

**Ester Hochmanová, *Victorian Feminism: Oppressive Notions Mediated in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's "Aurora Leigh"***

BA thesis

Supervisor's report

The submitted BA thesis examines the notions of femininity in the mid-Victorian times, as reflected in two major poems of the period, Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1859-62) and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). The thesis consists in three major parts, the first discussing the historical and cultural context that determined various aspects of the woman question, the other two being devoted to an analysis of the poems.

While reading the thesis, one realizes that there are unquestionable benefits as well as obvious limitations in Miss Hochmanová's treatment. As her supervisor, I must admit that, regretfully, the limitations are mostly due to the shortness of time and haste with which the thesis was finalized. If we had had more time for the discussions over its chapters and subchapters, I believe that the problematic issues would have been avoided or corrected. Which means that there is a great potential in the student's approach but unfortunately a few things have been left unreflected.

Methodologically, the thesis is correct. The first chapter presents principal questions concerning the position of Victorian (middle-class) woman, such as the character of marriage and the economic dependence of a married woman, the role of religious interpretation of the ethic status of genders, or intellectual and cultural attitudes towards the role of woman in society. The subchapter on death seems incongruent: it begins with the discussion of death of a woman as a romantic emblem and an aesthetic value ensuing from such a concept, just to turn into a sociological discourse of the Victorian death-rate, with a specific accent on death caused by childbirth; it is truly difficult to reconcile the two views and the offered conclusion sounds rather vague and haphazard.

The second chapter, interpreting Rossetti's poem, is perhaps the best part of the thesis. The student's reading is consistent, her arguments concerning the questions of Victorian sexuality, encoded in the story, are convincing. Partial aspects can be developed in more detail, such as the meaning of hair in the commercial transaction, commercialisation of sexuality in the Victorian era or a possible reversal of gender roles (goblins as modern-times Sirens). But these are marginal issues. More, in my view, should be said about *Aurora Leigh*. The poem is

presented as portrayals of four female characters representing different forms of feminine attitudes. What I lack, however, is the understanding of it as a verse novel, i.e. as a study of relationships, and especially as a study of the mental and moral development of the titular character. Her uneasy relationship with her cousin, Romney Leigh, deserves close examination; what are the values he stands for in the story and what role do they play in the formation of Aurora and, more particularly, in her final decision to marry him? The dynamism of the characters' relationships contributes to the "novelistic" conception of the poem and lends it the psychology of modern fiction. Here I see a debt.

The haste is also very probably the cause of several language and spelling errors, showing that the final editing is still necessary.

To conclude: I recommend Miss Hochmanová's thesis for defence with a preliminary grade to be a "very good" (velmi dobrá), but at the same time I have no objection to upgrading this after a successful viva voce.

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