

**Veronika Flanderová, *Tenants in the House of Language: English Romantic Authorship***

MA thesis

Opponent's Review

Ms Flanderová's thesis is in fact a study in Romantic subjectivity, no doubt a very insightful and useful one. The question of authorship is just one aspect of this broader theme, being inspired by Eliot's arguments in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and later, post-structuralist dismissal of the category of the author (Barnes, Foucault). However, let it be noted in the same breath that Eliot never used the word "Romantic" in his essay and that the emphasis on studying a text regardless of the personal biography of its author came not only with Eliot-inspired American New Criticism and French post-structuralism of the late sixties and seventies but that it also occurred in Continental literary structuralism since the late thirties (including Felix Vodička's seminal essay "Literární historie, její problémy a úkoly", 1942, fostering the idea of "a text's immanent logic of development").

The principal goal of the thesis is to refute the simplifying notion which understands Romantic poetry as a more or less direct expression or projection of the author's "genius", which is always individual and original. The student sees Romantic creativity as a more complicated and ambiguous issue, in accordance with recent critical studies elucidating this topic. After an extended theoretical introduction where she makes a close connection between the major exponents of the English Romantic Movement (especially Coleridge) and the German idealist philosophers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, she continues to demonstrate three types of subjectivity (or, more accurately, of the attempts to resolve the seemingly unsurmountable barrier between subject and object) on the works of S. T. Coleridge ("Kubla Khan", "Love" and *Biographia Literaria*). This perspective narrows the problem considerably. The thesis thus discusses Coleridge's conception rather than Romantic in any broader sense. The question is why the title of the thesis promises more and if so, why the earlier parts, in which the student tends to repeat some facts, amplifying and specifying them, is not briefer and why instead Wordsworth's conception of language – found in his *Preface of 1800*, *Preface of 1815* or, especially, in his *Essay upon Epitaphs* – is not confronted with Coleridge's. The assertion that Coleridge's use applies more or less to all the major Romantic poets cannot stand without evidence.

On the other hand, the student's analysis of Coleridge's texts is brilliant and her comments invaluable. I would only argue that even in "Kubla Khan" and "Love" we can find performativity as the poems' central theme. In both poems language as a tool of power is thematised and it depends on the speaker with which strategy he will finally win over his listener. In "Kubla" this is presented as a frustrated desire of the poet who wishes to use the divinely inspired language of poetry to enchant his audience by its perfection (a conception looking back to Shaftesbury's Platonic dialogue, if not Plato himself); in "Love" the same role is played by a carefully chosen text of mediaeval romance winning a girl's love. But it's basically power strategy that the two poems speak about, and a performative act. Which in no way excludes the student's interpretation – I agree that one text can exemplify the Kantian linguistic model while the other the Herderian one and that they may represent opposite principles of Romantic authorship (if we take the speakers as being representative of "authors").

In conclusion, I'm happy to state that the submitted MA thesis has met high standards of academic work and that I can recommend it for defence, with a preliminary grade being excellent (**v ýborná**).

PhDr Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.

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