

Oponentský posudek

Daniela Theinová, “Limits and Languages in Contemporary Irish Women’s Poetry (Doctoral Dissertation)”

Daniela Theinová’s dissertation focuses on the work of selected Irish women poets of the last three decades of the twentieth century and of the beginning of the twenty-first, engaging with poetry written in English and in Irish side by side. The latter comes across as a significant achievement in itself. The dissertation is clearly structured, written in a lucid style, and the principal points of argument are strong and carefully phrased.

Part One of the dissertation deals with the various ways in which the poets under discussion have been confronting the inherited, male-centred tradition and its conventions, and highlights the seminal role of irony, satire and humour in their work. Part Two deals with the transformation of conventional figures of poetic inspiration and argues that secrecy, in various shapes and forms, has been a chief strategy on the part of Irish women’s poets, serving to “undermine established figures and discourse” without making the work sound as “agit-prop” (80). A vital point argued throughout Ms Theinová’s dissertation is that the marginality in the canon of Irish poetry has, perhaps paradoxically, served the women poets as “a central enabling metaphor”, thus turning “margin” into “threshold” (16-17) and giving rise to brilliant innovative poetry, since the liminal zone represents “an excellent place to write poems” (18).

An important strength of Ms Theinová’s work consists in the judicious use of post-structuralist theory (with an emphasis on the word “judicious”), particularly Jacques Derrida’s *Monolingualism* in the discussion of what is customarily referred to as “the language issue” in Irish literature. Derrida’s work enables the candidate to voice her observations on the “impossible nostalgia” of Irish poets in English for the Irish language, and on English being felt as “unnatural” at the same time (24-25). This discussion inevitably leads to a detailed commentary concerning poetic translation, which comes across as some of the strongest and most innovative features in the present dissertation (by way of a side remark, this is hardly surprising, given that its author is an excellent translator herself, and has in fact translated into Czech most of the poets treated in her dissertation). It is particularly the sound argument for the need to depoliticize translations from Irish into English (169-72) that merits the attention of poets and scholars alike, together with the

challenging – but well-justified – point that “the current trend of the increasing separateness of the literary production in Irish and English does not signify failure but marks a new stage of salutary emancipation in both traditions.” (33)

Generally, I find that the critical stance of the candidate is very finely attuned to every single nuance of each poem and the individual observations are tied together into an inspired and intelligent interpretation. It is particularly the opening passages of Part Two (81-82) and the pioneering work on the Irish-language poet Aifric Mac Aodha and her use of linguistic and figurative anachronism (159-68) that achieve a good measure of brilliance.

Notwithstanding that, there are some minor objections that need to be voiced concerning the structuring of the argument in Part Two. In my view, the general discussion on pp. 129-36 of poetic inspiration and how it has been conceived and figured is partially repetitive of points made in the Introduction and other earlier parts of the dissertation. The passage may need to be edited down and placed before Chapter Three. Conversely, the points concerning the history of English translations of Irish-language poetry made in note 106 on p. 171 are far too important to be placed in a footnote; in my opinion, they should be developed and positioned in the body of the text.

Despite these minor reservations, Ms Theinová’s dissertation comes across as a solid basis for a first-class monograph which should be brought before the international scholarly community.

I recommend the dissertation for defence. / Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.

Praha, 30 July 2013

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD