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Letter about Vít Vaníček's dissertation: J. Hillis Miller

March 16, 2012

Ms. Romana Jensenova
 Research Department
 Charles University
 Prague

Copies to Professor Martin Prochazka and Professor Erik S. Roraback

Dear Ms Jensenova:

I give my enthusiastic approval to the dissertation by Vit Vanicek (*Territory and Deterritorialization in Works of Thomas Pynchon: Space in the Post-Modern Novel*) as fulfillment of the requirements for the doctorate at Charles University in Prague. I have read the manuscript of the dissertation carefully and greatly admire it. It would earn him the doctorate at any university in my country, the United States.

[Please excuse me for dropping the accents on Mr Vanicek's name and that of others in this letter. It is awkward to compose these repeatedly on my computer.]

Mr. Vanicek does with admirable learning, originality, and insight three different related things in his dissertation:

1) He establishes at the beginning a fully elaborated critical methodology about space in the novel, about the state as a type of social organization, and about the form and ethics of Pynchon's novels. This methodology calls expertly on work by a wide variety of theorists: Eco, Dolezel, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Nancy, Lefebvre, Soja, Deleuze and Guattari, Matruana, Varela, Arnheim, and Hofstede. Mr. Vanicek's mastery of the thought of these diverse thinkers in quite amazing in its accuracy, breadth, and insight. He puts together on their basis a new methodological construct of his own. Salient in this construct are Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's ideas of being in the world and Nancy's idea of being with others. Most important, however, for Vanicek's thinking are Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of striated territorialized space and smooth deterritorialized space in their *Nomadology*, as well as their concept of the modern state as an imperialistic War Machine depending always for its survival on occupying more space by conquest. These Deleuzian ideas depend in turn on the notion of the threat of self-destructive entropy in any autopoietic system like a modern state. This complex methodology is brilliantly deployed by Mr. Vanicek in the readings of Pynchon's novels.

2) Mr. Vanicek demonstrates an impressive mastery of previous scholarly work on Pynchon. These works are not just listed in the bibliography. They are constantly cited at appropriate moments in the dissertation, usually in support of Mr. Vanicek's own readings, but sometimes respectfully to disagree.

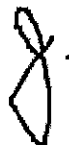
3) The final two thirds of Mr. Vanicek's dissertation are devoted to detailed readings of Pynchon's five major novels. These readings are brilliantly detailed, original, and cogent. They demonstrate that space rather than time is the major organizing form and theme of Pynchon's work. As opposed to many essays about Pynchon that treat just one or two of his novels, Vanicek presupposes that all six of these difficult novels form a single developing unit. He makes his way twice through all six novels, one by one, first in an account of the action and progression of each, then in a specific investigation of Pynchon's "spatiality" as it develops from novel to novel. These readings are extremely impressive. Pynchon's novels are conspicuously complex and difficult. Vanicek has wonderfully illuminated these novels for me. He has given me new ways to read Pynchon in all his complexity, as well as to see the way the six major novels form a developing unit and manifest an orientation toward spatial rather than temporal organization. He also shows that the methodological presuppositions in the opening sections are elaborately exemplified in Pynchon's novels, including their positive ethical teaching.

Vit Vanicek's dissertation is a distinguished piece of work and fully worthy of being accepted for the PhD.

I have two small further comments: 1) There are a number of small stylistic slips here and there in the manuscript. These are not serious enough to delay the dissertation's acceptance, but it needs to be checked again carefully before being published as a book, which I hope will be the case. It certainly merits publication. 2) Though a good bit is said here and there in the dissertation about Pynchon's style and form, most of the citations are made in support of conceptual or thematic points Mr. Vanicek is making, or as demonstration of some moment in the action of one or another of the novels. Mr. Vanicek almost never cites a passage and then analyzes the intricacies of its style: the syntactical complexity, the extravagant use of idiomatic or slang language, the sometime obscure (to me) allusions to popular culture, and so on. Nor does he demonstrate through citation (though he mentions) the abrupt discontinuities that are often so bewildering to the reader. I am sure Mr. Vanicek could have done a little of this sort of "close-reading" brilliantly. I found myself wishing he had done so. Perhaps a little of this kind of analysis might be added in a version for book publication. These observations should in no way delay the manuscript's acceptance now as a dissertation.

I conclude by repeating my enthusiastic recommendation that this distinguished manuscript be accepted as a dissertation in fulfillment of your requirements for the PhD.

Sincerely,



J. Hillis Miller
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