

Opponent's Report

Eliška Šmídlová, "McCabe and the MaCebre: Portrayals of Madness in the Work of Patrick McCabe" (BA Thesis)

Eliška Šmídlová's thesis focuses on the depiction of madness in three of Patrick McCabe's novels, attempting to place this motif in the broader cultural context of Ireland past and present. The objective is partially achieved, despite the fact that the candidate's account features a number of needless simplifications: by way of a prominent example, the dysfunctional Brady family of *The Butcher Boy* is described as "an embodiment of traditional Ireland" (23) on the one hand, while Raphael Bell of *The Dead School* is similarly labelled as symbolic of "traditional Ireland", which this time involves, e.g., "a childhood of bucolic bliss" (32). Quite apart from the notion of "traditional Ireland" being problematic in itself, one may indeed wonder about the candidate's knowledge of the era in question. The claim that "the motivations behind the end of the eighteenth-century Gothic and the end of the twentieth-century postmodernism are not much different" (5) is also simplistic, since it for instance implies that all of contemporary Irish writing is similar to McCabe's; moreover, the candidate never comments on why McCabe's work should be regarded as postmodern.

The title of the thesis only partially reflects its actual focus, as the work consistently engages with the notion of the Gothic and depicts McCabe as using the conventions established by the early Gothic novels. This is largely a feasible hypothesis, with the candidate making an effort to outline the basic features of Gothic fiction and relate them to McCabe's novels. Despite her use of some authoritative sources on the subject, however, the argument in my view overstates the importance of the macabre in early English Gothic fiction. Can the seminal role of the macabre be documented by specific examples?

As regards McCabe's fiction, Ms Šmídlová repeatedly uses the term "Bog Gothic", apparently as used by earlier critics, without providing a definition. What kind of specificities does the "Bog" in "Bog Gothic" involve?

My final reservation concerns the chapter on *Winterwood*: this is really a missed opportunity, since the chapter consists largely in a summary of the plot of the novel, with little attempt to compare the use of madness and Gothic features with the previous novels (or, for that matter, early Gothic fiction).

The style of the work is lucid, despite the frequency of minor language mistakes, and the structure of the thesis is coherent.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "very good" or "good", based on the result of the defence.

Prague, 31 August 2011

doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD