



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Review

Alena Skálová, "Boland, McGuckian and Groarke: Nature and Self in Three Contemporary Irish Women Poets," MA thesis

Following from Ms Skálová's BA research on the poetry of Medbh McGuckian, the thesis engages with an expanded field of enquiry that takes in the work of two other important poets in the contemporary Irish context. As with her earlier project the topic area selected for the thesis is a challenging one and shows intellectual initiative. Ms Skálová's MA dissertation illustrates well how far she has developed as a scholar; beside a well developed close analysis of the motifs of nature and self in poems by the three writers, she has attempted to position these analyses within a critical and historical context, with I would contend, some success.

The aim of the thesis is to explore the selected authors' re-negotiation of literary traditions channelled in their frequent use of nature motifs in their work. Ms Skálová's point that this tendency in their work can be appreciated not only politically, but also aesthetically is a valid one. That said, she is careful not to assume that the three authors somehow share a political or aesthetic programme. The objectives of the work are quite clearly laid out at the close of the introductory chapter and, on the whole, the thesis fulfils these objectives in a systematic way.

In its structure and development the thesis also testifies to Ms Skálová's progress. Overall the work displays a logical and clearly comparative structure. Chapter one sketches the issue of gender politics and poetry in Ireland and presents the work's argument and methodology. Chapter two offers an extended historical overview of Irish women's poetry based on work by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Margaret Kelleher, Patrick Crotty, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Anoinette Quinn, Gerardine Meaney and Clair Wills among others. While there is some overlap with the content of the first chapter, the historical and critical contexts for the project are well covered. There are some minor errors here—see p22 where the Irish Women's Civil Rights Movement is dated from 1960. It should be the Irish Women's Liberation Movement which was launched in 1970. However, this would seem to be a slip of the keyboard rather than a major misconception, as the rest of the chapter shows. The chapter indicates the debates that have taken shape around the incursion of feminist approaches to literary criticism, outlining its activist phases via work Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Ailbhe Smyth and then going on to the more amorphous 'post-feminist' present. As the opponent's report laments, greater space is not afforded the 'counter discourse' voiced by Edna Longley, Peter McDonald and David Wheatley, among others. This would certainly be a point for discussion at the defence. Beyond this, I find the engagement with the work of each of the poets in chapters three, four and five is excellent; it is both sensitive and creative and the effort to compare their work is praiseworthy.

Despite the lack of coverage of the critiques of Boland's early work, I find the research undertaken for the project is admirable; it is both detailed and wide ranging. The thesis demonstrates Ms Skálová's skill in searching, selecting, and evaluating sources. Her use of



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sources is, on the whole, clear and strategic. In terms of style and language, while some minor errors remain, the work is written in a clear and fluent fashion and a consistent register is maintained. The format of the work is excellent.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work either “excellent”/1 or “very good” / 2 depending on the result of the defence.

30.8.2012

Clare Wallace, PhD