

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., thesis opponent

Teja Šosterič, BA

Labyrinths in Postmodernism: Danielewski, Pynchon, and Wallace

M.A. thesis evaluation

Thesis Supervisor: Docent Erik S. Roraback, D.Phil. (Oxon.)

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Ms. Šosterič's MA thesis explores the labyrinthine nature of three primary texts: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000). Various labyrinthine features of the novels, such as labyrinthine narrative, language, structure on the page, and labyrinths as a plot element are discussed, as are (participatory) choices readers need to make in navigating such narratives. The thesis also explores the relation of postmodern labyrinthine novels to contemporary understanding of society/material reality, and the reasons behind the shift to increasingly complex and more sinister multicursal labyrinths. In addition to the three novels, Ms. Šosterič briefly considers other media and other forms of labyrinthine narratives

The first chapter provides some background on the idea of the labyrinth in history and literature. Chapter II is a discussion of the labyrinthine characteristics of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*; Chapter III focuses on David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*; the fourth chapter, on Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. The fifth chapter looks at labyrinthine aspects of children's literature, TV, the internet, and other media. The concluding chapter focuses on the role of social criticism (or lack thereof) in postmodern labyrinthine works.

There is very little unpositive to say about Ms. Šosterič's work. Her thesis is an outstanding, highly readable commentary on a very important (and revealing) component of postmodernist (post)culture by an erudite young scholar. Her chapters throughout are replete with useful, accurate information and insightful commentary, whether on the general topic or on specific works within the genre. They are also of an evenly high quality; it is highly unusual for me not to be able to pick out a "favorite" chapter in a thesis; but in this one, they are uniformly outstanding.

The "negative" comments I am about to add should be viewed then, not as impugning any aspect of Ms. Šosterič's product, but simply as supplementary "friendly amendments." First, in addition to Ms. Šosterič's accurate comparison of her authors's work to Borges, I would also suggest at least passing consideration of comparisons to M.C. Escher, to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, to the "Before the Law" section of Kafka's *The Trial*, and to Robert Frost's eloquent and condensed portrait of the imposition of retrospective significance in "The Road Not Taken." I liked the connection of paranoia (in Pynchon's sense and otherwise) with labyrinthism, and I would value further development of that topic, as well as enhancement of the brief (but intriguing) mention of centerless or decentered, labyrinths as a metaphor for the anticlimax (or lack of climax) characteristic of labyrinthine/postmodern works. Finally, the quirk of an historian, I found it surprising that although Ms. Šosterič acknowledges that her order of presentation of the novels treated in the thesis is based on chronology, she nowhere explicitly mentions the dates of publication of the three.

Much of the preceding is, as I say, beside the point. Ms. Šosterič has written an MA thesis, based on extensive background research and impressive analysis, that is fully worthy of an evaluation of “1, vyborne.”

Thesis evaluation: “1, vyborne.”

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz.