

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Nikolay Aretov Aretov,

Professional field 05.04.02. Bulgarian literature

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on the academic output for participation in a competition for the academic
position of

“Professor” in Professional field 2.1. Philology (Modern French Literature),

with sole candidate Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova, Ph.D.

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Racheva Yotova, Ph.D. graduated from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” with a degree in French language and literature in 1991.

In 2001 she became Ph.D. with a dissertation entitled « L'espace géométrique dans le nouveau roman » (Paris 10 – Nanterre). In 2007 Yotova attain the academic rank of Associate Professor in France, and in 2008 – in the Sofia University, where she was teaching since 1993, at first as an assistant, later as an chief assistant, and, since 2008 – as associate professor. In addition to her lectures in French literature, R. Yotova also turns her attention to other scholar's fields that are new not only in Bulgaria – she prepares and offers lectures in the university specialization of African studies, such as: « Litterature-monde en français », and « Littérature Africaine ».

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova was a director of studies to two Ph.D. students, she was the leader of one international research project, and a participant in several other projects.

Rennie Yotova has been an editor-in-chief of the periodical « Frequences francophones », published by the Association des professeurs de et en français en Bulgarie (l'APFB) (2003 – 2010); she was also president of the Bulgarian association of the specialist on Canada (2006 – 2009), and member of the Board of the Centre régional francophone pour l'Europe centrale et orientale (CRFECO) (2010 - 2017). Rennie Yotova is also an active translator of French literature (Albert Camus, Gérard de Nerval, Ágota Kristóf, et al.) including some Bulgarian authors writing in French, such as Tzvetelina Dobрева, Sonya K. Anguelova, etc.) In some cases, Rennie Yotova also translates Bulgarian texts in French for example a short story by Palmi Ranchev. Rennie Yotova is active in presenting to the Bulgarian public some foreign authors (not only French) such as Marguerite Duras, Patrick Modiano, Jonathan Littell, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Pauline Réage, Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, Henri Bergson, et al.

Scholar researches of Rennie Yotova are focused at first place, to modern French-language literature created in France, Switzerland, Canada (Michel Tremblay). A special accent in her work is on francophone literature in particular. For me, the special issue of the periodical "Panorama" (2024) that I have missed, dedicated to the "Romande", French-language Swiss literature, composed by R. Yotova and with her introduction is an valuable edition.

Other important fields of her scholarly interest are the problems of bilingualism and the "exiles experience" of the authors with different national backgrounds that have left their countries and started to write in other languages, mainly in French - Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, Andreï Makine, Bessa Myftiu, Ruzha Lazarova, Nancy Huston, Milan Kundera, etc. In some cases, her observations are built on personal conversations with them (Adam Biro, Luba Jurgenson et. al.). The interest of the scholar is focused on contemporary authors but in order to interpret more profound the phenome, she goes back to authors from the past, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Yotova's articles dedicated to the teaching of French literature also have a tight connection with the issue of bilingualism.

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova is author of articles on Bulgarian reception of French-language poets, such as Guillaume Apollinaire (2015), Blaise Cendrars (2012); in the later she comments the story of the discovered/mystified by Kiril Kadiiski Russian edition of « La Légende de Novgorode ». The receptionist's observations of Rennie Yotova, especially those

of them published abroad do not let pass the opportunity to present the global picture of Bulgarian literature and even the political life here. The publications in which Rennie Yotova present to the French public Bulgarian literature such as « L'année 1925 dans la littérature bulgare : les influences francophones » (2012) are really valuable. Here the focus is on Nikolai Rainov, Asen Zlatarov, Boyan Penev, and the less known Hristo Stoychev, who has published a study on Bulgarian history in French language in Sofia. In some other texts, Yotova also refers to Hristo Stoychev and his disputable ideas on Bulgarians.

Studies of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova use a complex methodological approach dominated by the tendency to apply the ideas of the so-called "Geneva School" (Jean Starobinski, Jean Rousset, Georges Poulet) that puts stress on « l'épanouissement simultané d'une structure et d'une pensée, amalgame d'une forme et d'une expérience dont la genèse et la croissance sont solidaire »; Yotova who is well acquainted with Geneva School adopts approach to the objects of her studies.

The interest of Yotova to the reveal the connections between modern literature and ancient myths (mainly Hellenic and Roman) is enduring as well as her drive towards philosophical problems (За смисъла на страданието, 2014).

