

Supervisor's Report on M.A. Thesis by

Marek Torčík

### **“Objectivity Disguised: Ideas of Authenticity in the Novels of Paul Auster and Thomas Pynchon”**

Mr. Marek Torčík's diploma thesis evaluates conceptions of authenticity in three novels each from Paul Auster and from Thomas Pynchon. The thesis contains 106 pp. across some preliminary matter, seven parts, a Bibliography and an Abstract in English and in Czech. There are also 15 subsections. The principal sections include: “Introduction and Summary”, “Chapter I: The Texture of Imagination”, “Chapter II: To Begin Anew”, “Chapter III: Multiplying Failure”, “Chapter IV: Textual Feedback and Authentic Loops”, “Chapter V: Objectivity Disguised”, and “Conclusion”.

The prose style is very good, though there are some glitches. These include the following: “attacks on World Trade Center” (10) needs to be “attacks on the World Trade Center” (10), “rest if Auster's work” (15) should be “rest of Auster's work” (15), “compared to what Herman” (23) should be “compared with what Herman” (23), “shares a certain characteristics” (23) should be “shares certain characteristics” (23), “experiencing thing” (39) should be “experiencing things” (39), “compared to his earlier novels” (46) should be “compared with his earlier novels” (46), “consists a multitude” (47) should be “consists of a multitude” (47), “feet” (67) should be “feat” (67), “point of need” (70) should be “points of need” (70), “*New York Times*” should be “*The New York Times*” (70), “different of representation” (76) should be “different representation” (76). Also the language is sometimes a bit wordy, yet generally it is ably and very well written.

The candidate sets the stage thus, “I use authenticity in the sense of both a category of the individual's experience of the self and a general narrative power to convey subjectivity, or myth, in a relatable manner. What this work is primarily interested in, are the various modes of authenticity that contemporary novels use in order to build a certain mimetic possibility used to explore various notions of the self and thus providing a ground for observation of the ways these authentic selves change within the passage of time” (6). This the candidate accomplishes. Furthermore, “This thesis establishes an understanding of authenticity as a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the logic of most contemporary American fiction; it explores notions of subjectivity and objectivity in their constant state of flux – everything is always reinvented, challenged by different modes of identities. Representation is never singular. Rather, authenticity is found in multiplicities, the objective hidden under the ever amounting subjective” (7). Another key moment is this one: “While acknowledging the artifice of all aesthetic forms, Auster adds that “the making of art is what distinguishes us from all other creatures who inhabit this planet, that it is, essentially, what defines us as human beings.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, art in 4 3 2 1 and its various forms (with special emphasis on the literary) bears a potential for change, a shift in one's authenticity towards a more complex understanding of the world. It influences events too, as when the third version of Ferguson experiences life through the prism

<sup>1</sup> Auster, *Talking to Strangers*, 384.

of films” (34). This is a high claim for the aesthetic from Auster. **I ask the candidate what would the take of Pynchon’s fictional work on this question possibly or plausibly be?**

In addition, “In *Infancy and History*, Giorgio Agamben argues that “modern man’s average day contains virtually nothing that can still be translated into experience.”<sup>2</sup> This argument is at odds with the very premise with which both Cage and Auster operate. The mundane is never to be underestimated, for even in the overload of information, the mundane act of reading newspaper can be translated as experience – the shock at historical events can shatter one’s soul too. It is precisely the mundane, the everyday experience, the street sounds that compose the music of a novel” (36). **How would this translate to Pynchon’s compositional work? Further when we read, “Paranoia is the fundamental authenticity of all of Pynchon’s writing” (50), could the candidate elaborate more precisely upon what this means?**

Another passage: “Hence, *Against the Day* (and subsequently also *Inherent Vice*) is concerned with a portrayal of this fragmentation of objective knowledge. Everything even approaching the absolute category of “truth” is ridiculed and “subjectified”” (52). **Still, I ask: Is there truth out there even if fiction such as the foregoing cannot approximate it as closely as may often be presupposed?**

The candidate states aptly on the last page: “While Auster is fundamentally more interested in the individual, the character, Pynchon focuses on historical processes that often go against notions of the authentic within individual characters. However, both authors use authenticity within their work as both simultaneously real and fictional” (98). Not only this, “notions of authenticity as a fluid category, subject to changes in time and space, are instrumental for a better understanding of the ways contemporary fiction operates, how it captures reality, or even refuses it” (98). This is all well put by the candidate, and shows some essential outcomes of this perceptive thesis.

In light of the foregoing mentions, I hereby recommend the pre thesis defense mark of a 1 (výborně) for the thesis work.

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<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History* (London: Verso, 2007) 15.