

Tomáš Balvín

‘Shelley’s Negotiation of Metaphysics’

MA thesis

Opponent’s Report

The MA thesis sets out to explore the development of P.B. Shelley’s concept of metaphysics, anchoring the discussion of the primary texts in various key strands of philosophical thought which influenced Shelley, and attempting to position metaphysics alongside the dichotomy of materialism and idealism which are deeply interfused in Shelley’s thought. The thesis is well grounded, exceeding its prescribed scope as well as engaging in complex critical discussion, and meeting the formal requirements of its academic genre overall. The selected secondary material is extensive and used in a relevant manner, though it at times leaves space for possible further discussion or hints at unexplored avenues of enquiry.

The strength of the thesis is mainly in its keen ambition to provide an overview of Shelley’s metaphysics, specifically his negotiation of materialism and idealism. This dichotomy is ripe for critical enquiry and the thesis attempts to reconcile it in view of the selected texts by Shelley. The chosen topic and primary and secondary texts form an inviting and inspiring platform to support the argument throughout, however a more levelled structuring of the central argument, a clearer foregrounding of it in the introduction and a firmer grasp of its many intricate developments might have contributed to a more even-keeled appraisal of Shelley’s thought overall. As it stands, on the positive side, the thesis clearly shows the candidate’s potential and understanding, engaging in interesting and informed discussion and exploring some key aspects of Shelley’s work, such as the concept of necessity (though a more concentrated discussion of the Lucretian elements in Shelley’s thinking as well as his stark departure from Lucretian materialism when it comes to the concept of the soul would have been useful here).

One of the drawbacks of the thesis is a certain disjointedness of the close reading of the selected primary texts within the overall structuring of the argument – this has probably resulted from the ordering of the primary texts, aligning them with the chosen ‘schools’ of thought. However, it is important to note that the candidate has worked quite studiously through these influential secondary texts to produce an overview of the issues that arise in the attempt to isolate and individually get to grips with the selected divergent strands in Shelley’s thought. It only remains to be said that the thesis topic, wide and all-encompassing as it stands, probably proved to be something of a hindrance in the process of writing, and a more focused repositioning of the title

as well as some key nudging of the overall argument would have made this a more consistent study. It certainly shows a considerable degree of potential – indeed, the Conclusion sums up the thesis in a critical review, in a series of well-made points.

On the formal level, the thesis is well written, with some occasional stylistic lapses. The Czech abstract contains a few grammatical and stylistic errors, possibly owing to a hasty translation from the English original. The formatting is mostly in order throughout, with only a few minor issues (consistently not indented individual paragraphs, a missing full stop at the end of the odd footnote, a misplaced comma, an instance of doubling up double inverted commas, the occasional placing of punctuation after the footnote in the main text, or a missing page number, for instance). The bibliography is extensive and well formatted.

I have a question for the candidate to respond to during the viva voce examination:

In your opinion, does Shelley's metaphysics invariably centre around man?

To conclude, I am very happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of 'very good' (velmi dobře), depending on the candidate's performance during the viva voce examination.

2 September 2020

Mgr. Mirka Horová, PhD.