

REVIEW

By associate professor Hristo Boev, PhD, Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen,

member of a scientific jury appointed with an order by the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski“ RD 38-161 of 17.03.2025 and commissioned to review a dissertation work for awarding the educational scientific degree of “doctor”, domain of higher education – 2. Humanities; professional direction – 2.1. Philology, Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (British and American Modernism (in English)).

Author: Kiril Romanov Hadzhikosev

Scientific advisor: Professor Madlen Danova, PhD

Topic: “Center and Periphery in British and American Modernism: James Joyce, Jean Rhys, Djuna Barnes, Thomas Wolfe”

1. General description of the presented documents

The present procedure concerns the defense of a dissertation work titled “**Center and Periphery in British and American Modernism: James Joyce, Jean Rhys, Djuna Barnes, Thomas Wolfe**” for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of “doctor” in the domain of higher education 2. Humanities; professional direction – 2.1. Philology, Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (British and American Modernism (in English)). The author of the dissertation work is Kiril Romanov Hadzhikosev, a Bulgarian citizen and regular doctoral student at the Faculty of New and Classical Philologies, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Bulgaria.

The presented to me set of documents belonging to Kiril Romanov Hadzhikosev contains:

- a doctoral dissertation – 142 pages
- a European format CV
- a diploma for master’s degree with the profile of “Communication: Language, Literature, Media“
- a diploma for bachelor’s degree in the speciality of “English Philology“
- an order for the release of a doctoral student from the doctoral program “Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (British and American Modernism (in English))
- Three published articles
- a report of similarities
- a check on meeting the minimal requirements for obtaining the educational scientific degree of “Doctor”

- a dissertation abstract in English
- a dissertation abstract in Bulgarian.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral candidate

Based on the submitted by the doctoral candidate documents Kiril Romanov Hadzhikosev graduated from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Bulgaria in 2017, obtaining a bachelor’s degree in the speciality of “English Philology”. In the same university in 2021 he gained a master’s degree in the program of “Communication: Language, Literature, Media”. During the period 2021 – 2024 he was a doctoral student at the Department of English and American Studies, Sofia, specializing in British and American Modernism. The present CV does not provide any information about job positions occupied by the doctoral candidate, which can be accounted for by his intensive scientific educational activities continuing to the present moment. The submitted by the doctoral candidate dissertation does not appear to contain elements of plagiarism.

3. Relevance of the topic and expediency of the proposed aims and objectives

The doctoral candidate Kiril Hadzhikosev has solid knowledge of the modernist period under scrutiny (1910-1940) which he demonstrates by analyzing two representatives from British Modernism (James Joyce and Jean Rhys) and two representatives from American Modernism (Djuna Barnes and Thomas Wolfe). His main *modus operandi* is deconstructing our conceptions of these writers from the viewpoint of postmodern theories in the light of which the former can be discussed despite their having produced the examined works prior to the period of postmodernity. Appropriately, early works of the mentioned authors have been considered, e.g. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Rhys, categorizing her as a postmodernist with traits comparable to those of John Fowles’s from his *The Collector* and *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, all of them associated with the postmodern epoch after World War II, are respectively excluded from the study. The topic chosen by Hadzhikosev is very interesting with its examination of the *center* and *periphery* as key to (de)constructing our conceptions of opposition *modernism-postmodernism*. The early experimentations with composition and unfinished/ loose endings which we observe in the novel in verse by Byron *Don Juan* (1824), as well as the high likelihood of getting lost in convoluted and warped spaces, being judged and convicted in inhuman institutions which adduce other important characteristics of postmodernism discovered as key in seminal works by Kafka such as *America* (1927) and *The Trial* (1925) are not mentioned in the submitted dissertation in their role of precursors to postmodernity but it can be said with certainty that the proposed model of analysis is also applicable to them, which I consider to be the main contribution of the text presented to the attention of the jury. In the epoch of post-truth (in the year 2025) where we find ourselves and the tendency towards *new sincerity* (initiated at the end of the 20th, early 21st centuries) we could say that we are facing a new dichotomy where *periphery-center* could receive new reappraisals in a possible

hermeneutic dialog with the British and American writers from the early Modernism of the 20th century.

