

Alice Balažiková

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

BA thesis

Supervisor's Report

The BA thesis sets out to analyse ‘the different manifestations of intimacy as presented in the four cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*’ (‘Abstract’). Specifically, it tackles the key topic of intimacy as one of the ‘two key elements which set the poem apart from others of its time — the places it described and the intimacy of the poetic voice’ (Abstract) and sets out to trace ‘two distinct types of intimacy in the poem — physical and emotional’ (‘Abstract’) in Byron's signature narrative poem. While this distinction appears to simplify matters at first, there are useful ways in which the thesis attempts to distinguish between various layers of intimacy in the poem and its changing ethos from the first two cantos published in 1812 to the third and fourth, published later and during Byron's self-imposed exile on the continent. The key topic of intimacy and its various reflections and performances in the text is approached from a primarily biographical perspective and traces the poet's various emotional attachments and losses of loved ones across the text, which is helpful in highlighting certain parts of the poem in relation to Byron's poetic development. The thesis then also approaches the topic of intimacy on an abstract level, in relation to the Romantic tropes of communing with nature and history.

While the thesis is poised to uncover key aspects of these much celebrated and widely critically discussed four cantos, and showcases the candidate's engagement, interest in and sufficient understanding of the subject matter and its various contextual frames overall (covering relevant literary and biographical contexts), it is also based on selected close readings of key passages which support the claims about the ways in which Byron develops and moulds the theme of intimacy in these four cantos across diverse thematic nodes. The strength of the thesis therefore lies in its close local engagement with selected parts of the poem and its changing pace and atmosphere, to illustrate individual points of the main argument. The topic of intimacy is key to any reading of *Childe Harold*, though more questions could have been asked along the way about the ways in which Byron achieves this sense of intimacy overall, connecting the local to the global (in terms of the poem as a whole). Throughout, the candidate's choice of secondary material is relevant and her employment of it into her own argument

adequate. Apart from some typos and slight stylistic issues, the thesis is written in a confident style. The formatting is done to a good standard.

The weakness of the thesis lies in its sustained and overt correlation of the biographical with the thematic throughout. While there are key correlations to be traced in terms of intimacy in the poem in relation to Byron's turbulent and loss-ridden life, there are other aspects that could have been brought in to support the main argument about how *Childe Harold* inspires the sense of intimacy in its readers. As the thesis progresses, the aspects of intimacy traced cohere locally but somewhat loosely overall; though it is a vast topic to take up and therefore a certain local selectiveness was necessary to keep the frame of the thesis viable. As a first sustained effort at tackling a complex topic in a complex and diverse poem, the thesis delivers diligent effort at biographical contextualisation and local insight based on the excerpts selected. More work remains to be done on the overall argument and the specifics of Byron's shaping of intimacy across this text.

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:

- 1) In your opinion, would you say that Byron shapes poetic intimacy as a deliberate selling point?
- 2) Is the poem ultimately dependent on our knowledge of Byron's biography to make sense of it?

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

12.6.2024

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.

