

Supervisor's Review

Klára Strnadová "Violence and Formal Challenge in the Plays of Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp"

This is an ambitious and timely project based on considerable research and attentive textual exegesis. The objective of the thesis to undertake an extended comparative analysis of the influences and work of two influential contemporary playwrights – Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp – is realized in a developed and perceptive manner. The enquiry is introduced by an informative overview of the two dramatists and their respective positions vis à vis the "In-Yer-Face" grouping proposed by Aleks Sierz. Strnadová's statement of her aims and approach are clear and convincing. There follows an extended and very thorough summary of all the plays to be discussed. This is perhaps the most pedestrian part of the thesis, however Strnadová justifies this structural decision well.

Chapter two provides a theatrical/theoretical framework for the assessment of both playwrights' tactics of experiment and use of violence. Here the Aristotelian terms, mimesis and katharsis, are unpack and brought to bear upon Crimp's and Kane's work. Strnadová aptly observes that while they "cannot be said to work with mimesis and katharsis in a strictly Aristotelian way," [they] "operate with both terms" (22) in important ways: Kane through the disruption of a mimetic principle, Crimp through exaggeration and self-reflexivity. Similarly, katharsis is foregrounded yet mutilated by Kane, whereas Crimp's work detaches from the possibility of such direct engagement. As Strnadová notes, this "distinction between intellectual and emotional involvement" might be seen to be the most critical difference in dramatic attitude here.

Chapter three returns to Aristotelian terms as a means to launch the discussion of formal innovation in the playwrights' work. Here analysis of the status of innovation and experimentation is well informed and astute. Finally, the exploration of the use of violence and its significance to their drama in chapter four is exceptionally well wrought.

Strnadová's research shows both industry and imagination. Especially of interest is the use of an unpublished piece of Kane's early work, as well as recently published critical material like Aleks Sierz's new book on Martin Crimp. Valid connections are made among complex concepts and these are applied convincingly to the selected plays. The thesis as a whole is articulate, well presented and shows attention to detail. This work makes an impressive contribution to scholarship on the topic and, as materials on the work of Martin Crimp in particular are relatively few, certainly there are many possibilities for further research. I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "excellent"/1.

14 May 2008

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Clare Wallace'.

Clare Wallace, PhD