



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

### Opponent's Report:

#### Michal Macura, "The Doppelgänger in Fin-de-Siècle Victorian Literature," MA thesis

The chosen topic of this thesis is a tantalising one and has clearly been of interest to a number of scholars, in particular Linda Dryden. Notably, the title of Mr Macura's work implicitly promises a both a conceptual refinement and an extension of *Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells*. While there is some fine material here, neither promise is really fulfilled to the extent that it might be. The project is not built around a debatable hypothesis but instead tends towards an assemblage of observations loosely arranged around a pair of authors—Stevenson and to a lesser extent Wilde. The closest we come to an argument is that Stevenson and Wilde problematise Victorian ideas of the individual and "argue for harmony between all components of personality" (79). This seems quite a debatable point and deserves more discussion. The thesis without doubt attains a decent level of scholarship, however I think a great deal more might have been done to develop the enquiry in depth.

With regard to the structure and development of the work the following are the main points that I would highlight:

1. The table of contents is rather uneven, foreshadowing the loose structure of the core chapters. Where are the subheadings for chapters 2 and 3?
2. Chapter 1 provides some convincing historical detail to frame the enquiry. There are good points on urban development, the discourse around degeneration and the re-energising of the Gothic genre. Discussion of the concept of the individual is apt and opens many critical possibilities. Given this strong beginning, it is a shame that the introductory chapter forgets to provide a clear and forthright description of the objectives and the horizons of the project. Its subject matter is implied, but vague. Some specific information on which fin-de-siècle authors have been selected and why is seriously wanting, after all few would claim that the work of two authors could stand for a whole era of literary production. Another flaw here is the fact that major theories and thinkers are mentioned only via secondary sources. At MA level I would expect a researcher to attempt to engage directly with key sources (for instance John Stuart Mill's work is repeatedly cited but only through another secondary text). Additionally when it comes to its core term, the doppelgänger, the thesis seems dependent on just one source by Andrew J. Webber. By the end of the chapter there is a nagging sense that for all its potential the term doppelgänger as it is defined through Webber, may work better for Stevenson than Wilde. (It is also peculiar that in the historical overview no mention is made of E.A. Poe – an author who explicitly used the doppelgänger in his work).
3. Chapters 2 and 3 present some useful observations and commendably attempt to discuss less well-known works by both authors. The analysis is often meandering and the key term melts away amid other details – it is here that a few well-chosen



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

subheadings could have reined in the drift. The discussion of Wilde is much closer allied to a close examination of plot, in particular that of *Dorian Gray*, than the discussion of Stevenson.

A number of questions present themselves and might be further discussed at the defence.

1. Why choose the term *doppelgänger* specifically? Why not double, as several of the critical sources do? What does *doppelgänger* offer that double does not?
2. Since your title speaks broadly of Victorian literature, what other authors might have been of relevance here?
3. In what ways might Stevenson and Wilde's status as non-English writers be of significance?
4. If, according to Webber, the *doppelgänger* is an active performance of the split self, could you elaborate further on the usefulness of the concept in *The Master at Ballintrae* and *Dorian Gray*?

Overall, the thesis showcases adequate research on Stevenson. It is less thorough with regard to Wilde, about whom a great deal more has been written. The contextual material is appropriate, lucid and suggests that the author can identify currents of discourse with some confidence. Sources are primarily used descriptively with little sense of debate or original intervention. The central ideas and concepts are inherited, but the collage of facts and observations is interesting and coherent. The thesis is well written, showcasing a strong command of the language and fluidity of expression. The format is mostly correct; footnotes and bibliographical entries have minor errors.

I would propose to grade the work "very good" 2 depending on the result of the defence.

4.9.2013

Doc. Clare Wallace, PhD