

**OPPONENT'S REPORT regarding**  
**"PERSONAE IN A PORTRAIT THROUGH THE USE OF LANGUAGE" by Štěpán Dudešek**  
**(BA dissertation, January 2012)**

Štěpán Dudešek's present thesis is a reworking of a BA dissertation submitted in September, 2011 – it behoves the opponent to start by pointing out the changes made to the present version. Formally, the perfunctory non sequiturs of original Ovid quotations that prefaced each of the chapters have been removed; the typos and stylistic or syntactic incongruities have been reduced (even though by no means excised); also, the referencing style seems to have been considerably improved and more or less standardised. Content-wise, the problematic notion of *persona* has been replaced with a renewed, and more meaningful, stress on Joycean "distinctive styles" and "techniques" (though troubles prevail – see below); Mr Dudešek has also made an effort to expand the scope of, and engagement with, his secondary sources.

Formally speaking, all these factors make for a far more consistent and competent work than the one presented at the end of the last term. The thesis covers the scope of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* from the vantage point of the development of its protagonist and how this development is conveyed in and through language – its three chapters are, respectively, devoted to the language of Stephen as a child (Book I), as influenced by the Church (Book III), and as a would-be artist (Book V). The thesis remains close to the text, discussing its syntax (e.g. the theme x rheme duality), modality (e.g. the prevalence, in Book I, of the modality of necessity), and chiefly its vocabulary. The thesis concludes by stating that it has shown how "Joyce manages to evoke illusions of different language styles that have a significant impact on the reader and his perceiving the different subjectivities" [43].

However, a serious flaw (pointed out already in my report on its previous version) of Mr Dudešek's thesis still persists in his work with secondary sources. To demonstrate this, I shall refer to a few specific examples from the Introduction to his thesis:

- On page 8, Mr Dudešek disparages Hugh Kenner's "Uncle Charles principle" as "problematic by several reasons," yet none of these is mentioned anywhere in the course of his argument, and his subsequent chapters quote Kenner freely (and uncritically).
- On the next page, neither Barbara Seward, nor Derek Attridge can be said to claim that in the opening of *A Portrait*, Stephen the child "directly [speaks] to the reader" [9], as Mr Dudešek insists they do. He quotes Seward to the effect that the text "claims the song as Stephen's," while Attridge merely describes the scene as enacting how language comes to one "from the outside, from the other," and how the individual only gradually finds his/her place in it ("He was baby tuckoo.").
- When quoting Harry Levin for whom the final chapter of *A Portrait* "takes us back from an impersonal opening to the notes of *the author* [emphasis added] at the end" [10], Mr Dudešek not only fails to notice a critical opinion in accordance with his own (stressing the "impersonality" of the opening) but also eagerly emphasizes *the author* and accuses Levin of subscribing to the inane belief that these notes be "the open and direct cry of Stephen Dedalus," while failing to grasp that *author* is likely to be understood by Levin in a double sense, here – denoting both Dedalus, the author of would-be artistry, and Joyce, the author of the text.
- Last but not least, Mr Dudešek accuses both Anthony Burgess and Robert Spoo of "succumb[ing] to the same temptation" of believing that "content influences the reading of form" [14] and offers his own conclusion that "objectivity is non-existent" and posits the necessity of analysing "subjective meaning" [15], whatever is meant by that. However, a mere three pages later, Mr. Dudešek's analysis of Chapter I yields the observation that "[o]ne of the most obvious ways in which Joyce creates the feeling of an infant-like language are frequent inquisitive questions, *very much in the manner* [emphasis added] of those that children often and repeatedly ask their parents" [18], thus falling for the same "temptation" (which, in fact, is largely a necessity generated from within Joyce's text) of reading content and form as inseparable.

The entire critical argument of Mr Dudešek's thesis seems devoted to attacking straw men – to refuting positions which his "opponents" never actually hold. With this serious flaw in mind, the opponent would like to raise these points for discussion:

1. "Joyce portrays emotions and mental processes by the language itself" [9]. How does this basis of Mr Dudešek's argument differ from the arguments of Kenner, Levin, Attridge, except by supplanting their text-specific approach with an abstract generalisation? How is it more useful to discuss "the language itself" (whatever that is) than e.g. "Uncle Charles principle"? The opponent fears that it indeed is not, which begs the question: why steadfastly insist on an (illusory) novelty of one's approach rather than depart from a (careful) reading of one's critical predecessors?
2. The conclusion to Chapter 3 of Mr Dudešek's thesis stands out as particularly unsatisfactory: "The question remains whether this style should be viewed as definitive or whether there is a room for further development. To answer this, one has to look into Joyce's following work, *Ulysses*" [42]. The opponent wonders whether this indeed is the case: Can it not be firmly established, whether by secondary material (Joyce's correspondence and notes) or by *Ulysses* itself from episode 4 onward, that the style of *A Portrait*, or indeed the character of Stephen Dedalus, left Joyce with little room for development and had to be forsaken? Wouldn't it have been more useful to try and tackle the question of *why* this might have been so? (Cf. point for discussion no. 5 in my previous report which called for an expansion of Mr Dudešek's argument – a point evidently unheeded in the updated version.)
3. The introduction to the thesis equates *personae* with "distinctive styles," but the thesis as a whole concludes on a note of regarding Joyce's "language devices" in service of "emphasizing the various subjectivities, or *personae*, through which the characters [...] can be experienced in *A Portrait*" [45]. How and why has the understanding of "*persona* as style" turned into one of "*persona* as subjectivity"? And on what basis does Mr Dudešek distinguish between "subjectivity" and "character"?

I recommend that the thesis be graded either *very good* or *good*, this depending on whether Mr Dudešek's performance at the defence manages to address at least some of the objections highlighted above.