

PETRA BRYMOVÁ
“THE THEME OF HAMLET IN JOYCE’S *ULYSSES*”
OPPONENT’S REPORT

The topic of this thesis is well focused, which is its singular virtue.

If I were to offer one general complaint, it would have to do with the equivalent status accorded Stephen Dedalus (a fictional character) and James Joyce (author of *Ulysses*, etc.). There is a curious sleight of hand at work in drawing parallels between theories attributed to Stephen, and the process of their theorisation, and theories attributed to Joyce, and their theorisation: by which I mean, treating both Stephen Dedalus and James Joyce as personages, equally able to originate theories, draw upon sources, provide evidence and consciously mislead an audience—whereas in fact the entire spectrum of cognitive activities attributed to Stephen Dedalus are elements of Joyce’s fiction and no more. To her credit, however, Ms Brymová’s argument for “the possible existence of Joyce as the author inside [Stephen’s] *Hamlet* theory” is an interesting one—one which indeed has persuasive antecedents in Jacques Lacan’s work on the subject (uncited in this thesis; nor indeed is any other serious theoretical work dealing with such topological involutions of authorship and subjectivity—or almost any other related primary “theoretical” topic for that matter [the bibliography is barely 2 pages long, and weirdly makes no reference to any of the critical works on Joyce published within the department, several of which have direct bearing on the problem at hand]).

Additionally, there are a number of other annoying things that crop up. For example, despite the inclusion of “Oedipal complex” as a keyword at the foot of the abstract, there is NO DIRECT REFERENCE to the work of Freud anywhere in this thesis. Indeed, its entire theoretical edifice is, as it were, deduced from mostly late-mid-century literary critics, raising questions about Ms Brymová’s familiarity with recent and contemporary research on Joyce, Aquinas, “theory,” etc. Much of the work cited [other than Ellmann, Gifford and the like—which are in any case standard reference texts] is of marginal status within Joyce studies, and of questionable relevance, and appears to have been selected in an arbitrary, or at best contingent, manner [whatever happened to be locatable via Jstor?].

I was unable to locate any treatment of the “Shakespeare theory” in terms of linguistic sovereignty—a theme which is inaugurated in *A Portrait* but quite explicitly carried over into *Ulysses*, and was of evident concern to Joyce; as were themes of intellectual paternity (Aquinas, Augustine) and cultural authority. In the series of genealogical relations rehearsed in Brymová’s reading of the “Hamlet theory,” *Ulysses* itself is left out as a possible coordinate (one which responds to the question of literary patrilineation), while the “personages” of Hamlet (fils) and Hamlet (père)’s ghost, are always given priority over *Hamlet* (as a literary work and literary historical institution): always we are given interpersonal relations above any other kind of trope (crediting “Ann’s psychological castration of Shakespeare” e.g.—again, with no direct foundation for the adoption of Freudian terminologies). Too often Brymová treats such relations in the manner of a roman à clef, in which the names merely need to be shuffled about or substituted according to a simple key to reveal some hidden meaning—leading her to pursue a series of inverse deductions of the type: let’s assume Stephen is Shakespeare and Bloom is Hamlet’s ghost, then Gerty McDowell is Gertrude, but while “Bloom is Jewish” – and “Jewishness is touched upon during the lecture in connection with Shakespeare” – yet contrary to Stephen’s Shakespeare, Bloom is not so worried by adultery...’ etc., etc. In other words, the analogy having been made, the consequent body of interpretation is subordinated to the work of accommodating the myriad contradictions arising from it, all of which hinges upon—rather than proves—the veracity of the initial analogy itself (which is of course nothing but a type of hypothesis, on Brymová’s part; a rhetorical manoeuvre on Joyce’s).

A last point: the dependence upon secondary sources as starting points for analysis or argument. Too often whole paragraphs begin with “according to W...”; “X points out...”; “Y stresses...”; “Z notices...” These critics are almost always only cited to underwrite an additional observation, almost never extensively, and always without additional consideration of the implications of what the critic has said, its broader substance, or its soundness (I did not find a single attempt to “test” a secondary source, either in terms of theoretical cohesion or with regard to the supportability of the argument against Joyce’s actual text). I appreciate the limitations of the BA thesis, but uncritical and at times arbitrary use of a small body of secondary literature does not constitute research, and it does not constitute a critical argument.

My recommendation for this thesis is a grade of 2, unless the defence warrants otherwise.

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5 September, 2011