

**Petya TSONEVA, Suman GUPTA**

## INTRODUCTION

Anniversaries are extraordinary events – they wield the wonderful power of wrapping time and space in the festivity of a moment that contains the most distant geographies of a lifetime, making friends meet and discuss the best of times together. The present volume in honour of Professor Ludmilla Kostova is one such verbal meeting that invites colleagues, friends, and former and present doctoral students to share a space where past, present, and future meet in the land of the words, a wonderful “Land of Oz” where, as Professor Anja Müller wisely observes in her friendly address, we can find “the best of all possible worlds.”

It is there that time and distance shrink in order to bring distant friendships as close as possible, make academic partnerships as vivid as in the days when they happened, and cross-cultural dialogues that have persisted in the course of time, expand even further. For this volume contains a variety of times, spaces, and journeys across them that would fail to meet the requirements of a mere commemoration. Instead, they celebrate the everlasting power of the word to keep alive such meetings across distances.

This volume honours Professor Kostova’s contributions to the development of English Studies at the University of Veliko Tarnovo, throughout Bulgaria, and in the wider academic world, while acknowledging her essential role in the development of the Department of English and American Studies during her tenure as chair. Professor Kostova launched projects and initiated international partnerships that allowed many BA, MA, and PhD students to spend time studying and carrying out research beyond national borders. She led the department with foresight, ensuring its future via her PhD students, several of whom, like the present writer Petya Tsonova, are either tenured academics in English Studies or on their way to tenure. Professor Kostova organised numerous international conferences that fostered spirited interactions between young and established scholars, and increased the visibility of the University of Veliko Tarnovo among European and world-renowned organisations. She coordinated the first MA programme in Conference Interpreting with substantial support from the Directorate General for Interpretation at the European Commission. Professor Kostova presently serves as chair of the Bulgarian Society for the Study of English and is active in all initiatives of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE). Her academic pathway is marked by achievements and an impressive persistence in an academic environment that is not always easily accessible.

Professor Kostova attended the University of Sofia between 1972 and 1977, earning a Master's degree in English and Russian. She was awarded a PhD in English Literature in 1994. Her doctoral thesis was entitled *Liberating the Poetic Genius: William Blake and Mid- and Late Eighteenth Century Literary History*, and was published as a monograph in 1999. She started her academic career at the University of Veliko Tarnovo in 1981 and was promoted several times before becoming an associate professor with tenure in 1998. In 2013, she became a full professor. She was Head of the Department of English and American Studies of the University of Veliko Tarnovo between 1995 and 2018, and held the position of Associate Dean for International Relations at the Faculty of Modern Languages between 2003 and 2007.

Professor Kostova was the director of four MA programmes at the University of Veliko Tarnovo: British and Irish Studies from 1995 to 2017, Conference Interpreting from 2003 to 2019, English and the Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching from 2009 to 2019, and Anglophone Studies from 2018 to 2019.

While employed at the University of Veliko Tarnovo, Professor Kostova received numerous awards and prestigious external appointments. They include: Honorary Research Fellow, University of Wolverhampton, UK (from 2007); Visiting Senior Fellow, IFK, Vienna, Austria; Honorary Research Fellow, Edge Hill University College, UK; East Central European Andrew W. Mellon Fellow, IWM, Vienna, Austria. Awards and grants from the Fulbright Commission, the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, Socrates/Erasmus and TEMPUS schemes, the British Council, ESSE, the European Feminist Initiative, and other bodies, enabled her to contribute to key academic initiatives in Europe and elsewhere. She has been a coordinator in a significant number of international collaborative projects, notably: several CEEPUS, TEMPUS JEP, and Socrates/Erasmus projects; the "English Studies in Post-Accession Bulgaria and Romania" project (in collaboration with the Open University UK); the "East Looks West" project (in collaboration with University College London); the programme on "The European City and Its Representations" (with the University of Paris 13, France). Professor Kostova's much-valued contribution to the wider academic community also includes her work as a member of the editorial boards of several scholarly journals, including the Anglophone journal, *VTU Review: Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (<https://journals.uni-vt.bg/vtureview/eng/>) of which she is one of the founding editors. Most importantly, her wide-ranging scholarship and publications have made a significant mark in academia.

