

REVIEW

by Dr. Kamelia Svetlinova Spassova - Associate Professor
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on dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in the field of higher education 2. Humanities professional field 2.1. Philology doctoral
programme English Literature

Author: **DIMITAR KOSTADINOV KARAMITEV**

Subject: Historicity and Fictionality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (on Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)

Supervisor: dr. Jana Atanasova Rowland – PU "Paisii Hilendarski"

1. General description of the submitted materials by Order No. RD-21-887 of 25.04.2024 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU)

I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure for the defence of the dissertation on "Historicity and Fictionality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (on Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)" for the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in the field of higher education 2. Doctoral programme English Language Literature.

The author of the dissertation is Dimitar Kostadinov Karamitev - PhD student at the Department of English Philology with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yana Atanasova Rowland - Paisii Hilendarski University. The set of paper materials submitted by Dimitar Karamitev is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU, and includes the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of PU for the disclosure of the procedure for dissertation defence;
- CV in European format;
- the departmental council related to the reporting of the readiness for the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- dissertation;
- abstract;
- list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation;
- copies of the scientific publications;
- list of citations noted; -
declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;

The doctoral candidate has attached 3 publications on the topic of his dissertation.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral candidate

I know Dimitar Karamitev from the National Scientific Conference for Students and Doctoral Students held in Plovdiv (2021, 2022).

His contributions to the forum were vivid and mature, demonstrating a mastered scholarly ethos and an abiding interest in Victorian literature. These contributions have grown into two publications on the subject of this dissertation. I am pleased to note that my comments and recommendations at the conference were taken on board. In his professional career, PhD student Dimitar Karamitev already has considerable experience in teaching and a more modest amount of experience in research, insofar as the publication of his work is yet to come. In the period 2020-2023 he has taught courses such as Victorian Literature, New English Literature and Practical English, which have a direct bearing on his research pursuits. In this same period, he has also developed a research paper in the Young Scholars and Postdoctoral Researchers 2

programme. Until the beginning of his research as a PhD student, his education was traced by the successful completion of the Plovdiv Language School, the BA English Philology programme and the MA Translation and Business Communication programme. His persistent and continuous efforts to master foreign languages - English, German, French and Russian - undoubtedly testify to his broad philological literacy, English being the PhD student's leading language, as is evident from the bibliography to the proposed dissertation, which includes 248 titles - 13 in Bulgarian and 235 in English. It is also important to note Karamitev's membership in the international Thomas Hardy Society, which suggests the possibility of future recognition and inscription of his work in European literary-historical thought.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

First of all, I find the topic of the dissertation to be a contributory one, insofar as no similar work on the problem of fictionalizing history in Thomas Hardy's novels has been done in the Bulgarian context. Secondly, it seems to me important to note the continuity that this work makes, as it continues themes and observations from the habilitation thesis of the thesis supervisor, Associate Professor Jana Roland, PhD, on Hardy's poetry. Thirdly, the well-formed theoretical framework and the fruitful engagement of Paul Ricoeur and Wolfgang Iser with Hardy's fiction should be noted. It is well worth this careful and detailed reading of Thomas Hardy's novels to appear as a book; if it is translated into English, it will be the first monograph on Hardy.

4. Knowledge of the problem

Dimitar Karamitev navigates his research very well, skillfully using the instructions of the metanarrative to guide the reader through his interpretive moves. His thought flows smoothly in an enviable command of academic English. The dissertation, "Historicity and Fictionality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy (on Wolfgang Iser and Paul Ricoeur)," sets out to examine the relationship between fact and fiction; historical and fictional discourse; real life and its novelistic incarnations. The artistic example through which the main thesis of the work is illustrated is the late Victorian realist author Thomas Hardy. A good starting point, or *Ansatzpunkt* after Auerbach, is a great virtue of the work - it is the true illumination between theory and example. The theoretical framework is accurately presented and well related to the artistic material. Thomas Hardy's work is recognized in depth, precision and fine detail. Following this work, in the person of Dimitar Karamitsev, we have a narrow specialist on Hardy, which is an important step at the beginning of the academic path. The clarity of the problem posed, the carefully defined focus, and the good structure of the work show an exceptionally thorough knowledge of the object of study.

5., 6. Research methodology, characterization and evaluation of the thesis

The research methodology ingeniously combines the receptive aesthetics of Wolfgang Iser with the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, aiming to distinguish between two nuanced notions of historicity. Both theoretical approaches are attuned to sociocultural contexts and temporal progressions. Wolfgang Iser's framework is employed to demonstrate how historical experiences are transformed into fiction through acts of selection, combination, and playful self-disclosure. Paul Ricoeur's perspective is harnessed to elucidate the interplay between temporality and narrative.

