



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Review

Eliška Šmidlová, "McCabe and the MaCabre: Portrayals of Madness in Patrick McCabe's Work," BA thesis

Choice of Topic:

The proposed topic of this BA thesis is an interesting one, although it has been the subject of not a little scholarship. The title of the thesis does not entirely accurately reflect the subject matter as the focus is upon the relationship between the Gothic and madness in McCabe's work. The potential of the topic is partially realised by the resulting work.

Thesis statement / aims and objectives:

The project is constructed around a cluster of issues; these include McCabe's contribution to contemporary Irish fiction, the role of madness in his work and the Gothic genre. The objectives and statement of purpose quite clearly stated on page 13 where Ms Šmidlová describes her intention to "explore McCabe's world of madness and the macabre in relation to the tradition of Gothic fiction and to prove the author as a modern descendant of the gothic heritage."

Structure and development:

Overall the arrangement of the thesis is logical. The attempted historical contextualisation in the introduction is rather simplistic. Undoubtedly there are some strong source materials here, but the complexity of the points they present is sacrificed for a binary notion of Irish history: tradition versus modernity. Chapter 2 makes some concerted effort to explain the roots of the Gothic genre. This is slightly sidetracked into irrelevant discussion of the sublime which comes (undeclared) via Luke Gibbons's work on the subject. Nevertheless, Ms Šmidlová later uses Gibbons's *Gaelic Gothic* to some effect in this chapter. While the specificity of "Bog Gothic" is not really explained, McCabe's use of motifs (p.15) is well observed. The section on madness and Ireland at the close of chapter 2 errs again on the side of simplicity and might have been developed further given the central role of madness to the thesis as a whole. In chapter 3 the analysis of *The Butcher Boy* stays close to existing sources, but is well structured and makes a sustained attempt apply the term gothic to the fictional representation of clash of values and eras in the novel. The discussion of *The Dead School* in chapter 4 revisits this conflict and its representation. Unfortunately here the term Gothic seems to apply to the novel only tangentially. On page 34 the association of Gothicism and Revisionism very questionable and ought to be discussed further at the defence as might be the role of religion and its role in "Bog Gothic." It is a shame that when the thesis comes to one of McCabe's recent and much less critically discussed works that analysis gives way to description. With *Winterwood*, Ms Šmidlová has an open opportunity to explore how well the term Gothic continues to apply to McCabe's work and to comment on how it has modified since his breakthrough novels of the early 1990s. The chapter seems rather confused and fails to elaborate a convincing or consistent analysis of the gothic features of the text. What is the role of the storyteller in the novel and does the tradition versus modernity binary still function in a similar way in 2006, after a decade of Celtic Tiger transformation?

Research:

The thesis draws on some useful and important sources in the area of enquiry and some effort to account for the Gothic is evident. The work as a whole is, however, heavily dependent on a couple of Cambridge Companions and the range of the research on Irish fiction remains limited.

Use of sources:



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Appropriate use of sources has been an issue throughout the composition of the work. Now, in the final product, sources are cited adequately, though at times paraphrasing is often rather close to the syntax and vocabulary of the original texts and source blending / extensive cross referencing occurs.

Stylistics and language:

The register of the work is somewhat informal and minor language errors are frequent.

Format:

Generally well done.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work “good” / 3 or “very good” 2 depending on the result of the defence.

27.8.2011

Clare Wallace, PhD