

Jansi Rani PhD Thesis Evaluation Report

Title: *Toward a Radical Anthropology: An analysis of Walker Percy's Nonfiction*

Name of the candidate: S.S. Jansi Rani (Ref. No. 3171)

“Southernist” Walker Percy, widely known for his existential and philosophical novels, is considered one of the major writers of the postmodern America. Although, his fiction has drawn thousands of readers, his endeavor in non-fiction has provoked great controversy.

PhD candidate Jansi Rani explores Percy's theory of language, his theory of man and his theory of the speaking man and provides satisfactory arguments in order to prove that Percy's theories could lead to a shift toward a radical anthropology.

In the first chapter, the candidate discusses Percy's preoccupation with human communication, his unique talent as a writer and refers to the limited acknowledgement of his achievements as an essayist.

In the second chapter, the candidate describes the 'Delta Phenomenon' which is Percy's theory of language based on semiotics explaining and consolidating his view of language.

The third chapter, titled 'The Helen Keller phenomenon: Percy's theory of man' describes Percy's effort to provide and justify a new theory of man underlining the fact that the discovery of language by man is what really makes him human. The candidate has to be appreciated for explaining the theory explicitly based on Percy's essays. This is perhaps the best chapter of the thesis.

In the fourth chapter, containing also thought-provoking philosophical underpinnings, titled 'The Homo Symbolificus', the candidate analyses in depth Percy's theory of speaking man which aims to prove that the assertory act of symbolization can lead to a radical anthropology.

The concluding chapter refers to Percy's achievements as a writer, his contribution to the American literature while pointing out

the controversy caused by his views expressed on his essays concerning language. The candidate emphasizes the fact that studies on Percy's non-fiction have been incomplete and successfully proves that there is a need for reinterpretation of Percy's essays.

A convincing, well-written study by Jansi Rani, the thesis has to be commended for the logical arguments it contains and the supporting citations. There is no point in arguing, perhaps, against Percy's linguistic ideas, or to argue in favour or against Chomsky. This would lead us too far. The candidate has done her work satisfactorily.

Some critical remarks, however, seem to be indispensable:

p. 39: Saussure is much more than just "the founder of the European School of Semiotics" as the Candidate argues. Indeed, he is regarded more as the founder of modern structural linguistics, the initiator of the diachronic vs. synchronic dimensions, and one would prefer to speak about his "theory of the linguistic sign" rather than of that of "Semiotics".

p. 146: isn't too bold to write about "a milestone in the history of thought"? W. Percy, is not as familiar to the linguist as the thesis would suggest.

pp. 209-210: between these two pages a third one seems to have been lost. P. 209 ends with "Crowley et al. 1989", and p. 210 continues with "Gretlund et al. 1991". I do not find "Fromm", cited on p. 117.

These remarks don't, however, disparage the worth of the study. Based on its convincing manner and valid conclusions, it is recommended for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature.

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