

HODNOCENÍ PŘEDNÁŠKY PRO ODBORNOU VEŘEJNOST

Masarykova univerzita	
Fakulta	filozofická
Obor řízení	dějiny konkrétních literatur (germánské literatury)
Uchazeč	Jeffrey Alan Smith
Datum přednášky	14. 4. 2023
Téma přednášky	Character Archetypes in Anglo-American Political Fiction and Film: A Provisional Schema
Přítomno posluchačů (počet)	24 + 12 online
Pověření hodnotitelé (členové komise)	Prof. Susan Belasco, PhD. prof. Mgr. Milada Franková, CSc. Doc. PhDr. Stanislav Kolář, Dr.

Review of “Character Archetypes in Anglo-American Political Fiction and Film: A Provisional Schema, by Jeff Smith, Friday, 14 April 2023, 12 noon.

Jeff Smith’s well-organized, lively lecture was an overview of his use of archetypal and myth theory in interpreting 20th century Anglo-American political fiction. Using impressively rendered slides of texts and visual images, Smith first provided an overview of the history of this literary theory. The second part of his lecture was a discussion of his schematization of the character archetypes he has identified and his work on the directions for interpretation and analysis. Noting that archetypal and myth theory dates from ancient times, Smith offered a shrewd history, focusing on the twentieth century developments, beginning with those promulgated by early studies in religion, magic, mythology, Carl Jung’s psychological types, and folktales. Influenced by these studies, Northrup Frye attempted to define a comprehensive theory of literature and make the study of literature “scientific.” In *The Anatomy of Fiction*, 1957, Frye developed the idea of an “archetype”—plots, settings, characters, images, motifs—that are the fundamental elements of literature. Briefly showing how various masterplots can use archetypes in a variety of ways, Smith cited important criticisms of archetypal and myth criticism—that it is not really scientific, can be reductive, and is rooted in problematic 19th century notions of race, gender, and ethnicity. Further, archetypal and myth criticism depends upon a cultural literacy that is rapidly vanishing, especially in the U.S. where shared texts and visual experiences—such as Shakespeare, Huck Finn, and even Harry Potter—are becoming increasingly rare. Nonetheless, as Smith observes, there remain current applications in creative writing manuals; studies of literary types, such as the trickster or the femme fatale; in popular culture; and in cultural history studies. In the second part of the lecture, Smith focused on his identification, classification, and grouping of character types. Among them are partisan leaders, iconic Lincoln, handlers, Mr. Smiths, bosses, novices, tempters, naifs, demagogues, mad prophets, Frankenstein’s monsters, and action heroes. As he scrutinized each of character types, it was clear that within a particular type, the

character could range widely in motivation and function—for example, “handlers” could be either manipulative or virtuous. Smith covered a wide range of political fictions, describing how the various character types work within films such as the early *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* or television programs such as the satiric *Veep*. Not surprisingly, sometimes the character types overlap, and the categorizations seem porous. His definition of “demagogues,” for instance, sometimes seems similar to “mad prophets.” But as Smith observed at the beginning of his lecture, archetypal criticism sometimes overlooks subtle and complicated components of literary characters, and he is refreshingly aware of the limitations. At the end of his lecture, Smith provided impressive, diagramed illustrations of the ways his character types work. Finally, Smith reminds us that the value of archetypal criticism is to show us how stories are formed and how characters appear and reappear over time. Of particular importance and value is how stories and characters emerge at distinct historical moments and what that might reveal about the function of literature. He concluded by suggesting that the new developments in AI would have major implications in how we can study the structure of literature with the ability to search and analyze vast literary canons. The lecture was both accessible and impressive—a fine statement of Smith’s work.

Závěr

Přednáška Jeffrey Alan Smithe, Doctor of Philosophy “Character Archetypes in Anglo-American Political Fiction and Film: A Provisional Schema“, přednesená v rámci habilitačního řízení **prokázala** dostatečnou vědeckou kvalifikaci a pedagogickou způsobilost uchazeče, standardně požadovanou v rámci habilitačních řízení v oboru dějiny konkrétních literatur (germánské literatury).

Brno dne 17. 4. 2023

Susan Belasco

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