

## **Supervisor's Report on the BA Thesis "Mental Illness in the Works of Edgar Allan Poe" by Alena Hladká**

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The topic of the thesis is exciting and the author has endeavoured to trace and cover at least some of its relevant aspects, restricting her attention to Poe's short stories. The choice of the texts, ranging from the descriptions of obsessive and murderous madness to more subtle problems of Romantic doubles or Doppelgängers is more or less adequate, although one wonders whether some Poe's poetic compositions, for instance "The Haunted Palace", would not deserve equal attention.

The most important implication of the author's rather descriptive treatment of Poe's selected stories is the thematic resemblance of some stories with Poe's famous essay *Eureka*, making parallels between the creative play in fiction and the universe as "the plot of God". It is a pity that the author has not paid more attention to the ways the fictional analogues of God's "plot" are developed in Poe's stories, demonstrating the function of *Eureka* as a general reflection of Poe's creative approach to fiction. The only aspects of narratology discussed by the author are the relations of the narrator and individual characters, seen strictly in relation to the function of madness in the narrative.

Unfortunately, with one exception, the author does not explain Poe's representations of madness in the context of the perception and understanding of madness in contemporary America and Europe. It would be worthwhile finding out how Poe's fiction relates to the contemporary period when the control by means of surveillance and segmentation is flourishing, as demonstrated in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, and when the discourse of madness is often linked to the deployment of sexuality.

Finally, although the author has been reminded of the necessity to deal with Poe in the wider context of American Gothic, she was not able to explore the similarities or differences between Poe and his predecessors (Charles Brockden Brown) or some of his contemporaries, especially Nathaniel Hawthorne. As a result, the occasionally perspicacious reading of Poe's stories about madness cannot yield a wider, context-based interpretation of the interesting phenomena of American Romantic Gothic.

In spite of these deficiencies, I value the author's thorough approach to the thematic features of selected Poe's stories, supported by well-researched secondary sources. I recommend the thesis to the defence and propose to grade it "very good".

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