

La Sapienza

Revisione esterna tesi dott. HOWARD ROBERT COASE (37 ciclo)

COASE HOWARD ROBERT

za zgodność z oryginałem

Wydział Humanistyczny
 Starszy specjalista
 w Biurze Ewaluacji i Obsługi Instytutów
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Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

“A viable breathing substance”: the poetics of atmosphere in the work of Barbara Guest

Affiliation of the reviewer

Saint Louis University Madrid

Report

I am pleased to offer my evaluation of Howard Coase’s dissertation, which I found both engaging and intellectually stimulating. Coase’s study proposes a “poetics of atmosphere” in the work of American poet Barbara Guest, and in doing so, repositions Guest as a central figure in modernist and avant-garde traditions. Perhaps most notable is the way Coase bridges affect theory, phenomenology, and poetic form to shed new light on how poems function—an accomplishment that speaks directly to ongoing debates in literary scholarship.

In essence, Coase argues that Barbara Guest’s poetry is best understood not through rigid formalist binaries (such as surface vs. depth, or abstraction vs. figuration) but through how it creates and is created by “atmospheres.” These atmospheric forces—comparable to shifting weather patterns or diffused light—operate both at the level of subject matter (Guest’s explicit depictions of clouds, haze, and weather) and poetic structure. I particularly appreciate Coase’s observation that Guest’s works envelop readers in textual spaces, making each poem feel like a self-sustaining, “viable breathing substance” (in Guest’s own words), rather than a mere object of interpretation.

Throughout the project, Coase carefully and persuasively demonstrates that Guest is far more than a peripheral member of the New York School, revealing her broader significance for the evolution of twentieth-century poetic practices. This reframing is one of the dissertation’s major strengths. I also found Coase’s concept of atmosphere refreshing and sophisticated. By examining how Guest’s poetry mobilizes non-semantic, sensory qualities, Coase expands our sense of what it means to be “immersed” in a poem’s world. His approach not only reinvigorates Guest studies but also offers a broader theoretical lens for modernist and contemporary poetics alike.

As a modernist myself, one of the contributions I found most distinctive is Coase’s claim that modernism can be reactivated rather than simply inherited. He shows how Guest’s version of modernism emerges dynamically through ephemeral experiences—of weather, breath, mysticism—that continue to shape contemporary poetic practice. I was consistently drawn in by this argument’s clarity and originality.

Coase’s writing style is both precise and engaging. The prose manages to be elegant without sacrificing analytical rigor, and this balance makes the chapters a pleasure to read. Despite the clear scholarly apparatus, I often felt as though I were reading a polished monograph. Indeed, the dissertation succeeds in speaking to a specialized academic audience while remaining open to a broader literary readership.

Overall, I believe this dissertation represents a meaningful and innovative contribution to

modernist studies. It brings deserved attention to Barbara Guest and provides a fresh theoretical framework centered on “atmosphere,” which has resonance for scholars of poetry, affect theory, and phenomenology more broadly.

I wholeheartedly recommend Coase’s work for the doctoral degree. Given the dissertation’s originality and coherence, I have every confidence that it will evolve seamlessly into a book-length publication. I look forward to seeing how Coase continues to refine and share this important scholarship in the years to come.

Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

I found Howard’s commitment to his subject both admirable and exciting. His work demonstrates not only scholarly rigor but also a genuine passion for modernist poetics and critical innovation. From my perspective, he has every quality one hopes to see in a rising academic: depth of knowledge, imaginative thinking, and a clear, engaging writing style. I believe he will excel in a university setting—both as a researcher and a teacher—and I recommend awarding the doctoral degree without hesitation.

Evaluation file (optional)

Presentation and clarity

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and ‘user friendly’, without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

None Poor Average Good Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

The thesis can be considered for a 'cum laude' award

Yes No

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

- 1) adequate as is
- 2) require minor revision
- 3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation

board.

Accept as is Minor revision Major revision

Date: 12/23/2024

Reviewer: Badoi Olivia