

## Thesis Advisor's Report

Thesis Title: *Ulysses: Philosophy or Literature? Interrogating the text through the lens of philosophical nostalgia to identify the Derridian positionalilty of Joyce's oeuvre.*

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It is with much joy and much satisfaction that a teacher gets to supervise the creation of such a striking and unique thesis. In every aspect it surpasses any meaningful benchmarks for a bachelor thesis, it rather reads like a full-fledged academic (albeit short) monograph on Joyce. I will, very briefly, present my thoughts and only very little criticism of McMurray's work:

My personal and professional interest in the topic presented by Jess McMurray's thesis focuses on the idea of a literary *machina*, a semantic machine producing, *ad infinitum*, other texts. This is, in fact, a venerable idea, present in the works of Raymondus Lullus, in the Jewish Kabbalah, or even in Descartes. It gained notoriety through the works of Borges, Rossi, or Eco. Taking departure in a cryptic mention in Derrida, this thesis investigates the *oeuvre* of Joyce as a text *instar omnium*, a text to replace, substitute, encompass, or pre-suppose all others. Should the microcosmos of Joyce's *Ulysses* encapsulate the whole of literary macrocosmos, how does it fare *vis-à-vis* the notion of nostalgia? This, in all brevity, is what McMurray's thesis sets out to analyse.

I find the thesis, and particularly its individual steps and individual analyses, excellent, enthralling even. It does run the risk of possibly engaging in circular reasoning: Joyce wrote a meta/hyper/super-text, it needs to include everything; in order to investigate its character of totality, one needs to experimentally subject it to a "random" topic. Is, however, nostalgia a random topic in Joyce? But then again, McMurray's thesis brings the vicious cycle to a higher level: is nostalgia one of the "planned" founding blocks of *Ulysses* (the thesis presents a reading of *Ulysses* as a case study in nostalgia), or is it rather the case, that *Ulysses* indeed makes such a strong interpretation possible, because it encompasses all possible interpretations, productive receptions, receptive productions, re-writings, etc.?

Let me instead ask the candidate a clear question: how does one qualify a suitable experimental topic/idea that could, as a litmus paper, gauge the totality of Joyce's *Ulysses*?

My only criticism which remains somewhat valid even in the updated version of this thesis, is that parts 4 and 5 lack the same degree of coherence with the whole of the argument as parts 1-3. I must, on the other hand, with much satisfaction concede that Jess

McMurray included all my previous critical points. And I, unlike Joyce, am not a *perpetuum mobile* of criticism.

Given how difficult the terrain of a philosophical-literary interpretation of Joyce is, given how mature McMurray's writing and her argument are, and finally given that I have, for major parts of reading this thesis, forgotten that I should also be writing a report – not only enjoying the reading – , **I wholeheartedly recommend the thesis for defence and my suggestion for the grade is 1 (excellent).**

In Prague, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Jakub Marek, Ph.D.