

Supervisor's Report

Eliška Šmídlová, "Spirituality in the Drama of Tom Murphy" (MA Thesis)

Eliška Šmídlová chose to discuss in her thesis the spiritual journeys of Tom Murphy's characters in his plays from the 1970s and 80s, *The Sanctuary Lamp*, *The Gigli Concert*, *A Thief of a Christmas*, and *Bailegangaire*. While the topic has been covered in some details by others – in particular Nicholas Grene and Fintan O'Toole – her work demonstrates that the complexity of the matter still allows for fresh observations to be made (see, for instance, the discussion of the reversals in the use of the Faustian myth in *The Gigli Concert*, 28-30).

The style of the work is lucid and the argument easy to follow, despite of some language mistakes being in evidence. The central thesis that posits a development in Murphy's probings of spirituality in the plays under discussion is tenable, although the final description of the phenomenon as "progress" (56) amounts to a simplification of the matter, and also contradicts some of the careful observations made by the candidate earlier.

While the candidate's work is largely accomplished, there are a number of issues which seem to require a degree of clarification at the thesis defence:

1. Is it plausible to refer to JPW in *The Gigli Concert* as an "alchemist" (30ff), as opposed to simply a magician or conjuror who discovers that he is sham? The term "alchemist" connotes materiality, the search for the philosophers' stone or gold – are these relevant in the context of the play?
2. The Irish Man's encounter with JPW in the same play is described as representing a clash of a fixed, ordered world with magic. Isn't it precisely because the Irish Man's world becomes unfixed that he seeks therapy?
3. JPW's final singing like Gigli is preceded by drug abuse and heavy consumption of alcohol. Is it still legitimate to refer to his singing as a sign of achieving his full potential and experiencing transcendence (and if so, why)?
4. The candidate claims that Mommo's final recognition in *Bailegangaire* results in "a dead end" (45). This seems not only to contradict the dramatic situation (the three women resting together in the one bed) and Mary's closing speech (in which she speaks about the baby as of a new chance for their family), but also the candidate's own fine subsequent reading of the play.

5. Given the preceding detailed consideration of the world of the characters in all the plays, is it really plausible to refer to it in the Conclusion as one in which “God is dead” (57)?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as “very good” or “excellent”, depending on the quality of its defence.

Prague, 26 August 2014

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD