



FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA Univerzita Karlova

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Ester Hochmanová

‘Victorian Feminism: Oppressive Notions Mediated in Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s “Aurora Leigh”’

BA thesis

Opponent’s Report

The BA thesis analyses two trailblazing texts by Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning and sets out to ‘demonstrate the poets’ expression of feminist ideas on the recurring themes in their work and study the contemporary historical context following the Catholic Emancipation Act’ (‘Introduction’, p. 7). Specifically, it tackles the key topic of ‘women’s rights and their position in the Victorian society’ and the ways in which the two authors ‘have expressed their experience with navigating the religious imposed norms through their poetry’, pivoting on a ‘[c]ritical analysis of sisterhood, female companionship, or internalized misogyny’ and ‘the controversy of marriage and its connection to death’ (‘Introduction’, p. 7). The thesis is both highly topical and poised ready to uncover key aspects of these much celebrated and widely critically discussed texts and showcases the candidate’s academic promise, level of critical engagement and understanding overall.

The strength of the thesis therefore lies in its diligent engagement with the development of these key topics and its engagement in keen close reading to illustrate individual points of the main argument. The candidate’s interest in and knowledge of the subject matter is discernible. The candidate’s choice of secondary material is relevant, her employment of it into her own argument adequate. The structure of the thesis follows the two chosen primary texts in sufficient detail and with a clear structural guidance.

The moderate weakness of the thesis lies in its slightly limited discussion of ‘Aurora Leigh’, specifically the omission of its novel-in-verse potential. While the thesis is primarily tracing the topics it set out to explore, quite rightly, this formal aspect would have benefitted the discussion of further interrelationships in the text and potentially shed more light on the subject matter at hand. There are also slight issues with the way in which the problems faced by Victorian women are treated in isolation in this thesis (albeit aptly contextualised within the Victorian Age in the introductory chapter) – as if women in the previous eras of the 19th century or earlier were not thus afflicted – which then begs the question why that might be. The ‘rise of the middle class’ (p. 10) is certainly a factor, though perhaps



FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA Univerzita Karlova

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

the scale and manner of this rise might have been addressed in a note, at least, as the 18th century saw a rise in the middle class, too, without the same effect on curtailing women's rights, rather the opposite.

Apart from this, the thesis also exhibits a few unfortunate signs of a hasty submission without final copy-editing – the main issues occur in the Czech abstract ('se výrazně liší od ostatních soudobých literárních děl', 'Marianin tragický životní příběh Marian ústí do její obrazné smrti') and there are a couple, albeit very minor, instances throughout the thesis itself ('Lord Alfred Tennyson', 'this essay' meaning thesis). Nevertheless, apart from a few typos and slight stylistic issues (e.g. p. 21 'Subsequently, death inevitably became part of a woman's so-called career as a wife, mother, and home keeper'), the thesis is written in a fluent, confident style. The formatting is done to a good standard (barring a few minor things such as the omission of pagination for some individual chapters listed in the bibliography, redundant italics in page numbers in some footnotes, divergent font size in a footnote on p. 27). The quotations from "Aurora Leigh" could have included individual Books as well as page numbers (the relevant Books are mentioned, however, on pp. 44, 47 and 49).

I have a couple of questions for the candidate to respond to during her viva voce examination, on points that could have been discussed in the thesis conclusion, perhaps:

In your opinion, would you say that the poetic legacies of these two texts are overshadowed by their socio-political and gender agenda, and if so, would you consider this a plus or a minus? How does the poetic form corroborate the gender agenda in each case – and how does this differ from a similar agenda treated in prose? If you had more time to work on the thesis, which parts of it would you have liked to expand on or amend?

To conclude, despite some shortcomings listed above, I am very happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of 'excellent' (výborně), depending on the candidate's performance on the day.

25.1.2024

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.