

**Supervisor's report on B.A. thesis by Tereza Ottová:
"Nomina nuda tenemus: Postmodernist Method in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*"**

In her thesis, Tereza Ottová analyzes Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, explicating the features and literary techniques that make it a postmodern novel. Ultimately, the thesis argues that Nabokov's utilization of destabilizing textual elements and stylistic tools allowed him to create a confounding, endlessly interpretable novel, a kind of textual riddle or puzzle. The thesis also argues that these key elements of Nabokov's postmodernist method make the novel a key example of that literary genre or movement.

Nabokov is known as a postmodernist novelist par excellence as well as a stylistic master, and *Pale Fire* is widely considered one of his most intricate works. Tereza's close readings, research and exegesis help her elucidate key elements of Nabokov's writing. While she does not attempt to provide or promote a specific interpretation of the novel, her explication of its indeterminacy and refusal of singular interpretations opens up interesting readings of the book that are both comprehensive and authoritative.

The thesis contains an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. Chapter I argues that *Pale Fire* both parodies and destabilizes the traditional novel form. Focusing on the book's inclusion of academic apparatus and an unreliable narrator, the chapter illustrates the clearest ways that *Pale Fire* subverts traditional expectations for the novel.

Chapter II develops the theme of the novel's instability through an examination of several central characters. This chapter shows how characters including Charles Kinbote, Botkin and Charles II cannot be clearly separated or defined, causing a lack of clarity and an inability to distinguish one character from another — an element that goes against traditional character-driven plots in fiction.

Chapter III examines the novel's use of symbols and motifs. This chapter shows the multiplicity of symbols in the novel, many of which seem to allude to or echo one another to no clearly discernible end in terms of singular interpretation. The instability of these symbols in the book is used as another example of how *Pale Fire* destabilizes the novel.

The conclusion of the thesis provides an overview of the preceding chapters, arguing that the content and stylistic elements of *Pale Fire* examined in the thesis contribute to the book's contradictory ambiguity and constitute keystones in the novel's postmodern construction.

This was a somewhat challenging thesis to supervise. Due to the Coronavirus, Tereza and I were not able to meet in person to discuss her thesis, but she worked well independently, though she was not able to keep to the schedule we initially devised, which led to some frustration and rushed editing. Throughout the process, however, Tereza was diligent and, once the contours of the argument were clarified, focused on improving and completing the thesis.

Tereza is engaging with the novel on a high level and her command of written English is admirable, but — as we discussed — her studies at the law faculty have conditioned her to a certain style and structure of writing and argument that are not altogether usefully applicable to literary criticism. Her writing has a tendency toward abstraction and initially utilized structural elements that are more germane to legal writing. But, having witnessed Tereza's willingness to edit and rework her prose, I haven't taken these stylistic elements too significantly into account in my final assessment of the thesis.

In light of the above comments, I have three questions to pose:

- 1) How would you summarize the key postmodernist elements of the novel that contribute to its instability?
- 2) What might be the purpose of writing a novel that cannot be interpreted with any singular clarity?
- 3) What is the relationship, in your opinion, between postmodernism and formal innovation in 20th century Anglophone fiction?

I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA, PhD
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