

Advisor's Report on Pavliná Černá's Bachelor's Thesis:

“Authentic Existence and the ‘American Dream’ in Dreiser’s Fiction”

Ms. Pavliná Černá's bachelor's thesis work seeks to illuminate, from a genuinely psychobiographical and moderately self-reflective and theoretically inflected interpretive stance that is in the main informed above all by the interpretive strategy of close reading, the complexity of social reality for the vital problem of the engenderment of an authentic existence in a corrupt, false and fraudulently materialist world of Dreiser's fiction. The fifty-page B.A.-level thesis text contains an introduction, four major parts, a conclusion, endnotes, bibliography, summary in Czech and an appendix of photographs.

Ms. Černá thesis contains work to be appreciated. She asseverates near the beginning of the work that Dreiser “explored the false nature of the ‘American Dream’ and the hollowness and shallowness of its goals.” (3) and broadcasts “If anything was sacred to Dreiser it was the right of an individual to see the world of fact through his own eyes” (5).

- 1) Given the factuality of the lattermost claimed for fact, what else would the candidate want to bring on to the stage of this mention of not inconsiderable critical importance?
- 2) Also the broaching of the topic area of shopping on pp. 6-7 could be expanded by the candidate: how would she wish to do so? Certainly theoretical tacks such as those offered up by the Frankfurt School, by Guy Debord, by Jean Baudrillard et. al. could be brought into the discussion in a more advanced M.A. level study of the topic; but at this juncture I would ask the candidate to spotlight other textual moments in Dreiser that would formalize the crucial experience of shopping as a form of togetherness and of community (or of their lack thereof) in the production of individual modern life narratives in individual missions.
- 3) How is it that Dreiser could be said to be remoralizing the moral when he says for example “he was pointing out no moral” (8)?
- 4) What does the candidate make of the notion of ‘fungibility’ which means that all things can be exchanged for other things given her emphasis on the supervening fact of price tags in Dreiser's fictional universe?
- 5) What other sorts of microlevel social forms of togetherness would Dreiser and or his work or suggest or invoke if not espouse if it is true that for T.D. marriage is “society's own tinder-box” (13)?
- 6) As regard Dreiser's radical and multifaceted critiques of the perils of materialism what sort of out can one read from his artistic worlds or is his merely a negative critique as the candidate suggests on p. 37?
- 7) What does the candidate imagine the attempt to ascribe labels to Dreiser on p. 37 communicate about his invigorating refusal to be straightjacketed?

As concerns the prose style, the thesis is generally very well written. One error I caught is on p. 37 where the word ‘not’ seems missing (cf., ‘Dreiser's greatness lies in his style but in his sympathetic attitude, his humanism’). The candidate is to be applauded for submitting a work of such high level careful attention to detail for this kind of stylistic cleanliness is quite scarce.

Recommended pre exam mark: velmi dobře+



**Erik Sherman Roraback, D.Phil.
15 June 2007**