

Posudek na diplomovou práci Damiana Manire „*Living*“ *Europe: The Alien Impressions of Henry James and Lambert Strether*

This analysis of Henry James' work focuses on *The Ambassadors*, the international theme, and the relation between the author's subject and the role of Lambert Strether, one of his major heroes. It is based on a number of important works of recent Jamesian criticism and on influential approaches of contemporary cultural studies (Bourdieu, Bhabha) and also on the approaches of earlier representatives of novel theory (Mikhail M. Bakhtin). The thesis is clearly argued and well structured. Its major contribution is to see James's significance in relation to "the modern debate over fixed identities and borders—of what constitutes a citizen or an immigrant, a nation, a region, an individual or body" (p. 76).

The problem of the candidate's approach is that it requires comprehensive knowledge of a wide area of contemporary cultural studies and also the ability to recognize the difference between the formalist interpretation of James, based on the autonomy of the work of art, the "point of view," and the relationship between the narrator and the reflector on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the contemporary approaches focusing on the interplay between the author's consciousness and the fictional elements of the text (narrator, characters), such as the criticism of Kaja Silverman or David Carroll.

I have discussed with the candidate some reservations I had to this approach, especially a certain tendency to merge the *fictional representation* of consciousness with the *speculative re-creation* of the author's consciousness. This approach denies the text its independent status based mainly on the uniqueness of language (de Man, Hillis Miller) and on the exclusive status of literature in modern democracies, consisting in the autonomy of the fictional world (derived from the "acts of literature" as well as from its "secret," the indeterminacy in the process of signification) and in the absence of conventionally (legally, ethically) defined responsibility (Derrida). Even in the final version of the thesis I cannot quite agree with some naive comparisons between Strether and James, such as that quoted on p. 41: "Like James, Lambert Strether is troubled by his position as an alien, situates himself as a discrete observer, and tends towards an aesthetic reconfiguration of his observations in order to make a sense of them." Here we could argue that a fictional character is used to construct the author's consciousness, and that the whole correlation is aiming to assert the adequacy of James's fiction to historical reality. If there is any such correlation, it must be studied in terms of value paradigms as it is shown, in a rather crude form, in the sub-chapter "Moneyed Masculinity."

In specific literary historical terms, I cannot quite accept the discussion of James's approach to Hawthorne and American "provincialism". It is not sufficiently concrete (the candidate may not have read Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* as a novel which had a formative influence on James) and does not take into account Hawthorne's innovative approach to historical fiction and to allegory (one could refer, for instance, to Hillis Miller's essay on "Hawthorne and History").

In the cultural historical part, I lack a deeper approach to the problem of national identity, especially a distinction between nations based on ethnic and civic principles (Anthony D. Smith) and also the reflection of the fact that nations are communities, distinguished, as Benedict Anderson says, "according to the way they are imagined," and that a good deal of this imagining is controlled by modern technological media. Also, I lack a more consistent reflection of the theme of imperialism, especially a comparison of ideological definitions of British and American empire. Last but not least, the candidate should give more thought to the relationship between James's "international theme" and the beginnings of economic globalization, especially the tourist industry bringing Americans into Europe.

It is a pity that the final text still contains some typos, the most persistent one is the misspelling of the name of Homi K. Bhabha.

Despite all these problems I recommend the dissertation for the defence and propose to grade it "excellent" or "very good," depending on the candidate's performance during the defence.

Doporučuji práci k obhajobě a navrhuji hodnotit "výborně" nebo "velmi dobře" v závislosti na výsledku obhajoby.

V Praze, 11. května 2007



prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc.
vedoucí práce