



FACULTY OF ARTS  
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**Supervisor's Report:**

**Bc. Hana Farniková, "Haunted by the New Woman," MA thesis**

This thesis explores the ways late nineteenth century Gothic fiction transmits anxieties and contradictory impressions of women's roles at a time of considerable social transformation and debate. As Ms Farniková notes "The Gothic has ever since its birth been a vehicle for difficult political and social issues such as racism, slavery, colonialism, religious turmoil, sexually transmitted diseases, and other geographic and cultural clashes." (p. 7) While the pleasures of the Gothic genre are evergreen, its role in indirectly reflecting on the socio-political dynamics of its period(s) remains, as Ms Farniková's thesis convincingly demonstrates, a rewarding space of investigation. The resurgence of the Gothic at the fin-de-siècle offers insights into the mixed feelings concerning social transformation and, in particular, shifts in gender roles. Ms Farniková uses Chris Baldick's reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as "a myth for a new age" (p.7), with its violent and ambivalent energies of recreation, as a springboard to consider how the monster of fin-de-siècle Gothic channels gendered fears and concerns. She argues that "[t]he monstrous metamorphosis of the literary woman is caused by the culmination of the gender crisis" (p.14) in the late Victorian period. Ms Farniková's decision to focus her project on the figures of the vampire and the ghost serves to open a productive exploration of distorted temporalities and disrupted 'natures'.

The plan of development and key areas to be pursued are communicated clearly and in detail, and the structure of the work is logical with engaging chapter and subchapter headings. Chapter 2 provides an informative overview of woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and key tropes: the angel in the house, the madwoman in the attic and, finally, the New Woman. Ms Farniková does a good job synthesising many various materials here, touching on Ruskin and Saville, as well as acknowledging the impact of the shifts in attitudes to education. Via Woolf, Gilbert and Gubar, the mechanics of the angel trope are unpacked as are the ways it alters as the century progresses. The discussion of Tennyson's "The Princess" is buttressed by Showalter's arguments from *The Sexual Anarchy* concerning the effacing of behavioural gender codes, and Nina Auerbach's work on the fallen woman. The extent of the critical and social ground covered in the chapter means that at times deeper context is slightly wanting (especially regarding the madwoman and the witch), however the chapter coheres well and finishes on a strong analysis of the New Woman. This material is well wrought with some fine insights into the Gothic inflection of the rhetoric of some 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist campaigners (see p. 29-30). The status of the New Woman figure as both a receptacle for positive and negative attitudes is convincingly established by the chapter's conclusion.



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Chapter 3 focuses on monstrosity, in particular the legacies of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Ms Farniková begins with a perceptive synthesis of views from Moretti and Baldick in order to affirm the mythic status of the monster figure in modern narratives. She pays careful, and necessary, attention to the contrasts between *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*. Baldick's emphasis on the etymology of monster as showing – *monstre* – leads to a productive discussion of what monsters might show or reveal. Morretti distinguishes the ancient from the modern monster on the basis of distorted temporality – “The modern monsters [he suggests] threaten to live forever, and to conquer the world.” (p.33). As Ms Farniková explains this future oriented subversion of social norms is inevitably bound to women's roles. The terror embedded in *Frankenstein* and in *Dracula* is intimately entangled with the disruption of gender roles and maternal bonds, and by extension with a disturbance of social reproduction.

Chapter 4 pursues these ideas in relation to the figure of the vampire in Victorian Gothic literature. It begins with a precis of the vampire character and some useful contrast points between Varney the Vampyre, *Dracula* and the female vampires of Keats's “Lamia” and LeFanu's *Carmilla*. She argues that what the female vampire seeks is a connection with her victim. While Auerbach reads this tendency as indicative of women's continued lack of power, Ms Farniková usefully points out how in LeFanu's text there is some evidence to the contrary. Throughout her detailed discussion of *Carmilla*, Ms Farniková underscores the hazards, but also the force, of certain powerful female bonds that implicitly threaten patriarchal structures. By contrast, in *Dracula* Stoker renders the female vampire more overtly predatory and gender inversions as symptomatic of weakness or monstrosity. Ms Farniková develops some fine analysis of Lucy Westenra and the contagion she embodies (p. 48-49), that poses a danger analogous to the spread of feminist ideas. These better-known texts are usefully counterpointed with Florence Marryat's *Blood of the Vampire*, whose protagonist Harriet Brandt bears many features of the New Woman yet is deemed “unfit to live” by society and finally succumbs to the same view herself.

The last main chapter considers ghost figures. The shifts in the characteristics of the literary ghost are surveyed here. Ms Farniková explains how the revenant accrues a dangerous agency from 1850s on that might be attributed to the rising popularity of spiritualism. This means, she contends, that the revenant gains a new resonance and becomes one of the central figures of the female Gothic. In-betweenness or liminality, and the bending of time are important aspects of the spectre in literature of this period. The chapter elaborates these points in close readings of Vernon Lee's *Hauntings* and her theories of aesthetic empathy, and Henry James *The Turn of the Screw*. There are some good points here, but of all the chapters the connection to the New Woman seems weakest at this point.

I would suggest only a couple of questions to prompt further discussion at the defence:



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- You mention on several occasions that the New Woman was a journalistic phenomenon – could you elaborate on this? Are there any other sources for this phenomenon?
- Could you explain more fully the significance or role of the New Woman figure in the works by Vernon Lee and Henry James? As this seems to be the thinnest point of connection to your overall argument it would be good to hear more on what inspired your choices of primary texts.

Overall, as a piece of scholarship, the thesis identifies its key concerns with clarity; it is logically structured and consistently developed in relation to existing resources. Ms Farniková's research shows strong initiative and critical judgement while the use of secondary sources is strategic and informed. A range of relevant complex ideas is investigated and integrated with focused close reading of the selected primary materials. Sources are not only appropriately cited, but actively engaged with throughout. The stylistic register of the work is generally apt, if slightly informal in places. Nevertheless, the thesis is articulate and linguistically nuanced. Presentation and formatting show a meticulous attention to detail. Throughout the process of composition and revision Ms Farniková has demonstrated a capacity to work effectively and develop her ideas both on her own initiative and in response to feedback in a sensitive, productive way.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "excellent" / 1.

20.7.2022

Doc. Clare Wallace, PhD