Professor Kostova's publications and other scholarly outputs (e.g., in conference presentations) are remarkable both for their range and for their depth. At the most obvious level, her publications have been predominantly addressed to literary and cultural texts (broadly understood) in English through the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, covering both well-known

and relatively neglected authors. These texts are analysed through careful close reading and discernment of nuances. In every instance, such analyses are undergirded by a powerful sense of the critical placement of texts within their periods, in terms of received canons and existing critical conventions. In a general way, then, these publications evidence deep understanding of the existing critical contours of Anglophone literary culture and history. Crucially and illuminatingly, her own readings invariably trouble existing critical preconceptions and dominant framings, and reveal fissures, ambiguities, and tacit prejudices amidst apparent certainties and claims of veracity.

Professor Kostova's publications, therefore, form a distinctive and coherent intellectual project of dislocating and relocating such texts apropos contexts, re-examining the bases of critical production and reception, and foregrounding the critical performance of contextualizing itself. That aim, to a great extent, has guided her choices of texts for analytical scrutiny and commentary. A lot of her research work concerns *constructions of geopolitical spaces through narrative*, and the slippages and contradictions therein: that is, constructions of nationality, territorially-ascribed culture and ethnicity, and culturally-redolent imaginary geographies (such as the Balkans and Europe, East/West, Orient/Occident, centre/periphery). The narrative *constructedness* of geopolitical space/demographics is exposed through various methods. The tacit logic of partial representation and misrepresentation from a habitually "located" perspective has been an abiding concern in her work since the publication of her book *Tales of the Periphery: The Balkans in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (1997). She has unpacked and sharpened this logic especially productively by further exploring tropes of travel and border-crossings since. There are thus studies of, so to speak, travels *in* narrative imagination: e.g. of British authors' fictional or historical commentaries on Central/South Eastern European, Russian, and Greek contexts. Further, and more directly, there are scholarly papers on the travels of literary texts to audiences beyond their initial spheres of circulation: such as, the reception of Byron in Bulgaria (2008), the reception of Mozart in Anglophone contexts via W. H. Auden (2009), or the reception of William Blake in Bulgaria (2019).<sup>1</sup> Even more directly, there are studies of accounts of physical travels – of travel-writing by British and Bulgarian authors such as her articles and book chapters on Mary Wortley Montagu, Elizabeth Craven, Lord and Lady Strangford, and Rebecca West, among others. Together with Charles Forsdick and Corinne Fowler, she edited the essay volume *Travel Writing and Ethics. Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2013/2014). Professor Kostova also authored one of the book's chapters, "Writing Across the Foreign/Native Divide: The Case of Kapka Kassabova's *Street Without a Name* (2008)," demonstrating her interest in exophonic migrant writing.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Reception of Blake in Bulgaria" is a chapter in *The Reception of William Blake in Europe* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), co-authored by Ludmilla Kostova and Lubomir Teziev.

Of particular interest are those of Professor Kostova's studies which sharpen the cultural juxtapositions in travel-writing by focusing on food and culinary habits and domestic interiors (2003, 2007, 2008). Professor Kostova's interest in literary food studies has endured, resulting in a recent long article about food and eating in a late nineteenth-century Gothic text (2023), as well as a book project on which she is currently working with Oana Cogeanu-Haraga of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, Romania, who is one of the contributors to this volume.

Her interest in the crossing of borders of different kinds, from physical ones to religious divides has found expression in articles about religious conversion as well as in her editorial work, together with Professor Efterpi Mitsi of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, on a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies* (EJES) (vol. 23, 1, 2019).

Professor Kostova interest in translation as an activity that also enables border crossing is reflected in some of her writings as well as in a conference she organised in 2023 to honour Spas Nikolov (1943–1987), a distinguished Bulgarian translator and one of the founders of the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. She is currently finalising her work on the conference proceedings.

The representation of women in (patriarchal) literature has been a constant preoccupation in Professor Kostova's work. These studies have enabled her to step outside her usual disciplinary precincts to provide a thoughtful sociological account of the position of women in pre- and post-socialist Bulgaria (2012, 2015).

Professor Kostova has been active in advancing Irish Studies in Bulgaria as is attested by her own work from 1997 onwards as well as by a special issue of *VTU Review* (vol. 5, 1, 2021), which she co-edited with Professor Pádraigín Riggs of University College Cork, Ireland. Articles on Irish history, literature, and culture by European scholars comprise the issue.

