

## **REVIEW**

**Reviewer:** Prof. Kornelia Slavova PhD  
(DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES, SOFIA UNIVERSITY)

**PhD Candidate:** DIMITAR KOSTADINOV KARAMITEV

**Title of PhD Thesis:** **HISTORICITY AND FICTIONALITY IN THE NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY (BASED ON WOLFGANG ISER AND PAUL RICOEUR)**

**Field of Higher Education:** 2 Humanities

**Professional Area:** 2.1. Philology

**Doctoral Programme:** English Literature

**Academic Supervisor:** Assoc. Prof. Yana Rowland PhD

### **1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student**

The set of materials submitted by Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev is in compliance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv and the candidate meets the criteria and indicators for the acquisition of doctoral degree in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski". The procedure according to Order No. RD-21-887/ 25.04.2024 by the Rector of Plovdiv University, has been duly observed.

### **2. Topical relevance**

The topic of Dimitar Karamitev's dissertation, namely, the relationship between historicity and fiction in the novels of the English writer Thomas Hardy through the lens of

Wolfgang Iser's and Paul Ricoeur's theories is meaningful and unresearched in its entirety and comprehensiveness (the analysis works with all his novels and several short stories). The philosophical-literary approach to the interplay between fiction and history in recorded and re-configured time in Hardy's works is innovative.

### **3. Familiarity with the research field**

The candidate has an exceptional knowledge of Thomas Hardy's complete works: his novels, short stories and poetry, his world view, his correspondence, his own commentaries, essays and responses to criticism in prefaces and afterwords to his novels (sometimes, in successive editions). The object and research tasks of the study are clearly stated, namely, to trace the

relationship and interaction between history, historicity, and fictionality in the work of the English writer. The study has a logical and neat structure: It begins with an introduction to the literary and socio-cultural context, and the overall spirit of the Victorian era and literature that influenced the author (Chapter 4); it continues with a lengthy analytical chapter on the role of light and the visual in the depiction of scenes, circumstances and images in Hardy's literary narrative (Chapter 5); it further focuses on the category of "historicity" through the recorded events in Hardy's fictional narratives and prefaces, as well as in his own reflections on art (chapter 6); it moves on to explore the connections between reality and history, time and history, and how history and fiction circulate in nine novels (chapter 7), to conclude with discussion of the place of the individual in history and individual tragedy as history in Hardy's later novels *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure* (chapter 8). The in-depth analysis of circumstances, space, and characters (in transition) as markers and agents of change over the course of historical time demonstrates an excellent knowledge of both text and context.

#### **4. Research methodology**

The dissertation reveals a strong theoretical density: the chosen methodology combines appropriately ideas and concepts from different philosophical and literary theories. The basic concepts of "historicity" (pp. 15-16), and "fictionality" (p. 22), drawn from Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics and Wolfgang Iser's reader-oriented theory, are presented in a comprehensive manner, with their definitions being further enriched by the understanding of literary theorists Mikhail Bakhtin, Hans Robert Jauss, and Tzvetan Todorov, as well as contemporary historians Hayden White, Pierre Nora, and others. Particularly valuable are the observations on the correlations between history and literature, the "communication" between them (in Iser's terms), and Hayden White's more contemporary understanding of the organization of narratives in history and fiction, the selection of events, figures, and narratives. The theory is vividly present in the analysis; what is more, it is further elaborated in the very fabric of the analysis.

#### **5. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis and contributions**

The dissertation is 396 pages long (more precisely, 282 pages, excluding the appendix and bibliography); it shows solid knowledge of English literature and criticism, of the leading trends

and figures in the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions, as well as the views and overall work of Thomas Hardy. The text is well-organized and structured; it is written in impeccable English; with numerous references to diverse theories, genres, and works by English writers and critics from several eras.

One of the major strengths of the exploration is its interdisciplinarity and panoramic scope: it employs concepts and ideas from literary theory, philosophy, architecture, photography, and film studies (through the lenses of Roland Barthes, Tsocho Boyadzhiev, Eisenstein, and others.) For example, the analysis in Chapter 5 illustrates how framing and cinematic devices, along with light and color, enhance the visual representation and visibility of certain characters, circumstances, and scenes from reality. The many intertextual connections and philosophical references to other theories and authors, as well as the comparative observations on many English writers, demonstrate the candidate's erudition.

Yet another strong point of the research is how the literary analysis has been embedded in a series of contextual circles: in the context of the Victorian and overall English literary tradition; in the context of previous studies on the subject as well as building upon the Bulgarian scholarship in the field. The dissertation includes independent and original research, with no plagiarism detected.

## **6. Assessment of publications and personal contribution of the PhD student**

The candidate has submitted three impressive publications related to the topics addressed in this dissertation – published in scholarly journals and editions within the period 2021 - 2023. All of them are closely related to the problem under discussion and testify to the depth of the author's literary-critical insight. The dissertation's major contribution is the fact that is the first comprehensive study of all of Hardy's novels in the Bulgarian academic tradition. It is unique in its focus on historicity and fictionality in Hardy's novelistic work from the theoretical perspectives of Paul Ricoeur and Wolfgang Iser. It introduces new ideas, theoretical tools and specific terms such as "axial space" and, in part, "transitional character", as well as various definitions of the concept of "historicity". Last but not least, the dissertation discusses in detail Hardy's lesser-known novels such as *Desperate Remedies*, *The Return of the Native*, *A Laodicean*, and *Two on a Tower*.

## **7. Summary**

Since the dissertation has been written in English, Dimitar Karamitev has presented two summaries (both in Bulgarian and in English); they synthesize the essence of the dissertation and reflect the main results of the research.

## **8. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results**

Dimitar Karamitev's research is significant, adding his own contribution to the topic and further developing Bulgarian literary studies on Hardy. At the end of his dissertation, the author proposes three possible directions for future research on Hardy, which could be further developed by him. Along these lines, I would suggest that the candidate publish a separate study based on the useful appendix at the end of the dissertation (a corpus of the most important terms and examples of their use in Hardy's works, such as "truth," "reality," "fact," "history," "chronicle," "tradition," "change," etc.) as it contains valuable data.

## **CONCLUSION**

Taking into account the candidate's in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills for independent scientific research, I give my positive evaluation of the dissertation. I therefore suggest to the respectable members of the examination board that Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev be awarded the title "Doctor of Philosophy" in the professional field 2.1. Philology, English Literature.

22. 05. 2024.

(signature)

Prof. Kornelia Slavova PhD