OPINION

on the dissertation of Nedyalko Radostinov Zhelev
entitled:
"The Wars of the 20th Century – Novel Interpretations in Slavic Literatures after 1989"
for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in the professional field: 2.1. Philology, doctoral program "Literatures of the Nations of Europe, America, Asia, Africa, and Australia" – History of Slavic Literatures

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The dissertation titled "The Wars of the 20th Century – Novel Interpretations in Slavic Literatures after 1989" has been reviewed and approved for public defense by the Department of Slavic Literatures at the Faculty of Slavic Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The research aims to construct a comparative typology of novel representations of war in contemporary Slavic literatures, based on an analytical examination of conceptual approaches and models of representation observed across different literatures. A vast body of source texts has been studied, predominantly novels representative of the various post-Yugoslav literatures, in which the theme of war has been a significant and prevailing trend during the period from the late 20th to the early 21st century.

The dissertation comprises an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography, totaling 281 pages. The introduction meets established academic standards by outlining the research field and formulating the main objectives, goals, and methodological approaches. Chapters One and Two are devoted to the development of

the study's conceptual framework, based on existing conceptualizations and theoretical approaches to the theme of war. The starting point of the research is the construction of an interdisciplinary approach that integrates anthropological and psychological perspectives with specialized literary approaches.

In Chapter One, "The Psychology of War", the central focus is on existential fear and related ideas of immortality, self-perpetuation, self-denial, and self-sacrifice. Chapter Two focuses on analyzing the main working concept – *writing about war/war writing.* Clarifying this working concept proves to be a complex task, due to the challenge of defining its scope and boundaries, which are fluid and heavily dependent on historical context, as well as on social, political, and cultural conditions. Faced with this challenge, the author chooses to trace the leading strategies of interpretation and representation of the major military conflicts of the 20th century. The chapter draws on numerous theoretical premises and approaches, demonstrating in-depth research and a solid grasp of the scholarly tradition concerning the theme of war in literature.

The chosen research perspectives and conceptual frameworks are applied to specific literary material in Chapters Three and Four. In Chapter Three, "Narrative Models", the study explores various narratives about war, ranging from testimonial narratives and variations of traditional epic narratives to narratives through a child's gaze or a typically female perspective. The author presents the content of specific novels in detail, revealing the diversity of individual approaches and poetics while also constructing models representative of *war writing* in the post-1989 period. The thorough interpretation of the selected novels provides a deep understanding of these models, and the comparative analysis is productive in highlighting the multiplicity and dynamism of literary representations of war.

While Chapter Three, "Narrative Models", predominantly employs literary analysis, Chapter Four emphasizes approaches from literary anthropology and the psychology of war. The theoretical premises and ideas about heroism, the figure of the leader, and the use of mythologemes of good and evil, discussed in Chapter One, are applied here to the analysis of specific works. Of particular note is the problematization

of heroism and self-sacrifice, as well as of traditionally valued concepts such as “nation,” “ethnicity,” and “language.” The author’s reflections are focused on the destabilization of traditional notions of heroism and self-sacrifice associated with national ideologies. In this context, the research draws attention to the realization of the senselessness of dying for an idea, which leads to a clear distinction between immortality as an externally imposed ideologeme and the pursuit of immortality as a personal attempt to cope with the inevitability of death. A significant and original contribution of the research is the inclusion of Bulgarian literary works – "Wound" by Zachary Karabashliev and "The Palaveevi Sisters" by Alek Popov – in the comparative analysis.

The presented abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation.

Conclusion

The dissertation by Nedyalko Zhelev is a conceptually well-structured and scientifically correct study that undoubtedly contributes to Bulgarian Slavic studies. Based on the above-mentioned qualities of the dissertation and its scholarly contributions, I vote in favor of awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Nedyalko Zhelev.

23.06.2025 Assoc. Prof. Ina Hristova, PhD