In a broad way, the originality and impact of Professor Kostova's research and publications are best grasped in terms of the coherence of her critical perspective. Amidst what might appear, at first glance, to be an unusually diverse range of critical interests her research has developed a consistent analytical practice of interrogative close reading grounded in the constructedness of contexts. Such analytical practice appears to exemplify a new cosmopolitan turn in philological scholarship, of the sort that has been theorised in Edward Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004) and in Michelle R. Warren's essay "Post-Philology" (2003). Where conventional philological scholarship engaged in close-reading to articulate the cultural specificity of contexts, Professor Kostova's sort of scholarship engages in close-reading to convey the fluidity and ideologically-motivated constructedness of contexts and of notions of culture.

The originality of Professor Kostova's overall analytical practice naturally incorporates detailed original readings and re-contextualising of specific texts. Since

the method followed questions dominant critical framings, the discussions of specific texts often go against the grain of their standard readings and/or ostensible claims. This is evident in the papers devoted to critically negotiating with essentialist tendencies and polarisations in a range of Anglophone texts set in South Eastern and Central Europe: Kapka Kassabova's *Street Without a Name*, Thomas Hope's *Anastasius* in 2007, 2022, and 2024, Malcolm Bradbury's *The Hermitage* in 2005 and 2027, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in 1997, 2003, Krystin Lach-Szyrma's *Letters Literary and Political on Poland* in 2012, Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in 2004, to name a few.

A particularly innovative set of scholarly publications in that direction, and yet distinct from it, is found in her papers on travel writing. These form part of the project of deconstructing representations of South Eastern and Central Europe on the one hand, and Western Europe on the other. And yet, these also form a separate project insofar as they break new ground in conceptualising travel writing as a genre – in terms of the travel writer's ethical responsibilities and claims of authenticity, and in terms of gendered perspectives and tropes of domesticity. Remarkably, Professor Kostova has negotiated this slippery ground without (even inadvertently) endorsing any essentialist notion of authenticity herself. She has, for instance, successfully circumvented the claims to authenticity of auto-ethnography, which has often attracted researchers of travel-writing – as found in Marie Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992), and as critiqued in James Buzard's *Disorienting Fictions* (2005).

These innovative turns in Professor Kostova's detailed interpretations of texts are deepened by her self-reflexive observations on academic work generally, and specifically in the Bulgarian context (her 2009 paper on Marco Mincoff's *History of English Literature*). Unsurprisingly, her publications have received wide scholarly notice and had an impact on related research projects. The impact of her research is evidenced through the leadership she has provided for those working in related areas. In terms of publications, evidence of such leadership is found in the volumes she has co-edited: *Travel Writing and Ethics* (2013/2014), *Comparisons and Interactions Within/Across Cultures* (2012), and *Britain and Europe* (1994). Each of these involves guiding researchers towards contributing productively to a common forum.

The range of teaching that Professor Kostova has done, and is doing, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels is truly impressive. The BA courses that she has taught over her career include: English Literature of the Middle Ages; English Literature of the Renaissance; British Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century; Gothic Writing and/in Film; British Literature of the Age of Romanticism; Post-Romantic British Poetry; and British Prose Fiction since 1980. Effectively, Professor Kostova's lectures cover the entire range of British literature for every major period of literary history. The MA programmes that she coordinates and teaches are similarly wide-ranging, but in a different way. These strike a well-judged balance between scholarly modules and skills-development modules consistently exploring the mar-

gins of what is conventionally demarcated as “English” literature (e.g. delving Scottish, Irish, Welsh studies). She is an engaging speaker who strikes an appropriate balance between conveying information and stimulating independent thinking.

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The present volume comprises publications that enter into a productive dialogue with Professor Kostova’s academic work and can be grouped in several thematic areas: articles examining the historiographic location of literature; articles addressing the dynamic (with varying degrees of velocity) construction of time, space, and characters in travel writing; interdisciplinary contributions exploring the crossways of literary, cultural, and translation studies; and writings focused on the linguistic dimensions of cultural mobility and the future of teaching and researching English Studies. This thematic arrangement is further relocated in several sections, each one containing a thematically diverse range of contributions that intersect in significant ways. Crossing ways in (academic) time and space is a prerequisite for the meetings of ideas and perspectives that celebrates the blessings and challenges of academic friendship. The volume’s editors are delighted with this interaction, as it not only foregrounds Professor Kostova’s lifelong struggle with the barriers of fixed, self-centred pronouncements but also captures the essence of the anniversary meeting that this volume honours.

The opening part of the volume is a prelude of good wishes. It includes memories of shared experiences, impressions from joint trips, and admiration for intellectual and human relationships. They draw their own warm cartographies of journeys that are open-ended and always bound to “the best of all possible worlds.”

