

### **Posudek školitele**

#### **Radvan Markus, "Ironic Myths and Broken Images: Reflections of the 1798 Rebellion in Twentieth-Century Irish Fiction and Drama (Doctoral Dissertation)"**

Radvan Markus's dissertation is the result of diligent, conscientious doctoral study, in which he has completed all the assignments with excellent results and has kept to the designated time frame.

His topic fills a gap in the existing research on the literary reflection of the 1798 Rising, providing a comprehensive survey of twentieth-century texts focused on 1798 that is followed by in-depth analysis of two strategically selected novels and a play. At the same time, Mr Markus bases his work on that of his scholarly predecessors who have dealt with different periods and/or genres, particularly Jim Shanahan's analysis of nineteenth-century reflections of the Rising, Eileen Reilly's treatment of the period 1900-1916, and last but not least, Guy Beiner's detailed study of the oral tradition associated with 1798. Despite the fact that the dissertation examines fiction and drama, Mr Markus makes at least passing references to the most important works of twentieth-century Irish poetry that reflect on the subject.

The method of analysis selected by Mr Markus forges a plausible perspective out of seminal ideas of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, stressing on the one hand the narrative basis of historiographical writing, and the ethical obligation inherent in writing about history on the other. A principal strength of the dissertation consists not only in the originality of its methodology, but also in the fact that concepts and ideas of the respective scholars are adopted with requisite attentiveness to the disparity of some of their authors' concerns and the position of their argument within the discourse of their discipline (theory of historiography as opposed to philosophical hermeneutics) and the contexts of their writing. Moreover, Mr Markus does not hesitate to voice critical reservations as regards the weaker points of White's and Ricoeur's argument which come to light when an extremely complex and acutely resonant topic such as the 1798 Rising is tackled. The theoretical apparatus of the dissertation is feasibly enhanced by the use of the work of the German narratologist Ansgar Nünning, and the excellent recent study of historical drama in English by Mark Berninger.

The nature of the subject requires that its author move between the disciplines of literary studies, historiography, critical theory, philosophy, and cultural and political theory. Mr Markus achieves this with confidence, maintaining judiciousness and avoiding ostentation. His style remains always lucid, eschews pointless use of jargon, and his argument is always to the point. A particularly laudable feature that needs to be highlighted is that Mr Markus discusses writing in English and in Irish in true comparative fashion which is devoid of any implicit bias or agenda; this makes his work stand out among the existing discussions of modern Irish fiction and drama, including that by established literary historians.

Mr Markus's dissertation is thoroughly shaped by an awareness of the inextricable connection of the rivalling interpretations of 1798 with the situation in Northern Ireland in the different periods of the twentieth century, and also with the re-shaping of concepts of Irish identity in relation to issues of European integration and economic prosperity (or the lack of thereof). Markus notes that this has been the subject of analysis in relation to Irish historiography, and provides an appropriate survey; the task that he sets to himself is to find out whether any pattern is apparent in the literary treatments of 1798 in the same era, and to what extent it matches the developments in the writings of historians. The conclusion that he eventually arrives at, and which he backs by ample evidence, matches the findings of Nünning and Berninger in other areas, namely that

historical fiction and drama is not necessarily dependent on the findings of historians and that it presents interesting and useful alternative interpretations which often go against the trends that may be current in historiography.

The consistent awareness of what may broadly be designated as the politics of historical writing notwithstanding, Mr Markus demonstrates considerable skill and originality also in the detailed reading of the three selected literary texts – Eoghan Ó Tuairisc’s *L’Attaque*, Thomas Flanagan’s *The Year of the French*, and Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star*. What merits special praise is his discussion of Ó Tuairisc’s novel in juxtaposition with James Joyce and the Irish oral tradition respectively, the focus on how Flanagan works with the implications of the metahistorical reflections in *The Year of the French*, and the creative development of the existing discussion of Parker’s play by drama critics.

Mr Markus’s conclusion that it is impossible to judge between conflicting interpretations of history on purely epistemological grounds, provided that factual evidence has not been contradicted or ignored, clearly stands. Markus further argues that in the case of complex events such as the 1798 Rising where the discord among interpretations stems largely from the event being closely linked with an unsettled present, Paul Ricoeur’s concept of the debt to the past that forms the basis of an ethical imperative for any writer on history requires a certain broadening. This is understandable; however, one would suspect that such a broadening that would include the present and the future may already be implicit in Ricoeur’s argument as it is. Based on the evidence offered, Mr Markus’s claim that literary treatments of history are frequently more balanced than the work of historians may be endorsed, at least in this particular case. The ultimate assertion that “while it probably would not be wise to study historical fiction and drama for verifying historical fact, to look into literary works for valuable interpretations of history is more than legitimate” is well founded; however, the importance of the proviso that this may be done only in a situation where “the basic facts have been established” (p. 174) cannot be overestimated.

It is to be hoped that Mr Markus’s dissertation will presently be turned into a full-length monograph and brought to the attention of the international scholarly community.

I recommend the dissertation for defence. / Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.

Praha, 17. července 2012

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD