

## **Aleš Kuna: McCarthy's apocalyptic *The Road*: a minimalist and allegorical reading Opponent's Report on BA Thesis**

The thesis is an interesting attempt to interpret one of the key works of Cormac McCarthy in diverse literary and cultural traditions and contexts. Based on a number of recent secondary sources, it addresses a number of major topics of McCarthy's fiction, tracing their roots in American literary tradition, Southern literature as well as in the common heritage of literary genres (romance, pastoral, dystopia), and philosophical or religious thought. The unusual feature of the thesis is its range (86 pp.), which is the effect of a detailed nature of a number of analyses and interpretations of McCarthy's fiction and even some aesthetic problems (minimalism). On the other hand, the length of the text also causes problems, such as insufficient editing leading to vague and even erroneous formulations and typos ("T.S.Elliot", "Allan Tate", "Johan" instead of "Jonah"). It can be added that the thesis would benefit from reading the works of Czech Americanists, e.g. prof. Michal Peprník's recent book on Cooper and historical romances.

Concerning the post-apocalyptic genre, the thesis should more consistently focus on the divergence of *The Road* from thematic and symbolic patterns of the Christian Apocalypse and see it in the context of the transformation of these patterns in American Apocalypticism. From this point of view, I am not quite convinced of the relevance of the symbol of the Wandering Jew for the Apocalyptic tradition. On the other hand: a close examination of Judge Holden's function as an Apocalyptic (or Anti-Apocalyptic?) symbolic figure in *The Blood Meridian* would be definitely help. Nonetheless, the third chapter of the thesis brings a very stimulating reading of *The Road* in the context of the allegory in the Book of Revelation, thus re-focusing the interpretation to the major philosophical and religious issue of McCarthy's fiction, namely the indeterminacy of allegorical accounts of the end of the world.

Chapter 4 is a very interesting contribution to the interpretation of McCarthy's style; however, it lacks more detailed research of rhythmical patterns in McCarthy's fiction (especially in *The Bloody Meridian*). It may also be argued that the use of figurative language in McCarthy's prose goes against the minimalist tendencies of its style.

On the whole, Kuna's work in many respects transcends the requirements on BA theses and could be successfully defended as MA thesis. My chief problem with its present form is a rather imperfect and hasty nature of the introductory chapter. Hence a few questions referring to this chapter (and indirectly also to the rest of the thesis) for the defence:

1. The explanation of Steven Frye's use of the term "reactionary" (p. 11) to describe the literary (not political) features of McCarthy's work is rather vague. Does Frye contrast McCarthy with 'avant-garde' authors or does he have in mind his response to ideology, philosophy or religion? Can we interpret these features separately from McCarthy's political stance?
2. Judge Holden in *The Blood Meridian* definitely does not represent "mindless" violence (p. 12). Just on the contrary, his brutal violence is derives from his perverted philosophy.
3. Frye's description of McCarthy as an authentically American writer should be discussed critically, since McCarthy is, similar to Melville, also a fierce critic of American ideologies and political and social aspects taken for granted by most Americans.

4. 'Frontier romance' (p. 15): the selection of its authors, mentioning Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo before any Americans is rather surprising. Can the two mentioned authors be listed at all? George Dekker's book mentions them only generally as influences of the genre of romance.
5. Also, the relationship of 'frontier romance' to 'pastoral' (p. 16) should be explained using, e.g. Leo Marx's classical study *Machine in the Garden* and other sources. In contrast to the idealizing features of romance, modern pastoral often deals critically with social or environmental issues.
6. Can McCarthy's "universalism" (p. 16) be called simple, given its complex philosophical and religious roots. This statement would definitely need an explanation.
7. The link with minimalism (pp. 18-19) would have to be explored in some detail even in the introduction (and Chapter 4 could be shortened). Can the term be used consistently in relation to McCarthy, whose style is often an opposite of minimalism (e.g. in reproducing long anecdotes or folk narratives in *The Blood Meridian*)? Moreover, minimalism is a rather complex aesthetic phenomenon and I find very difficult connecting Hemingway's literary style with minimalist music. Some of these aspects are addressed in Chapter 4 but the introduction of the thesis should definitely include a discussion of the feasibility of such a wide aesthetic concept for the interpretation of McCarthy's novel.

Despite all these problems, Kuna's thesis definitely exceeds the standard of BA theses at our department. Therefore I propose the grade "**výborně**".

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