

Opponent's Report on B.A. Thesis
CZECHS, THE HEROES OF THE WILD WEST
by Lucie Hecková

This is an ambitious, well written thesis, which was both informative and a pleasure to read. Apart from a few slips and typos, the level of the prose was extremely high. I also very much appreciated the student's engagement with the subject; it was intriguing to see how the story of her own marriage was involved with the subject. Ignorant of the novels of O.E. Rolvaag, I was grateful for this introduction to his work.

My criticisms stem, however, from the very ambition of the thesis, as I feel that the student has perhaps strained to include too much material in such a small space. First, the research on the historical material in the first two chapters looks patchy in parts. Although I am not qualified to judge historical writing from an academic point of view, it was surprising to encounter Wikipedia as an authority. For all its considerable virtues, Wikipedia still cannot be accepted on such terms for academic research. Second, in her effort also to include advocacy of Rolvaag and an account of Willa Cather's canonical status, the student does not go far enough with either. I do not get a clear enough idea of the former, and in the case of the latter, I am surprised at the absence of Joan Acocella's *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism* (2000), which provides a nuanced account of the Virginian writer's difficult path to the panthéon. Although heralded by H.L. Mencken (and not "Mecken" as he appears here [39]), she quickly dropped out of favour in the 1920s and was not fully rehabilitated until the 1980s and '90s. Even then, feminist criticism had a troubled relationship with her work. *Pace* this thesis, part of that trouble had to do with precisely the "masculine" approach of Cather's heroines to the land. Ms Hecková writes: "With their care and love, [Alexandra and Antonia] turn the wild, inhospitable land into a beautiful garden, pleasant for life" (42). Why then is Alexandra so dismayed by the society she has helped create by the end of the book?

I strongly recommend that the student search out those passages of the thesis that depend on Wikipedia, and support the points therein by reference to better authorities. I do not think the thesis should be accepted until proper references are furnished (these can be added in the manner of an errata sheet).

My recommendation is for the grade of **very good (velmi dobře)**, and I look forward very much to the student's defence.



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