



FACULTY OF ARTS  
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**--Opponent's Report on  
Michal Mecner's Diploma Thesis:**

**“Robert Frost: The Village and Beyond”**

Mr. Michal Mecner seeks to illuminate the poetic output of Robert Frost using the critical lens of Guy Debord, a fascinating conjunction that to my knowledge has as of yet to be enlisted in the field of Frost or of Debord studies.

The body of the thesis contains eighty-six pages; in addition, there is a two-page long bibliography and a nine page summary of the thesis in Czech.

As concerns the prose style, the thesis is generally well written, well researched and well documented. Not only this, the bulk of this diploma thesis is a pleasure to read.

As regard the content effects of the piece I should adduce the following mentions from MM that show the basic line of argumentation and the standard at which he works in the thesis: “By and large, Debord’s theoretical attack on the gross cult of the spectacle and commodity is mirrored in Frost’s poetry” (48); “At the very heart of Debord’s theory, we find a theorem stating that in social life being has in general degraded into having” (48); in chapter four on “Community” we read of Debord’s critique of death as something that itself becomes commodified and spectacularized to the detriment of life whereas in Frost, “people’s aging and death are not haunting processes, they are inevitable natural facts” (64). How does the candidate see the conceptual intersection between death and community in Frost, therefore, more precisely?

Further than this, I am interested to know what the candidate thinks of the notion of love in a postmodern theoretical context if it is for Frost, “not an abstract thing [...] it is strongly localized and concretized” (66). Is the notion perhaps a semi-failure in Debord, among many other theoreticians of late? Here is the powerful coda to the thesis in which the candidate speculates of Debord’s dream that “the world will one day set itself free of consumerism and spectacular products of economy-driven evolution. Debord proposes that the world already dreams of such a time and in order actually to live it, it ‘only needs to become fully conscious of it’ (Debord, Thesis 164). Frost had a dream, he was conscious of this dream, and he transmuted this dream into a poetic world. Frost’s world, and he transmuted this dream into a poetic world. Frost’s world has the right amount of imperfectness and incompleteness. It is brilliant, both terrible and brilliant. Terrible in that there is death and irretrievable loss and brilliant because there is beauty and life in it” (86). This is eloquent. I ask the candidate to elaborate as the American parlance would have it: e.g., in regard to the specificity of what constitutes beauty and



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life, so to say, big notions but a little more semantic agency would be appreciated here.

All in all, the readings of Frost are good though at times they could have been more fleshed out and the use of Debord is somewhat heterodox but I think the candidate grasps many of the crucial issues in Debord, a thinker that contemporaries such as Giorgio Agamben take with the utmost seriousness (Agamben started out a Heideggerian and now pursues to write and to follow in the footsteps to some degree of Debord and of Walter Benjamin as his primary inspirators). Agamben could also have been used here but that I understand would be for another thesis.

Last not least, following on the track of the discourse, I would ask the candidate what are the shortcomings or weaknesses as he sees them in Debord's theories and in his own approach to Frost's verse (to be his own worst critic, so to say).

**Pre oral exam mark: výborná-**

**Erik S. Roraback, D.Phil.**  
**18 May 2010**