



FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report

Nathalie Lamprecht, "Class, Sexuality and Nationalism: Identity Building in the Prose Writing of Brendan Behan" (MA Thesis)

Arguing that Brendan Behan's work continues to be overshadowed by his larger-than-life public persona, Nathalie Lamprecht has produced a meticulously researched, comprehensive study of Behan's prose works. The principal aim of her thesis is to examine how the issues of class, sexuality and nationalism shape Behan's protagonists, and what this might indicate about the development of Behan's views and thinking as a person. From the very first page it is clear that this is a thesis written with genuine enthusiasm, and with considerable panache. The candidate explains clearly not only the objectives of her research but also the choice and grouping of material, including the appropriate decision to not make the final autobiographical volumes, also known as the "talk books", part of her analysis, since the precise extent of Rae Jeffs's – likely significant – input is difficult to establish (at least without extensive research in a US archive where the recordings on which the books are based have reportedly been preserved).

The overall argument is lucid and engaging, utilises virtually all available biographical material on Behan and references the most recent as well as earlier scholarship on the author. The materials are always used to support the argument and are often critically examined. Moreover, the study is based on the extensive recent work of Irish autobiography scholars (Liam Harte, Claire Lynch and Michael Böss in particular), showing how Behan's autobiographical writing may be seen to develop, and simultaneously reshape, the tradition of Irish nationalist memoirs, pioneering an approach used by later writers. What is perhaps as vital is that Ms Lamprecht's thesis is informed by the work of contemporary German narratology, which allows her to comment with precision on Behan's narrators, autobiographical or otherwise, and, importantly, stay attuned to the difference between Behan the author and Behan the authorial narrator, a distinction that has not always been maintained in the existing scholarship, even by well-established scholars.

The candidate persuasively details the multiple ways in which the working-class socialist, idealist Republican and bisexual Behan did not fit de Valera's Ireland and documents the writer's irrepressible anarchic impulse to rail against authority of any sort, and to stand by those who have suffered injustice, whoever they might be. As importantly, she lays out Behan's gradual development as a writer, from an emulator of the discourse of national heroism, through crafting a variety of literary personas in some of the early fiction and the newspaper columns, to a skilful experimenter with the narrative voice in some of the short stories and the creator of what she – together with some recent critics, and indeed Behan himself – regarded as his magnum opus, the idiosyncratic autobiographical novel *Borstal Boy*. The analysis of *Borstal Boy* is the true peak of the thesis, in which the candidate manages to perceptively discuss emotional matters such as the nature of Brendan and Charlie's relationship (and the related issue of Behan's homosexuality) on the one hand, and examine a multitude of factual details on the other, such as the books that Brendan allegedly knew in his early teens or the songs he sang in borstal, which allows her to



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reach poignant conclusions as regards the fictionalisation of the author's memories and his growing vocation as a writer. This is a most commendable thesis indeed.

All formal matters are in order, the writing is fluent overall; occasionally an odd word choice or stylistic awkwardness creeps in.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "excellent" (1), subject to a successful viva.

Prague, 14 May 2021

Prof. Ondřej Pilný, PhD