



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Posudek oponenta na bakalářskou práci Vladimíra Nováka

**“Grotesque, or Queer? Homosexual Characters in Tennessee Williams’s Selected Short Stories”**

The submitted BA thesis is a very useful contribution to Tennessee Williams studies (its focus on Williams’s fiction combined with an innovative approach to the representation of homosexuality is, I believe, fairly unique in the Czech context). Moreover, the thesis displays a very keen sense for logical organization and development of an argument. Linguistically, very few minor errors appear (articles, a few typos, economical instead of economic, etc.), otherwise language and style is fluent and quite appropriate. That is to say, that formally and in content, the text fully meets all the requirements for a bachelor thesis.

The question posed at the outset (i.e. are homosexual characters to be read as traditional Southern grotesque misfits or ought they rather be seen as displaying elements of what comes to be called “queerness”) is more than appropriately and persuasively answered by pointing out their overlapping of homophobic textual strategies and the deconstructions of queer theory. I appreciate the contextualization within the whole debate about homosexuality and the development of queer theory. Moreover, I find the specific readings of the selected short stories (whose selection is adequately explained) are highly nuanced and very sensitive to the text. (Especially, the parallels in the stories’ symbolism.)

I have only a couple of questions and requests for further explanation:

1. Can I receive a clearer distinction between the contemporary Southern Gothic and Southern Grotesque? Page 15 deals with this relation, yet seems to explain the difference more in terms of traditional (classical) Gothic novels versus the new Southern Grotesque; or in terms of Gothic villains (dealt with very generally – again the 18<sup>th</sup>-century context?) versus pitiful and compassion-arousing protagonists of the Southern Grotesque.
2. Page 25 mentions Shakespeare’s texts as examples of ambiguity in the presentation of male relationships. *The Sonnets* and *The Merchant of Venice* are meant as examples of a “homoerotic undertone present in Shakespeare’s work”. The word “homoeroticism” is used one more time on page 26. Yet, absolutely no distinction is made between terminological usage of these concepts: homosexuality, homoeroticism, and – we

could add another term coined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and relating to male bonding – homosocial.

3. According to some critics, especially Judith Butler, it is in parody, dressing in drag, for example, that the most effective way that traditional boundaries between the sexes might be confounded and reassembled. In her *Gender Trouble* Butler mentions also masquerade (taken over from Luce Irigaray, and even earlier used by Joan Rivers), and expands on the idea of performativity in *Bodies That Matter*. Could any of these notions be usefully applied to the stories by Williams? (To make the interconnection between the theoretical chapters and the analytical part even more explicit.)
4. Attention to the less known short stories of TW is highly appreciated – yet, could we get a link with the more famous examples of complicated male characters in his plays?

As mentioned above, I find the submitted thesis fully in keeping with the standards. I certainly **recommend it for defence** with the preliminary suggested grade of excellent (**výborně**).

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PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc. M.A.  
ÚALK  
Univerzita Karlova v Praze  
Fakulta filosofická