

David Lukeš – B.A.thesis – report written by the supervisor

In his B.A. thesis, Mr. Lukeš focuses on textual identity in selected novels by Philip Roth. While his approach to the actual analysis is primarily postmodern (see Butler), he also dwells upon the Jewish dimension, and the whole text culminates in an illuminating conclusion, connecting the previously discussed issues with ethics (see Lévinas). Now, I must admit that I was fairly skeptical initially, but that truly interdisciplinary combination works remarkably well, and it is precisely here where I see the greatest strength and achievement of the submitted study.

Mr. Lukeš writes in a clear and precise language about rather complicated matters, yet the result is never dry, always to the point, and occasionally even entertaining. The whole thesis is cleverly structured (with no help of mine), the central argument persuasively developed (with interesting observations on the side), and some of the points discussed and links established I have not even seen raised in the available secondary sources on Roth's works. Thus, what I feel I have to praise is not only academic depth, but also original contribution to the existing scholarship.

I find it hard to have any critical remarks, but will allow myself two additional questions. 1/ While the choice of the primary works is perfectly justifiable and any other titles would go beyond the scope of examination, how would the reading of e.g. *The Counterlife* affect the presented interpretations? 2/ On several different occasions, another Jewish American writer is mentioned, namely Bernard Malamud. Since he also deals with not only Jewishness, but also specifically black-Jewish relationships (and, in the mind of many, also heavily relies on both stereotypes and their subsequent undermining: see his novel *The Tenants*, or his short story *Black Is My Favorite Color*, or – to a lesser degree – *Angel Levine*), would his textual identities substantially differ from Roth's? And one truly marginal observation: In note 58, Mr. Lukeš seems to be implying that there is essentially no difference between fiction and academic writing. Would he be willing to develop that thought during the oral defense?

This being the case, I am not only suggesting the grade excellent/výborně, but also wondering whether Mr. Lukeš might not deserve our Mathesius Award. I am certainly aware of the fact that this award has been limited to M.A. theses only; nevertheless, it is my firm belief that breaking rules under justifiable conditions can be beneficial to all the parties involved.

Prague, August 7, 2011

Dr. Hana Ulmanová