

Posudek vedoucí na bakalářskou práci Kristýny Hoblové

“The Political Voice of Aphra Behn”

In the Restoration period the English press was undergoing some of the most important transformations in its history. The political upheaval of the Civil War, combined with the collapse of press controls, had contributed to an explosion of the press in the 1640s, and the seventeenth-century growth in literacy and emergence of a public sphere in print and politics were all faces of the same phenomenon. At the same time, the ongoing, gradual shift in the dominant mode of textual production in England – from courtly, manuscript culture to the print-based, market centred system we know today – was giving rise to a recognizably modern literary marketplace, and to the emerging professional literary subculture that by the late seventeenth century in England was already popularly referred to as ‘Grub Street’. The changing conditions of literary production and political expression in late seventeenth-century England enabled unprecedented female political involvement through print – that is, until transformations in sex roles and in culture at large left eighteenth-century women increasingly depoliticized. During the Restoration period, it was mainly the Popish Plot, Exclusion Crisis and the Glorious Revolution that galvanized political opinions and created the emergent political groupings that were to be referred to as the Tories and the Whigs. Among the former, Tory Royalist supporters of the Stuart line (Duke of York, James II), the most prominent was the voice of Aphra Behn.

In her BA thesis, Kristýna Hoblová has focused on the prose writings of Behn with an aim to show how these texts play with the set of propagandistic rhetorical tropes found in Whig and Tory ideologies. The selection of texts is relevant and sensible. (Although more attention to images and strategies used especially in her political poetry – panegyrics, odes etc. - may have boosted the argument. Nevertheless, such further analysis may have also complicated the structure of the thesis.) I find the approach, method of analysis, content, style, all very clearly stated and formulated. Therefore, I shall restrict myself to a few questions and comments below:

1. The capital letters in the Czech abstract are an obvious interference from English (and especially surprising in a work by a student of Czech). (See e.g. Kavalířská kultura, Toryovský feminismus).
2. Frequent claims are made to Aphra Behn’s brand of “feminism”. In what sense is this term applied?
3. The thesis rests on the claim that in this period “the public and private spheres were still closely interlinked”. What actually constitutes the public sphere at the time?
4. Questions of genre:

a/ page 12 – The roman à clef is, strictly speaking, not exactly interchangeable with scandal chronicle or secret history. Though the differences can indeed be very minute, in fact all may

deal with contemporary “scandals”, they can be (ought be?) distinguished along lines of e.g. methods of representation etc. Strictly speaking, it is only *Love Letters*... that ought to be counted into this category (and, actually, it is the most remarkable and important roman à clef of the Restoration period). Can Ms Hoblová attempt to draw a clearer dividing line between these genres?

b/ It is claimed that Behn’s special method was that of exploiting the potential for authenticating plus the romance technique to explore larger meanings and to complicate any straightforward simple political propaganda. How do the specific forms of narration in the individual prose texts actually contribute to this overall effect?

For example, the very complex deployment of the epistolary in *Love Letters*... demonstrates the strength of this manner of story-telling. Not only do the correspondents bare their souls, but in the process they indulge in rhetorical excesses that betray their insincerity.

5. Can further connections be made with Dryden’s *Absalom and Achitophel*? For example, the rhetorical postures of the poem – e.g. hatred of figurehead heroes, the malleable mob easily manipulated by unscrupulous politicians, the “feminization” of David (see the discourse of Achitophel attempting to persuade Absalom to overthrow the King – usage of the trope of rape). Moreover, the portrait of Absalom is not as perfect as page 22 would have it. (He is gullible victim to Absalom’s rhetorical manipulations - again the framing of his “seduction” by Shaftesbury).

6. Page 31 – the depiction of Oroonoko in terms of the public body of kingship is highly relevant. Yet, perhaps more could be made of Aphra Behn’s notion of racial difference.

To conclude, I find the thesis a significant and inspiring contribution to the analysis of Restoration literature. It clearly demonstrates the ways Behn’s stories of (illicit) love, complete with romance names and rhetoric, signify illicit politics. The “public” echoes the “private”, yet the formal domestication goes beyond the fundamentally patriarchalist analogy (the family is like the state). By the way, in England’s dynastic monarchy the sovereignty of the state is itself a family affair (and the Exclusion Crisis was a political and public event that turned on the most intimate secrets of sexual and conjugal behaviour). Hence a contiguity of the “private” and the “public”, of love and politics, exists on both levels of the analogy. A consequence of this is the presence of both private and public elements on both the “private” (signifying) and the “public” (signified) levels of allegorical semantics. Moreover, Behn’s texts oscillate between reference to actual particularity of historical personages and the concrete particularity of characters.

I recommend the thesis for defence with the preliminary mark of excellent (**výborně**).

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vedoucí práce