

## REVIEW

**for the competition for Associate Professor in the scholarly area  
"Theory and History of Culture" at the Section "Culture of the  
Balkans", Institute of Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of  
Sciences**

**Candidate:** Assist. Prof. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva

**Reviewer:** Prof. Bozhidar Stefan Manov, D.Sc.

I proceed to the analysis and evaluation of the habilitation research of the only candidate in the announced competition, Chief Assist. Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva with curiosity and at the same time with expectation of serious, well-defended authorial texts. The reason for this is my good acquaintance with the candidate as a researcher, not only because we belong to the same professional guild "Criticism" at the Union of Bulgarian Film Makers, but also because for at least 19 years I have known and followed her scholarly development.

For the announced competition, the candidate presents 13 habilitation papers: two monographs ("Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses", Sofia, 2021; and "The Image of the Balkans in Balkan and Western Films: Strategies for Representation", Veliko Tarnovo, 2010), which would be quite sufficient for the purposes of the competition. However, in addition, she also submitted 11 articles in scholarly collected volumes published in this country and in the UK, as well as in the Bulgarian journals "Cinema" and "Bulgarian Ethnology." They are all relevant to the topic of the announced competition, and in terms of their specific focus and quantity, they give a comprehensive picture of the candidate's research interests, searches, and results.

**The monograph "The Image of the Balkans in Balkan and Western Films: Strategies of Representation" (2010)** offers a comprehensive, convincing and faithful summary of the topic with undeniable relevance at the time of publication. The text is information-rich, factually saturated,

with ample research material – in short, a useful and complete scholarly study. For the Balkans have always, and even more so during the period under consideration by the author, justified their semantic signification as a region with a marked specificity, which, moreover, maintains its mythological colour on every possible occasion, in all historical-political, socio-economic, ethno-cultural conditions and events. It is no coincidence that the British journalist and satirical writer Hector Hugh Munroe (“Saki”) (1870-1916), as a war correspondent in the region during the wars of the early 20th century, remains in the annals of world journalism with his brilliant aphoristic phrase: "The Balkans produce more history than they can consume".

In the two parts of the monograph, "The Balkans after the End of the Cold War" and "In Search of Balkan Identity" the author achieves the desired comprehensive picture of the Balkans through the prism of film interpretation in various landmark titles from the region, but also in Western productions. However, not by itself, but with a leading emphasis on understanding the complex historical-political processes registered, illuminated and analysed with the artistic possibilities of screen interpretation. And particularly interesting and summarizing the whole text of the study is the last sixth chapter "Homo Balkanicus: who are they?" - not only delicious to read, but also as an elegant concluding poem of the whole preceding text.

The other, brand new monograph, **“Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses”** (2021), is justifiably of greater research interest and readers' expectations for several objectively indisputable reasons. For the first time in Bulgarian film studies, such a study appears - of an important and very successful world cinematographic event, which is among the most significant film festivals in the contemporary film world. Incidentally, there are not that many such studies in international practice either, or if there are (on the Cannes Festival, for example) they are by national authors and more often written as memoir-like summaries of the historical notes of their long-time functionaries, e.g. the book by the highly authoritative former President (and now President Emeritus) of Cannes, Mr. Gilles Jacob (Gilles Jacob, *Dictionnaire amoureux du Festival de Cannes*, 2018). Such books are rather curious, but not exploratory, without a marked scientific approach,

organization and systematization of the rich material, sociological and sociocultural observations, etc.

The proposed as the main habilitation thesis of Dr. Gergana Doncheva is prepared precisely as a serious, broad and in-depth scientific study with all the important parameters of its comprehensive integrity. The approach is mainly historical (as a tracing of the festival "biography"), but in this structure the main characteristics of such a huge cultural event over the years of significant social, economic, political, aesthetic and purely organizational changes in Greece, in the Balkans, in Europe and in the world are clearly outlined, explored and summarized. Moreover, during these decades of complex changes, the Thessaloniki Film Festival has not only preserved and not just survived, but has evolved and managed, with its ongoing annual editions, to largely reflect these important national, European and global developments in the selection of its film programs, accompanying parallel events, developing and expanding the Agora International Film Market integrated under a common "umbrella" and other useful initiatives. It is gratifying to note that this growing festival structure and its enrichment over the years is captured very well in the text of the monograph, and with adequate assessments and accurate conclusions in socio-cultural terms, as organizational management and as the evolution of festival selection.

