

Bc. Hana Farniková

'Haunted by the New Woman'

MA thesis

Opponent's Report

The MA thesis sets out to explore the development of late Victorian Gothic narratives with focus on the influence and literary implications of the New-Woman phenomenon therein. The thesis is well grounded, written in a confident style, engaging in a series of complex critical discussions, and successfully meets the formal requirements of the required academic level overall. The selection of secondary material is extensive and used in a relevant manner, though it at times leaves space for potential further discussion, hinting at unexplored avenues of enquiry.

One of the minor drawbacks of the argument is a tendency to favour compound generalisations, e.g. p. 35: 'The woman, unless she is a monster herself, can generally be argued to be an innocent. In the older narratives, the perfect heroine would be threatened by the monster and in need of a rescue from the dashing hero, who would later win her favour.' What are these 'older narratives'? If 'older' means medieval, can medieval literature simply be reduced to the chivalric code narratives featuring the dichotomy of submissive women and monsters? In the Romantic context, potentially of interest to this thesis at least in passing, how do Keats's *Lamia* (or Coleridge's *Geraldine*) fit into this, beyond the cursory note on the former on p. 38 and p. 39? While a certain degree of rhetorical shorthand is necessary to build up the thesis overall, it is somewhat puzzling that these are employed across the board without further reflection. Equally, at the end of the candidate's discussion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, there is no critical perspective on the gender implications of the novels' divergent sense of closure. The topic of abortive creative ambition would be one to follow more closely here, perhaps. On another critical note, any 'history' of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century vampire should at least mention Polidori's text and Byron's fragmentary tale.

However, it is worth noting that the candidate has worked studiously while discussing the selected texts to produce a critical reading of the gender issues arising. The thesis certainly shows knowledge, understanding, and considerable potential – the conclusion sums up the thesis in a brief review, in a series of rounded points.

On the formal level, the thesis is well written, barring occasional minor stylistic and grammatical lapses throughout, the latter mostly related to articles, specifically the overuse of the

definite article (e.g. p. 21: ‘made the divorce more accessible’; p. 37: ‘The preoccupation with the female sexuality’). There are also some stray redundant commas (e.g. p. 14: ‘In 1865, John Ruskin, famously formulated [...]’). The Czech abstract contains some stylistic quandaries (e.g. ‘posednutá žena’) and minor spelling errors, (e.g. ‘pozdně Viktoriánského gotického románu’; ‘Gotický román’) and a few redundant commas, possibly owing to a hasty translation from the English original. Formatting is mostly in order throughout, with only a few minor issues not worth noting here. The bibliography is extensive and well-formatted.

I have a question for the candidate to respond to during the viva voce examination, drawing on some of the issues raised throughout the thesis: in what ways can we still speak about the enduring trope of the empowered woman as monstrous in the Western literary tradition?

To conclude, I am happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of ‘excellent’ (výborně).

22 August 2022

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.