



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

OPPONENT'S REPORT

M.A. THESIS

AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION

Beyond Horror: or, Exploring The Connections Between E. A. Poe's Writings and A. Hitchcock's Cinema **Iva Martináková**

This is a challenging text, in part because already in its introductory pages the candidate briskly moves her readers through the views on horror by Aristotle, Burke, Deleuze, Foucault, Freud, Kant, Kristeva, and Ricoeur, among others. In part, however, the difficulty stems from the lack of clear and systematic presentation. For example, at the beginning of the second chapter, which is a theoretical introduction to horror, Burke and Kant are introduced, then Kristeva is mentioned, but subsequently Kristeva's theory is applied to Poe and we digress to a discussion of Poe—and all that happens in one paragraph. This reoccurs for example at the beginning of subsection 2.2., where the first paragraph begins with a reference to Deleuze, continues with Rothman, but ends with a discussion of *The Birds*. Moreover, that entire subsection focuses on how film (Hitchcock's in particular) evokes horror, and it is not clearly connected to the previous one, which addresses horror in general terms. What new theoretical understanding of horror is presented here; how does it relate to the aforementioned theories of Burke and Kristeva?

My intention is not to invalidate the ambitious scope of the thesis (which, in fact, is among the reasons why I propose to grade it as excellent), but rather to ask for a more careful approach to these complex debates. Due to the speed with which we move through the various theories, the argument is not always convincing. For example, do Kristeva's concept of the abject and Burke's sublime indeed overlap? The thesis illustrates that perhaps they do when it comes to their overwhelming effect on the subject, but does not Burke's explanation for the existence of the sublime differ from Kristeva's explanation of the origin of the abject, which is repression (so for Kristeva the experience of horror is essentially backward-looking whereas for Burke it is transgressive)?

The thesis also repeatedly presents an essentialist view of human nature, e.g. through claims such as: horror "is a necessary component of the human psyche" (5); "the human, no matter how modern, still has not changed in its essence" (14); or "its [horror's] nature and effects seem to be linked to something very basic and essential in the make-up of the human mind, resulting in timeless, constant and reliable strategies and structures of evoking fear, awe and suspense, which have seen success for centuries" (24). Could the candidate perhaps think of arguments against this static and homogenizing view of human nature? (In fact, is not a psyche that does *not* feel horror one of the most "horrifying" subjects of fiction, Poe's including?)



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

In the third and the fourth chapters, which focus on the actual analysis, the candidate presents many interesting and perceptive arguments, although again, she could have approached the subject with more clarity. It would have helped, for example, to indicate when the subject under discussion is the *sense* of horror and when it is the *genre* of horror. Or, the argument regarding the movement beyond horror (p. 71) could have been elaborated upon. Is the use of the term “dystopia” appropriate here? And where is this trajectory beyond horror present in Melville?

However, the candidate does identify various aspects of Poe and Hitchcock’s horror-making strategies and she demonstrates an exceptional ability to analyse them. Moreover, the conclusion is very succinct. Consequently, on the whole, there is enough substantial analysis and ambition to grade the thesis as **excellent** (výborně), depending on the views of the supervisor and on the defense.

Pavla Veselá, PhD.
September 3, 2012