This complex theoretical synthesis of Iser and Ricoeur, underpinned by a deep understanding of their traditions, echoes a conclusion familiar from Aristotle's *Poetics*: literature is more philosophical than history because it represents not just what has happened but what could plausibly happen given certain possibilities and necessities. The primary theoretical challenge

of this dissertation centers on how nineteenth-century literature reconfigures the concept of mimesis, often equating it with realism. However, the dissertation skillfully avoids this reductionist trap by interpreting historicity not merely as a reflection of reality in literature but as a literary refraction and reworking of the external context. To cite Thomas Hardy, it involves "distorting reality."

Acts of fictionalization are pivotal to this transformation. It would be beneficial to include Ricoeur's article, "On the Authority of Aristotle's Poetics" in the theoretical framework. This work provides critical insight into the modal categories of the probable, the possible, and the actual, which can further clarify the dissertation's leading thesis.

One of the dissertation's significant achievements is Dimitar Karamitev's decision not to pigeonhole Thomas Hardy as a mere realist but to explore his connections and continuations within modernist literature, with authors such as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. This examination of Hardy's work through the second methodological prism showcases Karamitev's ability to think historically, craft comparative narratives, and delineate the affinities and divergences in Hardy's poetics relative to his contemporaries.

Notably contributory is the elucidation of relationships between Woolf, Joyce, and Hardy, especially concerning "moments of insight" and the poetics of everyday epiphany, as well as the interplay between subjective time and objective historical time. This dovetails with Ricoeur's assertion that historical events are inherently organized as narratives and thus are inevitably influenced by the perspective of the narrating subject.

In terms of the theoretical framework, an intriguing question arises: How does Iser's concept of negativity and gaps manifest in Hardy's novels? Given that fictionalization involves fragmentary selections from reality, how are these narrative gaps woven into Hardy's storytelling? Additionally, the dissertation would benefit from more robust engagement with the reception of Iser and Ricoeur in Bulgarian scholarship. While Karamitev has diligently contextualized Hardy within this framework, incorporating related theoretical works by Ognian Kovachev, Alexander Kiossev, and Darin Tenev—such as "Reading in the Age of Media, Computers and the Internet" (2003) and Tenev's "Fiction and Image. Models" (2012)—could enhance the dissertation's integration into Bulgarian literary studies and foster a richer dialogue with existing interpretations of Iser's concepts.

7. Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice

The fundamental premise of the dissertation is premised on the intricate nature of fictional works as dynamic narratives that reveal temporal layers. I question whether the dissertation's propositions hold true not only in relation to Hardy's prose but also his poetry, and how these represent the unique aspects of meta-fictional (poetry) and metonymic (prose) fictionalization of historicity.

Dimitar Karamitev demonstrates masterful compositional skills; the dissertation is meticulously organized into six coherent chapters, each transitioning smoothly and adeptly illuminating its argumentative foundations while progressively unfolding its thesis. This contributes to the work's overall readability and engagement.

Particularly commendable is Chapter Three, "Light, Writing, Color," where Hardy's narrative techniques are paralleled with photographic techniques, generating the "reality effect" as described by Barthes. Karamitev's sensitivity to photography enriches his analysis, encapsulating the concept of "photographic sensibility." This not only captures the interplay between narrative and photographic imagery but also their shared attunements to light, focalization, punctum, point of view, framing, and montage. Employing Barthes' theory from *Camera Lucida* offers a highly effective analytical key, providing one of the most insightful examinations of Hardy's prose. This approach highlights a promising direction for Karamitev's future research.

The framework articulated here could be extended to analyze other Victorian or modernist works, suggesting a poetics of the photographic in prose as a distinct form of ekphrastic work. Karamitev's identification of impressionistic tones in Hardy positions these elements as modernist traits. Karamitev also examines Hardy's self-reflexive voice as presented in the prefaces to his novels, thereby revealing his research methodology from within. This illustrates how Hardy conceptualizes literature not merely as fiction but as a discipline that more dynamically remembers, preserves, and reconstructs the past through fabulation.

