REVIEW

from

Prof. Dr. Madeleine Danova

for the PhD Dissertation of Yana Ivanova Dimova

*Representation of Historical Characters in the Novels*

*of Fernando Campos*

for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

in 2.1 "Philology", Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia, Modern Portuguese literature, 20th-21st century,

Department of Portuguese and Lusophone Studies,

Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology,

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

***Data about the doctoral student***

Yana Ivanova Dimova graduated from the BA Program in Portuguese Philology at Sofia University in 2017, and in 2019 from the Master's program "Translator-Editor" at the same higher education institution. From July 2019 to July 2022, she was a doctoral student at the Department of Portuguese and Lusophone Studies, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and in 2023 she finished the doctoral program with the right of defense after extending the duration of the doctoral studies by one year.

Yana Dimova is also actively engaged in translation of both fiction and specialized texts.

***Data for the Ph.D. Studies***

Yana Dimova was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the "Portuguese and Lusophone Studies" department, SU with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Yana

Andreeva. The title of her dissertation is "Representation of historical characters in the novels of Fernando Campos". During her doctoral studies, Dimova successfully passed the exams provided for in her individual plan, regularly submitted reports to the department about the progress of her doctoral studies, and received a positive assessment of her work from the departmental council. Her dissertation work was discussed at an extended meeting of the Department of Portuguese and Lusophone Studies in April 2024 and was directed to external defense.

Yana Dimova has presented a Reference on the implementation of the minimum national requirements under Art. 26 of ZRASRB, according to which she fully meets the requirements - indicators from group A - 50 points out of the minimum required 50 points; indicators from group D – 35 points with a minimum of 30 points required; total – 85 points with a minimum of 80 points required.

On the basis of the above, we can conclude that there are no violations of the ZRASRB or the Regulations of the SU as far as the PhD studies and procedures are concerned.

***Dissertation and Abstract data***

The dissertation is written in Bulgarian and consists of 222 pages. It includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, an appendix, cited literature and consulted literature for the preparation of the appendix. The topic of the dissertation is very current and innovative, since in recent decades there has been a flourishing of biofictions in many Western European literatures, Portuguese being no exception. The main task that the dissertation student sets herself is to formulate the different types of representation of historical characters in the novels of Fernando Campos. Jana has selected five of Campos's novels, *The House of Dust* (1986), *The Broken Emerald* (1995), *The Interrogation Hall* (1998), *The Bridge of Sighs* (2000), and *Blue Lake* (2007), which she convincingly argues form a novel cycle through which the author offers alternative readings of Portuguese history. According to the doctoral student's main thesis, Campos achieves this through the use of various narrative devices and techniques to construct fictional images of real historical figures, which is also the focus of the study.

After a thorough review of what has been done in this area so far in Portuguese literary studies and stepping on the results of two large-scale projects of the University of Lisbon - "Portuguese characters" and of the University of Coimbra - "Fictional characters" - the dissertation also presents the theoretical framework on which the analysis is based. Using the knowledge gained from structuralism, semiotics, cognitive studies and narratology about the ways in which characters are constructed in literary works, Yana Dimova focuses on the so-called "silenced discourse", which is the discourse of the marginalized, suppressed voices of history and which helps for the construction of new readings of the development of human society.

The entire first chapter of the study is focused on the "theoretical settings and historical-literary perspectives" of the construction of characters in the historical novel and postmodern biofiction. Yana Dimova shows a very deep and broad view of modern theories on the construction of literary characters, which she skilfully breaks through postmodern biofiction, without neglecting the connections that exist between character-time-space-narrative. This gives her a solid base to develop the specific point of view she has chosen, namely the character in the historical Portuguese novel. This chapter also traces the development of postmodern biofiction through the historical novel and metafiction to historiographical metafiction and postmodern biographical fictions.

By creating a solid theoretical foundation both in relation to the different types of characters and narrators – autodiegetic, homodiegetic and heterodiegetic – and in relation to the use of history in literary narratives, Yana Dimova also builds the basic skeleton of the literary analysis of the selected works of Campos. But before entering into the actual analysis of the historical characters/narrators and their function in the various fictional narratives created by Campos in the novel cycle under study, the dissertation also makes a comprehensive review of the entire work of this contemporary Portuguese writer. The second chapter outlines the rich literary heritage of Campos, thus presenting it to the Bulgarian public for the first time. This chapter briefly presents all five books under analysis.

