



POSUDEK OPONENTA DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: Český jazyk a literatura – Anglická a americká literatura

Název práce: The Strange Case of Don DeLillo, the Postmodernist Modernist

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Stručná charakteristika práce / Short characteristics of the thesis

The thesis examines the modernist and postmodernist elements in four novels by renowned American Author Don DeLillo. It begins with a theoretical discussion of postmodernism, distinguishing it from modernism, but also highlighting continuities across periods. This is followed by four chapters, each devoted to a different novel, starting with *White Noise* (1985) taken as “an exemplary postmodern novel” (p. 37), moving to the combination of modern sensitivity to language with a postmodern awareness of media in *Libra* (1988), and Joycean influences in *Underworld* (1997), and finally the break with postmodernist aesthetics in *Falling Man* (2007). The author concludes that over the years DeLillo’s writing has gradually moved away from ‘typical’ postmodernist poetics towards a more immediate engagement with reality and trauma.

Celkové zhodnocení / Overall assessment

This is an excellent thesis that demonstrates a high level of research and writing skills. The thesis shows an impressive knowledge of Don DeLillo’s writing and postmodern theories of literature, identity, history, and more. It is well-written and makes clear arguments that are based on a broad view of each novel’s aesthetic project on the one hand, and detailed reading of specific phrases, characters, and scenes on the other.

Among the rich thematics of this work, the treatment of history emerges as a major concern that DeLillo returns to again and again, treating it from various perspectives and standpoints. In a sense, his work is shown to contain an extended meditation on the impact of historical events and legacies on the individual. An issue that remains a pressing concern since the early 20th century to our current times.

Overall, the author persuasively shows not only that “DeLillo’s writing is first and foremost syncretic, and in being so, it is a singularity which does not fit the bill of either modernist or postmodernist fiction.” (p.21), as already suggested by some critics, but also that there is a gradual change that can be traced across the oeuvre. It would be interesting to discuss this trajectory which seems to go backwards, from postmodernism to modernism, also in the context of the more general trend in 21st century literature, away from irony and playfulness and towards more serious engagement with traumatic experiences and its implications.

While the author is evidently knowledgeable about postmodernist poetics, which is her main topic, the portrayal of modernism in the thesis leaves something to be desired. James Joyce and T.S. Eliot are constantly referenced as the exemplary modernist writers, and with good reason, but this should be complemented with a recognition of diversity



within modernism. For example, while Eliot laments fragmentation as waste (p.75), the dada artists mentioned on p. 76, to take just one example, took a different view.

A related issue is the use of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, presented as a naïve pursuit of direct experience, which is then opposed to Baudrillard's sophisticated analysis of the loss of originality. However, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* analyses the modern condition as premised precisely on the *loss of the aura* which he traces back to the 19th century in the *Arcades Project*. As such, the loss of aura should be seen as a continuity between modernism and postmodernism, differentiated more in their attitudes towards this loss. Although it is impossible to treat any theory with the full nuance it deserves within the scope of such a thesis, I do believe that a more serious engagement with Benjamin's media philosophy could be beneficial for this work.

Finally, it is always a dilemma whether to treat the theory separately or combine it with other discussions and perhaps there is no 'right' solution. And yet, I would like to suggest that given the theoretical focus of the thesis, it may have been better to distribute the discussion of postmodern theories across the chapters, elucidating the concepts used in the analysis of the novels in context to highlight the connections between the theoretical framework and the specific readings.

A few specific observations/ issues/ questions:

p.16: In the quote from Benjamin, the description of the concept of aura is omitted and replaced by an ellipsis, while the reasons for its loss are cited, but the whole quote is taken as a description of aura. The description of the concept on p.26 is better formulated.

p.27: The ritualistic activity of photography can be productively explained through Benjamin's conceptualisation of the aura as stemming from religious rituals (a kind of spirituality that is often present in DeLillo's writing).

p.44: Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* may be useful to further develop the connection between photography and death.

p. 49: It would be interesting to compare the material description of the texts in this novel to the books in the library in *The Great Gatsby* which the guests are shocked to find are not just decoration but contain actual texts.

p. 53: It is a small point, but describing parts of *Ulysses* as postmodernist is confusing without a clarification of what postmodernist characteristic is referred to here.

p.54: McHale's distinction of ontological vs. epistemological dominant seems highly relevant to your summary of the attitudes towards fragmentation and language in this chapter.

p. 62: Hayden White's work on narrative building in historiography may be relevant to DeLillo's discussion of history.

p.66: I do not quite agree that the cold war was absent from American consciousness. The first page of NYT which you include on p.59 shows that Bobby Thomason's homerun was not considered more important than the hydrogen bomb. Concerns about atomic annihilation and global war were a constant presence in the news media and creative work of the time.



p. 88: Avoiding the explicit name of the event can also be seen as a symptom of trauma which makes totalising the event under one name impossible. And a small suggestion: the Italian and German connections of Ernst Hechinger/ Martin Ridnour might also relate to the European left-wing terrorist groups Baader–Meinhof in Germany, and The Red Brigade in Italy.

p.91: Your distinction between epistemological and ontological mystery makes a lot of sense and can be very productive in looking at the conspiracies and mysteries which abound in postmodernism, beyond describing DeLillo's highly individual poetics.

Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: výborně

Datum

Podpis