

Zuzana Burešová, *The Didactic Tradition: Reformed Heroines in Fanny Burney's Novels*
BA thesis

Opponent's Review

Zuzana Burešová's thesis examines the novels by Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay), one of the popular late 18th-century women writers, focusing primarily on the transformation of their heroines in contemporary society. As the model situations Burney introduced in her work became inspirational for her followers, the topic is relevant and well chosen.

The student divides the chapters dealing with *Evelina*, *Cecilia* and *Camilla* into sections of similar thematic concern, exploring the heroines' social background, the way the heroines are confronted with social rules and conventions, the character of their mentors and the stereotypical resolution in marriage. Such a structure may, on the one hand, provide her with a useful thematic framework although, on the other, it seems rather rigid and limiting, accountable for the passages which are more descriptive than analytical. Also the fact that the two later novels are given less space than the first one is apparently due to this concept. And yet, as the student argues (at least implicitly), each novel is different in its character, each presents a different heroine in a different situation, and these should be explored more thoroughly.

What definitely deserves a more profound and detailed attention is the nature of the girls' reformation. What exactly are the moments when this happens? Are there such turning points and eye openers as we can find in the novels, say, of Jane Austen and how does Burney incorporate them in their own fiction? This should in fact be the primary concern of the thesis. What also calls for clarification is Burney's relation to the ideas of J.-J. Rousseau. The way Rousseau is included on pp. 27-8 is vague and even confusing. The conclusion the student makes sounds too general and does not reveal anything about this question ("Nevertheless, although radicality is present in her works she does not share it overtly and, as mentioned in the introduction, she is classified as a conservative writer [...]. Therefore, she manages to firmly respect the patriarchal authority.") Yet I believe that the influence of Rousseau, however indirect it may be, can be found in the later novels as well, not only in the way suggested on p. 38, but also in the motif of the conflicting natural disposition and oppressive social demands, as it appears especially in *Camilla*. Burney's Rousseauism thus seems to be a principal issue that cannot be mentioned only passingly.

My last, albeit by no means least, objection concerns the language of the thesis. It is to be regretted that a piece of academic writing includes so many errors such as wrong grammar, a wrong word choice, incomplete and wrongly constructed sentences, omissions, typos, etc. What is, however, even more appalling is the fact that a Czech student is not able to present a flawless piece of text in her own native language, as the Czech abstract shows. I believe the role of an intellectual, especially in humanities, is to cultivate the society he or she lives in; but this can be done only by the cultivated. And since even the title page is not free from a misspelt word (Subjct), it is also a question of careful attention to what one presents – and how one presents oneself.

To conclude: I recommend Zuzana Burešová's thesis for defence but the number of objections does not allow me to suggest a better grade than **dobře**.

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