



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

OPPONENT'S REPORT

B.A. THESIS

On the Psychology of Human Desire of Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* & of Steinbeck's *East of Eden*

Kristýna Seidlová

The thesis opens with a discussion of the concept of the American Dream, particularly in relation to materialism and consumerism. Besides a few general observations—such as a brief consideration of revolt on p. 13—the thesis focuses on Holly Golightly and Cal Trask: two characters who made their first appearance in Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952) and Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), and who gained fame primarily through the filmic adaptations of the two literary texts (*East of Eden* [1955], dir. Elia Kazan, and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* [1961], dir. Blake Edwards).

Ms. Seidlová's thesis is reasonably convincing and clear; for example, the discussion of the two protagonists' involvement with materialist and consumerist culture is interesting. At the same time, there are some lingering questions the candidate could perhaps address during the defense:

How broad is her definition of the American Dream? It is argued that “[t]he belief that one can acquire what one desires the most is a very strong one and we call this deepest desire the American Dream” (p. 8). Is the American Dream synonymous with desire—universal, unbound to a particular space? In other words, is there no *American* dream? And was the “original notion of the American Dream” indeed “pure and virtuous” (p. 9)?

Regarding the contrast between Holly Golightly and Cal Trask, I wonder whether the character of Catherine Trask would not have been a good choice as well. She shares much with Holly. Could the candidate briefly contrast Holly with Cathy, particularly the narrators' depiction and judgment of the two women?

Finally: Cal, as Ms. Seidlová nicely puts it, “tries to rule the abstract world of emotions by utilizing materialism” (p. 12). But does the entire novel propose that “[e]ven if wishing for abstract qualities, such as the other person's feelings, or for instance freedom, one cannot fully avoid the involvement of materialism” (p. 23)? Or is it simply argued that submission to materialism can and should be avoided? Of course Cal hears his “timshel” after ostentatiously burning fifteen thousand dollars... So where does the novel stand vis-à-vis materialism and consumerism?

Proposed Grade: Výborně (Excellent) or Velmi dobře (Very Good)

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FACULTY OF ARTS
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