

**The Viva Voce Examination of Martina Pranić, Doctoral Candidate in the
Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Programme Text and Event in Early
Modern Europe (TEEME)**

**PhD Thesis:
“Four Fellows of Infinite Jest: Literary Representations of Folly in
Four Early Modern European Cultures” (2011-2014)**

Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague

18th February 2015, Jan Palach Library

Examination Board:

Prof. Dr. Sabine Schülting, Freie Universität Berlin (Chair)

Dr. Anne Enderwitz, Freie Universität Berlin (Non-Professorial Member)

Professor John J. McGavin, University of Southampton (Examiner)

PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A., Charles University in Prague (Examiner)

Prof. Dr. Manfred Pfister, Freie Universität Berlin (Supervisor)

Prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc., Charles University in Prague (Supervisor)

Minutes: Petra Johana Poncarová, Charles University in Prague

Minutes

Introductory Remarks by Professor Sabine Schülting

Pre-meeting of the Examination Board

The thesis as submitted was accepted without further corrections for discussion at the viva.

Result of the vote: unanimous yes: 6-0-0

The Viva

Part 1: The Final Examination

The candidate gave a short lecture on a previously assigned topic:

“Theoretical vs. historical approaches to early modern representations of madness and folly. Their advantages and shortcomings.”

Questions and Answers

Professor Manfred Pfister asked the candidate about the heuristic value of the framework.

Martina Pranić underlined that she would not subscribe to the frame of mind that confuses art with reality and said she agreed completely that the framework must remain separate.

Professor Martin Procházka commented on the fact that Deleuze and Guattari are not to be amalgamated into one philosopher and that schizophrenia is not a manifestation of folly (*A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* starts with a discussion of schizophrenia). Deleuze, one has to remember, is mainly a philosopher of sense. The important problem here is universal methodology versus non-methodology.

Martina Pranić pointed out that in her own research, she attempted to stay as far from universalities as possible, especially in relation to her topic, i.e. folly and madness.

Professor Martin Procházka stressed the importance of the historical background when talking about Deleuze and Guattari, as some of the problems they address can be traced back to Nietzsche. Mikhail Bakhtin's approach is, by nature, anti-historical, although it appears to be historical. Still, he reaches back to something that is pre-historical. Foucault's approach is a positive historical one as can be seen in *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

Professor John McGavin asked the candidate about her intention to approach folly as a multidiscursive practice, since she began her work with the issue of print. Print, as the tool of reason, helped the descriptions of folly to reach many places in Europe. When something is put into print, it unravels itself. It also receives the illusion of fixity.

Professor Sabine Schülting asked about the candidate's intention not to part with either the methodological or the historical approaches. How would she answer to criticism that reading early modern texts through post-modern concepts and ideas is anachronistic? Does the researcher read them back into a time when modes of thought were different? Is such an approach anachronistic?

Martina Pranić agreed and confirmed that the practice was anachronistic in her view, but she qualified her approach: when she said in her thesis that folly was a rhizome, she meant that it behaved in the same way Deleuze and Guattari describe a rhizome. These are modes of description, rather than definitions, and they helped her to think about folly in different ways.

Professor Manfred Pfister expressed his conviction that the problem emerges when one stops historicising the historical texts and does not yet start historicising the theoretical texts. Theory is historical, it is a continuum, and there is indeed a connection between early modern folly and what Deleuze and Guattari write about.

Martina Pranić referred to Deleuze's essay in *Essays Clinical and Critical* where he discusses Lewis Carroll and Antonin Artaud and argues that the child, the writer and the madman instinctively invent new concepts.

Professor Martin Procházka pointed out that when discussing the figure of Bratr Paleček, one is dealing with a Christian qualification of folly. Human beings are so inferior to divine wisdom that they must necessarily always appear as fools. This is the point of reference – the divine wisdom.

Closed Session

The committee especially praised the lively presentation and the candidate's ability to answer the questions with remarkable clarity.

The vote about the assessment of Part 1 (PASS / FAIL).

Results of the vote: PASS, 6-0-0

Part 2: Examination of the PhD Thesis

The supervisors presented their reports (see enclosures)

Professor Manfred Pfister praised the composition of the thesis and highlighted the fact that it fulfilled the requirements of TEEME programme perfectly. He asked the candidate if she could clarify her selection of the four examples: Are they examples of one phenomenon, or of different phenomena?

Professor Martin Procházka appreciated the comparative perspective of the thesis, its exemplary nature and the idea of early modern Europe as "interconnected polyphony". He expressed one minor reservation concerning the field of reception and the ways in which the individual figures – the candidate's chosen examples - were ideologised in later approaches. He expressed his conviction that the thesis might benefit from a comparison of the ideological transformations of the figures. He praised the candidate's overall performance as a researcher and

the high standard of her conference presentations. He suggested that the dissertation should be awarded with a distinction.

Martina Pranić presented her thesis and summarised the key problems in structure and methodology.

The examiners presented their reports (see enclosures).

