

READER'S REPORT

From **Associate Professor Dr Vitana Vassileva Kostadinova**

Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

Re: Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

area of higher education 2. The Humanities

professional field 2.1. Philology

PhD programme Literature in English

Author: **Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev**

Topic: *Historicity and Fictionality in Thomas Hardy's Novels
(Based on Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)*

Academic adviser: **Associate Professor Dr Yana Atanasova Rowland**

Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

The set of documents submitted by Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev fulfils the requirements of Art. 36 (1) of the Plovdiv University Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff. The doctoral student has enclosed 3 publications, which meets the legal requirements.

I would like to introduce a couple of details from the student's CV as they are directly related to the submitted dissertation. (1) Dimitar Karamitev went to the English Language School at Plovdiv, which was fundamental for his language acquisition, and then studied English Philology at the *Paisii Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv, where he expanded his knowledge of English and honed skills for working with literary texts. (2) A serious indication of research commitment was his 2014 participation in the Sixteenth National Academic Conference for students that ended with the third prize for his presentation on the topic of FORBIDDEN TERRITORIES IN CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S POEM "GOBLIN MARKET" (1862). (3) The tailoring of the dissertation topic would be related to the doctoral student's interest in photography, which explains the specific angle of research.

Researching the dynamics between fictionality and historicity is particularly topical in view of the decades of New Historicism and its priorities. For the survival of Literary Studies in our visual world it is crucial to construe literature as more than a document about the past – we need a revived interest in literariness.

Dimitar Karamitev's thesis is massive and commands respect with both its size and its range. The number of works included provides a reliable corpus for researching historicity and fictionality, and tempts the researcher to deviate into byways. Nevertheless, the dissertation keeps its thematic unity from beginning to end and it puts forward its own reading of Hardy. The English in it is excellent and the reader is taken on a journey in the artistic and personal world of the Victorian author.

The content strikes a balance between the two themes: Chapter 1 is dedicated to theory and methods, Chapter 2 reveals the interweaving of historicity and fictionality in the Victorian context, Chapter 3 prioritises literariness, Chapter 4 distinguishes between historicity and historicality, Chapter 5 resumes the outline of the dynamics between historicity and fictionality but this time in works by Hardy, Chapter 6 hints at alternative interpretations in view of the Romantic nuances in his writing. The Appendix has the potential to become an independent interpretation of the author's style with its array of excerpts that functionalise the research.

The doctoral student has an excellent grasp of Thomas Hardy's works and the secondary sources about them, which is paired with skilful utilisation of the selected theoretical framework. Ricoeur's and Iser's relevant texts are consistently used in the analysis; references to them are not limited to the theoretical introduction, which is often the case in doctoral theses. Still, the dissertation attempts to emancipate itself from the philosophical framework and to prioritise its inner logic – reminiscent of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, who resists being deformed by geometry. The analogy comes from the visual in Hardy's works, which seems to dominate the interpretation of fictionality in the thesis.

In the process of writing intentions change and this requires the re-calibration of previews so that they adequately reflect what the text is about – the dissertation will benefit from a stylistic revision.

I do accept Dimitar Karamitev's list of academic contributions and I would like to highlight the potential his research has to expand the Bulgarian appreciation of Thomas Hardy and his artistic vision of the interconnectedness of past and present, individual and society, reality and imagination. To the merits of the thesis I would add the defence of literariness in view of the tendencies to not prioritise literary worth but rather treat literature as comparable to other documents from any given historical era. The doctoral student does not avoid interpretations that are proponents of ideology but he does not turn ideology into an end in itself either.

The publications submitted for the academic procedure are in English, published in Plovdiv University unrefereed annuals with double blind reviewing, and they reflect the research of the topic in its progress.

The two abstracts meet the requirements and provide adequate representations of the results achieved in the dissertation. As the dissertation itself is in English, the Bulgarian abstract is double the size of the English one and offers greater detail. I recommend that it be published in order for the research results to reach a public that does not read in English.

It might be pertinent for a future publication of the thesis to extend the perimeter of theoretical takes on fictionality and historicity in the Viewfinder part as a warranty that the doctoral student is very much aware of alternative approaches and has made an informed choice of theoretical apparatus. What is important, however, is that we have a researcher in his own right, capable of managing theory critically, featuring his interaction with the literary text.

CONCLUSION

I hereby declare that I HAVE NOT registered any trace of plagiarism in Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev's thesis.

The dissertation exhibits results that are both theoretical and applied; they are an original contribution to scholarship and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing Regulations, and the relevant Plovdiv University Regulations.

The dissertation testifies that Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the field of Victorian Literature and possesses the abilities and the expertise to carry out independent academic research.

Based on the above, my assessment of the research is affirmatively positive and I propose to the academic board to award the educational and academic degree *Doctor of Philosophy* to Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev in the Humanities, professional field Philology, PhD programme Literature in English.

06.06.2024

Reader:

Associate Professor Dr Vitana Kostadinova