4. Knowing the problematics

Kiril Hadzhikosev examines the possibility to analyze the works of said four modernists through the prism of postmodernism and postmodernity, thus offering a new reading of the proposed modernist writers. In view of the proverbial saying that “the centre cannot hold” in Yeats’s “The Second Coming” from the year 1920, the discourse *center-periphery* has been considered from many and different aspects and perspectives. Singling it out as key for the new reading of the four writers, all very different in their modernist techniques for recreating the world in fiction, testifies to knowing a crucial factor in discerning and distinguishing the writers before and after the year 1950. Referring to Ihab Hassan’s very well-known table from his essay “Towards a Concept of Postmodernism” (1987) will indicate that examining the *center* as closed and open, respectively, would determine important distinctions between modernism and postmodernism, alongside many other characteristics which have been an integral part of hundreds of studies. Concentrating on this factor alone can be considered decisive in achieving a convincing thesis and creating a convertible model of comparison, which Kiril Hadzhikosev realizes in his doctoral dissertation.

5. Study methodology

The main points of departure and critical filters used by the doctoral candidate have been laid out in the Introduction and elaborated upon throughout the dissertation together with the proposed works by the modernists. These can be summarized in the following manner: reviewing the situation at the beginning of the 20th century in dichotomies related to the cultural, social and linguistic spaces with their appertaining contradictions, especially those engendered through the contrast between the literary and cultural traditions of the past Victorian Age and the new times with their inventions, innovations and sociocultural transformations (p. 2); examining the modernist novel against the realist and naturalist novels’ production as based on difference rather than what Hadzhikosev calls “the principles of repetition” (p.3); outlining the foundations of postmodernism through referencing eminent representatives of the literary and cultural history such as Liotard, Foucault, Bart, Jameson and Baudrillard; placing the modern person “in the world” as a new correlation to the other and to otherness (p.3); delineating the authors at the center of this study who categorically inscribe themselves in what we understand by Modernism in the narrow, but also in the larger sense of the word, i.e. James Joyce with *Ulysses* (1922), Jean Rhys with *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), Djuna Barnes with *Nightwood* (1936) and Thomas Wolfe with *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929); using postmodern critical studies which accentuate on spaces and their signification. Some of the important theoreticians to be found in the reviewed text are Deleuze and Guattari, de Certeau,

Blanchot, Foucault, but also some of their important predecessors-phenomenologists with predilection for exploring spaces such as Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Heidegger and Iser.

The authors under consideration are intensely experimental but in very different ways. Hadzhikosev engages them in the proposed discourse of *center* and *periphery* in the following manner: “[They] can be used to outline the ground for a larger and more theoretical analysis of what is identified as a fundamental change in the perception of what held the world together during the 1910s through 1930s, and what gave it its peculiar historical twist” (p.5). Hadzhikosev lays out the overall theoretical frame regarding the *center* thus: “Contrary to Derrida’s conception, the center, the paradigmatic house of structured multiplicities and metaphysical balance, is taken to include all possibilities of the “play” which modernism seeks to maintain open for the future (of reading and writing) in order to reinvest into the social sphere what has been radically left out of its structure, namely the *structure* of the event which should be constituted within the deterritorializing forces of the center” (p. 6). Clearly, the doctoral candidate stays close to Deleuze and Guattari and the application of their expanded discussion in two books *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) of what they call *body without organs* (*le corps sans organes*). In the created culturological discussion Hadzhikosev prioritizes *distant* over *close reading* which, despite being completely well founded albeit a little outdated, and despite being associated mostly with the New Criticism from the beginning of the 20th century, has not lost its significance which has had a convincing demonstration in several influential critical studies by Hillis Miller, as well as in a very recent work by Jon Phelan, *Literature and Understanding: The Value of a Close Reading of Literary Texts* (2021).

The doctoral candidate proposes to prove “that [the] modernist authors already envisioned the post-modernist condition where the center lacks an essence“ and it can be regarded as unstable in its impossibility to serve as a secure pedestal (p. 7). He proposes to examine the *center* and *periphery* as fluid in the modernist works of his choice, by tracing their modernistic inclination via the instability of the *center* in the conditions of creating literature in the state of crisis (p. 9). Hadzhikosev determines the objectives of this dissertation as showing how “British and American modernism laid the groundwork for post-modernist deconstruction of the *center-periphery* dichotomy”, as well as “bring[ing] closer to our contemporary culture the literary artefacts produced by notable modernists” at the core of the study (p. 11).

