

POSUDEK BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Jméno a příjmení studenta: Aneta Benáčková
Název bakalářské práce: Edgar Allen Poe's Arabesque: an Analysis of this Subgenre
Vedoucí bakalářské práce: PhDr. Christopher Koy, M.A., Ph.D.
Opponentka bakalářské práce: doc. PhDr. Kamila Vránková, Ph.D.

- I. Cíl práce a jeho naplnění: 1. Cíl práce byl stanoven a naplněn v souladu s tématem
- II. Struktura práce: 1. Logická, jasná a přehledná
- III. Práce s literaturou: 1. Výborná: zvoleny a použity vhodné prameny v patřičném rozsahu
- IV. Formální stránka: 1. Odpovídá všem stanoveným požadavkům
- VI. Jazyková úroveň práce: 2. Velmi dobrá
- VII. Náročnost zpracování tématu: 1. Velmi vysoká

Vyjádření vedoucího bakalářské práce:

This bachelor thesis treats a very famous author from the United States who had both difficulties and advantages in his youth: he was adopted after both of his parents died and he enjoyed an upbringing in wealth as well as a private high quality education at the primary and secondary levels (both in the UK and USA). Poe knew French, some German, Latin and ancient Greek and was well steeped in the finest European literatures. Poe's approach to literary fiction was highly original and inventive though he also knew and accordingly followed many European literary traditions in his fiction writing as well. Poe's treatment of horror employing the arabesque is highly unusual in American fiction.

Miss Benáčková decided to approach selected stories of this subgenre and has achieved a thoughtful examination in this thesis, showing how he expanded on romantic European traditions. He was also aware, as Miss Benáčková points out, of the developments of literary taste as well as the innovations of science (both medical and technical) during the infancy of the industrial revolution which were blended into some of Poe's fiction. Biographically, Poe had personal issues with alcohol, something which Miss Benáčková admits (p. 10) but shortly later strongly downplays if not refutes (p. 11) as well as minimizing alcohol's impact on fictional characters (p. 22). Likewise, Poe seems to have, like many other authors of this period, experimented with a few drugs. His horrible relationship with his father is legendary,

as well as his marriage with a 13-year-old cousin, which ended, like Poe's mother's life, in a slow agonizing death. Much of these experiences, it has been believed, had been inventively projected into his fiction, often in shocking ways: irrational hatred, revenge killings, destruction of age-old mansions and families.

Poe was accustomed in his early childhood and throughout his teenage years to an affluent lifestyle while most of his adulthood was a life of near abject poverty. Nevertheless, as an adult he wrote overwhelmingly of the well-to-do and even the aristocratic milieu as he suffered from debt and even occasional hunger. Romantic stories at any rate usually focused on the affluent or aristocracy residing in mysterious castles where some horror mystery may happen. Gothic horror was in vogue, especially in England and Germany. Miss Benáčeková writes her introduction well, but sometimes important issues lack sources. For example: which "experts" (first paragraph, p. 6) "debate whether Poe aspired to write in the Arabesque or if commercial requirements of convention in writing directed him to do so" – I would really appreciate knowing the participants of this debate (names of experts) who took one side or the other about this question, with a sourcing of their respective publication articulating a position, since this debate may well be understood as the very foundation of your thesis.

Miss Benáčeková of literary taste and "**Berenice**" is well argued, though the cause of this gentleman Edgar A. Poe appearing so distasteful – given his Southern gentleman education in private primary and secondary schools – is not really explained. Poe should have known Berenice was more than bizarre but revolting to people of taste. Did he manage this miscalculation as a sophisticated and calculated way to achieve his ambition of literary fame? Which was most important to him: principles or literary fame and (commercial) success? The answer as I read it from Miss Benáčeková was ambiguous at best. With regard to reprinting and republishing, Herman Melville solved that problem in his 1846 novel *Typee* (his very first novel) by publishing it first in London, and immediately taking a ship to USA with a modified title with some different subplot versions (to reduce the anger of evangelical Christians), both of which were published within a month, and both with secured payment contracts. If Poe considered a literary profession with the approach described by Miss Benáčeková intentionally, then he decisively kept himself in poverty.

Miss Benáčeková links Poe to E.T.A. Hoffmann. It would have been helpful to know (from the secondary source cited, Palmer Cobb) specifically which of Hoffmann's many works Poe had been influenced by, but none are named. Hoffmann has many musicians, lawyers and politicians as characters in his Gothic horror stories (Hoffmann had worked in these professions himself, as well as serving as a judge on the Berlin Supreme Court), and like Poe alcoholics populate Hoffmann's fiction, which certainly is something he biographically shared with Poe (like him Hoffmann died rather young, also in his 40s). Hoffmann wrote longer, convoluted plots compared to Poe, and gives the feeling of having been on drugs to compose such crazy plots. Poe is pedestrian by comparison: "Poe successfully commands the reader's attention and rewards them with cohesive essence" (p. 18).

