

Opponent's Report

David Lukeš, "Textual Identity in Selected Novels by Philip Roth: Representation, Dissimulation, Creation" (BA Thesis)

David Lukeš's thesis presents an erudite analysis of Jewish identity in the United States as portrayed in selected novels by Philip Roth. The candidate manages to construct a coherent and functional conceptual apparatus from Paul Ricoeur, Judith Butler and Emmanuel Lévinas, disparate as their thought may in many ways be, and proceeds to use it in what is an outstanding work of creative criticism. Needless to say in this context, Mr Lukeš's essay supersedes the requirements for an excellent bachelor's thesis by a significant margin.

The overall argument is presented in a lucid manner, with particular strengths lying in the way the discursive construction of Jewishness in Roth is placed in the context of the ways in which blackness and whiteness are conceptualised not only in the same works, but also in the writing of other American authors (Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Ralph Ellison), and in the discourse of modern and postmodern U.S. society in general. What is likewise admirable is the stylistic brilliance and thoughtfulness with which the discussion of Roth's novels is presented: the candidate demonstrates masterful control over his argument, making his work a truly exciting read, quite apart from its intellectual profundity.

There are only a couple of marginal comments that I would like to make by way of criticism. While the term "textual" in the thesis title is certainly not out of place, given the concepts used in the work itself, the term "discursive" may have perhaps been preferred. On another subject entirely – and this time concerning a mere detail – the candidate might perhaps consider another potential aspect of the adjective "lily-white" (discussed in a passage from *The Human Stain*, e.g. on p. 25): would it make sense to ponder an additional ironic level in its use in the passage, one consisting in the fact that the lily is a familiar symbol of purity, and originally a Christian one at that?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "excellent". Moreover, I would like to emphatically join the thesis supervisor in nominating Mr Lukeš's work for a Mathesius Award for the academic year 2010-11.

Prague, 31 August 2011

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD