

## Opponent's Report on M.A. Thesis by

Daniela Rydlová

### (In)Sincere Authorship – Three Novels of Jeffrey Eugenides

Ms. Daniela Rydlová's diploma thesis evaluates conceptions of New Sincerity and insincerity as well as other topic areas including tradition, nostalgia, entropy, and forms of metamorphosis and transformation in three novels by the contemporary US author Jeffrey Eugenides: *The Marriage Plot*, *The Virgin Suicides*, and *Middlesex*. The thesis contains 72 pp., which includes an Introduction, three core chapters, a Conclusion, and a Bibliography. There is also an Abstract with key words in English and in Czech.

All in all, the prose style is good, though there are some errors. These include the following: "as the same time" (13) needs to be "at the same time" (13), "as writer is" (14) should be "as a writer is" (14), "Eugenides' text" (18) should be "Eugenides' texts" (18), "with has been said" (24) should be "with what has been said" (24), "isolation with numbered" (quote on 27) should be "isolation which [or that?] numbered" (quote on 27), "does not belief in progress" (42) should be "does not believe in progress" (42), and "the truth override" (48) should be "the truth overrides" (48).

In the Introduction we read of the three novels here under consideration by Jeffrey Eugenides that,

The common denominator is their response to postmodernism and postmodern irony, not in the form of their abandonment, but rather in their unmasking and transcendence. Especially postmodern irony is simply part of the (literary) world and to deal with this heritage, it must be embraced and discarded at the same time. Martin Paul Eve in "Sincerity" formulates this approach as "a calculated reactionary response against a perceived fraudulence paradox within a specific style of mid-late twentieth-century writing: ironic postmodern metafiction [en.3] (8).


Also we discover that, "The attempt to be liked, attractive and impressive but in a genuine and not fraudulent way is at the heart of many New Sincerity texts, and especially those of David Foster Wallace" (9). In relation to a discussion of Adam Kelly in Wallace, we learn that "The ethical obligation to decide whether the author is sincere or insincere falls on the reader. Sincerity is therefore an unfinished project, an ongoing dialogue between the author and the reader" (9). The candidate also argues at one point that, "Irony and cynicism are very clearly defense mechanisms that create unavailability" (12). In a discussion of Wallace's "This Is Water—David Foster Wallace Commencement Speech" we read, "The important thing is not to slip into the default setting of our self-centred thoughts but to try to understand the Other, the other's face and what is behind it" (14). Crucially, we read that in relation to comments from Wallace, "To surpass irony even though it is revered by television and is part of everyday experience is the task for New Sincerity" (17). **First question:** to put it in a nutshell, is this successfully accomplished in any works of this era of

time that the candidate mentions in her thesis including those by Jeffrey Eugenides? If so how and if not why not?

In Chapter 1 the candidate asks a question that I ask of her in turn (what she thinks herself) when she writes of *The Marriage Plot*: “is it a flaw of the novel that it is not capable of envisioning the new path for literature, or is such a vision simply impossible in the post-postmodernist literary landscape?” (32). Therefore, **second question**, what does the candidate say herself precisely to this matter? In Chapter 3, intriguingly, “The reinvention in *Middlesex* is very much a modernist process, similar to the process of reinvention and repetition in [Gertrude] Stein’s [*The Making of Americans*]” (56). Not only this, but “*Middlesex* is a call for reconsidering the status of hybridity in the American society and reassessing human relationships, especially between white and non-white Americans” (58). Crucially, with *Middlesex* “as in *The Virgin Suicides* there is some unspoken disease in the American society” (61). We later learn that this disease “seems to be connected to the impossibility of reconciling many worldviews, mainly racial and ethnical. It is a disease that could be cured by hybridity if there was any viable hybridity accessible” (63).

In the Conclusion, we read that with regard to *The Virgin Suicides*, which the candidate first treated in Chapter 2, “There is no alternative future. The future is declined. There is nothing to counteract entropy that has been growing in Detroit since the decline of its automobile industry” (66). Intriguingly, we encounter too that “what is felt in the novels is an underlying, hidden voice that accounts for the unspoken agenda—a call for reconstructing the American golden age and finding a necessary remedy—without explaining what remedy and kind of future is required” (68). However, of these three Eugenides novels “their method is a one-way pleading, not a two-way conversation” (68). **Third question**. Given what you say here about the solitariness of the reader, and how that makes her or him (or them) “as a person responsible for the fate of their reading, their life, and finally the world at large” (68) is there not present here some notional possibility if not instance of intersubjectivization with respect to the notion of “the world at large”? If not can you clarify why not? Finally, “Each novel presents space, not so much for rethinking the events of the past, as for creating a challenge for the future” (67). **Fourth question**: how or how not (and why or why not) does this point to some kind of future-oriented dialogue between the reader and the Eugenides novel text?

In light of the foregoing mentions, I hereby recommend the pre thesis defense mark of between a 2 (velmi dobře) and a 1 (výborně) for the thesis work. The defense will decide the final outcome.



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26 May 2022

