



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Opponent's Review

Kateřina Pinov, "The Production History and Reception of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* in Irish and Czech Contexts," MA thesis

Kateřina Pinov's dissertation proposes comparison of Irish and Czech productions of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and the reception of those productions. That much is certainly clear even from the title of this work. Despite the fact that the critical coverage of this seminal place in an Irish critical context is near exhaustive, the Czech angle affords some potential for original insights. The resulting thesis presents and explores some relevant contexts and details for the selected topic, but in a conceptually limited and structurally questionable way.

While the topic is promising, a central argument is absent. The purpose of the venture is oblique at best. It would seem to have a comparative drive, yet much of the body of the thesis is not structured by a comparative agenda at all. It would also seem that the work ultimately tends towards the assertion that the Czech productions of the play were, on the whole, positively received, that the directors' approaches and the reception of the productions was simplistic. Beneath this is the implication that there is a true version of a play and a false one, and the truth of the play lies in the text and in an authentic appreciation of its historical resonances. This is, of course, a major field of debate in theatre and performance studies; unfortunately this conceptual premise is never discussed or problematised in the thesis. So with regard to the topic selection and a hypothesis about that topic, the thesis does not identify a core challenge with clarity, nor does it address any subsidiary, embedded, or implicit aspects of the issue in any great depth.

As to the structure and development of the work, chapters 2 and 3 provide extensive contextual information at two levels: first on the play itself and second on the historical contexts for the play. Chapter two is primarily a description of the play with reference to some scholarly critics. The views of these critics are not subjected to any analysis or questioning, the description of the play covers the expected territory. Chapter three provides some useful details, detouring into local and historical particulars and concluding with a very brief and schematic review of the Field Day Theatre Company. My main questions with respect to these chapters is what is their purpose? How are they absolutely necessary to a comparative analysis of the Irish and Czech productions of this play?

Chapters 4 and 5 approach the proposed substance of the thesis. Both are quite heavily dependent on summarised information from programmes. Chapter 4 to a degree succeeds in presenting a range of productions with attention to directors, set and staging, casts and reviews. The coverage of the six productions is somewhat unbalanced. Particularly weak was the attempt to analyse the 1996 Lyric Theatre production along with the admission by Ms Pinov that there was insufficient material available. There is a great deal of information here, but the impression conveyed by the thesis is that its author is collating as opposed to evaluating or interacting critically with the material. Chapter 5 is somewhat better. Clearly Ms Pinov has more of an attitude to the Czech productions and a more perceptive appreciation of the politics of directing and casting. For both chapters it is a significant failing that no visual material from any of these productions is included in the thesis. The consequence is that



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descriptions of the staging decisions and general presentation of the shows is too vague, their importance remains difficult to discern.

The final chapter carries the weight of the comparative agenda. Here the assumption of the primacy of the text is instrumental and is insufficiently addressed. Is there a ‘right’ way to stage *Dancing at Lughnasa*? Or a wrong way? Is the socio-political context vital or limiting? Also worthy of more attention are the differences in Czech and Irish theatre culture. The more experimental heritage of European theatre often means that a traditional drama like Friel’s is perceived through a very different lens. What are the main differences in expectation? Why? On page 94, it is suggested via a source that *Dancing at Lughnasa* is Friel’s attempt to explore “non-verbal theatre”; is it really? In what sense? Finally, why is the translation of the play not discussed more? This is a crucial element to how Czechs will see the play.

The thesis is undoubtedly built upon a decent range of research and assembles many facts, impressions and details on the play, its performance and its reception. Throughout, however there are few attempts to distinguish among fact, opinion, and value judgments. The style of expression is consistent; there are regular typographical errors and minor grammar mistakes throughout.

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.

16.5.2013

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