



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

OPPONENT'S REPORT

M.A. THESIS

Masquerade Scenes in the Works of Eighteenth Century Women Authors

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In the introduction to this lucid and engaging thesis, the reader is offered a brief theoretical consideration of various functions of masquerades and carnivals, as well as a useful initiation into the context of eighteenth-century England, masquerades in the real world and women's social positions. Subsequent chapters are each devoted to a literary text: Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem*, Haywood's *The Masqueraders; or Fatal Curiosity* and Inchbald's *A Simple Story*.

On the whole, I do not have any major objection to the thesis, which in my view may be graded as **excellent** (výborně) or as **very good** (velmi dobře). What the candidate could have perhaps highlighted when evaluating her research and literary analyses is the dubious function of masquerades, their limitations rather than merely their liberating potentials. In other words, I am not convinced that masquerades, especially outside literature, had such a subversive function as the candidate generally assigns to them (e.g. in her conclusion on p. 92). They may have exposed the conventions of the real world as just another masquerade, but so what? The material conditions remained fundamentally untouched and the Lord (although not always the Lady), after his detour into the fantasy hall, could go back to his comfortable position of power.

As for the space of the masquerade itself, again I am not sure how liberating it could have ever become. True, perhaps women could assert themselves sexually, but besides often paying dearly afterwards, the space also allowed for much violence, as the candidate herself mentions on p. 88. Moreover, particularly when it comes to class: could there ever be a mask that would conceal one's social rank? One can always see the shoes; i.e. behind the mask, there is a voice, an accent, manners, smell... I would think that particularly the boundaries of class would have been difficult to transgress at that time, and that seeing masquerades (or carnivals for that matter) in such positive terms is a (favorite modern) fantasy and desire for a utopian space in which the hierarchies of the real world would be suspended.

Further, when we switch to literature, the disjuncture between masquerades in the real world and those portrayed in women's fiction could have been utilized in order to argue, maybe, that self-empowerment, pleasure, etc. is what these writers actually *wanted* masquerades to give them (instead of arguing that this is what masquerades already did).

Could the candidate perhaps consider these arguments?

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