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UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Report on Bakalářské Práce(Oponentsky posudek):

Harry Potter: A Social Critique

Harry Potter: Sociální Kritika

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General Remarks:

This thesis is generally well written and conforms to the requirements of academic writing, the text being largely devoid of any serious issues- there are however countless errors of spelling and grammar all of which constitute an irritating distraction from the subject matter and which detract from the impact it makes. This thesis really needs to have been given a much more thorough proofing before submission.

The introductory pitch of the thesis is overwrought and for very good reason: it seeks to disguise the salient fact that this is basically a long winded way of saying that Fantasy fiction works by presenting an alternate mode of reality from which/with which to satirise our own reality- et plus ça change plus c'est la même chose ... The assertion that the addition of detail renders this a viable and exceptional bildungsroman which acts as a rigorous social critique is somewhat misguided as there are countless works of fantasy fiction which do similar things and yet which still fall short of having serious satirical credentials, something which Rowling's work, despite all the hype, has also suffered from. Social criticism is nothing new in Children's writing nor in fantasy fiction and it is hard to ignore that this assertion of exceptionalism or even novelty is fraudulent, especially worrying in the thesis exposition.

The assertion that "Victoriana is thus used pragmatically and serves as an exotic background for the presentation of various social discriminations, and is arguably the dominant mode in children's modern literature." Really needs to be challenged in the sense that it is part of a general gestalt aesthetic in modern literature rather something specific to Children's literature and there is no serious consideration of the postmodern/postcolonial employment of the Victorian in terms of parody and pastiche. In this regard , a thorough reading of Jameson's *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* would have afforded the student the possibility of viewing Rowling's use of Victoriana as

a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order-what is often euphemistically called modernization, post-industrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism.¹

This said, the content of the thesis in terms of its comprehensive nature and its clear enthusiasm for the topic is laudable and it would be churlish to deny that the work offers a substantive survey of many themes in the Harry Potter series, which are not dealt with in many secondary sources with such thoroughness-the caveat being that after such a substantial delay in the work's completion, one might reasonably expect exactly that, if not more.

¹ Frederic Jameson. *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*. from Brooker, Peter, Ed. *Modernism/Postmodernism*. New York: Longman, 1992.

The formal introduction on page 10 reveals yet another logical fallacy which is endemic in fan fiction, as evinced in the following statement: “ examining the social order of the magical community and how it is connected to the real world will provide another viewpoint to the discussion of Harry Potter ”. There are many moments in the reading of this thesis where the issue of critical psychosis is not far from the mark: the paper is discussing a speculative social order within a fantasy model society, relative to a FICTIONAL rendering of the contemporary world which is itself in fact something of a retrospect vision, embodying the world of the 1970s/80s rather than the modern day. I mention this as this is a subtle but important misapplication –a hermeneutic expository system which is contaminated with a dearth of critical rigour is merely a guided tour, not a critical essay.

Section 2. Fantasy as Medium for Social Criticism, compounds certain problems by the use of Hollingdale and Barthes, the combined effect being to demand that Rowling’s work is seen as a cultural product , a collective work which is not an isolated literary text. Fair enough, but would it not then be the onus of the student to demonstrate a little historical and political nous and to accurately identify the world Rowling is depicting – hers is the world of inherited Conservative politics and the schizophrenic response of the Scots to that post-imperial imposition of internal -colonialism by an alien political class. She is writing during the New Labour years and with a clear acknowledgement of the conflicted identity she herself felt , supporting Labour but with a clear latent British Tory jingoism in the background. There is little analysis of the social and political landscape of Rowling, nor of her own role as *Mater Dolorosa* of the crypto-conservative New Labour camp. Section 5.0 makes a series of gaffes in this respect and is a particularly weak section of the thesis- Rowling has no real credibility as a commentator on gender politics.

Despite offering a solid consideration of a wide variety of aspects of characterization etc in Rowling’s Harry Potter series, there is an unresolved lack of clarity in regard to the foregoing which detracts from the credibility of the critical thrust: it lacks the relativistic and independent bent which would have raised this thesis to another level, rather than remaining, as it does, impressive through sheer volume and bulk.

Recommendation

I find this thesis to be of an acceptable standard and would recommend a pass at a grade of 2(velme dobre) or 3(dobre).

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