by viewing mimesis as a double and self-referential category.

Another contribution is an approach which can be labelled as "compiling historical paradigms of aberration", the research into figures of self-reflection in different contexts, a remarkable interdisciplinarity and the resourceful use of works of fiction as unexpected sources of examples to illustrate ideas of literary studies. This constitutes Spasova's trademark.

It is equally important that she skilfully combines fact-finding, contextual background and unexpected cross-sections, which, once fleshed out, shed light on the various ways of construing mimesis, simultaneously providing some unexpected insights. The author offers extremely detailed, slow readings, as well as a taste for the philological – not only in her analyses of Auerbach, but also in her own style; she pieces things together in an unconventional fashion, building theoretical and historical constructs, the multi-layered debate between ancient and modern, seen during various periods and offering exciting insights into the contemporary, never forgetting the flexibility and caveats as to what it means to be modern.

Finally, “Modern Mimesis” is a book which engages in a rare (especially for younger authors) unabashed debate involving the past and the present of Bulgarian philosophy and literary theory, a debate in which Spasova’s positions are well defended.

II. Conclusion

Considering the serious work of the candidate, the depth and insight of her reasoning and argumentation, as well as her overall output as a recognised researcher and university lecturer, I vote with conviction for awarding senior assistant professor Dr. Kamelia Spasova the academic title of ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in 2.1. Philology (Literatures of Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Australia – Ancient and Western European literature). I hereby propose that the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Slavic Studies should approve her application.

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Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil.