



POSUDEK OPONENTA DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **Anglická a americká literatura - navazující studium**

Název práce: **Coming-of-Age in American Fiction**

Autorka práce: **Bc. Jana Šojdelová**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D.**

Oponent diplomové práce: **Mgr. Tomáš Jajtner, Ph.D. et Th.D.**

Short characteristics of the thesis

Jana Šojdelová's thesis deals with the problem of coming-of-age in modern American novel. She expands on her earlier work dealing with Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). The text starts with a theoretical introduction to the coming-of-age narratives, their similarities and differences to the earlier *Bildungsromane*, their standard structural pattern (*separation – initiation – return*), their traditional gender bias (i.e. vast majority of earlier narratives dealt with male maturation) and, finally, the key issue of self-transformation as their crystallization point. The following chapters provide a detailed analysis of two (relatively) recent American novels dealing with the coming-of-age problem, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (first publ. 1963) and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Virgin Suicides* (1993). Methodologically, the analyses focus on three key themes of identity, sexuality and death. The findings of the thesis are summed up in the conclusion.

Overall assessment

Overall, the thesis makes the impression of a carefully planned text, based on close reading and good knowledge of secondary literature. The interpretation of the novels is thus clearly focused and well-researched and, what is more, delivered in highly readable and practically flawless English. Jana seems to be passionately engaged and interested in the interpretative process which adds yet another dimension to the text, namely, a sense of urgency and topicality of the problem she deals with.

All in all, the thesis fulfils all the main requirements for the final work of an M.A. student: it provides a well-organised text which makes good use of both primary and secondary literature and proves the student's ability to analyze a complex literary text with clarity and depth.

In fact, there are just minor issues I find worth discussing at the defence. The title of the thesis "Coming-of-Age in American Fiction" suggests a much more thorough treatment of this topic in modern American literature than the analysis of just two novels. In this context, the title is rather misleading.

The second issue is somewhat broader and concerns the form of dealing with certain theoretical concepts. As I have said before, the theoretical framework of the thesis is appropriate and well-applied in the analysis, however, there seems to be no critical discussion of some of the assumptions the concepts take for granted. Indeed, there are many different concepts of maturation and education in a broader sense, which view these issues differently. Roughly speaking, those concepts (e.g. the Jungian one, to mention perhaps the most important one) talk about the need for



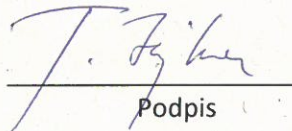
"integrating" the various tensions adolescents must deal with in the process of maturation. After all, the very idea of maturation suggests the need to define the concept of "maturity", i.e. a standard to be achieved in order to be able to succeed in life. From that perspective, the issues of identity are not simply defined by the notion of binary oppositions or the sexual difference, but also in terms of the "discovery of the Self", i.e. of interiority which manages to integrate the various oppositions of an individual life or of human existence in general. A more critical attitude towards some of the standard assumptions of feminist theory, or psychoanalytical criticism (Lacan, Kristeva etc.) would perhaps result in a more "individual" and less "expectable" reading of the novels.

Of course, I do not mean it to debunk Jana's achievement (which I find remarkable): in fact, I want to suggest the possibility to move the interpretation to different horizons, if some of the interpretative concepts are more critically reconsidered. If Jana continues to work in the field of literary studies, I am sure she can provide new, fresh insights into this important topic.

However, this is really just hair-splitting. I obviously **do** recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the following grade: **excellent (výborně)**.

10. 5. 2013

Datum


Podpis