

REVIEW

by Prof. Amelia Veselinova Licheva, PhD, St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, higher education area: 2.1. Philology (Literary Theory) for the purposes of the selection procedure for the academic position of Associate Professor in higher education area 2.1, applicant: Senior Assistant Professor Bilyana Kurtasheva, PhD

I. Evaluation of the applicant's compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of New Bulgarian University

The applicant in this selection procedure, Senior Assistant Professor Bilyana Kurtasheva, PhD, is a renowned member of Bulgarian literary circles and it is thus natural that her body of work should far exceed the minimum requirements for the position of Associate Professor. Dr. Kurtasheva's list of activities demonstrates that she fully meets the additional requirements of the New Bulgarian University (NBU). In this sense, the package presents a robust applicant profile, with the applicant long since deserving to attain the academic position of Associate Professor on the merit of her overall scholarly activities and teaching.

II. Research (creative work) and results

Bilyana Kurtasheva is among the most intriguing Bulgarian literary scholars, a group of individuals boasting distinct styles and modes of work and developing out-of-the-box ideas that always inspire reactions in readers and do not go unnoticed by literary circles. In our present-day context, this last point already shows clear determination to make one's mark in the humanities.

Bilyana Kurtasheva's application package for the selection procedure features a significant number of articles in Bulgarian and English that have made their way to renowned publications and the monograph *Along the Edge of Comparison* („По ръба на сравнението“).

The articles serve to outline the broad range of topics of interest to the author, starting with the Bulgarian Revival period and some of the most canonical Bulgarian authors and reaching contemporary writers, all the while balancing carefully between the Bulgarian and the global, a feature very typical of Dr. Kurtasheva's texts.

I would like further to highlight Bilyana Kurtasheva's contribution to preparing teaching material as part of the new curricula in literature for profiled classes at schools. The analyses she offers in the *Readings through Dialogue* section demonstrate the manner in which academics should write for schoolchildren, namely with due care and moderation, always keeping in mind their readers, the recipients.

All that said, I would like to dwell on the monograph presented by the author for the purposes of the selection procedure since the text is significant in that it serves as a sublimation of all the points touched on so far.

The intertextual approach has particularly strong roots in Bulgarian literary studies and it is indeed a cause for joy when younger authors manage to contribute. In the spirit of academic honesty, Bilyana Kurtasheva presents her theoretical framework, emphasising the ideas of Julia Kristeva and reading these in the context of the ideas propounded in the later works of Barthes and, more generally, post-structuralism. She goes on to highlight the contribution of Nikola Georgiev, who drastically broadened the scope of intertextuality, bringing to the foreground not so much comparison as the equal footing on which the texts connected should stand and emphasizing 'inter-character' readings and the role of meta-literary studies at large.

The overall purpose of Dr. Kurtasheva's text seems to be to test the limits of intertextuality, to remind readers of the role of unexpectedness (which the author also achieves by virtue of her own readings), to enable a new way of perceiving what is known. This last point brings to mind one of the most significant contributions of the book, which allows one to add it to the ranks of works in literary studies by the likes

of Nikola Georgiev himself and Milena Kirova: when Bulgarian literature is read using contemporary paradigms or, as Dr. Kurtasheva does, when Yavorov and the Rolling Stones, Konstantin Pavlov and Shakespeare, or Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky are juxtaposed, Bulgarian literature sheds its provincialism and is catapulted into a global dimension. It is not a coincidence that the topic of the local and the global, of small and big literatures, of world literature and markets and of when exactly a writer becomes a global figure, while not central, constitute a thread running through the monograph. In fact, the conclusions reached also concern literary theory at large: the Bulgarian is put on a par with the global in the text. Last but not least, references to the present and the justification offered for the significance of an intertextual approach in the world of Internet technology, including by virtue of the intriguing idea of Michel Foucault and the consideration of some of his notions in the context of predicting the Internet, are of importance.

As for the specific analyses Bilyana Kurtasheva puts forward to illustrate her theoretical constructs, which offer particular contributions, opening new perspectives on authors such as Yavorov, Geo Milev, Dalchev and Konstantin Pavlov, these can be termed exemplary. They see a convergence of the principles of meticulous close reading and justified contextualisations, with the author drawing on a wide gamut of supporting evidence, balancing between the elitist and the popular, reading with reference to a work's place in the canon, introducing thematic cores such as childhood and the common obsession with age, the role of the city, nature, problematizing stereotypes and offering a perspective on phenomena through the prism of marginal characters (Bulgarian poetry of the 1990s and its aunties).

III. Educational and teaching activity

Bilyana Kurtasheva is one of the recognisable members of the New Bulgarian Studies Department of the NBU. She actively participates in and organises many of the conferences and public literature-related events of said department. She also teaches specialised courses on issues relating to Bulgarian and world literature and some of the general

courses offered by the NBU, such as the course on essay writing. I have had the opportunity to listen to some of Bilyana Kurtasheva's students at conferences and to take account of her work on their preparation. Dr. Kurtasheva has also engaged in rigorous specialisations that have allowed her to become a more focused and professional academic. In summary, I should say that Bilyana Kurtasheva is a lecturer with a wide array of interests capable of striking a balance between the experimental and the conservative, all with the aim of being useful to and sparking an interest in the present-day generations of students.

IV. Administrative and public activity

This review started with the statement that Bilyana Kurtasheva is a well-known member of Bulgarian literary circles. This is, in part, due to her work as an editor of poetry volumes and translated works, as a scrupulous critic and as a translator, but also as a person engaged in the publication and editing of periodicals. Here, I am referring to the *Vitamin B* („Витамин Б“) magazine, which was among the emblematic publications of the 1990s. Above all, I should highlight her work on the excellent journal *Sledva* („Следва“), where she serves as editor-in-chief. Dr. Kurtasheva also participates in various projects of importance, one being Snezhina Petrova's *A Bulgarian Woman* („Една българка“). She is also the driving force behind and head of important workshops held at the NBU. To put it briefly, she is a scholar whose voice is heard.

V. Personal impressions of the applicant (if applicable)

I have known Bilyana since the 1990s, when she started to contribute to the *Literary Paper* („Литературен вестник“) publication. To my mind, she has always been among the most meticulous and intriguing authors, whose texts I follow consistently. If she edits a volume or writes about one, this tells me that it merits attention. In my work, I have found her texts and recommendations drawing on her observations on world literature particularly valuable.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and notes on the applicant's work and achievements

Being familiar with the unconventional ideas of Senior Assistant Professor Bilyana Kurtasheva, PhD, the serious and comprehensive way in which she advocates and upholds them, her extraordinary erudition, the authority of her texts and her entire body of work as a university lecturer and a humanities scholar of merit, I am certain that she deserves to receive the academic title of Associate Professor at the NBU in higher education area 2.1. Philology and I support her application before the honourable Academic Council of the NBU.

Date 25.03.2022

Signature:

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