

Veronika Flanderová

Tenants in the House of Language: English Romantic Authorship

MA thesis

Supervisor's Report

The MA thesis sets out to 'examine the phenomenon of Romantic authorship as a conceptual tool of literary criticism' and takes decisive issue with the overused and under-examined concept of the Romantic 'genius', positing instead a much more complex set of issues at work at the heart of the Romantic agenda of authorship and its manifestation in literary works. The specific example on which the thesis showcases its theoretical explorations is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, represented in a close-reading selection of works both poetic and prose, namely 'Kubla Khan', 'Love', supplemented by key passages from *Biographia Literaria*. The thesis is, to a large extent, interested in the contemporary Romantic philosophies of knowledge and, more specifically, the competing theories of language therein, which provide the intellectual substrate for the Romantic era and which we may presume Coleridge, the most likely of all British Romantics to be familiar with these topical debates of his time, came to reflect in his works.

Opting for a thorough theoretical grounding, the thesis first posits its premises within the contemporary debate on Romantic authorship and its recent re-evaluations of specific stereotypical issues of Romantic subjectivity, relating to its being to a large extent invented by 19th and 20th-century literary criticism. Having exposed this superimposed conceptual framing of Romantic authorship/subjectivity after the event, as it were, the thesis then turns to 19th-century theories of language and the ways in which these influence the age-old debate of subject vs. object. On the examples from Coleridge's work, the thesis successfully shows that the centrality of the author for interpretations of Romantic literary works is not non-negotiable and generally requires more complexity.

The thesis is factually well-grounded and meets the formal requirements of its academic genre, often exceeding its remit on the level of discussion, insight, and understanding. The thesis consults a relevant array of secondary material, used well to illustrate individual points or larger arguments. The strength of this thesis is mainly in its ambition to provide a lucid comparative reading of the most renowned Romantic theories of language and then apply these findings to the close-reading section devoted to the selected works by Coleridge. The thesis is interested in the ways in which the concept of the Romantic author and his seemingly unassailable authority over his text(s) is more fluid and indeed more complicated than may have been acknowledged by literary critics largely peddling the trope of the Romantic genius. The traditional dichotomy of subject-object is also problematized in decisive and insightful ways.

To conclude, I am very happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary grade of ‘excellent’ (výborně).

27 May 2021

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.