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Text and Event in Early Modern Europe (TEEME)

An Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate

Doktorská práce / Ph.D. Dissertation

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Název / Title: Early Modern Players of Folly

Oponentský posudek / Opponent's Report

The dissertation focuses on the concept of early modern folly as a discursive phenomenon used to question rational knowledge. It needs to be said at the outset that this is a very good piece of work with an immensely broad frame of reference and some highly distinctive qualities. It is written in flawless English, with virtually no typographical mistakes. It is obviously the product of sustained research and also of a prolonged period of intimacy with cultural history, literature and literary theory. The thesis is also very clearly structured, written in a clear and elegant style, the main points of argumentation are carefully formulated. (Though there is e.g. one, rather comical, given the topic of the dissertation, typographical error on page 91, where the author talks of Strauss's experimentation coming into "fool bloom". Also, the formulation on page 61 about Germany being "the largest kingdom" may be more misleading than informative, given the correctly mentioned "heterogeneous" nature of the Empire.)

An important strength of the thesis consists in the judicious use of theory – Martina Pranić engages not only with Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida etc., but particularly the critical philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, from whom she coins her method of analysis - "the nomad thought of folly", which allows her to embrace fully the potential of folly's paradoxes, its divergent readings.

Given the breadth and scope of the given topic, Martina Pranić organized her material very well. Obviously utilizing the full potential of the international character of the TEEME programme and making good use of her studies and research in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic, plus her own personal background, she was very discriminating in her choice of representative figures, her “players of folly”, in creating a framework of four various types of folly: The jester Tyl Eulenspiegel presents folly embodied, its discourse of corporeality. The wit Pomet Trpeza is the folly of politics. Brother Jan Paleček is holy folly, while Sir John Falstaff is the player par excellence, illustrating the folly of play. The arguments and analysis are well conceived and thoroughly constructed with textual supports where necessary.

My overall assessment of the submitted dissertation is very positive. Therefore, I shall at this point resort to merely a few general questions:

I fully agree that attempting to define folly is an act of folly in itself. Yet, despite that, cannot we to some degree engage in a clearer presentation of what this meant – not only - for the early moderns and how the notion developed? Instead of a cultural historical account, we primarily receive a critical reading of Bakhtin etc. How would Martina Pranić account e.g. for the transformation from moral sins and vices to laughing at the so-called acquired follies, manners, in Restoration comedy (which of course also relied so heavily on the idea of laughter in Hobbes, cp. 86). Alternately, can she think of other representatives of folly? What would happen if we changed the list of figures? And one more perspective – is there any way in which early modern folly was gendered?

The politics of sixteenth-century Ragusan society are deemed to be of outmost relevance for the reading of Pomet and the play *Dundo Maroje*. Despite that, we learn only very general observations and hints as to the hierarchical organization of the republic. How exactly does *Dundo Maroje* relate to the way Ragusa was run and conceived of its citizens? How indeed was Ragusa run and what was so distinct about it?

I am not quite convinced about the still current centrality of Brother Jan Paleček for the Czechs. Some of my generation became acquainted with the figure primarily through the account of Frantisek Kubka (who, despite impressive and meticulous research in all the background and “textual afterlife passages”, gets only a very brief mention on page 188, without a relevant comment about its idea of Paleček or a connection to the previous material) and the rather unfocused anthology *Witty Fools* (or, arguably, rather “Wise” ? Fools, page 189). Members of a younger generation are rarely able to distinguish him from, say Kašpárek or Tom Thumb (also translated as Paleček).

To conclude: All in all, this dissertation constitutes a substantial contribution to the scholarly discussion. It comes across as a solid basis for a first-class monograph which should be brought before the international scholarly community. For myself, I would appreciate if the cultural historical element were enlarged, which may make the book more attractive to other kinds of readers than the rigorously theoretically minded.

I hereby recommend the dissertation for defence. (Doporučuji doktorskou práci k obhajobě).

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