



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

OPPONENT'S REPORT
BA THESIS
“Chaim Potok's Selected Characters and Their Resistance towards Assimilation”
Petra Hadlová

The thesis discusses “the general tendency of American Jews and their descendents to resist assimilation with a much higher probability than the other immigrant groups present in the United States of America” (4). Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* and *My Name is Asher Lev* are analyzed with the objective of proving the aforementioned tendency (4). Ms. Hadlová argues that “the main three points, which are clearly necessary to resist assimilation” are religion, family and education (9).

This is an engaging thesis dedicated to urgent contemporary issues. Nevertheless, its arguments should have been more convincingly presented. At the start, Norman Lebrecht is quoted, writing that “Chaim Potok stands four cubits apart from almost every other American Jew who left a mark on English literature” (10). If this is the case, how can Potok represent the “general tendency of American Jews”? No other Jewish American writer is mentioned thus the text does not reflect the diversity of Jewish American literature, which could have illustrated the variety of Judaism more accurately.

The thesis could have also provided clearer evidence for its sociological analysis. For example, it is stated that in respect to assimilation, the Jews “did not and still do not succumb as fast as the other immigrant groups” (14). Which other immigrant groups? Could the candidate provide concrete examples? Or, we learn that “[n]o other religious or social community relies on the family to such [an] extent as the Jewish one” (28). Again, could the candidate provide further evidence? The opening sections of chapter 3, “Family's role in defying assimilation,” look for support in Ernest Burton's 1896 article from *The Biblical World* and later in Lipset and Raab's study from 1995, but what about other recent studies in the field, such as *Women Remaking American Judaism* (ed. Riv-Ellen Prell)? A similar problem occurs on p. 17 in the context of defining assimilation. The candidate refers to *Remaking the American Mainstream* (ed. Alba and Nee) but instead of benefiting from the discussion offered in this text, she reproduces a definition that was provided by Robert Park and E. W. Burgess roughly a century ago, and which Alba and Nee merely departed from in their own definition of assimilation. Moreover, the definition is incorrectly cited in the thesis. (Otherwise the prose and citations are clear, disregarding minor issues. For example, the author of the quote on p. 42 does not appear in the “Works Cited” section so the source cannot be traced.)

The thesis thus delves into important issues that nevertheless deserve further research and evidence. In my view, on the BA level, it may be graded as “very good” (2), depending on the defense.

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