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

Kiril Hadzhikosev’s doctoral dissertation is a modern comparative study with well-chosen modernist writers who share more differences than similarities. Certainly, this is not a mistake since this choice allows a comparative revelation of the multifaceted essence of the early British and American Modernism outside the strictly canonized authors to whom out of the ones under consideration here, we can single out only Joyce. The entire comparative study contributes to bringing the rest to the *center*, if we take Joyce to be the *center* in this discourse and the rest – the *periphery*, as well as to deconstructing these notions through

the prism of our looking back to the beginning of the 20th century. The proposed study develops its ideas in 6 chapters by discussing in parallel the critical thoughts behind it and the movement of the modernists in directions distinguishing them from their contemporaries for whom we could apply with a higher degree of correspondence the mentioned useful table of Hassan's in its part concerning modernism (also associated with other modernists), as well as to discover more hits in the part concerning postmodernism (again unlike other modernists up to the 1940s). Although this table is not part of this study, if applied to the analyzed authors, we could establish a considerable overlap in both directions – modernism – postmodernism which corroborates Hadzhikosev's claims about the instability of the *center* and *periphery* in the authors under scrutiny. While the first 2 chapters develop the theoretical ideas laid out in the Introduction, chapters 3,4,5 and 6 are more directly engaged with the examined authors by shedding light on specific aspects and fragments of their literary works, thus illustrating the chosen theoretical approach. In view of the aforesaid, Chapter 3 is titled "Deconstructing Conmee: Mediating between *Center* and *Periphery* through Operators, Bodies, and Excess in the 'Wandering Rocks'", a chapter from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Chapter 4: "Decentralizing Anna Morgan's Agency in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*"; Chapter 5: "Djuna Barnes Narrating the Peripheralized Body in *Nightwood*"; Chapter 6: "Recuperating a Peripheralized Wolfe: Life-in-Death and The Power of Bad Writing".

In the following lines I will examine briefly the chapters in the dissertation with certain remarks. Chapter 1: "*Center* and *Periphery* in Modernism from a (Non-)Post-Modernist Perspective" examines historically the emergence of Modernism with its culturological peculiarities such as colonialism and tension as regards history. Using language is aptly and appropriately discussed as a way of expressing the individual among and in relation to people and the environment. Despite not being worded in a subtitle, the chapter also discusses the position of the authors under consideration as regards their own historical times, significance and reception they received then. While being a small number, at places there are certain typos which could be corrected – for instance, on page 32 we have "can be view[ed]" with the missing inflection. Chapter 2: "Politics of Space: The Modernist Artistic Condition" competently introduces a discourse involving Heidegger as one of the defining theoreticians for the emergence of the theories of space in literature and fiction. To my regret, the chapter continues in an excessively high-style scientific jargon, which is a possible manner of discussing the condition of the man of art in new and challenging times, but in my view it excludes the humanistic sensation of this difficulty of his in finding a literary expression comprising his or her state or status among the others and to himself or herself respectively. Chapter 3 dedicated to the emblematic novel by James Joyce, *Ulysses*, touches on characters and moments from the text of the British modernist, but again the style remains rife with a scientific jargon, and this leaves an impression of distancing from the literary works themselves. It is to the doctoral candidate's credit that he himself admits to the existence of this danger in composing literary criticism, which he remarks on page 50 relating to "the technoscientific discourse predicated entirely on reason and logic at the beginning of the 20th century". One would appreciate better more examples from the literary chapter so that the critical statements made could have a more solid foundation. And again, there are inaccuracies in the linguistic expression that are

