In Ms. Nekvasilová's words, “the thesis aims for an explanation of the significance of the spatial as well the temporal setting in the selected stories by Edgar Allan Poe” (25). To this end, it employs Daniela Hodrová’s concept of a place with a secret and analyzes several well-known stories by Poe, namely “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Black Cat,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “Eleonora,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Masque of the Red Death,” “The Oval Portrait,” “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “Ligeia.”

The first chapter introduces Romanticism and Gothic fiction, Poe's oeuvre and the theories that inform the thesis. While the section “Edgar Allan Poe in Context” is relatively detailed and serves its purpose, “Setting as a [L]iterary [E]lement” attempts to quickly cover the work of too many theorists too quickly. (From these, only Hodrová is consistently employed later; Bakhtin is briefly mentioned three times and Lotman with Bachelard are not featured again until the Conclusion.) In other words, the work of the featured theorists could have been engaged with more thoroughly here as well as throughout the thesis.

The subsequent reading of Poe's stories is interesting and it is supported by a great amount of secondary sources; however, it is not always clear. To begin with, a large part of the thesis is focused on characters rather than on spacial and temporal setting of Poe's stories; it is argued that “the spatial setting in Poe’s tales proves to be undeniably linked to the characters who inhabit it” (64). Notwithstanding, the motivation for this movement from setting to character is not clear to me. A number of arguments seem puzzling as well. For example, the supposed difference between madness (potentially positive) and perverseness (negative) is not sufficiently explained here (on what basis is the distinction drawn?); the conclusion of the second chapter which reads “Poe’s portrayal of madness possibly suggests that without the influence of drugs or perverseness, the characters can perhaps benefit from their insane mind” (32) is confusing. Similarly, the statement “[i]t needs to be noted that while prison was historically perceived as a profane, low place, its comprehension gradually changed, and a prison was thence understood as a place of meditation and contemplation on life” (42), which is attributed to Hodrová, needs further explanation. On the other hand, sections such as “Text as a Labyrinth” and “Rooms” are well done.

The thesis is well written, leaving aside several language and stylistic errors (e.g. “Nejprve jsou díla Edgar Allan Poea a Daniely Hodrové zařazeni do kontextu” [5], “are be observed with an attempt to explore how does the spatial setting in them correspond to the concept of ‘a place with a secret’” [6], “Poe’s tales depict the descend under earth” [41]). The English title of the thesis (“Setting in Poe’s Short Stories and Its Relationship to Characters”) does not really correspond well with the Czech title (“Umístění děje v povídkách Edgara Allana Poea a jeho vztah k postavám”)—could Ms. Nekvasilová suggest an alternative?

Having said the above, my overall impression is that Ms. Nekvasilová engages with Poe's stories in an interesting and rich manner. Despite many loose ends, her thesis is a praiseworthy attempt to explore complex questions.

Proposed grade: 2 (velmi dobře) or 1 (výborně).

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