Abstract

The submitted doctoral thesis is an analysis of five novels and one prosaic fragment of the German writer Wolfgang Koeppen (1906-1996). Its first part concentrates on Koeppen`s literary depiction of the phenomena of modernity and of the modern consciousness. In the second part I follow the existential dimension of Koeppen`s novels and I try to put them into the context of the existentialist discourse, which influenced the genesis and the establishment of the so called existentialist literature. Koeppen`s novels share with the texts of existential philosophers and writers the topic of the problems of human existence and of the situation of man in the historic reality of the modern times.

This doctoral thesis places Koeppen`s novels, as novels belonging to the literary modernism, into the thematic context of the reflexion of modernity. It is based on the foundation that Koeppen`s novels depict the phenomena of the rationalistic modernity and of the modern consciousness with a critical intention. As follows, it deals with the selected themes of Koeppen`s novels such as the lack of meaning, the loss of utopia and the crisis of the individual in the modern era. In the context of modernity, also the melancholy of Koeppen`s protagonists is being interpreted which has, apart from other things, a connection with their dissatisfaction of the modern world and their reflection of the metaphysical homelessness of the modern man. The first part of the doctoral thesis is concluded by a chapter dealing with the topic of the modern woman.

The second part of the doctoral thesis examines how the novels of Wolfgang Koeppen work with the elements of the existentialist discourse. This intention corresponds with the thesis of Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann which says that literature is a polyvalent system which enables various assignments. Koeppen`s narrative texts can obviously be contextualized in the broader cultural complex of the existentialist discourse.

In Koeppen`s postwar trilogy the reflection of World War II, of the critical symptoms of the postwar time, and the insecurity of the modern man through the existentialist discourse gains the central meaning. In all three novels there is the „experience of the historicity“ articulated, which is the central category of the thinking of Jean-Paul Sartre. The affinity of Koeppen`s texts to the existentialist discourse is exemplified by the concepts taken from this discourse, similar pictures of the world and analogue reflections. Clearly existentialist are the topics of plunging into existence and the time basis of existence, self-realisation and self-loss, solidarity and commitment, absurdity, the revolt and the boundary situations. In Koeppen`s novels we can find explicit references to Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger and to the
postulate of the nothingness by Jean-Paul Sartre. The novel *The Hothouse* shows intertextual allusions to the novel *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre. With the texts of Søren Kierkegaard, Koeppen’s novels are combined through the depiction of the problems of despair, the aesthetic, ethical and religious existence; with the texts of Jaspers, Marcel and Heidegger, Koeppen’s narrator shares a critical view of the modernity, the distrust of the technic and on the culture industry. As in the texts of Sartre, Camus and the existential thinker Jean Améry Wolfgang, Koeppen’s novels introduce the motif of suicide, which the dissertation solves in connection with the questions of the determination and freedom of human individuals.