



# FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA Univerzita Karlova

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Emma Marešová

An Ecocritical Study of Percy Bysshe Shelley's Selected Lyrical Works

BA thesis

Supervisor's Report

With a timely ecocritical lens to hand, the BA thesis sets out to explore the ways in which Percy Bysshe Shelley presents and develops his ideas of “a sustainable revolution” “based on nature”, where the word “nature” is understood as “both human nature (love, emotion) and the natural world (the environment)” (‘Abstract’). The candidate confidently presents Shelley’s conviction that “nature functions as a balanced system” and is therefore an appropriate model for ideas of how to improve human society at large, where the poet “argues for a morality based on love, empathy, and connection” (‘Abstract’). While the chosen topic is complex and the project therefore quite ambitious, the candidate sustains her main argument in a convincing manner, having selected two short and two long poetic works from Shelley’s short but highly productive creative career and some of his key relevant essays (“On Love”, “A Defense of Poetry” and “A Vindication of Natural Diet”) to complement her discussion and present a rounded context of Shelley’s developing thought.

The thesis is interested in highlighting and discussing the key ecocritical aspects of these widely read and critically analysed texts by Shelley which have not yet been universally underscored by literary criticism, and showcases the candidate’s keen engagement, avid interest in and insight into the subject matter and its basic relevant contextual frames overall (ecocritical, historical, socio-cultural). The thesis also engages in selected close reading of key passages which support the argument’s ecocritical/social-reformist focus, namely the ways in which Shelley critiques the pitfalls of the then current world order and develops the concept of a sustainable revolution throughout his works. The main strength of the thesis therefore lies in its organised discussion proceeding lucidly across close local engagements with selected



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key passages across Shelley's selected works, illustrating individual points of the main argument as it proceeds to its conclusion.

Throughout, the candidate's choice of secondary material is varied and relevant and her employment of it into her own argument effective. Apart from a few stylistic oversights, the thesis is written in a confident, refreshingly economical style. The formatting is done to a good standard overall.

The weakness of the thesis is two-fold - firstly, while being manifestly engaged in an ecocritical reading of Shelley's work, the thesis does not present a brief introduction to the relevant aspects of ecocriticism and its current state of the art in Romantic Studies, barring passim references to Garrard and Morton; and secondly, the thesis tends to locally oversimplify Shelley's complex lyrical imagery in favour of a pragmatic, natural-sciences-based explanation (e.g. geopolitics over poetic symbolism – these are not mutually exclusive but would benefit from a holistic discussion). While this manner of ecocritical close reading ultimately supports the thesis argument, more rounded comments on the chosen poetic passages would have benefitted the argument and made it more convincing. Sometimes the thesis reads more like a manifesto than a work of literary criticism. That said, the thesis still successfully presents and develops its individual points on Shelley's radical, proto-ecological mindset, and delivers a convincing, appealing argument overall.

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

- 1) In your opinion, what is the most radical ecological thought of Shelley's relevant to the challenges of our own era?
- 2) Are Shelley's poetic works dealing with socio-ecological challenges ultimately more powerful in retrospect than his essays on the subject, and if so, why?



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

28.8.2024

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.