The first article of the volume’s second part, “Slow Travels in a Canoe: On Two Recent Narratives by David Gange and Alys Fowler,” by Cambridge Draper Professor Charles Forsdick examines two texts in which canoeing is used to explore very different parts of the British Isles, arguing that slow travel can reveal new perspectives on the construction of the travelling self and his/her historical and cultural whereabouts. This is followed by Kathryn Walchester’s exciting investigation of how gardens can be read as multi-layered, palimpsest texts that communicate cultural and social meanings. Drawing on Professor Kostova’s article “Acts of Intercultural and Interlingual Mediation in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*” (*VTU Review*, vol. 4, 1, 2020), she observes the role of landscape as a source of cultural translation that blurs certain aspects and augments others.

Andreas Jucker’s contribution “The Pragmatics of Emotion in Fiction” discusses the ways in which language imparts emotions in fictional contexts. This becomes problematic when the emotional experience of the readers diverges from the characters’ emotional condition.

Alexander Shurbanov, a distinguished Renaissance scholar, translator, and poet, dwells on the human vulnerability to manipulation and control in Shakespeare’s tragedy *Hamlet*. He concludes with the open question of whether Hamlet,

whose nature becomes instrumental but plies only under the command of divine justice, should be regarded as “an idealist who has come to reform the world” or his failure to do so is a just outcome in return for spilled blood.

Madeleine Danova’s discusses the challenging routes of cultural self-location in contemporary North America. Guided by the autobiographical writings of Henry James, and a few excerpts from *The American Scene*, in particular, she explores the controversial aspects of cultural assimilation and considers the complete dissolution of individual cultural/ethnic difference as one of its most treacherous traps.

The following two articles, Efterpi Mitsi’s study of travelogues about Greece written by Victorian travellers and Oana Cogeanu-Haraga’s critical reading of the changing attitudes of neighbourhood between Bulgaria and Romania, as seen through the eyes of Romanian travellers, are concerned with the genre of travel writing and the cultural production of landscapes and lifestyles through individual experiences.

Next, Mihaela Mudure challenges the pronouncement of the literary canon that *Robinson Crusoe* is “the first novel in English literature.” She argues that Eliza Haywood published her novel *Love in Excess* in the same year in which Defoe’s work came out, and dwells on how the acknowledgement of this fact rewrites the place of women writers in literary history.

Jelena Šesnić of the University of Zagreb, Croatia, re-examines postcolonial writing in her project that rehabilitates the role of the political in late modernity. Seen through the experience of the Haitian American writer Edwige Danticat, the political implications of historically laden relations produce the awareness that the political is organically bound to narratives engendered by traumatic memories.

Armela Panajoti of the University of Vlora, Albania, reads Joseph Conrad’s novel *The Shadow Line* as an initiation story that illustrates the complexities of self-knowledge and personal growth. She employs Schopenhauer’s philosophical model of education to state that the captain’s sea journey may well epitomise the human journey through life with its mysterious, shadowy transition to maturity.

Lubomir Terziev’s article “Representation and Repetition in William Blake’s *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*” studies the construction of the poetic myth through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s now-time (*Jetztzeit*) and explains the repetitive patterns of its mythopoesis through the paired characters of Los and his spectre.

Brenda Tooley’s essay dwells on Miroslav Penkov’s Anglophone collection of short stories *East of the West: a Country in Stories*. She observes how a writer of Bulgarian descent claims his country of origin in his fiction by a language that is not his native tongue. Her contribution explores Penkov’s “inhabitation of two cultures, languages, and literary traditions” and focuses on specific strategies of representation engendered by geopolitical, historical and cultural contexts.

Next, Hristo Boev discusses the anticipation of unisexism in Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* and warns against the contemporary trends of excessive neutralisation of gender roles in Western liberal societies, along with the reverse tendency to impose patterns of enhanced heteronormativity by conservative regimes.

