



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report:

Štěpán Krejčí, "The Irish Prince: Irishness in the Works of Oscar Wilde," BA thesis

Choice of Topic:

The subject area of this thesis is both an ambitious and fruitful one for a BA level project. The thesis explores an aspect of Wilde's work that has relatively belatedly been addressed in Wilde scholarship. As Jarleth Killeen notes in a 2015 article titled "The greening of Oscar Wilde," it remains something of a contentious discursive terrain with "nationalisers" in one corner claiming Wilde as a "committed Irish nationalist" who was deeply interested in and influenced by Irish folk and oral culture, and "internationalists" who deem Wilde's attachment to Irishness as opportunistic and his acquaintance with the finer points of Irish political issues and folk traditions as superficial at best, in the other (see Killeen, *Irish Studies Review* 2015, 424-425). Such a subject area thus requires considerable research effort not only in relation to the selected primary texts, but also in terms of historical context and critical secondary materials. Mr Krejčí has covered a great deal of ground in a persuasive and informative manner that is remarkable for a BA level thesis.

Thesis statement / aims and objectives:

The project is constructed around a cogently articulated set of objectives. Primary among these is a reassessment of the significance of Irish influences on Wilde's writing throughout his writing career. The opening chapter offers three contexts for the project. The first is critical. Here, Mr Krejčí attends to the work of Jerusha McCormack, Davis Coakley, David Lloyd among others, and establishes the significance of colonialism and postcolonialism to Wilde scholarship. The second treats the historical context of Wilde's Ireland, carefully mapping the rise of the Ascendancy class and its importance to the late nineteenth century Anglo-Irish situation. The third homes in on the Wilde family specifically and the immediate domestic context. The agenda and limits of the project as a whole are clearly indicated. Mr Krejčí navigates between the extremes of nationalist and internationalist positions in a judicious fashion in order to justify his hypothesis while qualifying or integrating contrary views or interpretations.

Structure and development:

The organization of the thesis is logical and coherently realised. In chapter two Mr Krejčí begins his journey through Wilde's work in an unusual place with the largely critically ignored play, *Vera; or The Nihilists* (1880, 1883). Although the play seems to present little by way of Irish input the chapter argues otherwise to strong effect. The political resonances of this lesser studied play are handled with insight and confidence, especially the horizons of and inconsistencies in Wilde's notions of socialism. The analysis draws out the comically Hibernian qualities of Wilde's fictional Russia to make its case for an Irish undercurrent to the drama. Chapter three turns to the more predictable territory of Wilde's fairy tales examining *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *The House of Pomegranates* (1891) through the lenses of "rediscovering the native" (35) and "imagining orality" (37). The chapter weaves



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in key details about Wilde's parents' interest in archaeology and folklore, in particular Lady Wilde *aka* Speranza's nationalist folk publications *Ancient Legends of Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* and *Ancient Curses, Charms and Usages*. There is a fine command of secondary material here. Mr Krejčí dredges through key sources to illuminate Wilde's ambivalent attitudes to Irish folklore that are poised between credulity and cosmopolitan scepticism. The analysis of the motifs of belief, enlightenment and blindness is lucid and the significance of Catholic religious motifs in Wilde's creative development is strategically established. The fourth chapter turns to Wilde's poetry and synthesizes a detailed exploration of the political resonances of "Eleutheria" with the Christ metaphors of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Overall, the project showcases a notable aptitude for close reading coupled with thorough research and relevant context.

Research:

The research undertaken for this project is commendable for a BA work. Mr Krejčí demonstrates a strong sense of research initiative. He has assembled a fine bibliography that has served the project well.

Use of sources:

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

Stylistics and language:

Mr Krejčí's writing style is excellent—fluent, consistent and accomplished. Language clearly and effectively communicates ideas and is nuanced and eloquent.

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 "EXCELLENT" / 1.

11.12.2019

Doc. Clare Wallace, PhD