Opponent’s Review
Matouš Kurz, “Folklore and Myth on Stage: A Comparison of Their Use in Revival and Contemporary Irish Drama” BA thesis

Choice of Topic:
The title of the work suggests a rather different field of enquiry and focus than the thesis actually contains. In fact what is outlined in the first chapter is a comparison of the uses of folklore and myth in just two plays: Yeats’s *Countess Cathleen* and Vincent Woods’s *At the Black Pig’s Dyke*. The rationale behind this decision is that both plays reference the folk story of the valley of the black pig, and that both plays are debut works that generated some controversy. These plays, it would seem are to be taken as representative of attitudes to myth and folklore in the two periods. It is a critical manoeuvre that renders the whole project paradoxically rather too broad and rather too narrow at the same time.

Thesis statement / aims and objectives:
There is no guiding hypothesis in this thesis. Description of various literary and historical contexts substitutes for any logical set of objectives. The comparative promise of the title is not fulfilled and receives only brief and insufficient attention at the end of the work.

Structure and development:
As already noted the lack of a core argument or hypothesis means that the structure of the resulting work is weak. The first chapter is poorly developed and fails to provide either a convincing introduction to the topic or a coherent case for the (apparently) ongoing role of folklore and myth in Irish drama. Some effort is made to flag the differences between folklore and myth, but this is largely an irrelevant matter in the discussions that follow. The brief synopsis of Ireland’s history, literature and culture is simplistic but also redundant since in chapter two further historical summarising is offered. Chapter two unfolds a basic overview of Irish history from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century mainly sourced from Richard Killeen’s *Short History of Modern Ireland*. The reason for including such extended and yet rudimentary information is not entirely clear, while the sources used to construct it leave something to be desired given the acclaimed histories available in our library. In chapter three we finally reach one of the promised authors. Here too the thesis detours into relatively simple biographical detail and much information on the various editions made by Yeats to the play before eventually wheeling around to the alleged subject of enquiry. Having covered so much often superfluous territory, it is a shame that the thesis does not present a clear description or structured analysis of *The Countess Cathleen*. Some attention is paid to Yeats’s use of folkloric references, but the motif of the valley of the black pig is only briefly discussed at the end of the chapter. Chapter four bounces back to basic and often tangential historical summary. On page 33 the changes wrought by the Celtic Tiger are mentioned, however it is worth noting that Woods was writing in the early 1990s before any Celtic Tiger economic boom. Tom Maguire and Killeen are the sources for the overview of the Troubles. Where the connection between all this material and the issue of myth and folklore lies is
something of a mystery. Chapter five, on Vincent Woods, again spends a good deal of ink on contextual material. A clear description of the play is absent. The analysis of Woods’s use of folk references is basically a collage of materials taken from sources. Ms Kurz’s input is difficult to identify. Disappointingly the ‘comparison’ of the two plays and their uses of folklore is afforded less than a page and does not really draw any convincing conclusion.

Research:
Some research certainly has been done. It is adequate and in general the sources selected are clustered in a familiar fashion.

Use of sources:
The use of secondary sources is also generally clear. There is rather a lot of paraphrasing that may reduce the meaning of the original texts in unforeseen ways. Some ideas are integrated, but in a partial fashion, while little sense of the differences among critical viewpoints or active critical commentary emerges.

Stylistics and language:
The register throughout the work is rather familiar and journalistic for a scholarly work. There are occasional grammatical and spelling errors throughout, but these do not impede the author’s meaning a great deal.

Format:
The format of the work is generally in order. Use of quotation marks, the position of footnote numbers in the text and punctuation around quoted material oscillates. Otherwise the thesis is correctly formatted.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work “good”/3.

Clare Wallace, PhD

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