



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Posudek vedoucí na bakalářskou práci **Nikol Němcové**  
“Women in the English Drama of the Orient”

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The Orient has always been for Europe more than just a geographical location. It was invented by the Europeans and functioned as one of Europe’s deepest and most recurrent images of the Other, against which Europe as the norm defined itself. Until the end of the seventeenth century the Ottoman Peril represented a constant danger for Christian civilization. But as the culture of the Restoration testifies, the mysterious East began to lose its fearsome image; as Oriental culture was symbolically appropriated and incorporated in terms of the exotic, the East was produced as a spectacle. At the same time, the attribution to the East of sexuality, which was excessively wanton, lascivious, promiscuous, posited it as unnatural in a period when “natural sex” came to be defined as rational, moderate, heterosexual, monogamous and procreative. That this carried a political inflection may be seen from the ascription of the same unnatural activities and desires to the regimes of Charles II, Louis XIV and the Catholic Church. Within this discourse the harem and Eastern woman could become metaphors not only for the whole East, but through “displacement” become a veiled commentary on the West.

It is upon such like premises that the submitted BA thesis written by Nikol Němcová has been built. She discusses the Restoration genre of Oriental drama as recycling and creating stereotypes of the Orient stemming from European fear of the enemy, but also from the East as the site of luxury, excess, sensuality. Her argument is that such plays offered a commentary on British norms, which otherwise would be difficult to voice. She provides four case studies of the genre – William Davenant’s *The Siege of Rhodes*, Elkanah Settle’s *The Empress of Morocco*, Mary Pix’s *Ibrahim* and Delariviere Manley’s *The Royal Mischief* – thus usefully working with two male playwrights and two female dramatists, chronologically covering nearly the whole latter half of the seventeenth century. Ms Němcová ingeniously limits her study by a close focus on the figure of the strong female protagonist and identifies a range of strategies by the means of which the plays enter period debates on gender and politics.

The individual case studies are introduced and contextualised by an exposition of the role of Saidian Orientalism in her readings, yet she does not remain blind to the broad range of diverse meanings generated by the plays and also cross-cultural relationships between the West and the exoticised East as grounded not only in myths of hostility but also desire: curiosity, even admiration and yearning. One of the most intriguing parts of her thesis is the exposure of problems inherent within so-called feminist orientalism, which despite its

“progressive” feminism still relies on binary orientalist oppositions of “fair”, i.e. Westernised virtue and “dark” monstrous oriental evil located in female characters, a feminism which to promote new “enlightened” values and approaches to women build on a negative image of Oriental patriarchy. Joyce Zonana’s concept, developed by later scholars and applied e.g by Bernadette Andrea, Ros Ballaster etc., is again not used by Ms Němcová unthinkingly, but cautiously debated in relation to esp. Pix and Manley, showing clearly how multiple-edged even seeming acceptance of traditional stereotypes can be in these plays. The Restoration again comes out as an immensely interesting transition period when relations between the East and West are highly complex.

The thesis is only slightly marred by several errors in spelling or word order, which, despite no doubt careful proof-reading still found their way into the text (such as, on page 31, thrown instead of throne, or page 36, three versions of the name Mariamme, Mariame, Marianne). Also, one could take issue with the Czech translation of the Middle East, the setting of these plays, as Středni východ. These geographical terms are used differently in Czech and in English.

I also have some further questions:

What happened to the genre of Oriental drama in the next century?

The thesis provides a definition of heroic drama. The studied plays are claimed to be examples of the form. What are themes of heroic drama in the covered period? What other locations or settings were popular at the time? Where comments on the current of politics more or less veiled as a norm in this dramatic form?

In conclusion, the readings are sound and perceptive, the choice of material is well justified. The dissertation displays a keen sense for logical organization and development of an argument. Language and style is fluent and quite appropriate. Moreover, I must praise the amount of reading that went into the production of the thesis – the list of bibliography is truly admirable. And, as supervisor, I must also appreciate the fact that Nikol Němcová has managed to orientate herself and feel quite at ease within a whole new field of literature in the space of a few months.

I find the submitted thesis fully in keeping with the standards. I certainly **recommend it for defence** with the preliminary suggested grade of excellent (**výborně**).

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