



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report:

Pavína Míková, "Gender and Loneliness in Contemporary Irish Short Stories," BA thesis

Choice of Topic:

The subject area of this thesis is a productive one for a BA level project. The thesis attempts to map the theme of loneliness and its gendered dimensions in a selection of contemporary Irish short fiction. The topic area permits a discussion of work by a range of authors not often collected together within a changing socio-political context.

Thesis statement / aims and objectives:

The introductory chapter works actively to outline the purpose of the thesis as a whole and frame it in terms of the Celtic Tiger context. The time frame for her corpus – 1991 to 2012 – extends slightly beyond the usual understanding of this 'era.' This choice enables the inclusion of material that contributes to the focus of the analysis in useful ways, however the deficit of work by women author is marked, and is peculiar given the focus on gender. Ms Míková shows a decent awareness of some of the recent scholarly work on the Irish short story and provides a capable overview of the context. The thesis goes some way towards elaborating some of the contextual factors at work here, but is limited by a lack of concern with the aesthetic aspects of the contemporary Irish short story or any more theoretical approach to gender politics, as well as by the open and slippery quality of her key terms.

Structure and development:

The organization of the thesis is logical and coherently realised. As already mentioned, chapter 1 lays out the agenda of the project clearly and provides a contextual, social frame of reference. The material is somewhat bounded by a rather general idea of the family, stereotypes and expectations concerning women's roles. This at times leads to a dulling of potential points for analysis, for instance of page 7 when the thesis attempts to handle loneliness as "a wide range of negative feelings with each one expressing itself differently" the causes of which "can be modern day (individualistic society, virtual world) or timeless (living in a stereotype and stuck in one's willingly or unwillingly accepted gender role)." It might have been productive to focus more on whether literary images of loneliness do something new, are they forms of social critique or modes of disruption or is there a continuity with the past in some way. Also the matter of stereotypes is taken largely uncritically as potentially atemporal. Chapter 2 on the "New Irish Woman" interprets Claire Keegan's "Men and Women" and Dermot Bolger's "Winter" in relation to gender stereotypes. The chapter offers a good deal of descriptive detail, and some insights into the chosen works. My main question here is how the choice was made to build a chapter around these stories – they seem so far apart, and when considering the question of representation of women, would it not have been strategic to have included more work by women? Chapter 3 is also constructed around an assemblage of stories that are analysed through the lens of masculinity. Some of these are more effective in unravelling aspects of contemporary loneliness than others. In particular Kevin Barry's "Beer Trip to Llandudno and Philip Ó Ceallaigh's "Walking Away" work well here, although perhaps what is really in focus are states of contemporary alienation rather than loneliness per se. Chapter 4, covering the ways in which gender politics in Irish life and law have changed, reveals an awareness of seminal debates and events in recent Irish history. However, given that the territory of the main battles has been the bodies of women, it is strange that the work chosen for



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discussion in this chapter is all authored by men. Does this not reinstate the dominance of a male perspective within a fraught cultural space? In what ways might the ‘story’ be different if not viewed through the work of Joseph O’Connor, Roddy Doyle or Colm Tóibín? By this chapter the focus on loneliness as a hinge for the discussion seems much less central as well.

Research:

The thesis demonstrates adequate skill in searching, selecting, and evaluating sources to meet the needs of the topic. Ms Míková has assembled a good bibliography and varied fictional corpus, though one that reproduces the gender inequality the thesis discusses.

Use of sources:

The use of secondary sources is generally clear and stylistically well framed. Some ideas are investigated and integrated. Research materials have been cited appropriately throughout. Well done.

Stylistics and language:

The register of the work is appropriate. Language clearly and effectively communicates ideas. Ms Míková’s writing style is fluent and consistent.

Format:

Consistent use of appropriate format. A great deal of care has been taken with format of the project.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work “VERY GOOD” / 2.

3.6.2019

Doc. Clare Wallace, PhD