For the competition, Assistant professor Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova presents two short monographs, dedicated to Ágota Kristóf published in Switzerland (one of them written in collaboration with Sara de Balsi):

La Trilogie des jumeaux d'Ágota Kristof, Infolio éditions, collection Le cippe, Genève, 2011.

Trois pièces d'Ágota Kristof, Infolio éditions, collection Le cippe, Genève, 2016.

These two books naturally complement one another presenting different genres in the oeuvre of Ágota Kristóf. First monograph deals with the novels of the « La trilogie des jumeaux » : « Le Grand Cahier » (Seuil, 1986), « La Preuve » (Seuil, 1988) « Le Troisième Mensonge » (Seuil, 1991), translated in Bulgarian by Rositsa Tasheva and published by

“Colibri” (2000). Rennie Yotova presents the plots of the novels and analyses the complex interrelations between autobiographical and fictional narration, seen in the context of the dramatic political events from that time and through the prism of the exile as a painful experience and the writing in a language different from the native one. An important source for these problems referred in the study is the short book of Ágota Kristóf « L’Analphabète ». Here Rennie Yotova offers also interesting parallels with « Les Nourritures terrestres » by André Gide.

After analyzing the trilogy, Rennie Yotova turns to Ágota Kristóf’s dramaturgy to which the second monograph is dedicated. Two of the plays that are in the focus here - « Un rat qui passe » (1972) and « La Clé de l’ascenseur » (1977), the Bulgarian public already knows due to Rennie Yotova’s translation (2011). The monograph starts with the early attempts of Ágota Kristóf, signed with the pen-name Zaïk and goes to the relations between the novels and the stage plays (some of them were not published in the author’s lifetime) and finds some similarities with the so-called Antonin Artaud’s « théâtre de la cruauté ». The early play « Un rat qui passe » is presented in the context of the anti-totalitarian dystopias; this work, and the other play « Le monster » (1972) were written before « La trilogie des jumeaux ». « La Clé de l’ascenseur » the most staged play by Ágota Kristóf and presented by the critic as “un bien étrange conte de fée” is an interesting text analyzed by Rennie Yotova.

The observations of Rennie Yotov on the oeuvre of Ágota Kristóf and other authors from different nationalities and with different mode of writing but with similar faith and the reasoning of exporters in that field lead her to an important general conclusion that widens our ideas not only about literature.

En somme, les écrivains du déracinement ne sont pas tout à fait des exilés. L’exil a une valeur beaucoup plus politique, et même s’ils sont partis, poussés par les circonstances historiques, les déracinés ne vivent pas exactement la même expérience que les exilés. Le déracinement est plus un sentiment et une expérience ontologique qu’une condition. Le déracinement est lié à une perte radicale des repères, à un défaut fondamental d’appropriation et d’appartenance. L’isolement fait paraître la réalité absolument autre de sorte que le sujet a l’impression de vivre dans un monde qui ne lui appartient pas. Avec l’œuvre d’Agota Kristof la littérature du déracinement devient

nihiliste et profondément tragique, conditionnée par l'expérience du négatif : refus de la langue étrangère, refus du pays étranger. Klaus, qui a passé quarante ans en exil, avouera : «Je lui dis que la vie est d'une inutilité totale, elle est non-sens, aberration, souffrance infinie, l'invention d'un Non-Dieu dont la méchanceté dépasse l'entendement.»

The list of publications in scientific (and specialized in the field of literature and culture) periodicals and collections of texts attached by Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotova enlists 31 texts (some of them with co-author). R. Yotova is also editor of several special issues of magazines and newspapers for literature, editor of one scholar's collection of texts, and co-editor of another.

After attaining the academic rank of Associate Professor in 2008 Rennie Yotov has taken part in 29 scholar's conferences in Bulgaria and abroad, some of them organized by her.

Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotov is co-author of several textbooks and manuals, of literary criticism, etc. Her contribution in « La vie de l'esprit en Europe centrale et orientale depuis 1945, Dictionnaire encyclopédique » (Editions du Cerf, 2021) and some other dictionaries and reference books is really important. Rennie Yotov often takes part in different forms of presentations of French and francophone authors and books in media and public events.

The List of the original scientific contributions, the List of the publications, offered by Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotov are correctly prepared. The List of the quotations of her studies deserves respect.

Conclusion

The entire activity and work of Assoc. Prof. Rennie Yotov, Ph.D. as university lecturer, scholar, translator, and literary critic fully corresponds to the requirements of the law. With conviction, I give a positive assessment of the candidate's academic activity and ask Academic Council at University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski" to award her the title of Professor.

February 27, 2022

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