

## CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Nevena Asparuhova Panova, Ph.D., Department of Classical Studies,  
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia,  
member of the academic jury, according to order No ПД 38-245/18.05.2022,  
on the PhD thesis of Assist. Prof. Monika Emilova Galabova, “Reading the periphery. The  
border’s space in the fiction of Ádám Bodor”, supervisor Assoc. Prof. Kamelia Spasova,  
offered for awarding the educational and scholarly degree “Doctor” in the professional field  
2.1. Philology (Hungarian Literature)

The dissertation of Assoc. Prof. Monika Galabova “Reading the Periphery. The border’s space in the fiction of Ádám Bodor” has a total volume of 173 standard pages, including a Bibliography (with over 80 titles in Bulgarian, Hungarian, English) and a list of five publications on its subject. In the Abstract, the author meets the requirements and presents fully the methodology used in the study, the main theses of the author, the conclusions and the contributions reached. Also, in view of the presented separate publications, as well as on basis of the other groups of criteria, M. Galabova meets the requirements of of the relevant Bulgarian legislation in the academic sphere, as shown by the complete documentation.

Monika Galabova has a bachelor’s degree in Hungarian Philology (from Sofia University and with specializations in Eötvös Loránd University, as well as at the Balassi Institute in Budapest), and a master’s degree in Bulgarian Language and Literature: “Literature, Book publishing, Media” Program from New Bulgarian University. I point this out because it seems to me that, still as a student, the PhD student had an interest not only in Hungarian language and Hungarian literature, but also in a wide range of topics and approaches in literary theory and other fields of humanities. Therefore, it is not surprising that her dissertation can first be defined as an interdisciplinary one, without diverting it from the specialized focus expected of this type of research on a particular material.

The dissertation of M. Galabova is dedicated to three novels by the Hungarian author of Transylvanian origin Ádám Bodor (b. 1936): *The Sinistra Zone* (1992), *The Visit of the Archbishop* (1999), and *The Birds of Verhovina* (2011), only the first of which is available in

Bulgarian (translated by Svetla Kiosseva, 2000). The three works, which the Galabova defines in one of her introductory notes as a kind of trilogy, created themselves within two boundary decades, are read and analyzed through the theme of periphery and/on the border and of “borderness”, which opens the study to subsequent thematic units related to power, time, memory, identity, language, culture, and nonculture. Such an analysis could only be carried out with a rich instrumental support, as already implied – not only through the scholarly language of the Hungarian studies and of the Literary theory, but also in relying on concepts of the anthropology and sociology, of the cultural and political history.

It is this task that predetermines both the good segmentation of the dissertation (consisting of Introduction (I), four main chapters with multiple subparts (II–V), Conclusion (VI), and its slightly unusual structure, in which the single interpretative approaches are intertwined. The relatively short Introduction presents the objectives, methods, and the significance of the study, but also the first main chapter, dedicated to the author, the works analyzed, and their critical reception, has an introductory character – so, gradually, and delicately, still here, some contributions of the study are outlined. The initial summary presentation of the plots of the three works, their “synopsis”, already justifies the theme of the border as a good interpretative key to Bodor’s prose, and the review of its critical reception shows that such an approach has not been applied so far, especially to the entire trilogy.

In the next chapter (III), “The Art Space of the Border” sets out and discusses those “theoretical perspectives” on which the analysis in IV and V will follow. The models that the author mainly uses are found in the figures of Bakhtin (and the chronotope), Foucault (and the heterotopies) and Lotman (and semiosphere). Here precisely and at the same time with ease and confidence, which is less common for such early studies, along with references to a number of further scholars (I would like to highlight the attraction of the Bulgarian contributions, for example in the field of semiotics), both the leading models and their possible (well-known or proposed by the author for the purposes of the study) are emerging. Besides, there is discussed, in several aspects, and defined, the very concept of “border/boundary”, and its divergent meaning, in order to narrow the study to the border’s presence in the studied works.

After this broad theoretical framing of the analysis, it goes on with a “close reading” of the trilogy through the problems of time-space, memory, identity, language, and naming in a boundary context; the already introduced problem of autotextuality, as well as the presence of the “real” Bodor – in the works encoded, as is generally the language of the border according to the study, is not abandoned. The detailed analysis continues in V, where the boundary is

considered to separate the culturally absorbed space from the natural/animal. Here, the emphasis is on “animalization”, by reaching the limit in the study itself, focusing, at the end of the chapter on the smells, physiological processes and sounds on the periphery.

The conclusion (VI) also, like the Introduction, has a relatively small volume, but accurately reflects the conclusions reached, as well as the contribution points of the study. Its peculiar “laconic” sound is due both to the specificity of the author’s style, which – this is evident in all the chapters – does not say anything “superfluous”, and to the fact that in the course of the PhD account are skillfully presented, or at least implied, a number of intermediate conclusions, which in a genuine way accumulate and mutually refine.

That's why we refer here to some of them that seem particularly important to us. Bodor’s world is interpreted as heterotopia, as opposed to its usual perception so far as an anti-utopian one (p. 24 sqq.). From Bakhtin the characteristics of the adventurous time in the novel (p. 27 and ad.) are applied to the novels studied, but in many instances the concept of dialogue is also used, albeit more hidden (p. 21 and al.). There is also a receptionist boundary – the one on which the reader is present himself as an external observer, between the codes of his own and of foreign culture – that of Bodor’s works (e.g. 40, 48). The theme of power and its language should also not be forgotten – it, in opposition to the periphery in which Bodor's protagonists reside in isolation, is a core/center (p. 42, etc.), and it is through the center – periphery dichotomy that the specifics, mainly heterotopical and heterochronical, stand out more explicitly, on the periphery – to and beyond the border. Across the border, on the other hand, not only space and speech are changing, but identity as well: “We would sum up as follows: crossing borders and entering the restraint zone is accompanied first by the complete depersonalization of the characters. Identity in this world is a very fragile concept...” (p. 82). Therefore, it is not surprising that the author devotes many pages to the various personal changes, name transformations and travesties of the characters near the border, although that does not save them from the peripheral existence, and it is “in connection with his spatial (Foucault), time (Bakhtin) and cultural (Lotman) isolation” (p. 57).

I use a little decontextualized the last quote to repeat that one of the serious contributions of Monika Galabova’s dissertation is the presenting of the subject in a whole network of theoretical models, leading or accompanying, some of which appear only in analytical chapters, which do not remain framing, but help to carry out successfully the interdisciplinary analysis.

I also know the earlier versions of the study (presented for PhD enrollment) as well as some of the presented publications on its subject, and I would like to emphasize the noticeable development and upgrade of both the approach and the academic language of M. Galabova. Despite individual lettering, punctuation, technical and style minor errors and roughness (e.g. it is desirable to use the present time in the entire conclusion; in a consistent reference to the same source, “Ibid.” should be used and not just a page, etc.), the text of the dissertation sounds fluently, confidently and even fascinating, in the moments when Bodor’s trilogy itself is presented. The latter is not a criticism, because such a discourse is self-understood in some cases when discussing artistic works. Here I would also express hope that Monika Galabova will contribute with her translation experience more works of this iconic Hungarian prosaic to reach the Bulgarian reader.

In conclusion, in view of all said above, I strongly recommend that the esteemed scientific jury awards Assist. Prof. Monika Galabova the educational and scholarly degree “Doctor” in the professional field 2.1. Philology (Hungarian Literature).

Sofia, June 25, 2022

Assoc. Prof. N. Panova, PhD