The structure of the text is properly constructed, with a logical sequence of the individual parts, and with a well-balanced volume and depth of analysis. A natural starting point are the general reflections and conclusions on the main characteristics of film festivals as socio-cultural events, their typology, categorization, profiles and functions. This is followed by a reasonable amount of history of the Thessaloniki Festival in particular and the Bulgarian participation (presence) in its annual editions. In these essentially concrete observations on the Thessaloniki Festival, the author shows a very good knowledge of the factual material, drawn from a huge volume of information sources published by authoritative authors in serious publications. Reference to most of the books and articles noted essentially exhaust the known archival and bibliographical sources that provide reliable information on the subject. In her other scientific publications, Dr. Gergana Doncheva has shown a

similar conscientious and responsible attitude towards the relevant literature on the subject.

A possible useful complement to the monograph (in ongoing future research) would be a similar in-depth examination of the Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival, created by the late festival erudite Dimitri Eipides in 1999 under the title "Images of the 21st Century." It emerged as an "offspring" of the older Thessaloniki Festival, but it fell into a very interesting moment - the digitalization of the entire audiovisual industry, quickly captured and reflected this so essential process in the development of cinema. So the "smaller" documentary festival became solidly organised and is still regularly run by the same management team as the "big" Thessaloniki Festival (March every year) with a very interesting programme of documentaries from all over the world. In this sense, the two festivals bear a kinship, which suggests the research interest in the documentary "brother" as well.

Even just the two monographs analysed would be sufficient for a convincing participation in the competition and defence of the required criteria for the award of the academic position of Associate Professor. However, the candidate adds to her habilitation works another 11 publications from various scholarly collected volumes, which confirms both her active research work over the years and the extended perimeter of her scientific interests and pursuits. I will not pedantically review all of these 11 serious articles, but I should note some of them that confirm a versatile search and even a peculiar research curiosity.

For example, the article "Season of the Witch: A Cinematology of the Magical" (2020) is definitely too enticing as a look at a specific segment of Hollywood production.

But in the article "Bulgaria: Reframing Contemporary Arthouse and Mainstream Cinema" (2020) we see an interesting and credible analysis of contemporary Bulgarian cinema (the decade 2008-2018), presented with a focus on foreign readers who presumably know little or nothing about the subject.

"In Search of Ceylan" (Cinema Journal, No. 2-3, 2019) is a similarly authoritative and useful article on the great Turkish filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan, but not as a traditional critical portrait, but precisely as a different view and renewal of Turkish cinema from the late 1990s to the present, with a faithful focus on the so-called hybrid model of European co-production, which has largely, and precisely through Ceylan's films, changed the picture of Turkish cinema internationally.

I could similarly examine other of the proposed articles, but these three publications also give a clear idea of the authorial approach in such texts and the serious thoroughness in the analysis of specific themes, objects and subjects.

Therefore I take the liberty to summarize. In all her habilitation works, Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva's has demonstrated: her profound interest in the matter under study in the field of socio-cultural processes in contemporary Balkan cinema; good knowledge of the specific factual methodology; correct focus on interesting and worthy of research attention topics and areas of observation; developed correct analytical approach; useful balance of rational arguments and art historical view; and last but not least well mastered professional language and adequate literary style.

The report on the scholarly contributions of Dr. Gergana Doncheva is reliable, without unnecessary "fortissimo", but with correct and accurate facts. Therefore, I have no doubts that the presented habilitation papers are original texts and personal work of the candidate, without a shadow of plagiarism.

As I noted at the beginning of the review, I know personally the candidate for this competition, Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Doncheva and I have been following her scholarly development for a long time: first as a reviewer of her thesis at the Department of Cultural Studies of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski (2002); then as a reviewer of her doctoral dissertation (2010); and now as a reviewer of this habilitation procedure.

In the meantime, I have observed her serious professional activity and a number of publications in specialized publications, or in her participation in professional forums: conferences, critical discussions, festival press

conferences, various event discussions, etc. I have always appreciated her serious presence and reasoned participation in such platforms, which is an important part of everyday professional work.

Therefore, I now add to the positive attitude already expressed above regarding her candidacy and specifically regarding the attached habilitation papers, my general positive impression of her active participation in a number of professional forums over the years.

And these complex observations give me strong arguments to persuasively plead before the esteemed scientific jury to award the candidate in this habilitation procedure, Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva the academic position of Associate Professor.

I vote “For”!

**27 July 2021**

**Prof. Bozhidar Manov, D.Sc.**