

Opponent's Report

Lenka Pichrtová, "The Role of Gender in Selected Irish Plays" (MA Thesis)

The objective of Lenka Pichrtová's thesis is to interrogate how three canonical Irish plays from the late 1980s and early 1990s reflect the seminal changes in Irish society in which a prescriptive patriarchal model has gradually begun to crumble. The thesis is clearly structured and confidently written. The extremely detailed close reading of the play texts is anchored in a solid theoretical background concerning the concept of gender, and demonstrates a good knowledge of the contemporaneous Irish society and its principal issues.

The plays addressed in the thesis are *Carthaginians* by Frank McGuinness, *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel, and *The Mai* by Marina Carr, the overall argument being that gender and sexuality represent central themes in these works. While the case is persuasively made and one finds little to add in this respect, the choice of these particular plays is never explained. Could the candidate perhaps elaborate on the decision in the defence of her work? To the present writer at least, the selection seems somewhat disappointing, given that all the three plays have been extensively covered by a number of critics, while her own writing displays sufficient familiarity with the context of Irish theatre of the time which would allow for a more challenging choice of material. Moreover, the inclusion of *Carthaginians* in a thesis that concerns the cultural and social climate in the Republic of Ireland begs an explanation for a more specific reason.

Perhaps the only point of criticism to raise concerning Ms Pichrtová's discussion of the selected works pertains to the section that deals with space. The nature of the argument largely allows for the plays to be treated as dramatic texts only; however, this particular section would have benefitted from a consideration of a representative sample of productions. As it is, only a single reference to an (unidentified) staging of *Dancing at Lughnasa* is made in a footnote.

As regards factography, the candidate's assertion that Bloody Sunday has been a taboo subject in Northern Ireland (p. 57) is hardly accurate. A puzzling claim occurs on p. 84, which has it that McGuinness was "discouraged from any further cooperation" with Field Day after their rejection of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* but also that he withdrew *Carthaginians* from production by Field Day (the dates and the source of the information need to be checked here). These lapses are an exception in what is otherwise an accurate rendition of the historical context, however.

The thesis would have benefitted from more careful copy editing: frequent typographical errors occur, the same word or phrase tends to be used repeatedly in the course of a single paragraph on occasion, and the candidate has a tendency to awkwardly pile up adjectives (a notable example: “the merciless omnipresent typical societal expectations” – p. 44). Moreover, an identical quotation is used repeatedly on pp. 103 and 106, and a lengthy citation from Lib Taylor which is used in the introduction is repeated *in extenso* on p. 109. Finally, the carnivalesque is described as a strategy (121), which it is not. As far as the structure of the argument is concerned, the initial comments pertaining to representations of Irish masculinity and on masculinity in crisis (83-87) would be better placed in the introduction to the thesis.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as “excellent” or “very good”.

Prague, 24 August 2013

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD