

REVIEW

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Of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree “**Doctor**”

Of a domain of higher education 2 Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, the Doctoral Program of Literatures in English

Author: Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev

Title: “Historicity and Fictionality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (from the Perspective of Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)”

Academic advisor: Associate Professor Yana Atanasova Rowland, PhD, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

1. General description of all submitted materials

With an order No RD-21-887 of 25.04.2024 г. by the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv I have been appointed a member of the scientific jury for securing a procedure for the defense of a doctoral dissertation with a title “Historicity and Fictionality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (from the Perspective of Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)” for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the domain of higher education 2 Humanities, professional field 2.1 Philology, the doctoral program of Literatures in English. The author of the dissertation is Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev – a doctoral student in a regular form of studies at the Department of English Philology with an academic advisor associate professor Yana Atanasova Rowland, PhD, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The submitted by the doctoral student set of materials in paper copies is in compliance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Plovdiv and includes the following documents:

- An application to the Rector of the University of Plovdiv for opening the procedure for the defense of a doctoral dissertation;
- A Europass CV;

- The proceedings of a department meeting related to reporting the readiness for opening the procedure as a follow-up of a discussion of the doctoral dissertation;
- An opinion of the academic advisor;
- The doctoral dissertation;
- An abstract of the dissertation in Bulgarian;
- An abstract of the dissertation in English;
- A list of the scientific publications on the dissertation topic;
- The copies of the scientific publications;
- A declaration for the originality of the results and contribution;
- A declaration for the originality and authenticity of the submitted documents;
- A compliance check of the minimal national requirements.

The doctoral student has supplied 4 study materials: 1 dissertation and 3 published articles, the publications and the main text being in accordance with the minimal national requirements for awarding the ESD (Educational Scientific Degree) “Doctor” are completely compliant with the topic of the dissertation.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev has some university experience as a teacher of Practical English, Victorian Literature and New English Literature at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (3 years). In addition to literature, at the same university he has also taught Business English, English for IT, as well as translation for the duration of a year. The doctoral student’s teaching is not limited to the university only – he has also worked at a linguistic center “Lingua Aliana OOD”, Plovdiv, which goes to show that he has solid overall experience as a teacher of English and Literature at different levels and at different institutions, teaching appearing to be his work profile of choice. The written dissertation complements and further develops his interests as a teacher and scholar. The current position that he occupies of “International Collaboration Expert” at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv remains within his aforementioned interests and confirms his desire to work and develop at the university where he completed his higher education.

3. Relevance of the topic and expedience of the set goals and objectives

The dissertation of the doctoral student Dimitar Karamitev “Historicity and Fictionality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (from the Perspective of Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)” is an ambitious large-scale work which aims for clear lines as the study progresses without failing to provide com-

mentary and inform about minute details concerning the reception and research on Thomas Hardy's works in their thoroughness. For example, the doctoral student has considered it pertinent to note the Bulgarian contribution to this research, which, although not a focus of the study, presents useful information for the reader and stirs a sensation of a patriotic note, but also of a lack of omissions. In view of the enormous significance of history in Hardy's oeuvre, the doctoral student has set himself the task to explore the notions of *historicity* (the quality of truthfulness and actuality of a historical fact or event) and *historicality* (the quality of the event or fact having a historical value) in the entire works of Hardy – his novels, short stories, and poetry in two periods – the Late Victorian period and the Early Modernism. To achieve these aims, seminal works of relevant scholars, apart from the two listed in the dissertation title, have been considered, as well as writers from both periods, all Hardy's contemporaries.

4. Knowing the problematics

The text of the dissertation convinces in demonstrating the very good knowledge the author has of the primary and secondary sources, the interweaving of history and fiction being examined in a culturological discourse in Hardy's works; a critical development in Ricoeur, Gadamer, Ingarden and Hayden White has also been traced. Interesting is the idea followed through in the study of a "*transitional character*" (one that constitutes a compound or a clash of the old and the new). From this perspective, as well as from the presence of fictionality in Hardy's works, comparisons to changes in this direction as regards portraying the characters in Victorian writers such as O. Wilde, W. Collins, E. Gaskell, G. Eliot, W. Thackeray, Ch. Dickens, the Bronte sisters (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne), etc., even J. Conrad with his *Heart of Darkness*, and then modernists such D. H. Lawrence, V. Woolf and J. Joyce and their appertaining works are appropriate albeit overexamined (secondary sources have been used here as well while the latter could have been confined largely to Hardy's works with the scope of keeping a sharper focus) and they trace Hardy's position as an early modernist. Another way of registering changing modernity in a functional representation – from the Victorian Age to Modernism – could be to implement a study of changing heterotopia (Foucault, "*Of Other Spaces*"), but this would require a more in-depth study of place and spaces at the expense of temporality and historicality which are at the core of the present study.

