



FACULTY OF ARTS  
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**OPPONENT'S REPORT  
BA THESIS**

**Neither Old, Nor New: The Southern Belle Archetype in Lillian Hellman's *Birdie* from *The Little Foxes* and Tennessee Williams's *Blanche* from *A Streetcar Named Desire***  
Markéta Soukupová

Markéta Soukupová's "Neither Old, Nor New: The Southern Belle Archetype in Lillian Hellman's *Birdie* from *The Little Foxes* and Tennessee Williams's *Blanche* from *A Streetcar Named Desire*" aims to illustrate "how the cultural archetype of the Southern Belle served as a socially constructed norm enforcing women's passivity and submission to patriarchy" (18) and how "the notion of the Southern Belle [changed] in time – with *Birdie* portraying the post-Bellum South and *Blanche* the New South" (18). It is argued that although the "personality traits" of *Birdie* and *Blanche* "go against the traditional Southern Belle demeanour that dictates submissiveness, passivity and asexuality" (19), the two women continue being marked by what Ms. Soukupová calls elsewhere a "warped manner of thinking" (12). They prove Goodwyn Jones's point that the "image of the Southern Belle figure persists up till today [...] in both modern literature and also American culture" (54).

To start with the last argument, could Ms. Soukupová provide examples of recent works which feature "the Southern Belle figure"? Next, could she elucidate several unclear and problematic statements, such as: "There were the cold, individualistic, money-driven Yankees in the North to whom the aristocratic, non-materialistic Cavaliers in the South formed their genteel counterpart" (10) – is this what Ms. Soukupová believes was the reality? What does she mean by "the historical necessity to enforce enslaved labor" (11)? And by "[c]ontrary to the Southern gentlemen, whose innate superiority enabled them to operate within the same sphere throughout their lives, the gradual development of Southern womanhood exposes far more complexity of the traditional Southern lifestyle" (13)? Or, "as Burton asserts, where there is hospitality, there is always violence" (14-15)? Or, "[t]he principle of 'noblesse oblige' ceased to exclusively exist on its own and the sole means of, at least, partial survival for the nobility rested in mixing their blood with 'the inferior newcomers who bore Italian, Polish and Jewish names'" (25). Such and other statements are either erroneously formulated or they express unacceptable and undeveloped ideas. The defense must clarify these issues. Further, the discussion of an "archetype" and a "stereotype" is too brief for it to meaningfully elaborate on the difference. And so are the references to Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler in the Conclusion. On the other hand, the close-reading of *Blanche* and *Birdie* in chapter 4 is fairly substantial, although Ms. Soukupová could have also addressed their roles in the two plays, which differ in their endings – with *Alexandra* and *Addie* suggesting a more hopeful future than *Stanley* and *Stella*. Last but not least, there are frequent language errors in the thesis and the footnotes as well as the bibliography are not properly edited.

Proposed grade: Good (3) or Fail (4)

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