

Posudek školitele

Hana Pavelková, “Monologue Plays in Contemporary British and Irish Theatre” (Doctoral Dissertation)

Hana Pavelková's dissertation is the result of conscientious doctoral study, in which she has completed all the assignments with excellent results and within the designated time frame. During her time as a doctoral student, Ms Pavelková co-edited two collections of essays, published three book chapters and an article in a refereed journal, and co-edited a major anthology of contemporary Anglophone political drama (supported by a Charles University grant), for which she also translated several plays. She has been a frequent reviewer for and contributor to the prominent Czech theatre periodicals *Svět a divadlo* and *Divadelní noviny*. She is the translator of eight contemporary plays, one of which has had two successful productions up to date. Ms Pavelková has presented the results of her research at international conferences on a regular basis (in particular, those of the German Society for Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English, the Irish Society for Theatre Research, the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies, the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures, and the Czech Association for the Study of English), and was the recipient of three scholarships awarded by the organising bodies. She was also a co-organiser of and presenter at three graduate students' conferences hosted by the Centre for Irish Studies at Charles University. Finally, Ms Pavelková was awarded a scholarship by the Anglo-Czech Fund for a period of research at Birkbeck College, University of London, where she was working on the completion of her project.

Pavelková's work focuses on a phenomenon noted by many critics: the extreme popularity of monologue plays in the British and Irish theatres of the last two decades or so. The regularity with which plays consisting of monologues have been written and staged has been subject to some debate: the genre has been both condemned as detrimental to the theatre, and alternately praised as a refreshing vehicle which highlights the very core of theatrical communication. Nevertheless, no single-authored monograph on the topic has appeared as yet. Pavelková's dissertation is therefore a welcome addition to international research on contemporary Anglophone drama.

The methodology used in the dissertation as a rule avoids theorising in favour of a hands-on approach. While this method may be challenged, particularly as regards drawing a strong theoretical conclusion based on the material, I believe that the diverse nature of the plays discussed by Pavelková prevents any such conclusion to be reached without using a significant level of intellectual violence. A careful discussion of the subtleties of the individual texts and performances is clearly preferable here to a quotable general statement that would have to suppress important aspects of the primary material. Having said that, the organisation of the material in the dissertation is scrupulous and intelligent, being based primarily on the formal properties of the plays discussed (the nature of the speakers and their number), and enables a lucid unravelling of the topic. The Introduction demonstrates requisite awareness of the work that has been done on the subject up to date, including unpublished dissertations and theses. Pavelková highlights the importance of the ground-breaking work of Clare Wallace, showing also that before Wallace's edited collection, *Monologues*, one essentially has to go as far back as to

Nikolai Evreinov for a consistent engagement with the genre. The terminological difficulty inherent in the search for the most appropriate umbrella concept to cover all the work discussed in Pavelková's essay is sufficiently resolved in the choice of "monologue play", as opposed to "monologue", "soliloquy", or "monodrama".

The selection of material for analysis may be regarded as representative, despite the fact that any reader with sufficient expertise is bound to lack the discussion of a particular play, or possibly even an author (such as Steven Berkoff, for instance, or a more detailed engagement with Mark O'Rowe's celebrated play *Howie the Rookie*); the quantity of British and Irish monologue plays from the 1990s onward clearly prevents the discussion of every single play available in print, or indeed those that have remained unpublished. The material covered by Pavelková stretches from static storytelling performances, through complex dramatisations of conflicting aspects of the self, the contrasting of alternating narratives, up to plays featuring radical alienation devices (such as *My Arm* by Tim Crouch), and thus provides an evocative mapping of the variegated contemporary use of monologue as a basis for drama.

As regards the quality of writing, the argument in each section is laid out well and the major points are carefully supported. The style tends to vary somewhat at times, from accomplished to rather unadorned, and there is a regrettable number of typographical errors (some in names of authors). However, Ms Pavelková's dissertation is commendable on the whole, and presents a lively comparative analysis of the actual functioning of monologue plays on the stage, and also in different socio-historical contexts.

I recommend the dissertation for defence. / Práci doporučuji k obhajobě.

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