The third and fourth chapters contain the basic analysis of the strategies of representation of the historical characters in the novels of Campos, as well as their thematic projections. Particularly valuable in my opinion is the fourth chapter, in which the representation of historical characters is closely related to the reconstruction of identity and to the "silenced discourse" of marginal communities in Portuguese society. Based on the detailed projections of the narrator and the male and female characters that Campos builds from the third chapter, in the fourth chapter Yana Dimova manages to connect the research threads and convincingly defend her thesis that "through the increased use of the technique of suppressed discourse, the writer confirms, builds on or refutes the historiography's ideas about key Portuguese referential figures, whose point of view was silenced by the leading authority of the era" (Aftoreferat, p.6). Thus, the "silenced discourse" becomes fundamental for understanding the message that each of the five novels under analysis sends to its readers, and it largely determines the ways in which the characters construct their identity. In the last part of this chapter, Yana Dimova also examines one of the dominant themes in Campos's work, namely the journey through which the characters very often build their identity. This also becomes one of the connecting themes in the so-defined cycle of novels about the rise and fall of the Portuguese Empire.

All observations and findings are summarized in the Conclusion, which confirms the conclusion that "in parallel with the exaggerated application of suppressed discourse, Campos manages to construct the artistic representation of influential historical referential characters" (Aftoreferat, p. 23).

 The appendix, which offers the main historical facts regarding the characters described, also contributes to highlighting the ways of constructing and deconstructing the artistic images in Campos' novels.

Overall, the dissertation is very well structured, the chapters are logically arranged, the introduction and critical discussion of the various theoretical models follow a well-defended internal logic that shows a thorough work on the text. The proposed analyzes are original, being entirely based on the built theoretical model in the first chapter of the dissertation.

Here we should note that the Abstract is also very well written and organized, although short and gives a very good idea of ​​what has been achieved in the dissertation work.

***Scientific contributions***

The five scientific contributions listed by the doctoral student are sufficient proof of the significance of the presented work, and perhaps the most important among them is the conclusion that "the literary critical analysis categorically proves that by means of the reception of the suppressed or silenced discourse of the historically referential narrators and central characters... they confirm, upgrade or refute the ideas of historiography and the author's messages are brought out" (Aftoreferat, p. 25).

I fully agree that the dissertation manages to build its theoretical framework, which is an undoubted achievement, but the interdisciplinary approach at times expands the field of research too much and not all conclusions turn out to be solidly defended. A major problem remains the distinction between some of the main terms with which the text deals, such as historical novel, metafiction, historical metafiction and biofiction, which, although very well analyzed in the first chapter, are sometimes used interchangeably, which cannot be justified, especially in the case of historical novel/biofiction. While the historical novel in most cases tends to "tell" the historical facts as the author sees them, biofiction as a postmodern genre often finds itself involved in a complex game of seemingly reliable reflections of the lives of public figures, completely rewriting the historical facts. That is why they cannot be used as synonyms, but only as stages in the development of the genre features of the modern novel.

***Publications and participation in scientific forums***

The presented seven publications are part of the dissertation topic developed by the dissertation student and show her in-depth work on the topic, which is the basis of the proposed dissertation work. Yana Dimova has participated in four scientific conferences in Bulgaria. I believe that it will be of great benefit to her further scientific development if she participates in international conferences outside Bulgaria, as well as the publication of articles in Portuguese or English on this topic, so that the ideas contained in this dissertation become available to the public. -wide audience.

***Conclusion***

Based on all the above conclusions and conclusions, I would like to recommend that the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" be awarded in direction 2.1. Philology, Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia, Contemporary Portuguese literature, 20th-21st century by Yana Ivanova Dimova, full-time doctoral student at the Department of "Portuguese and Lusophone Studies", Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

 19.06.2024 Prof. Dr. Madeleine Danova