Posudek oponenta na doktorskou práci v rámci programu TEEME

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Název práce: „Nuclear Shakespeare: Apocalypse and Annihilation in *King Lear* and *Hamlet*“

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds!", these are the famous and well-known words that Robert Oppenheimer spoke, quoting the *Bhagavad Gita*, upon witnessing the detonation which tested the A-bomb in July 1945 in New Mexico, the result of his scientific work on the Manhattan Project. The submitted PhD dissertation proves, however, that research on "nuclear" topics need not only be destructive but actually incredibly constructive.

I must mention first one of the most aesthetically pleasing elements of the dissertation: its symmetrically ordered and organized structure and logically organized argument. The methodology does work and is well applied. I appreciate close reading of texts and the comparative approach. Yet, the emphasis primarily on Holocaust Studies could have been enhanced by a larger consideration of Trauma Studies.

All formal requirements are met, citations, references, language register and style all fully in keeping with the standards for PhD dissertations. Yet, in the copy available in the Student Information System, there seems to be one page missing in the Introduction. The numbering works but page 1 and 2 do not logically follow. I suggest that this missing page be added as an Addendum [page of Errata?] to the SIS. And, for example, on page 58 Ursula Le Guin quotes Milan Kundera's essay but that is not included in the footnotes. Despite such minor issues, this is a thought provoking dissertation and one of the best I have recently read.

Below are some questions and comments not meant to undermine the premise of the dissertation but perhaps intended for future consideration and for discussion during the viva.

The opening of Chapter 1 mentions: “the nuclear threat is often dismissed as outdated” (page 10). Well, I do not think so. Quite on the contrary. Certainly in Central Europe there has been an ongoing debate about nuclear power plants as an alternative to fossil fuels. The debate now just has more facets, just as ecological activists’ stance to nuclear power.

The whole problem of how to speak about the unspeakable is also a question of other literary etc. studies, such as slave narratives. In such context I can also mention the “pornography of the Empire”, e.g. when David Dabydeen explores the scopophilic pleasure of observing / gazing at such trauma. That is after all, the whole issue around such discourses as eighteenth-century sensibility, when the suffering of others is meant to excite an emotional and aesthetic response in the reader or onlooker (see page 23 and comments on Steiner). And, afer all, what is behind the contemporary fascination with the disaster at Chernobyl? The TV series and other plethora of texts have spawned and incredible amount of various responses (including facebook profiles created by teenage girls literally in love with the dead heroes of that event).

One simple question: apocalypse is used in the dissertation in the original sense of a promise of redemption after resurrection and the Last Judgement. Today, the word more obviously means chaos and destruction (pages 38-9). Why and when did such a shift occur?

And last but not least, the Third World Woman’s perspective, mentioned in the introduction and in the conclusion (and I suppose in the context of Spivak’s subaltern) is not really brought forward. What precise avenues does Ms Kesavan see along these lines?

It is true that towards the end the dissertation loses some of its power and verbal force of argumentation but ideas still remain plenty. As mentioned above, the comments and questions above are not criticisms but issues that could possibly be explored later (or considered before possible publication). I certainly and fully **recommend** the submitted dissertation for PhD defence and recommend not only the grade of PASS but suggest it for a **PASS with DISTINCTION.**

V Praze 6.9.2021 ……

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