5. Methodology of the study

Examining the so positioned *historicity* and *fictionality* takes into consideration two important aspects of Thomas Hardy's oeuvre related to the representation of place (Wessex, England) in a temporal-historical plane. The chosen by the author vantage points: Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur are

completely relevant. The doctoral student highlights the evolution of concepts in the two literary critics alongside different works by Thomas Hardy. The application of the selected literary theories is appropriate and well done but it would be beneficial for the text if some of the numerous comparisons had been spared – the ones that Karamitev undertakes with authors from the Late Victorian period and Early Modernism – that way the main lines of the performed analysis would be more clearly cut as well as a certain repetitiveness in the dissertation could have been avoided.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the doctoral dissertation

The dissertation has its appropriate “Introduction” and a “Theoretical Viewfinder” (an adept wink at photography which is one of the aspects in the dissertation) – for clarifying and arranging the used terminology, “Victorian Worlds of Fiction and History” – undoubtedly, touching on Heidegger has suggested the necessity of such a chapter, “Light, Writing, Colour” and their examination from extraliterary prisms, contributing to the interdisciplinarity of the dissertation; “Narratives on Recorded Events – Historical and Paranormal”; the seventh chapter is divided into two parts and examines the interactions (gyrations) between history and fiction; the eighth chapter deals with specific Hardyian characters in a more intimate perspective – “Tess, Michael and Jude – Individual Tragedy as History”.

It is also pertinent to mention some aspects related to the very writing of the text: the use of English in the dissertation is excellent and my observations tell me that it surpasses what is typically found in the theses of doctoral students whose mother tongue is not English. From a stylistic point of view however it should be noted that the consistent usage of “we” should have been avoided and have it alternate with “I”. There are moments where the author engages the reader and so we get to the “we”; in other cases, where it is apparently only himself (e. g. “our research”) there arises the question to whom this “we” / “our” refers, except the author himself. In the Humanities it has already been accepted as appropriate and correct to have the scholar stand behind the personal pronoun “I”, hence “this / the present study are also good options.

The last chapters of this ambitious dissertation are focused mostly on Hardy and the “gyrations” between history and fiction and as such they constitute what I would define as the center and essence of the text. The question of how factological, historical, truthful fiction is, has been asked time and again over centuries of literary studies. If we compare the representations Dickens made, for instance, of social processes, communities, and their coexistence in Victorian London, as well as his depictions of people belonging to lower or higher strata of society to economic and social studies of the period, we will find a considerable overlapping. Most importantly, alongside it we can extract

something which is often absent in the strictly scientific investigations – the creation of a unique atmosphere which we feel as a personal experience in our reception of the text, in the fictional world created by the writer. These chapters are related to a “historic changes of [...] [place] his native Dorset” (p. 178) reflected in Hardy’s novels. To the raised questions: “Did Hardy aim to be a kind of historian in his intentions of preserving a record of a vanishing life that was dear to him? Did he desire people to hold his novels as reliable points of reference for those who will [would] be interested in the life that certain people led in this south-west corner of England? Was this urge to document and preserve the knowledge and lore of his Wessex paired with an understanding that not only [it] was it vanishing [,] but the replacement would be of a downgrading nature?” (p. 244)” Karamitev concludes that the undertaken study reveals Hardy as a historian acting within the capacity of a writer, who, as I mentioned above, imparts the atmosphere and his own attitude towards the depicted world (p. 245), which makes him effectively different from a historian who is not a writer of fiction.

