



POSUDEK OPONENTA DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **nAAL - nCNAS**

Název práce: **Seizing the Past in the Novels of Julian Barnes with Regard to the Author's Narrative Techniques**

Autorka práce: **Bc. Karolína Češková**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D.**

Oponentka diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.**

Short characteristics of the thesis

Karolína Češková's MA thesis deals with the theme of the past in selected novels by the British author Julian Barnes (b. 1946). It discusses the treatment of the past in relation to the narrative techniques Barnes' employs. From this perspective, seven of Barnes' novels are analyzed in detail, focusing primarily on the postmodern features of his representation of the past and on the ways the narrative techniques used enhance these features.

Overall assessment

The thesis seems to be a result of a focused and hard work. The topic is very well chosen and clearly outlined – both the issues of the past and the question of the narrators are crucial for Barnes' novels and the examination of the connection between the two is a great MA thesis topic. The scope of the thesis in terms of the material analyzed is also quite impressive – the author covers in detail seven of Julian Barnes' novels, which she clearly knows well, and her examination touches on a number of areas and issues, while remaining focused on the main topic. This in itself is an achievement.

The thesis is clearly and logically structured and it is easy to follow the argument, the individual chapters are organized in a way that may not be completely intuitive at first sight (the novels are not discussed chronologically), but is well explained in the introduction and proves to make good sense. The topic of time is not an easy one, but the author does not let it overwhelm her: the decision to approach it through the prism of narrative techniques, and connect it to the use various narrative perspectives, proved a fortunate one and the analyses of the individual novels work very well.

The main points discussed in the thesis in relation to Barnes' representation of the past: history as fiction, skepticism about historical truth, multiplicity of perspectives



on the past (and in the past), the unreliability of memory, and the relationship between identity – both national and personal – to history/tradition and memory, are clearly argued and well-grounded in the texts of the individual novels, illustrated by well-chosen quotations from the texts.

While the work with the primary textual material is mostly confident and betrays a deep knowledge of the texts, I find the dealing with the critical and theoretical sources less confident and one that would benefit of some improvement. A sound conceptual framework grounded in some basic theoretical works is lacking – a thesis that is supposed to be based on narratology should make it clear (ideally at the beginning) which narratological approaches it is based on, define the basic concepts and strategies, etc. As it is, there is not a single explicit reference to a major narratological theory, sometimes an occasional term appears without being clearly referenced and explained (a typical example would be the sudden unexpected use of Genett's term "focalizer", p. 21, also on p. 82, without referencing Genett and without using the framework of his theory – which might prove quite helpful in connection with Barnes, in fact). This results in an overall terminological and methodological uncertainty and vagueness. Similarly, the complex issues of the representation of history in contemporary novel would benefit of some (even just very basic) support in some of the more general critical discussions of the problem – there are, of course, major scholarly works dealing explicitly with the treatment of history in postmodern literature to which the author of the thesis, quite appropriately, relates Barnes. These should have been used to create a basis of the research undertaken in the thesis.

This lack of support in authoritative critical sources seems to be one of the recurrent shortcomings of the thesis. A large number of the works cited are articles in minor university journals, MA (even BA) theses, un-peer-reviewed online articles (academia.edu), book reviews, etc. With the online space full of easily accessible academic and pseudo-academic texts, it is an important part of the students' work to learn to distinguish between the two and filter the dubious ones out. Another problematic way of working with sources is the use of "second-hand" citations of relevant sources that should have been cited directly: David Leon Higdon's chapter on Barnes' narrators (not a book, as it would seem from the italics used for the title) is cited second-hand from an article published by a minor Polish academic journal (p. 16), while a copy of the book – published by Palgrave Macmillan – is available from the National Library and, in fact, listed among the works cited. It is quite striking that when referring



to T. S. Eliot's concept of the past in his seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the author does not cite Eliot, but a BA thesis (not even an excellent one) written in Czech at the department of aesthetics at our faculty. These are just random examples of the author's awkwardness with sources, more could be added.

My last point will concern the style and the language of the thesis: the text reads well and seems to be flowing on with energy, the style is vivid and fresh while remaining essentially scholarly. However, while the English is on a very good level, too often I have come across errors –mostly in syntax (word order, awkward constructions sometimes bordering on incomprehensibility, long sentences which tend to lose coherence and sometimes sense, etc.) and in the use of articles (sometimes quite unnecessary). I believe the author herself would be able to correct many of these mistakes, but they are there (and they are not just a few) and as an opponent of the thesis I feel the duty to mention it.

Overall, Karolína Češková's work certainly meets all the requirements for an MA thesis and I have not hesitation in recommending it for a defense. There are some shortcomings that do not allow it to qualify for an excellent thesis in my view, but it certainly is a **very good** MA thesis.

Práci **doporučuji** k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **velmi dobře**

16. 1.2023

Datum

Podpis