

Opponent's Report on B.A. thesis by

Mr. Ádám Hushegyi

A RITE OF PASSAGE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF ANGLO-AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS IN THE POST WORLD-WAR II ERA

Mr. Hushegyi's thesis delineates the evolutionary development and deployment of the cultural form of the comic book in various media in the Anglo-American world from 1945-present. The study is both well researched and well written and contains work to be commended. More than this, the topic area is an exciting one in the field of popular culture.

The thesis contains forty-six pages across an Introduction, five chapters one of which is a Conclusion and a rich Bibliography. The chapter titles for the body of the thesis include the following: "1. The Origins and Brief History of Comic Books 2. Confronting Racism and Censorship in the 1950s 3. Superheroes Strike Back 4. Transformation in the Wake of the New Millennium 5. Conclusion". All in all, the thesis is very well structured and organized and clear in the exposition of its presentation strategy as the titles of the individual units of composition suggest. Stylistically the thesis is very well written although there is the odd error e.g. "the *The Dark Knight Returns*" (29) does not need that first 'the'. Overall though the English is again to be sure very strong and elegant.

Chapter one is brief and to the point very informative and chapter two inserts the cultural form of comic books in the overall dynamic of "race" and of "censorship". The discussion is rich and fertile of insight. Chapter three points out the importance of commercial concerns in the deployment of the comic book in U.S. culture and the function of superheroes in this cultural and money economy. The remarkable cultural phenomena both of Batman and of Superman are also broached in this third chapter. **First general question:** Would the candidate take these two characters as somehow pushing forward the official American ideology of conquering individuality and leading a monadic existence or rather moving against the grain of the U.S.A. mentality in these or in other ways? If so how, and if not why not? You mention e.g. that Batman "does have many characteristics that demonstrate the authoritarian side of superheroes" (27) perhaps something that feeds the logic of development of the authoritarian aspects of a big capital society? Interestingly the candidate says superheroes anticipate "1970s and 1980s antiheroes" (28); yet this and for example Batman is two sided vis-à-vis Ronald Reagan's America as Adam submits "since the very need for the caped crusader is born out of the government's incompetence" (28). An emphasis on the crucial import of the works of Alan Moore and Frank Miller in respectively their written works *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* makes for compelling reading in this section. The 1993 comic book collapse that the candidate recounts emphasizes how this meltdown in popularity led the industry into other cultural media such as TV and film.

Chapter four (pp. 34-39) gives special pride of space to director Christopher Nolan's Batman series of three films to make the point that the

cultural form of the comic book in the domain of cinema has the capacity to provoke and to be a vibrant contributor to the culture of debate in the U.S. The silver screen has even arguably made a certain spirit of the comic book more popular in that cinematic form than in the traditional print medium of the book. The seeming overall positive account of Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy* (*Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, and *The Dark Knight Rises*) goes against a good deal of commentary that takes the trilogy all in all as a reactionary trio of movies in sum, an issue that the candidate does broach. **Second question:** Would the candidate be able to problematize some aspect of the positive side of his basic thesis here about the Nolan *Trilogy* that he feels has not been given interpretive justice? That is how would you more detailedly argue for and against the progressive and regressive aspects of the Nolan trilogy in more specific terms than you are able to cover in your thesis account? There are cultural critics and theorists in your bibliography for example (Slavoj Žižek, et. al.) that you could roll in for this purpose.

Last not least the Conclusion albeit interesting and compelling does not really make absolutely clear the author's own position on the future development of the cultural form of the comic book for instance in movie culture. Perhaps this is because of the ambiguity of the problem itself. Nevertheless, here is a **third question** for the candidate: Do you see some emancipatory potentials possible in the form of the comic book in its ongoing development and deployment that would be capable of new forms of progressive elements, or do you have a more pessimistic view of what may lurk on the cultural horizon? **Fourth question:** What are some key facets here in this regard? The pressure of big finance capital? New authoritarianisms? Issues of fascism, gender, race, or class and economic justice? The rise of good TV culture in the past decade that continues apace? Something else?

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

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