



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Alice Balažiková, “And thus the heart will break, yet brokenly live on”: The Layers of Intimacy in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*

BA thesis

Opponent’s Report

Alice Balažiková’s BA thesis discusses various forms of intimacy in Lord Byron’s famous oeuvre *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. As she identifies a rather intense autobiographic source of inspiration for this composition and even direct (or indirect) references to actual persons, she researches in the author’s life and presents sufficient background information concerning the facts about Byron’s relationships and experiences. Not only does she, hence, make use of specialized critical sources but also explores Byron’s correspondence and journals to support her views. Thus we learn about the genesis of the poem and its position within the Romantic context, in particular about a potential influence of Shelley, Wordsworth or Scott, and also the influence the poem had on various figures of European culture. A special attention is paid to the question of Byron’s sexuality, though the evidence is not direct, especially as far as his homosexuality goes. Nevertheless, some details about his relation to women and men suggest that his intimate life might have been complex and unorthodox and that this may account for the variability of intimate positions expressed in the poem.

So far so good. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* can be (and is) viewed as a text in which the author’s personal situation is projected with a thinner aesthetic filter than usual and that sometimes it is difficult to draw a line between the author and his hero. What seems to be the actual problem of this thesis is its rather too broad and unclear conception of intimacy. As the student asserts her perspective will involve, on the one hand, emotional and physical intimacy (which is a rather coarse polarization), on the other intimacy in relation to other persons (love or sexual attraction) as well as to impersonal entities such as nature and history. But lyrical poets are usually intimate with their subject matter, and in Romantic poetry it is almost a clichéd trope (cf. Shelley’s line “Earth, Ocean, Air, beloved brotherhood!”); so, to what extent does Byron follow this imperative of modern poetry and to what extent is he authentic? What is so specific about Byron’s motifs of intimacy? I’m afraid the thesis is able to answer this question only in part, because the student focuses on selected passages and tends to derive her meanings just from them, in isolation. She fails to view the intimate motifs in the context of the entire composition. (How does, e.g., Childe’s treatment of the Cadiz women relate to the reasons for which he left England, “sore sick at heart”?) An overall impression from the student’s treatment is that of fragmentation and perhaps even incongruity. I believe that this is due to the perspective that is too large. The thesis is unnecessarily long; a shorter version concentrating on one or two aspects of intimacy, discussed more profoundly, perhaps even less biography-oriented, less apodictically, would be far more beneficial.



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However, this is not to say that the thesis failed completely. There are many positive aspects and hard work behind it. I only feel that the conception should have been decided more thoughtfully and that the method could have been more refined. The language of the thesis is acceptable, with only occasional slips (*complains* instead of *complaints*, *disparity over the loss* instead of *despair*, *wonder* instead of *wander*, etc.). More serious is the factual slip saying that "Prior to *CHP*, Byron published only one poetry collection" (14-15), while he in fact had published three more volumes, as acknowledged on p. 32.

To conclude, I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the preliminary grade to be a **very good**.

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.

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