8. Assessment of the dissertation publications

To date, the publications on the PhD thesis reflect the work of the PhD student during three of the years of his PhD. In the three years from 2021 to 2024, he has participated in five scientific conferences, three of which were followed by publications on the submitted papers. Two of Karamitev's publications are in one of the good PhD periodicals - *Verba Iuvenium* (ISSN: 2682-9460) - Issue 4 and Issue 5, which is included in the National Reference List of Contemporary Bulgarian Peer-Reviewed Scientific Publications. Karamitev's third publication is in the annual Scientific Proceedings of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (ISSN: 0861-0029), also refereed in NACID, as well as in COBISS. I highly appreciate both the publications of the PhD student and his presence and participation in scientific forums. Based on my direct observations, as well as the publications submitted, I can boldly state that we are facing a well-formed scientist who is able to present original and quality research papers. We can certainly expect that Karamitev will continue to develop and expand his ideas and present new and important research observations in his field. Such growth and constant striving to achieve higher standards ensure that the PhD student's upcoming publications will be even better and more meaningful to our community.

9. Doctoral student's personal involvement

In his dissertation, Dimitar Karamitev demonstrated precision, punctuality, and careful reading of both literary and critical and theoretical texts. However, I would like to stress that he also expresses his own ideas, with a delicate style of expression and creativity that cannot be underestimated in this kind of research. The doctoral student shows particular attention to historical detail and is careful in his analysis and interpretation of sources. Their precise use and combination provide the basis for his contributions. However, the PhD student has provided only a partial contextualisation of Bulgarian studies on Thomas Hardy and related authors, such as George Eliot. Although his contributions are important and correct, there is a need for further work and effort to establish a broader contextualization of Bulgarian studies within the global context of the literary tradition - here I am not only referring to elaborations on Hardy, but also to references to studies on other authors of the period to which Karamitev refers, as well as to the lack of theoretical contextualization of Bulgarian thought on Iser and Ricoeur already mentioned above. This recommendation is important only insofar as in the

person of Dimitar Karamitev I see a new strong voice on the scene of literary-historical thought in our country, which is why I believe that with this additional work and diligence, he will be able to broaden the context of Bulgarian studies on Thomas Hardy and related authors, thus taking his place in the academic environment and contributing to the development and history of literary scholarship. 10. Abstract The abstract, which is attached to this dissertation, corresponds to the content and main ideas discussed in it. Although the abstract is an abbreviated statement of the dissertation, the doctoral student has succeeded in preserving the integrity of the information presented in the abstract and in providing a clear and coherent summary of the main observations and conclusions about Thomas Hardy's work. I would like to draw special attention to the fact that the abstract is not done in a dry and business-like manner, but on the contrary, with a thorough attention to an elegant writing style, making light of some of the ideas developed in the work, which facilitates the understanding of the topic and its main aspects. The linguistic treatment of the text has been carried out with care, observing all the requirements of academic writing. The presented abstract includes a brief overview of the structure of the work, a focused introduction, a statement of the aims and objectives of the thesis, a presentation of the methodology and sources used, a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the main results and conclusions, a concluding section, an appendix that uses a modern analysis technique such as the so-called distant reading or working with tables and graphs, a bibliography, and a reference to the scientific contributions. I would like to stress that the abstract reflects the content of the thesis in an accurate and objective manner. It provides a summarised and, in a sense, an expanded work, insofar as it shows a further reflection on the overall pledge. The quality of this text secondary to the dissertation meets the high standards of academic writing and research.

10. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

Insofar as the PhD student has already developed a relationship with and become part of the Thomas Hardy Society, it seems to me an important step in his research path to expand the reception of Hardy in Bulgaria, focusing of course on his own already significant work, and to become actively involved in their conferences, publications and in general in the wider activities that this literary society carries out, insofar as the contemporary European situation facilitates such exchanges easily and accessibly. Karamitsev's work implies making such an effort. Also, while the cosmopolitan strategy of writing is not to be ignored, I would suggest that Dimitar Karamitsev consider a full (or partial) translation of his research into the Bulgarian context, as this wonderful dissertation should undoubtedly also appear as a book, why not in two editions - in Bulgarian and in English?

Conclusion

The dissertation presented by Dimitar Karamitev contains significant scientific and applied results, representing an original scholarly contribution. It meets all the requirements stipulated by the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the corresponding regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University. His work evidences his independent research acumen and potential for future contributions to the field of philology. I confidently recommend awarding Dimitar Karamitev the degree of "Doctor" in the higher education field of 2. Humanities, Professional field 2.1. Philology, Doctoral Programme in English Literature.

09.06.2024
Sofia

Reviewer:

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(signature)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamelia Spassova