

Posudek na diplomovou práci Elišky Mečířové “The Picaresque in Angela Carter”

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Angela Carter’s “reinvention” of a genre whose history can be traced to the early modern period is the overall topic of the thesis. Intertextuality and creative appropriation that subverts expectations of genre and (social, literary) norms are indeed characteristic of all Carter’s fiction and typical for her brand of postmodernism. It does not matter that Carter’s own definition of the picaresque novel is indeed very loose and by generically classificatory standards rather wrong, the elements associated with “the picaresque” are perceptible in much of her fiction. If not always the autobiographical first person narrative, she nearly always depicts low-life outsiders (pícaros of sorts), uses the motif of journey, and the theme of a clash of illusion, convention, social expectation etc. Indeed, Carter’s texts are “orbiting in the picaresque galaxy”, or, to quote another concept, this time coined by Harry Sieber, her stories, plots and situations can be seen working with a “picaresque myth”. Reading her texts, therefore, in this specific “mythic” tradition can, and the thesis proves it, add to their appreciation and understanding within the wider context of fiction.

Eliška Mečířová displays an awareness of the historical and literary context of the genre, does not overburden the thesis with too much historical survey, yet manages to classify the genre sufficiently for it to be usefully appropriable for her own analysis. The gist of the thesis lies in the interpretations of chosen texts – focus is on *The Magic Toyshop*, *Heroes and Villains*, and, mainly, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* and *Nights at the Circus*. Arguably, more novels could have been included, if only to explain their difference (or lack of strong picaresque presence). Thinking in terms of character, how would *Wise Children* fit?

The concept of the picaresque in the Anglo-American literary tradition has, from the beginning, been applied rather vaguely. Nevertheless, already in the eighteenth century (and Angela Carter’s own definition seems to testify to this confusion) the picaresque somehow co-existed with texts that lay at the beginning of the Bildungsroman. *Tom Jones* may be a case in point. But the novel of education based on experience went against the formal aspects of traditional previous picaresque. Although Carter may indeed “refer to two or three different frameworks” (page 15), how different would Eliška’s argument about the role of journey or characters’ self-awareness be if instead of the picaresque, she counted with, say, the framework of the Bildungsroman? Or, to rephrase the question, how exactly does Carter’s “use of the picaresque” give “her space for ... Bildungsroman motifs” (page 69)?

In the recitation of similarities between *Heroes and Villains* and *The Magic Toyshop*, there is one more aspect hinted at but not further developed. Not only Jewel, but also Finn “fall short of the glamorous etc.” (page 34). Not only is Melanie on the brink of womanhood (an observation made immediately after the above quotation, page 34), but a similar fate develops for the heroine – a basically lower- middle- class fate, being trapped into a conventional family “romance”. With this in mind, “the wild surmise” of the look which Melanie and Finn

exchange is not only an allusion to the Garden of Eden (page 44), but a direct quotation from a poem by John Keats. What meanings can this intertext have (there may even be a possible relation to the overall theme of the thesis)?

To sum up, the thesis is well organized, the argument properly and logically developed, its fundamental premises sound. Taking into account my comments above, I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the grade of very good (**velmi dobře**).

V Praze dne 4.9.2012

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