

Ms. Holečková's M.A. thesis – review written by the opponent

Ms. Zuzana Holečková's M.A. thesis, **Moving the Frontier of Conscience: Representations of Animal Ethics in Selected Works of Contemporary Anglophone Literature**, is, in my humble opinion, a groundbreaking work in the Czech literary context (admittedly, as it is seen in the Czech abstract, we even do not have an equivalent for the term „animal studies“). As far as I can recall, even though the novels *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* and *Under the Skin* were translated, there has been minimal or virtually no discussion pertaining to literary animal studies in our country. At the same time, the theme is obviously of huge contemporary interest that should go well beyond the limits of the universities. My role, though, is to judge the merits of the submitted thesis in the given setting.

First, the thesis is truly interdisciplinary, relying on the relevant philosophical and ethical theories. Here, Ms. Holečková was able to historically outline (Kant, Bentham, Descartes, Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida etc.) what she needed for her subsequent literary analysis, devoted to the carefully selected primary sources from the 21st century. While I see the merit of that approach, I cannot help but ask whether she could have at least pointed out some earlier (preferably, but not necessarily anglophone) titles – such as Franz Kafka's „A Report to an Academy“ mentioned several times in her study. Is it perhaps a short story that might be re-interpreted in line with her main argument?

Having said that, I have to stress that I appreciated Ms. Holečková's focus and clear structure, namely the organization of chapters 2, 3 and 4. Going from mental boundaries to physical boundaries and finally literary boundaries made perfect sense to me, and the analysis provided was always very persuasive, yet sensitive. The only detail I did not quite get is the allusion to I.B.Singer's short story „A Friend of Kafka“ on p. 44 – is it her own observation, and could Ms. Holečková explain its importance during the oral defense?

The last but one (truly marginal) remark will be devoted to Ms. Holečková's style. While her command of academic English must be applauded, perhaps she could get rid of those many „however“ – either cross them out entirely, or replace them with more specific words, clarifying the connections in between the individual sentences/thoughts.

And the concluding note regarding possibilities for further research. There is also *The Overstory*, a fairly recent novel by Richard Powers,

discussing among other things the trees and their place in our world. Might that be something that could develop her present argument, or is it pushing the above mentioned boundaries way too much?

This being the case, I am suggesting the following grade: výborně/excellent. In addition, I believe that this thesis should be seriously considered for the Mathesius Award.

Dr. Hana Ulmanová

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