Dr. Soňa Nováková asked the candidate if she could elaborate on four points:

- the cultural history of folly and how folly moves into the Restoration period
- what if more examples were added to the existing four: would the framework of the dissertation collapse?
- the gendering of early modern folly
- Bratr Paleček – the dissertation presents him as a rather central figure in contemporary Czech culture, but that does not seem to be the case from the point of view of Czech people

Professor John J. McGavin stressed the fact that the thesis opened a whole new world of academic research. Not so much in terms of the topic itself, but in the way the research was conducted and in the internationality and scope of the project. He highlighted the combination of excellent method and the acknowledgment of the newness and the frailty of the framework. He asked the candidate about the spectator, the receiver of the stories about folly – the figure who is much more difficult to theorise and historicise than the creator of the discourse of folly. He also asked about the amount of cruelty in the stories of folly and about the relation of Geoffrey Chaucer's works to the early modern representations of folly.

Martina Pranić thanked her supervisors for their guidance and help and her examiners for their praise and for their interesting comments and ideas. She first answered the questions proposed by the supervisors and examiners. The floor was then open for questions and comments from the other members of the committee.

She pointed out that getting into the minds of early modern spectators was virtually impossible due to the lack of sources.

She expressed her reservation to the practice of dividing history into great epochs, which she tried to overcome by looking at the afterlives of the figures after the early modern era.

Concerning the cultural history of folly, she explained that the re-invigoration of interest in classical authors and in Socratic irony as disseminated by Erasmus brought out the irony in folly. She explained that while in the medieval morality plays (which also involved representations of folly) the soul was at stake, in restoration comedies, it was honour and institutions. She pointed out that for example the paradoxical wisdom of Till Eulenspiegel seems to have lost currency immediately after the early modern era.

In terms of cruelty, she pointed out that there was very little cruelty in the stories of Paleček, only mild cruelty towards the stupid individuals, but everyone could after all become one of the Brethren. In the case of Falstaff, there is cruelty to the naïve spectator who follows Falstaff throughout the plays. There is also cruelty in Falstaff himself, cruelty he is responsible for. Again, this is mimetic cruelty. An interesting question presents itself in this respect: would people leave the theatre after the performance thinking that order as been re-established, or that they have

been fooled by Falstaff? Or both? Speaking about Falstaff, order and reinstating it, may be Falstaff exists to remind the audiences that the order is not that orderly as they are supposed to think.

Answering the question about gender, **Martina Pranić** pointed out she decidedly used men as examples: they are examples of men's reason in the Renaissance, which was the period of silence of women's reason. She mentioned that she moreover did not know of a prominent female fool in literature. Erasmus's Moria was female for some reason, but that could have been just to add another layer of irony to his argument. Sexual images can be found in Till Eulenspiegel and Falstaff, to a lesser extent in stories about Paleček.

Concerning **Professor John J. McGavin's** comment, she agreed that the characteristics of early modern folly were already present in Chaucer.

On the question about the four examples, she affirmed that they were definitely an open category. The thesis could have had more chapters, which would however complicate the structure. Whether they were the same or different – by calling them early modern players of folly, she adopted an open, umbrella term, which keeps the examples open.

Professor Sabine Schülting asked about the performativity of folly. Does the mode matter – whether it is a prose tale or a play? Does it matter whether one reads it, or whether one sees it performed?

Martina Pranić pointed out that there was a richness that could only be achieved in performance. But what she mainly had in mind was the performativity of folly in the sense that there was an unwritten agreement with the other participants in the foolish act, they did know that the player of folly was not serious. She did not think the difference in genre was crucial in these cases.

Professor Manfred Pfister mentioned that at the beginning, of the project, he also wondered whether one should not focus more on the medium, on written prose and theatrical presentation. But then he realised that this distinction, with the material at hand, was not that crucial. He expressed his conviction that the title “players of folly” was chosen very wisely. Narrative prose in this case was close to oral speaking and they did not fall that far apart.

Closing remarks by **Professor Sabine Schülting**.

Closed Session

The committee takes a vote on the assessment of the dissertation defence and the members of the committee express their overall impression.

Dr. Soňa Nováková affirmed that it was an excellent performance.

Professor John J. McGavin said that in his view, it was a clear pass and a clear distinction. The thesis presented an immense scope for new ideas.

Dr. Anne Enderwitz pointed out that not many people working in the field in comparative literature would dare to work on such a broad and diverse project.

The result of the vote: PASS, 6-0-0.

The committee takes a vote on the distinction.

The result of the vote: DISTINCTION, 6-0-0

The result of the viva: **PASS WITH DISTINCTION.**

Prague, 18 February 2015



Prof. Dr. Sabine Schülting
Chair of the Examination Board

Enclosures:

Supervisors' Reports (Prof. Dr. Manfred Pfister; Prof. Dr. Martin Procházka)

Examiners' (Opponents') Reports (Prof. John J. McGavin; Dr. Soňa Nováková)