The arabesque in the "**Black Cat**" analysis is marred by Miss Benáčeková veering into the personal relationship between the narrator/murderer and his victims; they are referred to too much for an arabesque analysis. However, the hanging of the cat (and doing that from a living tree) possibly symbolizing a wooden crucifix, not to mention of delicious image of "the axe in her brain" and the circularity of this violence which Miss Benáčeková beautifully writes of might have been further addressed and deepened. To be sure, there is no arabesque to be found in superstitions regarding black cats, and Miss Benáčeková dilutes her powerful analysis by embracing it. On the other hand, I would suggest Poe assigns the cat's name not by accident, for "Pluto" is the god of the underworld (and afterlife), and son of the god of

time, "Saturn." Time and space are inherent in both arabesque and the symbolic meaning of this black cat's name. Though the name "Pluto" does not appear in the title of this story, the animal does, so it might have been significant enough for Poe to compel us to interpret more about arabesque aspects regarding this special "divine" name.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" includes architecture concealing a corpse (under floorboards) WHICH EVERYONE WALKS ON. This arabesque aspect might be attended to. The audibility of a (dead?) heart within a home is also possibly arabesque since it beats to a rhythm which mirrors mathematical arabesque design; the eye, like the "Black Cat" story, is a possible arabesque fixation. It is thought-provoking that the rhythmic sound of the heart is emphasized rather than the spell of the corpse; smell emphasizes death but also never has a rhythm while a living beating heart does... This story's arabesque analysis by Miss Benáčeková is very well and persuasively written.

The descent into the catacombs is obviously very impactful in **"The Cask of Amontillado"** as well as the architecturally-altering production of the brick wall, relegating all sound (yells for help) and space (his "room") irrelevant for Fortunio's nonfuture. This story has magnificent arabesque terror which could have been a bit better analyzed. While Miss Benáčeková may minimize alcohol's impact on Poe's fiction, it is in point of fact only alcohol that motivates Fortunio to undertake this unpleasant trip to the netherworld (that he will permanently join) in the first place. Given Poe's near constant state of poverty, he may well have projected a revenge wish he entertained against some of his wealthier rivals into this story.

"The Masque of the Red Death" is Miss Benáčeková's masterpiece chapter. She covers it all. She presents the colors developing terror and architecture and everything arabesque perfectly. All I can write about this is "BRAVO!!!"

Rather than focusing on a contagious disease like in "Masque," Poe's (perhaps anti-Catholic or anti-Spain) horror story set during the Inquisition, **"The Pit and the Pendulum"** engages the reader by focusing on the arabesque element of interior space via biting (rats) and cutting (by a huge blade) or falling (down a deep precipice) as the means by which space may save or kill you. Tasting, smelling and hearing, and not merely seeing are put to great use in this story. Moving walls are especially an architecturally creative form of arabesque. The reader completely identifies with the prisoner. Miss Benáčeková sagaciously notes an arabesque element of time regarding the pendulum, set in a rhythm, that limits by mere seconds the opportunity for the prisoner getting the ropes off in order to escape. Of course the *deus-ex-machina* conclusion is a weak subterfuge of an ending where Poe disappoints with an utterly unrealistic happy end.

In **"The Fall of the House of Usher"** Poe's frequently anthologized story involves Gothic almost everywhere – the castle, the moat, the tomb, and all the decay and is explored by Miss Benáčeková in all of its arabesque manifestations. One may argue that the disease of Madeline (and her brother Roderick) is arabesque if it is caused by the timed decay of the physical house, as such mildew often does. This is another very strongly presented chapter.

In conclusion, "Arabesque" as decorative patterns in mosques suggest a sort of patterned repetition causing an impact (physical, spiritual) on the audience. As Arabs are especially known for their mathematical skills, the nature of the abstract repetition of the pattern would be especially calculated for its mental impression. That is how arabesque is conventionally understood. In the story "Masque of the Red Death" architecture is carefully addressed with attention to detail, to a bit lesser extent by Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Cask of Amontillado" where the impact of the respective enclosures the characters find themselves in constitute both mystery and endangerment. Hence, direct conflicts between people is less an issue for an interpretation

of the impact of the arabesque but rather the interior design, shape, size, depth etc. Hence, Poe's "construction" (rather than composition) of these stories might have been attended to. It would have been nice if Miss Benáčková could have linked the psychological crises of his characters less to Poe's biographies, as admittedly valid a course that may be, but more to the impact inherent in the arabesque characteristics of the interior residences or facilities (entombments, the catacombs, decaying mansions, prisons etc) which Poe's characters find themselves in, and link that to what romantic understanding of symbols Poe wishes to convey with these arabesque interiors. That "[s]peculation about him is still interesting today" (p. 18) may be true but it remains divorced from questions regarding the use of arabesque.

Práce splňuje základní požadavky kladené na tento typ prací, a proto ji doporučuji k ústní obhajobě.

Navrhovaná známka: výborně

Otázky k obhajobě:

1. In your opinion, does the narrator/prisoner of „The Pit and the Pendulum“ seem overly unemotional (compared with Fortuna, Roderick Usher, the Tell-Tale Heart narrator, or Prospero) as he confronts the arabesque forms of challenges in keeping himself alive? How do you account for that?

2. Do you know of another writer employing the arabesque to any kind of similar effect?

Podpis vedoucího bakalářské práce:



Datum: 18. 5. 2023

*nehodící se škrtněte