

Varditer Arzumanyan, 'Journey Through Parallel Universes: The World of Portal Fantasy'
BA thesis

Opponent's Report

The BA thesis sets out to examine the plot- and character-forming aspects of parallel-world experience in the following fantasy novels: Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, Phillip Pullman's *Dark Materials* trilogy, and Seanan McGuire's *Wayward Children* series. The thesis is well written but appears slightly loosely structured, tackling a wider array of issues than it can consistently assess, with individual chapters discussing selected key aspects of the respective fantasy novels (e.g. rite of passage, Bildung, exile, the imaginative potential as a way of social critique). The thesis does introduce a wider range of relevant fantasy-genre agenda which is tied to the topos of the portal, and provides a 'meta-analysis' and conclusion which maps, somewhat sketchily, the similarities and differences among the various texts discussed. The thesis is well researched, using an adequate, relevant selection of secondary material.

The strength of the thesis lies in its engagement with the various methods of characterisation, plot development and critique of societal issues in the chosen texts in relation to the topos of parallel worlds. The thesis shows promise and testifies to the candidate's knowledge, understanding, and a degree of critical thinking – however, and this is the major drawback of the thesis, it could have benefited from a more focused central argument (a more coherent discussion of the distinct particulars of 'portal fantasy' in the context of the fantasy genre – perhaps around selected central themes, e.g. exile, liminality, entrances and exits).

Overall, the thesis would have benefitted from a more thorough intertwining of the theoretical background laid out in the introduction and the subsequent discussion of relevant detail in the respective novels. As it stands, though worked out diligently, the thesis lacks a coherent central argument that would tie the details listed throughout into a tighter structure.

On the level of formatting, the thesis is executed nigh meticulously. On the level of language, the thesis is consistent and well written, with only minor occasional stylistic issues, e.g. 'inevitableness' (p. 22). NB – 'essay' should not be used synonymously with 'thesis' and its proper synonyms. The Czech abstract could have done with professional language editing, as there are stylistic issues throughout and some grammatical issues: 'příběhové linky' [linie]; 'úkol' does not translate as 'quest'; the proliferation of redundant possessives (e.g. 'Každá kniha je shrnuta a zkoumána ve své příslušné kapitole'); incorrect inflection ('autorky Seanan

McGuireovi'), sometimes combined with awkward phrasing ('jedná se o juxtapozici ... a kontrastnostem knižních struktur'). Though ancillary, the Czech abstract is a requirement of the thesis and it is disappointing to see it in this state.

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

- In your opinion, do the various ethical concerns discussed in your thesis expand or limit the imaginative potential of portals?

To conclude, I am happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of 'very good' (velmi dobře), pending the candidate's performance during the viva voce examination.

4 February 2021

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.