

Veronika Flanderová, 'Coleridge and the Self'

BA thesis

Opponent's Report

The BA thesis sets out to examine the development of the Self in the Romantic period, exemplified by a reading of the two most famous poems by S.T. Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan'. The thesis follows an ambitious line of enquiry, along logical steps that form a firm framework of argument. On a scope limited by the format of the thesis, the candidate's analysis is bold and well-informed, if also unnecessarily limited, in a series of ways listed below. Overall, however, the argument is well-rounded and persuasive.

The strength of the thesis lies in its serious engagement with the development of a philosophical concept at a particularly crucial moment in the history of thought, in its well-grounded point of reference and its interesting line of argument, bringing to the fore the central debate about the Self that largely defines Romantic poetry as a whole. The candidate's choice of secondary material is wide-ranging and relevant, her employment of philosophical lines of enquiry into literary texts often illuminating, if also a little one-sided, side-lining somewhat the symbolic levels of Coleridge's poems, let alone his deep and life-long engagement with questions of faith and the religious tradition.

The thesis' weakness is two-fold – on the one hand, the candidate seems to have adopted a quasi-clinical line of enquiry about the complexities of the Self in terms of dreams and memory, somewhat forgetting that this is primarily a literary analysis. On the other hand, related to my previous comment, the candidate does seem to be following a strikingly literal line of enquiry about poems that are deeply symbolic, which sometimes leads her analysis into tight corners – e.g. 'We are compelled to ask what kind of logic this world, where the purely subjective story influences nature and where nature itself acts in accordance with the story, has.' (p. 24). In the otherwise engaging discussion of 'The Mariner', the candidate cuts corners in her conclusion: 'The urge to wander around the world and tell his story confirms the importance of dialogue and voicing inner thoughts' (p. 35) – is there a dialogue, other than the reader-response loop, in this case, the mariner simply forcing the wedding guest to listen to his monologue?

On a stylistic level, the Czech translation of the thesis title might have benefited from another word, such as 'pojem', 'koncept', or 'problém'. The candidate should also unify the

spelling of 'Romantic'/'romantic' throughout. The candidate's adoption of the antiquated academic 'we' throughout is somewhat jarring and does not facilitate clarity of expression. Overall, the word 'problem' / 'problems' is used to excess, often obfuscating the point being made rather than clarifying it. Generally, the candidate's style can often be too clinical, not in line with the traditional style of literary analyses: e.g. 'Explanation of mechanisms of these problems' functioning on concrete case studies, i.e. the selected poems, we believe, will render a complex insight into the holistic change of perception of the Self' (p. 5). As to formatting, the candidate should stop using 'pp' throughout for one-page references (this recurs from the first footnote onwards).

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

- 1) How does Coleridge's concept of the Self in these two poems relate to death?
- 2) In what ways is 'Kubla Khan' an exercise in memory rather than a 'vision in a dream'?
- 3) Does 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' harbour confusion about or insight into the developing Romantic Self?

To conclude, I am happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of 'excellent' (výborně) if the candidate performs well on the day.

28 August 2018

Mirka Horová, PhD