

## Supervisor's Report

### Giulia Parin, "The Organs of Perception and Expression in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Works" (MA Thesis)

The focus of Giulia Parin's Master's thesis is on specific issues related to corporeality in three selected plays by Samuel Beckett. The bodily aspects that are subject to special attention are those of the mouth, the eye, and the ear. The argument is framed as comparative, discussing the relationship between Beckett's work and Dante's *Divine Comedy*; subsequently, the candidate comments on the ways in which Beckett re-shapes or may be seen to allude to images and ideas from Dante's *Inferno*. While Beckett's inspiration by Dante has been extensively covered by numerous critics (including, prominently, Daniela Caselli, whose monograph is duly referenced by the candidate), the link between the respective authors is given an original thematic focus in Ms Parin's work and engages also with the reflections on mouths, eyes, and ears that appear in their work.

The structure of the thesis is logical and well justified. Following the Introduction, Ms Parin delivers a competent exposition of *The Divine Comedy* in relation to issues of corporeality, perception, and expression, with detailed focus on the *Inferno*. Her thoughtful summary is concluded by a vital section that concerns not just the links but also the multiple differences between Dante's poem and Beckett's work for the stage; the section appropriately highlights the fact that Beckett's plays must be considered in performance, rather than as textual artefacts. This assertion commendably guides the candidate's subsequent engagement with the three selected plays – *Play*, *Not I*, and *Footfalls* – in which she pays detailed attention to the involvement of the audience in the plight of the characters which they are watching. The three chapters demonstrate a judicious use of important secondary sources, and in relation to the Dante-Beckett link represent a useful extension of Caselli's work to the area of Beckett's drama; numerous original observations are made, for instance the persuasive juxtaposition of the protagonists of *Play* and the punished Epicureans in the *Inferno*. However, the chapters come across rather as three loosely connected essays than developing a strong overall argument.

The extent of the intellectual engagement and the range of areas covered by the cited secondary sources clearly demonstrates that Ms Parin's thesis is the result of hard work guided by considerable enthusiasm. It is regrettable that the work suffers from linguistic, stylistic and formal deficiencies: language mistakes are frequent and are complemented with numerous typographical

errors, and there are some shortcomings as to the formatting of the footnotes. Perhaps most importantly, the candidate has a tendency to use pleonasm and tautology which – combined with needless overuse of jargon – turns the reading of some passages of the text into a somewhat jarring experience. Nevertheless, this is compensated by sections which are the work of a truly inspired critic.

I would like to raise two issues for the thesis defence:

1. In the Introduction, the candidate argues that “an analogous concept of ‘sin’” underlies the respective plays and related passages in the *Inferno* (p. 7). While the relevance of sin in Dante is obvious, the use of the concept in relation to Beckett’s work begs a question. In what sense might the term be appropriate? Moreover, could the candidate discuss the concept in relation to Caselli’s notion of “Beckett’s poetics of perversion”, and her claim that Beckett uses Dante “as part of a critique of value and authority” (qtd. on pp. 7, 25)?
2. The candidate relates May in *Footfalls* to the Futile in Dante, and elaborates on the futility of her existence. In what sense is May more futile than the characters in the other two plays under discussion, particularly Mouth in *Not P*?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as “very good”.

Prague, 25 August 2015

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD