



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's General Report on Mr. Richard Stock's

Ph.D. Studies and Thesis, 'The Puzzle Novel'

I write as the supervisor of Richard Stock's doctoral thesis in order to assess the quality of the intellectual work Mr. Stock has accomplished over-all to proceed to the dissertation defense.

Richard's dissertational treatment of 'The Puzzle Novel' contains 189 pages, which includes the following sections, "Abstract", "Abbreviations", "Introduction" and then the main component chapters entitled, "1. The successes and failure of narratology", "2. The failures and success of novel theory", "3. Boundaries reconsidered: the puzzle novel", "4. *Ulysses*: puzzle novel foundations", "5. *Gravity's Rainbow*: the puzzle novel comes of age and starts to disappear", "6. *Prisoner's Dilemma*: the puzzle novel as novel", "Conclusion" and "Works Consulted".

The prose style is highly readable and the intelligence and thinking on display very analytical.

Mr. Stock's principal novelistic works authored by James Joyce, Thomas Pynchon and Richard Powers are outfitted by analytical-creative instruments offered by Leo Bersani, Maurice Blanchot, Gérard Genette, Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Paul Ricoeur, and Peter Brooks, among others. The work thus displays a wide ranging knowledge of works authored by representatives from a number of critical parties. This constitutes part of the attraction of the work for this reader, for this sort of cultural backgrounding and scaffolding of its topic area allows the candidate to achieve a certain kind of syncretic methodology in his investigations. And to cap it off these theoretical modelings and understandings are given an audience and a voice by a very relaxed and fluid discursive prose stylist in Mr. Stock.

Perhaps the chief merit of the work lies in its probing, searching, inquiring, paving the way for future exertions in this area of comparative cultural research in future studies of the novel form. For Richard does a fine job of profiling the chief contours of his chosen critical apparatuses not only to illuminate his target texts but also to set the stage for yet more participants on the theater of his doctoral work; he says as much with the following: "My greatest hope for this study is that it does not serve as the final word on these theories and novels, but rather encourages others to proliferate the meanings and possibilities that this field offers by engaging with these texts in new ways." (10)

More exactly, and in light of the foregoing admission, I would ask the candidate what he considers the most under-developed part of his basic argument; or, what he feels most unclear about concerning his line of argumentation, and why? Here a certain kind of self-problematization would be helpful. Second what possibilities of research does the candidate still see in his thesis work for a possible book version of the dissertation, for example, if this interests the candidate?

Last not least, I would be interested to hear some speculation as to why puzzle novels seem no longer to be in vogue from the year 2000 forward? For as the candidate writes: "In my conception, the puzzle novel does seem to be inescapably a postmodern form, whether we take that word to refer to cultural and social realities or artistic forms, or both. If my kind of puzzle novel is no longer produced, that may provide support for an argument that we have progressed beyond the postmodern period. Even more tenuous would be an argument about what period we are now in, or even more radically if we are beyond the need to label historical and artistic periods. The failure to find a better label than adding to the previous period "post-" in the postmodern period (that is, "post-postmodern") already shows a kind of discomfort with labeling. It may be that the specific insights this study produces are limited to the postmodern era, but as I hope I have shown, the motivation for this study, and the need to produce a more accurate criticism and theory of the novel, remains as current and pressing as ever. (182)".

By way of conclusion, Richard has not only done high quality work in a very challenging area of literary study with his engagement of writers such as Joyce, Pynchon, Blanchot, inter alia, but has also performed very admirably in courses he has taken at the English department, including two with me on related topics such as Pynchon's 'Gravity's Rainbow' and Joyce's 'Finnegans Wake' in relation to notions of cultural forms, of cultural modernity and of the philosophical baroque.

I hereby endorse Mr. Stock's application to proceed to the thesis defense.

Sincerely,



Erik S. Roraback, D.Phil. (Oxon.)

Prague, 3 February 2010