

**OPPONENT'S REPORT**  
**BA THESIS**  
**H. P. Lovecraft's Fear of the Unknown and Unimaginable**  
**Mgr. Jan Oliva, LL.M.**

Drawing on selected stories and poems by H. P. Lovecraft but also referring to a number of other works of literature, criticism and philosophy, the thesis “focuses on determining the source of fear of the unknown which Lovecraft found to be the main cause of fear in his stories” (5). In the second chapter that follows the Introduction, Lovecraft's work is framed as a defensive response to modernity; we read that “[t]he new era brought previously unseen concepts such as the rise of industrialization and mechanization, scientific innovations and discoveries, and new humanistic theories that improved our daily lives” (9) but Lovecraft “did not welcome the abrupt disruption of the preciously preserved *status quo*, saw the change with distrust and had his own way as how to deal with the transformation” (9, original emphasis). The third chapter elaborates on Lovecraft's evocation of the fear of the cosmos but it also briefly considers his “ornate” language, several “Lovecraftian” films, religion and Burke's ideas about the sublime. In the fourth chapter, Jan Oliva discusses the genre of Lovecraft's stories (with reference to the work of Tzvetan Todorov and Noël Carr) but he also returns to the fear of the unknown. The Conclusion, rather than reflecting on the thesis or indicating possibilities for further research, rather inappropriately states that Lovecraft “was a sorry character, but there is no need to be sorry for him” (61).

The text is interesting though it is not easy to follow as there is little discernible development; instead different ideas are often presented one after another without being clearly connected, e.g. when in the fourth chapter, Oliva switches from discussing Lovecraft's language to brief remarks about “Lovecraftian” films. Perhaps a more systematic approach to fewer issues would have been better. One such issue that could have been developed further is the very idea of the fear of the unknown. The first chapter draws attention to Lovecraft's distrust of modernity so what produces fear here is the absence of the known—the disappearance of the New England tradition, Lovecraft's racist fears of “the degeneration of the old Anglo-Saxon families” (15), etc. In Oliva's view, is it possible to fear “the unknown”? Or is it the absence of the known? And what about Freud's idea of the “unheimlich,” is there a way to read Lovecraft's stories through that theory? Then, to mention another issue, there is the idea that

[f]antastic literature was omitted and neglected throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the literary critics and the modernists were no different. Ursula K. Le Guin even blames the movement (together with Marxists and others) for backgrounding the fantastic literature and favouring realism. [...] The position of man is also a defining point for Le Guin who notes that the “realistic fiction is drawn towards anthropocentrism, fantasy away from it.” (16)

Could the candidate discuss Le Guin's text here in detail? Would he agree with her observations?

Proposed grade: velmi dobře (2) or dobře (3)

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