

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., thesis opponent  
Markéta Soukupová  
Shock and Awe: Deformities in Southern Gothic Short Stories of Flannery O'Connor,  
Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote  
M.A. thesis evaluation  
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Ms. Soukupová's thesis traces the phenomenon of American Southern Gothic literature in relation to its most integral part: exaggerated monstrosity. Concentrating on selected short stories by Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, and Truman Capote, she argues that even though the prevalent distorted images employed by those authors are usually associated with aesthetic decadence, their moral symbolism should not be neglected. Ms. Soukupová also insists that, as she maintains, since the Gothic tradition is congruent with the unconscious and irrational, insufficient psychological (and particularly psychoanalytical) perspective imposes unhelpful limitations on Southern studies. Drawing on this approach, Ms. Soukupová's thesis investigates the role of deformities from a distinctively American angle: in connection not so much to external conditions as to individual consciousness. More than literary historical concerns arising within the context of the American South (to which she by no means does injustice), the main aim of the thesis, she posits, is rather to examine the nature of individual writers' distortions and portrayals of distortion, and of their psychological and aesthetic links to the trauma of the Southern past. This undertaking, she approaches, by her own affirmation, from an interdisciplinary point of view, in line with her conception of Southern studies as beneficially incorporating the historical, literary, and psychological fields, among others. In particular, Ms. Soukupová reflects this cross-disciplinary approach by generous and helpful application of Freudian insights and interpretations.

The thesis is exceptionally thoughtful—especially in its distinction between the European Gothic and American Gothic genres, and in its relation of Southern sensibilities to the distinctive regional subspecies of the American genre—and Ms. Soukupová's analysis of three very challenging authors is consistently acute and well-informed, regularly drawing on commentary by valuable critics and intelligently comparing their insights to her own. Her efforts to relate the three writers to each other, stylistically, historically, and psychologically, are laudable, and, I believe, both successful and illuminating. The essay, in short, manages to do very competently what it sets out to do, adding valuably to the knowledge of the reader and of the discipline(s) of which it constitutes a part.

That stipulated, I have several quibbles, which, while not detracting from my very positive evaluation of the work, I think are worth the author's consideration going forward. They are:

1) I believe that the influence of the Southern *past*, with all of its admittedly Gothic complications, is greatly exaggerated by Ms. Soukupová and, to be fair, by many other commentators. While the Southern past is certainly a shaper of the *mentalités* and psychologies of the Southern present (whether in 2020 or at times contemporary with the productions of the authors discussed), it is on their Southern *present* (with more than sufficient complications within itself) that these writers are focused, and on which, therefore, commentary on them should, I think, be focused. The fantasy world of the Lost Cause may have had some influence on the writers of Faulkner's and Margaret Mitchell's generation; but it had, for good or ill, much less relevance for their mid-twentieth-century counterparts.

2) Is there black Southern Gothic writing (whether called by that name or not)? Addition of a black perspective here, to complement white Southerners' reactions, would have been both constructive and instructive.

3) While the language (especially the vocabulary) employed in the thesis is very impressive, there are sufficient grammatical and syntactical problems—and, of course, the usual clumsiness with the definite article—that, were it to be used, in part or in full, in future, it would benefit from a rewriting, with appropriate advice on these issues.

Overall, Ms. Soukupová has produced a nuanced, and valuable M.A. undertaking. Because of its quality and grasp of the subject, I believe that Ms. Soukupová's thesis merits an evaluation of "1, vyborne."

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne."

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz).