

Supervisor's Review

Lenka Kristenová, "Troubles on Stage: Theatrical Representation of the Conflict in Northern Ireland"

Lenka Kristenová's thesis presents a detailed analysis of three acclaimed plays from the 1980s and early 90s, Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*, Frank McGuinness's *Carthaginians* and Vincent Woods's *At the Black Pig's Dyke* which are all concerned, in their different ways, with sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. The argument is clearly structured, offering a brief introduction to theatre in and about Northern Ireland and a note on the historical context and then proceeding to discuss the selected plays from the perspective of how they go about representing religion, gender and locale.

The thesis is written in a generally lucid manner, using a rich English with only minor errors of grammar (articles, punctuation). The main strength of the candidate's work lies in the interpretation of the individual plays, which is balanced and quite thorough, leaving very little to add within the framework given by the aspects chosen for discussion. Negligible inconsistencies occur only, largely of stylistic nature: for instance, the claim that the alleged prophecy by St Colum Cille about the Valley of the Black Pig being fake (not "false") is surely well-based; however, the legend itself *does* pre-date the early 1900s – contrary to the candidate's assertion – as it is also apparent from W.B. Yeats's use of a folk version of the narrative in his play from the 1890s, discussed in the following paragraph by the candidate herself (p. 62-63). Such contradictions are, however, marginal within the overall discussion offered.

There are some reservations to be voiced regarding the introductory section of the thesis, which would have benefited from a more careful and extensive treatment of important issues. A number of details that call for clarification are caused by stylistics again, such as the claim concerning the "wider audiences" of dramatic representation (p. 5; what is the point of comparison here, one is prone to ask: Poetry? Fiction? Or film?), or the presented summary of early 1970s drama from Northern Ireland (p. 5; it is unclear whether the claim is that there were no plays addressing the Troubles at the time or that there was a wave of schematic political plays that have been justifiably forgotten). What is of greater significance, and should be addressed in the thesis defence, are the following points:

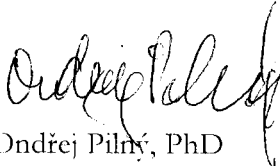
- 1) In the candidate's view, Brechtian theatre "break[s] through the restrictions imposed on the narrative by realism" (p. 7) Lacking context, such a statement seems at best unclear.

- 2) The candidate places both *Carthaginians* and *At the Black Pig's Dyke* within a Brechtian tradition. While some degree of justification is provided with the former play, what requires clarification is how the alienation effect is seen to work in the latter.

A final objection concerns the writing in the Conclusion of the thesis, particularly its opening part, which is rather reckless: the term "gender" tends to get used as a synonym for "sex," and spurious formulations appear, such as "*officially* the women are in an inferior position to men" (p. 69; my emphasis).

Despite the critical remarks outlined above, the specific discussion of the three plays is of real merit, and also demonstrates sufficient knowledge of the wider cultural and political context of Northern Ireland. Therefore, I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "very good."

9 September 2007


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