

REVIEWER'S REPORT ON THE HABILITATION THESIS

Title: *Odraz Kierkegaardovho vnímania človeka a spoločnosti v dielach modernej americkej literatúry*

Author of the habilitation thesis: PhDr. Martina Pavlíková, PhD.

Reviewer: prof. Olga Byessonova, DrSc.

Field: Foreign languages and cultures

The habilitation thesis by Martina Pavlikova consists of a set of six analytical works. They were published in peer-reviewed journals and address the influence of the first existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard on the works of modern American literature. The focus is made on reflection of Kierkegaard's perception of man and society in the works by Wystan Hugh Auden, Walker Percy and Don DeLillo. These authors implemented the ideas of the Danish philosopher in their own literary works and subsequently created their own concept of man and modern society of the twentieth century, which was a century of very dramatic and tumultuous events.

The comprehensive analysis, that is offered in the thesis, provides the up-to-date approach to the treatment of connection between philosophy and literature in the twentieth century. Bringing into the open the connection between Kierkegaard's existential philosophy and the works of American writers, M. Pavlikova stresses the importance of philosophical interpretation of specific human situations as revealed in literary works. It should be pointed out that in this sense M. Pavlikova's work is interdisciplinary. It lies on the borderline of the fields of literary studies, literary criticism, philosophy, and hermeneutics. It is an important contribution to literary anthropology and cultural studies in a broad sense. The suggested treatment of works by Wystan Hugh Auden, Walker Percy and Don DeLillo gives a complex picture of the specificity of the Kierkegaard philosophy and opens up new vistas for even deeper probes concerning his philosophical legacy in the field of literary research work. Such an approach appears to be of relevance and topicality.

The author approaches the research subject matter in terms of the philosophical facet and the acknowledgement of the importance of existential understanding of the manner, in which contemporary human consciousness has been shaped being influenced by contemporary society. M. Pavlikova takes into account the recent achievements of the present-day literary theory and practice. The author supports the analysis by resorting to different views on the phenomenon under study, which should be approved of. The bibliography section, which lists sources used and referenced in the thesis, deserves a special comment as a valuable source of information about the problem in question.

In order to reach the objective, the author applied a number of relevant methods to the selected works by the three recognised representatives of American postmodern literature. Having applied comparative textual analysis, biographical method, elements of hermeneutic-interpretive method, M. Pavlikova managed to emphasize the connection between Kierkegaard's existential philosophy and the works by Wystan Hugh Auden, Walker Percy and Don DeLillo, who complemented Kierkegaard's philosophical legacy with their own thoughts and views.

The major goal, successfully achieved by M. Pavlikova in her research paper, i.e. to "analyze the way in which man and society are perceived by these writers, with special regard to the analysis of man living in the modern times of the 20th century" (p. 5), is absolutely relevant and timely. The subject of the analysis are literary characters in the works of the mentioned American authors, who face the feeling of loneliness, anxiety and loss of the meaning of life, or their place in modern society.

M. Pavlikova provides convincing interpretations to illustrate the examination of the concept of man and society with emphasis on the subjectivity of individuals and the impact of consumer society on the inner world and human experience. The selected works are analyzed by the author in a thorough and explicit fashion suggesting some ideas as to further research.

In her initial research, which was the basis of the presented studies, M. Pavlikova focused on the analysis of works and writings by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard *Sickness Unto Death, Either / or A Concept of Anxiety*. Touching upon Kierkegaard's concepts of despair, anxiety, fear, and loneliness, being a striking element of human civilization, his religious philosophy, and suggesting original interpretations, M. Pavlikova overviews the ideas of Christianity and their treatment, the modern dilemma of man today, living in an age of anxiety, which are inextricably linked to the works subjected to the analysis. The consideration of the concepts in question, as well as the study of their reflection in the works under investigation, provide essential knowledge and skills for the interpretative approach to the literary analysis.

