

Petra Vašendová, 'Ethics and Religion in George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter*'

BA thesis

Supervisor's Report

The BA thesis sets out to examine the issue of religion and loss of faith, alongside the related issues of ethics and social critique, in George Orwell's mostly unknown second novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter*.

The strength of the thesis lies in its diligent engagement with the development of the central character and the various degrees of social critique in Orwell's wry fiction. The candidate's interest in the topic of faith and the loss of faith is discernible. The candidate's choice of secondary material is mostly relevant, her employment of it into her own argument adequate. The structure of the thesis follows the novel's individual chapters, emphasising in each the relevant aspects of the protagonist's complex rite of passage.

The primary weakness of the thesis lies in its purely pragmatic approach to the novel, focusing on the social criticism aspects while somewhat neglecting the experimental aspects which this novel, perhaps most of all Orwell's texts, rather abounds in. However, it is worth noting that the topic of the thesis is always adhered to, and even the most divergent elements on the novel are brought under some critical scrutiny related to the central concerns of the thesis. Rather than contemplating the novel as an experimental text, the thesis attempts to isolate, highlight and trace the intricacies of depicting religious faith and the loss thereof, and its wider implications in terms of character development, while also commenting on Orwell's strategies of mockery and critique, drawing on the relevant context of Orwell's own personal experience, as a child and as an adult. Overall, the thesis would have benefitted from an additional level of critical discussion, using the textual and (auto)biographical evidence gathered so far to further contemplate the possible further ethical implications of Orwell's novel, beyond the immediate plotline.

I have a question for the candidate to respond to during her viva voce examination, on a point that could have been discussed in more detail in the thesis:

In your opinion, is Orwell more interested in describing and developing the faith-related quandaries of the protagonist or in satirising the hypocrisy of the self-professed Christian

community at large? Is Orwell more concerned with class-system critique overall rather than a critique of religion as such?

To conclude, I am happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of 'very good' (velmi dobře), depending on the candidate's performance on the day.

26 August 2020

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.