

MONDAY, 05 SEPTEMBER 2011

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Report on Bakalářské Práce(Oponentsky posudek)

Playing Tricks: An analysis of Janice Galloway

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., MA.

Oponent: Colin S. Clark MA

Zpracoval : Michaela Kotalíková

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General Remarks:

This student work suffers from a general lack of attention to detail at the most basic level and is replete with errors of spelling, grammar, misquotation of primary and secondary sources and poor use of English which ranges in effect from the merely irritating to the confusing.

The structure of the work is also quite perplexing with the student asserting that this is an analysis of the tricksiness of Janice Galloway and yet it only engages with *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and flirts with *Foreign Parts*. Because of this it is imbalanced and presents only one narrow view of the text, all the more disappointing in light of its postmodern/post-structuralist pretensions. Little reference is made to Galloway's other writings and I find the omission of *Clara, Blood* and *This is not about me* very difficult to justify, bearing in mind the fact that the thesis is avowedly about Galloway's oeuvre.

The central problem here is that there is no real thesis: this is a look at *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and, while it does indeed consider many of the major themes, it fails to make a case for anything more complex than that this is a novel which deals with loss and grieving. It does not join up the dots and indicate that this is part of a larger psychoanalysis of gender and nationhood, something that a reading of Christopher Whyte's *Gendering The Nation* (see *And Woman Created Woman* by Alison Smith for example) would have confirmed.

The student misses the implications of Galloway's debt to Alasdair Gray's textual innovations at the close of the 80s and utterly misses the "unheimlich culture" it emerges from.. as exhaustively explored by literary critics like Michael Gardiner (From Trocchi to Trainspotting).

Side references to Sylvia Plath (*The Bell Jar*), Lawrence Sterne (*Tristram Shandy*) Lewis Grassie Gibbon (*A Scots Quair*), James Kelman (*How Late it was How Late*), Franz Kafka (*The Castle*), Muriel Spark (*The Driver's Seat*), A.L. Kennedy (*Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains*), Jackie Kay (*Wish I Was Here*), Candia McWilliam (*Wait Till I Tell You*), Ali Smith (*The Accidental*), Shena MacKay (*Music Upstairs*), Susie Maguire (*Furthermore*), Liz Lochhead (*Women Writer Talking Blues, Medea*) et al, could all have been fruitfully deployed in an effort to understand the predicament of Joy Stone...sadly, none are.

1. The Thesis introduction makes remarkable claims such as "women authors tend to be somewhat overlooked by the reading public etc" is quite simply wrong and highlights an ongoing problem in this paper where the student continually writes about "contemporary scotland" rendering it unclear whether she refers to the time of the novel (clearly at the dour end of Thatcherism and the beginnings of the grand hypocrisies of Major's *Back to Basics* Britain. Non specific terms like "in the past" in relation to women's expression of inner thoughts are asinine.

2. The term "decompose" is rather oddly used in this essay, is deconstruct the term required?

3. References to something called "whole new philosophy" and "the questions of gender" remain unqualified and therefore useless.

4. The student seeks to apply the well worn binary method of definition of the Scottish psyche, however this is rather passe and also deeply flawed when dealing with a character like Joy Stone who has much more in common with Alan Warner's *Morvern Caller* than Scott's *Flora Mac-Ivor*. Applying Said's scepticism of the "Dualistic Seige Mentality in Decolonising Literature" may have been more constructive.

5. In section 2.1 the student asserts that the tale is told in a "retrospective voice" without asserting a person or tense in detail. This is quite bizarre as the fact is that the tale shifts between first, second and third person and chronological logic is degraded, especially in the hospital setting. This is where identity is being annulled and Joy has to write notes to herself to retain any sense of agency.

Additionally it references a social criticism which Joy Stone delivers but which remains...unvoiced except to say that it is patriarchal. This is simply insufficient and inefficient in terms of a text which forms a cat's cradle of national woes as this one does.

Not enough is made of the surreality of Joy Stone's perspective...the fact that it allows a certain complicity with the audience in dealing with her suffering is overlooked; the association of Joy with all of the (M)major institutions of the nation.

While it is reasonable to empathise with Joy..the student fails to see that she may be condemned roundly for her behaviour as well...she is an alcoholic, self harming, mistress who has a very worrying relationship with one of her secondary school pupils and who allows herself to be sexually used by her boss and who has no idea if she is pregnant until it is suggested to her...engaging with the text also means accepting that Joy is not the best judge of character. This ought to be acknowledged even if just as symptomatic of her bipolar/depressive condition.

6. Section 2.3 seems unaware of the raft of texts dealing with Scottish identity and picks ONE definition out of many (Alice Brown) and applies it without explanation. This section also references Hall without further footnotes or other in-text details.

Page 14 makes reference to "a deeply rooted concept of traditional Enlightenment Values" but does not explain that Scotland and England had VERY different experiences of this Enlightenment and their cultures codified the project differently..in Scotland it was the State and state support allied with a romanticised titration of social idealism which survived..England's experience was more in keeping with the quotation from Waugh the student applies.

Page 16 applies a definition of capitalist/consumerist determined identity formation however I fail to see its relevance to Galloway's character of Joy Stone here...there are places where she shops for comfort items (with Michael for example in M&S) but beyond this it is unclear.

Page 17 argues for an analogy between Scotland as a nation and Joy as a Woman (because she is discriminated against) but this is sadly inadequate and other authors have approached this issue more robustly (Iain Banks in *The Wasp Factory/Complicity*).

On Page 19 The student seems confused as to whether Tony is or is not Joy's Lover.. she has had sex with him, yes, the rest is debatable.

Page 23 deals with assertions that one's job defines one's identity and the student seems to ascribe to Joy a kind of outrage at this lack of agency along the lines of Kesey's Randle Patrick McMurphy . This is incorrect as Joy is in many senses relieved by institutionalisation. The sardonic wit seems lost here..even the process of grieving is being subverted by Joy, she is too smart to buy into coffee table psychology like this and mocks it, the reader and the culture that values it.

Page 26 makes the very contentious assertion that "She is not ill in the real sense of the word; she only deviated from the routine behaviour structure". This is unsupportable and requires urgent justification: Joy Stone is ill on many levels and is not merely a victim of the misapplication of medicinal intervention.

7)Section 3.2(page31) makes a case for use of the term bricolage but it is a struggle to see which meaning of the term applies... the closest is Derrida's, is this what is intended?or is it that of Levi-Strauss or Deleuze?

Page 33 contains useful commentary on the liturgical responsorial text of the church service for Michael .On the same page there is an incomplete reference to McHale that requires a footnote.

Page 37 is in need of stylistic clean up and ignores the fact that the joke about the psychiatrist is reused multiple times and becomes a mantra, not a joke.

page 38 makes a rather obscure comment about selective/authorised history but only references it to Foreign Parts.. does it have a corollary in *Clara*,*The Trick is* or other works?

There is a failure to explain how this adequately supports a thesis about the "loss of identity" or the "artificial ideologies" (39,40) and the concluding message of *The Trick is* seems cleverly balanced to provoke debate in the same way that *The Bell Jar* ends with the opening of an interview to determine everything. Joy Stone ends with "Reach for the bottle. Watch the Lights" ...the ambivalence of this is not highlighted and the student's interpretation that she is creating chaos or irregularities to survive is unconvincing .Joy may very well be about to end it all..if not, she just *lasts* with the little things.

Recommendation

I find this to have too many errors and to be of too limited a scope to be considered a good attempt at analysing this novel . The technical analysis is flawed and not well enough considered. I cannot recommend a grade above a *dobre* (3).

Colin S Clark MA