The logic of the author's analytical works can be approved of, as it contains the results of the methodological framework application. The observations made and the results obtained are transparent and explicit. Successfully blending Kierkegaard's philosophical background data and practical literary survey, the author contributes with her own thoughts to the analysis of the concept of man and modern society, which is one of the permanent challenges of researchers and experts.

Logically and structurally the thesis is balanced. There is a detailed table of contents, followed by Introduction. The dissertation ends up with a convincing summary of the crucial results obtained and the main observations made in the course of the analysis. One must give a special credit to the author for the quality of the language, precise and clear style of the thesis. Due attention is paid to the clarity of material presentation hence the paper's organization makes it easy to find specific information.

The scientific contribution of the research presented in the habilitation thesis by Martina Pavlikova lies mainly in the original analysis of the works of writers Auden, Percy and Don DeLillo with an emphasis on the existential message of the Danish thinker Kierkegaard. M. Pavlikova comes to the conclusion that it is different in many respects but one attribute of American culture, which is the crisis of modern society and the individual, the loss of identity, feelings of despair, fear, loneliness and alienation of society, as well as the awareness of the existential limit, which is the death of the individual. The habilitation thesis will definitely provide a perfect referential source for experts, scholars and pedagogues specializing in foreign language and culture teaching as well as for students, and public at large interested in the literary work of the authors, who have significantly enriched American literature and influenced the cultural spectrum not only in the United States of America, but also in Europe.

What raises some questions and requires certain comments on behalf of the author is as follows:

1. A number of distinguished writers have been influenced by S. Kierkegaard's thinking. Among them are W. H. Auden, James Baldwin, Samuel Barber, Harold Bloom, Don DeLillo, James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, and Walker Percy. Why did the author choose the works by Wystan Hugh Auden, Walker Percy, and Don DeLillo to be analysed in terms of Kierkegaard's philosophical impact on their aesthetic outlook?

2. Chapter 3 of the thesis entitled *The power of modern technologies in the fiction of Don DeLillo* deals with the analysis of the literary work of Don DeLillo, who focuses on the impact that modern consumer technologies have on men. Can you specify which aspect of Kierkegaard's philosophical views is implemented in the works by Don DeLillo subjected to the analysis?

3. Is it possible to apply the suggested method with the emphasis on the existential message of the Danish thinker Kierkegaard to the analysis of other literary works? What challenges can be faced and how can they be met? Compare the possible efficiency of the method suggested in the thesis as regarded to different literary genres.

Regardless the questions mentioned above, I have grounds to say that this specialized research proves to be exceptionally useful. The thesis by Martina Pavlikova is an invigorating contribution to literary studies and a worthy impact to language and literature education in particular. It has every potential to become a highly instrumental tool not only for the American post-modernist works explorations, but for other forms of literature, too with regard to reflection in them of different philosophical views. Aside from that, it might be used as a didactic material

for university lecturers who train future teachers of the English language and of British and American literature.

In the course of the research Martina Pavlikova manifested the ability to analyse theoretical sources, literary material, to review different approaches, to correctly apply the selected methods of the analysis, and to draw convincing conclusions. The objective of the research has been achieved and the tasks set have been accomplished.

To conclude this review, the claim can be made that Martina Pavlikova has fulfilled the required formal and content criteria needed for this kind of qualification research paper.

I recommend that the habilitation thesis PhD. *Odras Kierkegaardovho vnímania človeka a spoločnosti v dielach modernej americkej literatúry* by PhDr. Martiny Pavlíkovej, PhD. be accepted for defense and after the successful defense and delivery of the habilitation lecture **I recommend** that the candidate be awarded the university title of Associate Professor in the field of **Foreign languages and cultures** – habilitation procedure and full professorship procedure.

November 25, 2021

Prof. Olga Byessonova, DrSc.

Professor of the British and American Studies Department,
University of Ss Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava,
Slovakia