there, e.g. “constitutes a moral topoi” (p. 75), which is grammatically incorrect since *topoi* is the plural of *topos* and needs to be used with the rules determining the correct form of accord. Chapter 4 concerning Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* also begins in a manner distanced from the literary text with affirmations sounding like conclusions without our being able to say what they are based on, but further in this chapter Hadzhikosev refers to more citations from the book with applicable analysis founded on Deleuze and Guattari’s abstract idea of *the body without organs*. In Chapter 5, which deals with Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, Hadzhikosev engages more directly with the text without omitting to discuss theoretically the body in comparison with its representations and manifestations in Rhys’s novel. As well as in other chapters, here we also encounter linguistic inaccuracies, for instance: “The drama upon which feminist readings of *Voyage in the Dark* and *Nightwood* are predicated upon” (p. 90) where we have a redundant usage of the preposition *upon*. Here is the time to say that the phraseological expression *is predicated (up)on* has been used way too often (50 times in the dissertation – for 132 pages not counting the Bibliography) while there are many other available alternatives. Despite the linguistic remarks made, the command of English in the doctoral candidate’s work surpasses by far that found in doctoral dissertations of authors who are not native to the language and the inaccuracies made in the text could be chalked up to the repetitive revisions which have certainly been made. Chapter 6 dedicated to Thomas Wolfe and his novel *Look Homeward, Angel*, as well as the last 4 chapters overall, also preserves closer contact to the text of the literary work. In this chapter Hadzhikosev proposes a conclusion which determines Wolfe’s modernism as “failure” (p. 114) due to his palpable romanticism. The hidden reference to Shelley’s essay “A Defence of Poetry” should contain the artist (the poet) as “the unacknowledged legislator of the world” (p. 114) instead of the “acknowledged legislator” found in Hadzhikosev’s text. Surely, between James Joyce, Djuna Barnes and Thomas Wolfe, as already mentioned, there are many differences and if we consider the experimentalism of the first two connecting it to the tumultuous, but also exuberant modernist processes and transformations at the beginning of the 20th century, Wolfe is a very original writer from the American South with unique characteristics, preserving a lot of the Victorian narrative linearity, but his modernism and modernistic sensibility, in my opinion, except for some of the characteristics of the Southern Gothic, are manifested in what we today call *new sincerity* in the literature of the 21st century – a notion initially associated with D. F. Wallace and the increasing to this day interest in autofiction. This *sincerity* (not only a sense of authenticity), also new for its time, can be observed remarkably in the Modernism of the 20th century in some French writers, as well as in the Romanian interwar writer Cella Serghi with her *The Spider’s Web* (*Pânza de păianjen*) (1937). Stylistically, Wolfe is strongly reminiscent of D. H. Lawrence – a British modernist who develops modernism in other spheres of the experimental unrelated to form or composition, but rather to spaces, spheres of corporeal interactions, discussions of the intellectual and carnal as part of the essence of the human being as a social entity, all untypical of the literary discourse from the previous epoch. A similar observation is made by Hadzhikosev who thus relates Wolfe’s unconventional approach to Modernism as “artistic evidence of real movement towards truth” (p. 118) and even concludes that it was his *Americanness* shrouded in transcendental myths that probably protected Wolfe from

the rise of European fascism (p. 118). Another remarkable conclusion of Hadzhikosev's regarding *Wolfe's bad writing* determines the possibility for "writing [... to] be seen as the perfect medium of communicating the imperfectability of life, art, and human nature" (p. 119).

In a nutshell, this is a modern scientific work which adeptly handles appropriate literary criticism in analyzing literary works. The proposed comparative model (reproducible with other writers as well) is its big asset; as drawbacks I see its limited direct engagement with the literary text of the examined works and its high style, at moments, repetitive scientific jargon.

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

With his doctoral dissertation Kiril Hadzhikosev contributes to the literary critical discourse in his rereading of completely or partially canonized authors from the beginning of the 20th century. He deconstructs the much-debated notions of *center* and *periphery*, as well as on a bigger scale, our perceptions and conceptions of modernism and postmodernism. In our post-postmodern present, after a period of about 100 years, which feels like a complete cycle in our political and cultural history, this study is necessary for the contemporary reception of the analyzed early modernists. We clearly realize that when classifying and categorizing periods and literary movements, we are probably doing it above all to facilitate the learning process for philology students. Despite this, in view of the whole existing literary theory, as well as in the spirit of this dissertation and its scientific style, I would say that insofar as boundaries often seem to dissolve, they are still there, and we should be at least conscious of their subliminal existence.

8. Evaluation of the publication under the dissertation work

The presented publications are entirely on the topic of the dissertation work and have been published in scientific volumes and journals in Bulgaria and abroad. Their number corresponds to the required three published articles.

9. Personal contribution of the doctoral candidate

Kiril Hadzhikosev's personal contribution is revealed in his ambitious study which he has done competently, thus effectuating a new reading of eminent representatives of the British and American Modernism.

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 St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. 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 Kiril Romanov Hadzhikosev in domain of higher education – 2. Humanities; professional direction – 2.1. Philology, Literatures of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (British and American Modernism (in English)).

18.05.2025 г.

Reviewer:



Town of Shumen

/Assoc. Prof. Hristo Boev, PhD/