

## Opponent's Review

Lenka Kristenová, "Troubles on Stage: Theatrical Representation of the Conflict in Northern Ireland"

The thesis sets out some clearly delineated, methodical objectives. The historical summary is straightforward, while reference to Stein Rokkan's sociological analysis of social segmentation in terms of centre/periphery, religious affiliation, owners/workers, urban/rural provides the co-ordinates for the analysis. The section on theatrical representation of the troubles is again a summary, this time from a single source. The assertion, in the introduction and subsequently in this section "that after a lapse of time, the theatre makers are encouraged to employ more complex techniques and intriguing concepts of the conflict" (p.5) although perhaps logical seems slightly naïve with regard to artistic practice, but also to the complexities of theatre business (in the sense of what work actually reaches a stage, the location, production etc).

The work as a whole is competently written (a further proof reading would have cleared up some obvious errors), and is researched sufficiently though within a narrow scope. Analysis of the three plays proceeds in a relatively descriptive fashion. Since a sociological approach is taken, more detailed research with regard to gender roles in Northern Irish society might have been useful. Carol Coulter and Eileen Evason, among others, have discussed gender and gender politics in Northern Ireland have been problematically entangled with nationalism, domestic violence and religious affiliations for instance. Moreover, there have been a number of relatively recent publications on gender and Irish theatre that might have been cited Susan Cannon Harris's *Gender in Modern Irish Drama*, Imelda Foley's *The Girls in the Big Picture: Gender in Contemporary Ulster Theatre* for example. Overall, the methodology employed seems to prevent discussion of the theatrical qualities of the plays—each of which is dramaturgically distinct in a manner that inevitably shapes any response.

One area that begs attention is the status of political theatre. The thesis closes with the observation that "All plays [sic] suggest that the inability to communicate with the other side prevents the two communities to see [sic] how much they are actually alike. The plays present to the audience a society which is steep [sic] in prejudice, inherited from one generation to the other [...] At the same time it is also suggested that the only way to overcome this social deadlock is the common will to communicate." (p.70). This might be taken to represent a shared agenda, a common attitude to the role of


theatre in a particular social context. Though Brecht is mentioned (however this would seem to be cited through another source), some more concerted treatment of the issue of political theatre or socially engaged theatre would have added a much needed dimension to the study and provided the foundation for the concluding claims concerning communication.

Suggested areas for discussion at the defence:

1. In the conclusion to the thesis there is a problematic fusion of the terms gender and sex. Could you clarify whether there is any common ground among the plays with regard to the construction of gender?
2. If *Carthaginians* and (more problematically) *At the Black Pig's Dyke* are regarded as plays indebted to Brechtian theatre, formally how would you describe *Tea in a China Cup*? Does this have some political implication?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "very good" / 2.

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