The last chapter, presenting the personal tragedies of Hardy’s characters as victims of history, succeeds to a point in being more intimate in its analysis. The assumption that Tess expiates the presupposed sins of her ancestors – the Normans, who may have treated many a servant girl even worse, is interesting and projects against the Late Victorian period of moral decay and ever more clearly cut double standards (p. 268) – of what was said in words and what was done in earnest (O. Wilde with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and R. L. Stevenson with *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* also offer harsh criticism of the perceived duality and hypocrisy of the times without touching on history, only marking the entropy of the Late Victorian culture.), and Alec, assuming the Norman family of a nobleman, as well as Angel Clare, bearing with his name the epitome of religiosity (the name can be translated as a *clear / pure angel*), could not have been less noble or religious in their treatment of Tess, who against this background looks like an arcane anachronism, a kind of unicorn like Laura from *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, of what her ancestors should have been but probably were not, as well as of what her contemporaries pretend to be but are not. This double mirror – of the past and the present – could engender interesting hermeneutic perspectives and conclusions one of which could be that not only we have no way of knowing the past, but there is no feasible way of knowing completely or even at all the present. Along with the devastating historical irony, we have the profound individual tragedy of a person (woman) (Tess) who does not belong to herself despite belonging to her times in her role of a victim. From this point of view, there is more to be desired in the analysis in this chapter. Karamitev’s conclusion is rather simplistic: “Hardy’s examination of Tess’s case then may be more suitably considered as a quest for answers provoked by his sympathy for the suffering of seemingly innocent persons” (p. 269).

Dimitar Karamitev's doctoral dissertation finishes with explanations of terms and key words in context (pp. 284-368), and as its author remarks, in spite of what has been said over a few hundred pages, there is still more that could be added to it (p.277) (Thomas Mann makes a passing remark to this effect in *The Magic Mountain* towards the 700th page, not without self-irony – that he may have bored the reader); the tables and bibliography are spread over 27 pages.

7. Contribution and significance of the work to the theory and practice.

Unquestionably, the doctoral candidate should be praised for his detailed approach, for his use of innovations (e. g. the examination of light in Hardy through the prism of photography), for his adept handling of interweaving critical and fictional materials, some of which in their role of meta-criticism, but we cannot forgo the fact that the multifaceted surface of the dissertation could be more prominent and clearer to the reader if the volume of the work were considerably smaller. As it is, it has an encyclopedic character – a kind of “Hardypedia” which does not pretend to be exhaustive although it comes close to offering completeness. Insofar as the appropriate comments on all these authors and their works in comparison to Hardy are impressive and the doctoral candidate has my admiration in this, they, in my view, lead to a certain dilution of the topic and loss of focus since with their sheer bulk the main critical line otherwise well laid out at the beginning becomes somewhat opaque. No evidence of plagiarism is detected in the text which constitutes the dissertation to be an original work.

8. Evaluation of the publications based on the dissertation

The submitted 3 publications thematically related to the dissertation meet the minimal national criteria for publications outside the dissertation. They are in scientific journals and volume collections of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, and namely: “Light in November – Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (Some Hermeneutical Reflections on Time, History, and Human Reception)” in *Nauchni Trudove of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv* indexed in COBISS and NACID, as well as “Photographic Sensibilities in Two Early Novels by Thomas Hardy” and “Major and Mayor – on Two ‘Truths’ in Hardy's Novels (Based on Reading of his Prefaces)” both in *Verba Iuvenium* indexed in NACID. The publications presented by the doctoral candidate are well written and constitute part of the preparation of the dissertation as ideas applied in the dissertation text itself; no evidence of plagiarism detected.

9. Personal involvement of the doctoral candidate

This dissertation constitutes an original work which summarizes scientific concepts related to hermeneutics and literary reception; it also applies elements of these theories to numerous texts by

Thomas Hardy. Along with this it makes extensive commentary on other writers, critics and cultural figures demonstrating an enviable range of knowledge which could qualify as encyclopedic.

10. Abstract

The two abstracts (in Bulgarian and English) are very good synopses of the contents of the dissertation, meet the criteria for their preparation and provide all the necessary information as a summary of the text of the dissertation.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

The remarks and recommendations are related mainly to reducing the dissertation text so that its accents can be made more prominent, as well as concern improving the scientific stylistics, which could also be done at the stage of publishing the dissertation as a monograph (listed above in items 5, 6 and 7).

CONCLUSION

The dissertation work **contains scientific, theory applicable and applied results which constitute original contribution to literature as a human science** and meets all criteria of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations on the Implementation of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (RIDASRBA), and the respective Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The dissertation work proves that the doctoral candidate **has** in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in a scientific speciality, by **demonstrating** the qualities and abilities necessary for an unaided by others conduct of a scientific study.

In view of the aforesaid, I **give with conviction my positive evaluation** of the undertaken study presented by the reviewed above dissertation work, abstracts, achieved results and contributions and **propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational scientific degree “doctor”** to Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev in domain of higher education 2 Humanities, professional field 2.1. Philology, the Doctoral Program of Literatures in English.

27.05. 2024 г.

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Hristo Boev, PhD