

Opponent's Report on B.A. Thesis by

Michal Otáhal,

“The Legacy of *Invisible Man*: Ralph Ellison's Influence on *Fight Club*”

In his B.A. thesis, Mr. Michal Otáhal gives a comparative account of Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel text, *Invisible Man* and its transtextual and intertextual cultural influences on Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel work, *Fight Club*. The thesis contains vi + 45 pp., which includes an Introduction, three main chapters, and a Conclusion. There is also a three-page Bibliography.

Stylistically, the thesis is in the main well written, although there are a few glitches in the prose: for example, “him as yet” (11) should be “his as yet”; “the closet approximation” (15) should be “the closest approximation”; “only mean of” (16) may be “only means of”; “depending who” (16) could be “depending on who”; and “realises he that” (39) should be “he realises that”.

As for the content of the study, the candidate contends that each of the two novels under his literary-critical purview examine “the issues of dispossession, the failed American dream, and the social invisibility of people living on the edge of society without any possibility to move upwards” (2). So these are to be sure, three grand topic areas. Not only this, “The thesis argues that the main concept of *Fight Club*'s Emersonian search for one's true Self—combined with social invisibility and the unattainable American dream—follows the interpretations in Ellison's *Invisible Man* but adjusts them to the contemporary globalized society” (3). This is by extension, well demonstrated in the thesis. Furthermore, we read of the principal characters in the two respective prose narratives that, “Through dispossession, which corresponds with Emerson's “Self-Reliance” [...] they aim to achieve freedom as individuals” (13). First question: what does this say about the notion of sovereignty or freedom itself? Can the candidate add some further clarifying thoughts here?

For the thesis writer, “They need to dispose of all possessions—both material and spiritual—to sink to the very bottom of their lives. When they are at the bottom, they discover, their true Emersonian Self, which requires approaching the Over-Soul (the fundamental equal validity of each human consciousness) and the consequent unity of the world,[nf.26] and then rising anew and reaching for their ultimate antinomian freedom from the grasp of society” (13). This is an excellent and well put point. Intriguingly we also learn that “their [the two respective principal so-called “characters”] identity-confusion enhances their spiritual dispossession” (20); furthermore, in an astute critical submission, we read that *Invisible Man* at the end of that narrative “becomes a modernized version of the Emersonian poet” (22) and “the ultimate speaker for his social class” (22). Crucially in a cultural pair relationship, “Near the end of the [two] novels, the narrators finally see through the schemes of the leaders they respected but are unable to remedy what the organizations have done through them. The power of the organizations proves to be, dishearteningly, far stronger than themselves” (30). Second question: if this is so, how can one by extension hope in these novel worlds to contest this mass of institutional and organization power against one?

Also in an illuminating comparative point, “Although the circumstances of their respective deaths are slightly different—Clifton defends himself against the harassment of a policeman and Big Bob flees a crime scene—they are both shot down by the police.” (31). This claim provides food for critical pondering and reflection in multi-pronged ways. In

addition, “In *Fight Club*, the death of Big Bob is also an eye-opening moment for the Narrator, when he realises that members of Project Mayhem are entrapped in “a fascist paramilitary group that is more dangerous than the social order it has set out to destroy.”[fn.62]” (32); and from the artistic universe of *Fight Club*: “The notion of being a Space Monkey corresponds with Jack’s remark towards Invisible Man, “you were not hired to think” (Ellison, 469)” (33); also in a forceful point: “Like the Brotherhood, Fight Club and Project Mayhem offer support and stability to people with empty lives.” (33). In a further cross textual comparison: “They [Narrator/Tyler and IM] began to embrace their invisibility as they reached the limit of their dispossession (severance) from the world.” (34) and vitally too, “they [Narrator/Tyler and IM] have already set on their path towards total dispossession of their self and, therefore, towards their freedom; and they have nowhere to come back to. In their final moments, the narrators realize that it is they who must take the final step towards freedom, and nobody can do it for them.” (35). Another good exegetical point appears thus: “The teachings of Project Mayhem in *Fight Club* are immensely nihilistic, depriving the members of their selves and individuality: [...]. This corresponds with the Brotherhood’s notion of world unity—the brotherhood of man.” (35). Third question: Does this teach us to think that nihilism is the real deadlock in our ongoing cultural modernity?

Compellingly, “The Brotherhood, at least in theory, offers salvation, a new purpose, on which such people can linger and develop—a new version of the American dream.” (36). Question number four: does this aesthetic moment teach us to think of other conditions of possibility for the incubating if not for the launching of other ideological values for the so-called American way of life? Last not least, “Whether “rising above” that situation can restore their agency and potency remains, in the case both of Invisible Man and the Narrator, an open question at the end of their narratives.” (41). This may speak for itself.

In light of the foregoing mentions, I hereby recommend the pre thesis defense mark of 1 (výborně) for the thesis work.



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30 August 2021