Part Three of the volume comprises articles that consider translation as a practice shaped by the dynamics of cultural exchange. Thus, Meglena Bodenska focuses on the Bulgarian translators and translations of works by Eugene O'Neill, and regards the translation and reception processes as forms of mediation that include elements of censorship (mostly during Bulgaria's communist past), adaptation, even rewriting of the source text, common with the earlier versions. Bodenska contextualises the translations biographically and in a larger, socio-cultural ambience to demonstrate the complexities that accompany their evolution. From a historical point of view, most of the earlier translations are, in effect, retranslations via an intermediary language, like Russian, which enhances the risk of losses along the way. But Bodenska also emphasises the gains made possible by the translator's personal ingenuity, as seen in Spas Nikolov's translations. She finds that few translations of O'Neill's plays are available to the Bulgarian public, and hence the American writer and Nobel Prize laureate is largely unknown in Bulgaria. In turn, Vitana Kostadinova maps the 2022 Bulgarian translation of Mary Shelley's dystopian novel *The Last Man* onto the author's Bulgarian reception, and discusses aspects of the interaction between readers and text in terms of language and culture.

Part Four focuses on linguistics. Alexandra Bagasheva investigates the cross-ways of determinative nominal compounding and its interpretations, Boryana Bratanova dwells on the grammatical adaptation of Anglicisms in the Bulgarian language in EU legal acts, and Gergana Kusheva discusses the intricacies of teaching thesis statement writing.

Since Part Five belongs to Professor Kostova's "offspring," a generation of university lecturers and researchers who have followed in her footsteps, it is among the most gratifying parts of the volume. It includes articles by Vesselin Budakov, Pavel Petkov, Yarmila Daskalova, Petya Tsoneva, Vakrilen Kilyovski, Stefan Stefanov, Ivan Dimitrov, Galina Devedjieva, and the youngest "generation" of doctoral students, Viliana Georgieva, Tsvetina Paralesova, and Tsvetelina Petkova. What was sown yields fruit and the articles in this section promise continuity, but also the possibility to build on Professor Kostova's legacy and adopt it as the basis of further growth.

The final part is dedicated to the prospects for future development of the discipline of English Studies. In it, Glyn Hambrook, a long-lasting friend and colleague from the University of Wolverhampton, UK, reflects on the less overt but imminent shift of perspectives on the "Anglosphere" as a cultural and linguistic space, produced in the dynamics of transnational transitions rather than by the hegemonic sta-

tus of the English language and Anglophone culture. He remarks upon the ongoing transformation of Anglophone academia by the “extensive community of Anglicists from outside the Anglophere,”

Alexandra Glavanakova of Sofia University, Bulgaria, is concerned with the role of the reader in the enhanced development of advanced technologies that modifies the process of communication. Drawing on Ian McEwan’s novel *Machines Like Me* (2019) and Ted Chiang’s short story “The Truth of Fact, The Truth of Feeling” (2013), she focuses on “the imagined reader – disappearing, absent or misplaced by technology” as represented in these works.

Elena Tarasheva from the New Bulgarian University in Sofia examines the evolution of Cultural Studies in Bulgaria, influenced by an increasing comprehension of the adaptable boundaries of Philology. Magdalena Vassileva’s contribution illustrates how this practically takes place in teaching foreign languages – Japanese, in particular. She dwells on some interesting cases of intercultural communication that can be observed in the presentations of Japanese university students.

Svetlana Stoycheva-Anderson’s article offers an analysis of the novel *Pop Bogomil i savarshenstvoto na straha* (*Reverend Bogomil and the Perfection of Fear*) by contemporary Bulgarian writer Vladimir Zarev. While the novel can be seen as belonging to a Bulgarian literary tradition that depicts the medieval heresy of Bogomilism, its interpretation of history is also reminiscent of works by Thomas Mann and Umberto Eco. The article suggests that “the novel can be read as a postmodern fictionalization of the Bogomil heresy or a postmodern alchemy of historiography and Bogomil mythology”.

Finally, Violeta Ruseva explores the vast spaces of poetic imagination in the collected works of two modern Bulgarian poets, Hristo Fotev and Ivan Teofilov. She approaches their poems as palimpsests that mediate between the individual poetic voice and its unlimited projections across time and space. In particular, her observations about the “visibility of things that emerge as if in a slow memory” (my translated periphrasis of Teofilov’s verse, P. T.) return us to Charles Forsdick’s acknowledgement of the benefits of slow travels – travelling slowly across the uncertain spaces of memory is just as rewarding, allowing the traveller to take rest from today’s hectic rhythm.

Whether advancing slowly against the ever-increasing acceleration of contemporary time is a good strategy or a reckless rebellion against a fast-moving world, is up to the reader to decide. But we would like to thank Professor Kostova for her appreciation of slow speed – because long-lasting time and efforts are said to yield best fruit and the best of all possible worlds.

May this volume set the beginning of new crossways of ideas and meeting of friends!