

David Vichnar, PhD  
SUPERVISOR'S REPORT:  
re "(In)Sincere Authorship – Three Novels of Jeffrey Eugenides"  
by Daniela Rydlová (MA dissertation, 2022)

Ms Rydlová's MA project deals with the challenges entailed in literary pigeonholing by addressing the problematic status of Jeffrey Eugenides vis-à-vis his (non-)belonging to the New Sincerity group.

In her Introduction, Ms Rydlová cannily surveys some of the cornerstone postmodern tropes (irony, inauthenticity, television culture, etc.) and their critique in David Foster Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram", clearly delineating her subsequent theoretical framework in which to analyse Eugenides' output. Ms Rydlová's thesis comes into its own in the three Chapters dealing with three major Eugenides novels *The Marriage Plot*, *The Virgin Suicides*, and *Middlesex*, again in the context of such crucial themes as tradition vs. innovation, nostalgia and entropy, binaries and hybridity. In her Conclusion, Ms Rydlová is unafraid to take Eugenides to task for some of the political conservatism espoused in his novels, as well as their oftentimes muddled ideological thrust.

Ms Rydlová's argumentation is lucid and sticks to the point. Her close readings are always detailed, complex and well-argued, apt at synthesising or drawing parallels between concepts whose similarities are far from evident. Also praiseworthy is the consistency with which she defines her terms and the wide-ranging theoretical sources (Baudrillard, Jameson, Derrida, Huyssen, Levinas, Wiener, et al.) she brings to bear on her argument without ever letting them drown out her own voice. Although (or maybe since) a labour of love on the candidate's part, the production of the thesis was a lengthy process (also due to the disruptions caused by the covid-19 epidemic) of search and discovery, for both the candidate and his supervisor.

The supervisor is happy to state that Ms Rydlová took to heart most of his misgivings and criticisms levied during the research and writing process—more often against Eugenides than herself—and addressed them in the final product. On that note, it would have been advisable to remove all of my final edits to the "Introduction" in the track-changes mode from the finished thesis—I have counted at least seven such instances in the final pdf.

Given the above, the supervisor shall constrain himself to raising four questions of a general nature (leaving it up to the opponent's report to raise critical points pertaining to the nitty-gritty of the thesis, should he have any). The first two have to do with the Derridean interplay between the singularity and the exemplar, the latter two with a crucial word "authorship", to be found in the thesis' very title.

1. What makes Eugenides' case unique? What constitutes his writerly "signature" and why / how does Ms Rydlová seek to "countersign" this signature in her thesis?

2. What makes Eugenides' case general? In what ways can he serve as a good "example" of a broader tendency within post-postmodern / contemporary fiction?
3. Why conjure up, half a century after Barthes & Co., the ghost of the Author(ship)? Is this just in order to draw contrast between the New Sincerity and Eugenides? The New Sincerity, where "the ethical obligation to decide whether the author is sincere or insincere falls on the reader" which makes it into "an unfinished project, an ongoing dialogue between the author and the reader" (p. 10), as opposed to Eugenides, a writer of "metafictions, ambiguity and misconceptions" (p. 68)? If so, what does this do to challenge the overall portrayal of the New Sincerity as a progressive movement and Eugenides as a reactionary?
4. One of Ms Rydlová's final findings regarding the methods in Eugenides' novels portrays them as a "one-way pleading" rather than "a two-way conversation" and criticises them for their perceived failure "to create a literary space of availability," while also stressing that "the reader of Eugenides' novels is ultimately always left alone" (p. 68). I wonder how and why Ms Rydlová contrasts a lack of "a space of availability" (as per the NC) with the reader's "being left alone" (as per JE)—does not the one imply the other? Does not "leaving the reader alone" work to enhance the "space of availability" for their interpretation?

Having raised these issues, I am still positive that Ms Rydlová's thesis presents a well-researched work whose theoretical savviness and argumentative skills meet the usual requirements expected of a regular M.A. thesis at the Department.

Therefore, I have no qualms in recommending it for the defence and propose a grade of either **excellent – výborně** or **very good – velmi dobře**, depending on the candidate's performance at the thesis defence. **Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.**



David Vichnar, PhD  
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